Learning outcomes: perspective and practice

A case study of University of Belgrade

Ljiljana Krstić

Master of Philosophy in Higher Education
Department of Education, Faculty of Educational
Sciences

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

June 2016

Learning outcomes: perspective and practice

A Case Study of University of Belgrade

Ljiljana Krstić

Master of Philosophy in Higher Education

Department of Education, Faculty of Educational Sciences

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

June 2016

Abstract

This master thesis aims to identify perspectives relevant to the understanding of learning outcomes, as well as their interpretation and embeddedness in the context of the University of Belgrade. Moreover, it will try to find patterns in the perceptions of change associated with the introduction of learning outcomes to the University of Belgrade. The analysis is based on 'Prøitz model' (2010) that categorises *learning outcome* perspectives according to nature and meaning, and the purpose of the concept. It is also a useful analytic tool to show how learning outcomes are interpreted and embedded in the institutional setting of the University of Belgrade. Moreover, the study builds upon the set of institutional approaches relevant to the policy adaptation, in order to reflect how actors who assume different roles and positions within the organisation may interpret learning outcomes, or how the concept may be relevant to the policy adaptation as well. The study employs twelve interviews among academics and academic leaders to explore their perceptions of learning outcomes. Furthermore, it complements the opinions of academics with the document analysis to strengthen the findings. The findings indicate that neither of the perspectives can contribute solely to the understanding of learning outcomes, but all four together provide a holistic overview of the concept's complexity. In addition, data shows considerable variations in interpretations and application to practice, not only as tool useful in curriculum design or on the opposite a tick-box accountability tool, a formal requirement with questionable value in practice. Finally, academic perspectives of changes associated with the introduction indicate to several patterns which might be of a future study interest of the process of institutionalisation of the learning outcomes.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor Prof. Bjørn Stensaker for providing me the guidance throughout the process of writing the thesis. His invaluable comments helped me structure the paper, encouraged me to think critically and most importantly, motivated me to push through to the end. I would also like to thank my initial supervisor Rachel Sweetman for helping me find my way through the initial steps of the process, especially in the preparation for the fieldwork.

Special thanks to my friends and colleagues from the department who were always my critical listeners and reviewers. I appreciate all the advice and the support each of you has given me along the way.

Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to my family, especially my parents Petar and Svetlana, the endless source of the emotional support throughout the years. Thank you for teaching me to be curious, it brought me to where I am today. I dedicate this thesis to you!

Abbreviations

CAQA- Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance

CEDEFOP- European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

CONUS- The University Conference of Serbia

ECTS- The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

EHEA- The European Higher Education Area

EQF- European Qualifications Framework

EU- European Union

HE- Higher Education

HEI- Higher Education Institution

HP- Hard-pure

LO- Learning outcomes

LoHE- Law on Higher Education

NCHE- The National Council for Higher Education

NQF- National Qualifications Framework

SP- Soft-pure

QA- Quality Assurance

Table of contents

1 Introduction

The following paper aims to explore the key perspectives for understanding learning outcomes, as well as their interpretation and embeddedness at the University of Belgrade. In addition, it will attempt to point out the perceptions of change processes associated with the introduction of learning outcomes at the University of Belgrade. The concept of learning outcomes subsumes a variety of definitions and meanings with respect to the nature and purpose of the concept. The plethora of theoretical propositions hinders the common understanding and acceptance of the concept in practice, hence sparking the interest to explore the phenomenon within an institutional context and diversified group of academic actors. The foci of the study are academic perspectives on learning outcomes as institutional actors responsible for their development and practical use.

The research interest in learning outcomes had steadily grown from the mid-twentieth century but appeared to culminate within the last two decades and the overarching European higher education reforms that put the concept to the limelight as a quintessential tool of successful reforms. The fundamental idea behind the approach implied a necessity of a 'paradigm shift', a pivotal change in the learning process focus and responsibilities from providers of knowledge, the teachers, towards the recipients, the students (Adam, 2006). The traditional role of the teacher as a central figure evolves to a facilitator one, to steer the learning process towards the students as the ultimate users of education. Student centered approach substituted traditional 'input' based techniques of curricular design and instructional planning that relied on student numbers and study expenses as indicators (Prøitz, 2010). This required more precise curriculum and learning outcomes were the media of expressing the results of learning after a certain period (Ewell, 2005).

The following chapter introduces the concept of learning outcomes as action lines within the Bologna process reform, reflects on the multiplicity of meanings and purposes within the scholarly literature and points out to potential downfalls of using learning outcomes in practice.

1.1 Learning outcomes and the Bologna process

The Bologna process, as a higher education system reform in Europe, mapped out learning outcomes as an aid to curricular programme reforms fairly early and firmly grounded them on the idea of a paradigm shift, even though their applicability was not recognised in the reform related documents at the time (Adam, 2008). Mostly seen as a prosaic device, learning outcomes were defined as statements of '*knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes and understanding that an individual will attain as a result of his and her successful engagement in a particular set of higher education experiences*' (Adam, 2008, p. 4).

Nonetheless, the narrative of learning outcomes grew stronger especially throughout Bologna follow-up meetings, ministerial communiqués, and other official documents and it advanced to acquire the epithet '*building block of the Bologna reform*' (Adam, 2004, 2006, 2008). What was once understood as a prosaic tool, became a '*methodological approach for the expression and description of the curriculum (modules, units, and qualifications) and level, cycle and qualifications descriptors associated with the 'new style' Bologna qualifications frameworks*'(Adam, 2008, p.4).

To illustrate how expectations from learning outcomes grew in the European political arena, several quotes from official Ministerial Communiqués will be presented chronologically. Prague communiqué (2001) does not mention learning outcomes directly, but sets the action lines towards the creation of EHEA and encourages adoption of readable and comparable degrees, two-cycle study system, the establishment of a credit system, promotion of mobility and cooperation in quality assurance and the promotion of 'European' dimensions in HE. In addition, it promoted lifelong learning, wider inclusion of Universities and students as partners in the shaping of EHEA.

Subsequently, the Berlin communiqué (2003) asserted the social dimension of higher education, but always on traditional academic values. Moreover, the report called for shared criteria and methodologies with respect to quality assurance in HE and emphasised the fact that ultimately, it lies upon the individual institution to uphold it. Learning outcomes would aid the creation of a common qualifications model that would allow degrees to be comparable throughout Europe and replace the existing system which described degrees regarding hours of study or credits. '*Ministers encourage the member States to elaborate a framework of*

comparable and compatible qualifications for their higher education systems, which would seek to describe qualifications in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences, and profile (Berlin Communiqué, 2003, p. 5)'. Furthermore, learning outcome definitions ought to reflect the differences in cycles with respect to profiles and orientations of studies mostly due to the diversity of needs in academic, individual or market sense.

In 2005, the Bergen communiqué expressed satisfaction with the two-cycle degree implementation and urged HE institutions to develop internal quality assurance mechanisms and correlate them to the external ones. *'We adopt the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA, comprising three cycles(..), generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences, and credit ranges in the first and second cycles.'*(Bergen Communiqué, 2005, p.2).

The London communiqué (2007) asserts that learning outcomes embody the student-centered approach, although the application throughout European HEIs was very limited. The ministers underlined the necessity of '*curricula reform leading to qualifications better suited both to the needs of labor market and to further study. Efforts should concentrate...on proper implementation of ECTS based on learning outcomes and student workload.*'(London Communiqué, 2007, p.2). An added meeting conclusion was the necessity to create comparable and transparent qualifications frameworks to increase the mobility of students and act as an aid in module and programme development based on learning outcomes and credit system.

The Communiqué in Leuven (2009) declares student-centred learning as a future priority in order to develop competencies in students necessary for the rapid change labour market but, with respect to institutional autonomy. Many EU countries have established national qualifications frameworks connected to the overarching EHEA framework built upon learning outcomes and workload. Employability continually presents a goal to strive for with graduates. Therefore, they have to be equipped with knowledge, skills, and competencies for professional life.

The Budapest-Vienna Declaration (2010) launched the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), a goal set in the Bologna Declaration in 1999. Academic community was

acknowledged of having a crucial role in the creation of the EHEA as well as in the facilitation of a student centred learning environment.

The Bucharest communiqué (2012) asserts that economic crisis affects the funding of higher education and makes job prospects unpredictable. It calls for *'meaningful implementation of learning outcomes, implying the necessity to fully understand the concept prior to developing and applying it in practice. In addition, they were claimed to be a crucial factor for the successfulness of 'ECTS, Diploma Supplement, recognition, qualifications framework and quality assurance* (Bucharest Communiqué, 2012, p.3).' The credit system, learning outcomes, and student workload require a stronger link, and it is a task for institutions to create it, along with more precise assessment procedures which include the attainment of learning outcomes.

In 2015, the Yerevan communiqué presented several goals for the future; among which was a continuous aspiration for quality improvement and focus on teaching and learning activities supported by transparent descriptions of learning outcomes. Furthermore, HE institutions will continue to have the support in the promotion of innovative pedagogic environments that support student centred learning on all study levels.

The above mentioned documents indicate that learning outcomes approach did gain in relevance throughout the years, beginning as an auxiliary tool in the description of qualifications in 2003, on the basis of generic '*Dublin descriptors*' in 2005, moving towards presenting a convenient tool to promote student centred learning. Moreover, in 2007 they are expected to become an aid in curricular reform and definition of ECTS. The chronological presentation of documents does not have the purpose to claim linearity of influence spreading of the learning outcomes approach, but to suggest that from a political point of view, learning outcomes have become a useful tool with different purposes.

Adam (2008) denotes how learning outcomes should not be mistaken as sole bearers of reforms, or as a remedy for every problem higher education institutions might encounter, rather as a methodological approach that complements other reforms. Moreover, learning outcomes cannot be expected to change the culture of HEIs over a short period, given the fact that the academics partake in the reforms with a great deal of responsibility and from an

4

institutional point of view, resistance might occur. A paradigm shift implies a change of thinking, a transformation that happens as a result of an institutional response to globalisation. The process of the 'input-' and 'teacher-centred' to output and 'student- centred' approach to learning requires both time and systemic analysis (Adam, 2008).

1.2 The complexity of meaning and purpose of learning outcomes

Ministerial documents acknowledge learning outcomes a high status in the reform process, even though the implementation and implications of their systemic use are still uneven and lack analysis in their value and purpose throughout Europe (Prøitz, 2010). The study will not empirically engage into examining the value of learning outcomes, rather, focus on the principle of 'fit for purpose' (CEDEFOP, 2012), and exploring how academic community as institutional actors understand and interpret the term and how it is embedded in the institutional setting.

So far, research on the topic has shown the lack of appropriate manner to approach learning outcomes. They are *'best understood as a collection of useful processes and tools that can be applied in diverse ways in different policy, teaching, and learning settings* (CEDEFOP, 2012, p.10)'. Additionally, it has been concluded that connotations and denotations of the term, along with the functions they assume, vary across national systems, therefore they are particularly interesting for exploration. Moreover, they are expected to perform various functions in national higher education systems, *'in recognition of prior learning, the award of credit, quality, learning plan, key competences for life, credibility for employers, etc., as well as modernizing the governance of education and training as systems are reformed to encompass lifelong learning* (CEDEFOP, 2012, p.10)'.

According to social constructivism, if a certain concept has been accepted by the collective, whether on the university, state or international level, then it has become an institutional fact (Prøitz, 2010). Seemingly, it may appear to be right, however, evidence has revealed that the level of understanding or the lack of it, along with random application in practice remains an issue of many HEIs throughout Europe. First and foremost, learning outcomes encompass a diverse set of definitions, followed by fragmented theoretical propositions (Allan, 1996,

Prøitz, 2010), different levels of applicability and finally their formulation and application are highly determined by the context and culture of a particular country or down to the institution itself. To slowly untangle reasons of such complexity, a short history will be presented, followed by a plethora of established definitions in the academic community and practice as well as terminological clarifications that contribute to the confusion and criticism of the term 'learning outcome'.

1.3 History of the concept of Learning Outcomes

Before referring to the multiplicity of learning outcome definitions, it is necessary to go a bit into the past in order to explain why there is no universal approach to the concept and why there is confusion in understanding the meaning and purpose of the term. To begin with, the history of the concept is rather short, and can be loosely connected to the psychological experiments on conditional learning that Pavlov conducted in the late 19th century and further on, to behaviorism, school of thought in psychology developed by Watson and Skinner in the first half of the 20th century. Behaviorism suggests that learning occurs only as a result of external stimuli, is observable and therefore can be measured. According to behaviorism, learning occurs only if it has measurable outcomes. Although their research methods were crude to an extent, their work did contribute to the development of more refined research on learning outcomes, aimed at improving teaching, learning and training methods in US business schools, army, and agriculture. The research was later on expanded by educationalists in other countries, particularly in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, UK, Scandinavia and the rest of the Europe and focused mainly on vocational education and training (Allan, 1996; Adam, 2004, 2006; Prøitz, 2010).

At the time, learning outcomes were perceived as a practical tool, instrument useful in bringing precision to curriculum development, and often intertwined in literature with the terms 'objective', 'aim', 'goal', ' intent', making it harder to follow the path of development of learning outcomes. Allan argues that interchangeability in the use of these terms was a consequence of 'liberal use of a number of labels to connote statements of purpose which operate at different levels of specificity' (Allan, 1996, p.93). That is why the history of the terms 'learning outcome' and 'objectives' is closely knit together in the literature of curriculum development and even if these terms were wrongly used as synonyms, basic

6

principles and intentions of learning outcomes are rooted in the objectives movement (Prøitz, 2010).

Terminological confusion aside, the discussion on learning outcomes is not limited nor constrained by behaviourism as it only offers one perspective on learning. Another prevailing pedagogical ideology is social constructivism (Eisner,1979; Prøitz, 2010), a competing school of thought on learning, and consequently on learning outcomes to behaviourism. According to social constructivism, learning takes place when individual constructs meaning from the social environment, with limited impact of the instruction on the process of learning (Prøitz, 2010). Since learning outcomes were initially considered a tool for curriculum development, a dominant school of thought, either behaviourism or social constructivism, had an implication on the foundation of the teaching methods, and therefore on the desired outcome of learning.

1.4 Defining learning outcomes

The scholarly written literature has shown high divergence in opinions on how learning outcomes should be defined and whether they have or have not become institutionalised. Moreover, any discussion on learning outcomes may lie on wrong assumptions unless it is not clear which perspective administrators or educationalists follow (Prøitz, 2010).

In practice, established definitions often rely on the ideas of 'behaviourism, the objectives movement, curriculum planning movement or the mastery learning movement' and represent 'written statements of intended and/or desired outcome to be manifested by student performance'(Prøitz, 2010, p.128). Definitions based on this perspective have three main characteristics: outcome of learning is pre-formulated, assessment criteria are pre-developed and definitions are very similar in formulation. Following examples of definitions are commonly used in practice:

> - *Learning outcomes are statements of what learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning (ECTS Users' Guide 2009,2015)*
> - *Learning outcomes are an explicit description of what a learner should know, understand and be able to do as a result of learning (Bingham, 1999; Kennedy, Hyland, Ryan, 2006, p.4)*
> - *A learning outcome is a statement of what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do at the end of a period of learning and of how that learning is to be demonstrated (Moon, 2002 in Kennedy, Hyland ,Ryan, 2006, p.4)*
> - *A learning outcome is a written statement of what the successful student/learner is expected to be able to do at the end of the module/course unit or qualification (Adam, 2004)*

Focus of definitions is not on a teacher's intention expressed in the aims, but on a student's achievement and demonstration of knowledge, skills and competences at the end of the learning process. The common denominator for all definitions is the need to introduce precision and consideration as to what the student acquires at the end of this process, whether it is a lecture, module/course or entire programme (Adam, 2004).

Although widely spread in practice, scholars of social-constructivism dispute established definitions and offer their views and alternative definitions. According to this perspective, learning is an open-ended process, and outcomes of it cannot be covered entirely with predefined written statements. Furthermore, there is no possibility to measure the outcomes of learning. Definitions differ substantially to the established ones and are built on the social-constructivist logic. Here are two examples of alternative definitions:

> - *Learning outcomes represent what is formally assessed and accredited to the student and they offer a starting point for a viable model for the design of curricula in higher education which shifts emphasis from input and process to the celebration of student learning (Allan, 1996).*
>
> - *One possibility is to work with a flexible understanding of learning outcomes. This all seems a long way from learning outcomes, but it does mean when we construct these, we need to do so in terms of the creation of a writerly text, one within which both teachers and students can write themselves(Avis,2000 in Prøitz 2010, p.129).*

It can be concluded that definitions of learning outcomes differ with respect to learning traditions of a particular institution, the purpose they hold and the de facto lack of exact agreement on how to write them. Furthermore, even the well-established definitions vary slightly, predominantly because they were written and discussed in English, a dominant language in the debate of learning outcomes. The linguistic factor may also influence how the term may be defined in non-native English speaking countries.

The concept of learning outcomes has permeated the national and institutional setting in Serbia as an educational policy close to the Bologna process and 'Europeanisation' of higher education of the country, therefore a well-established definition which circulates in an

international setting will be used as a reference point in the discussion on how the concept is understood in a national setting. A definition that appears in numerous official documents of the EU is the following from ECTS Users' Guide (2005, p.47, 2009, p.13):

> *'Learning outcomes are statements of what learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning'.*

The definition does focus on the learner and achievements in terms of knowledge, skills, and competences after a process of learning, instead on teaching intentions. The teachers' intentions are expressed as aims of modules/courses or programmes (Adam, 2004). Sometimes the terms 'learning outcomes', 'objectives' and 'aims' have been mistakenly interchangeably used as synonyms, to connote the same process hence, it is necessary to distinguish between them.

1.5 Terminological clarification

The difference between *learning outcomes*, *aims* and *objectives*

'*The aim of a module or a programme is a broad general statement of teaching intention, i.e. it indicates what the teacher intends to cover in a block of learning* (Kennedy, Hyland, Ryan, 2006, p.5)'. Teachers write them, and generally they indicate an overall direction and content of the course or a module (Kennedy, Hyland, Ryan, 2006). For example, the aim of the course could be 'to provide a general introduction to governance structures in higher education' or 'introduce students to the French history of the eighteenth century'.

The objective of the course or a module is a narrower statement of teaching intention than aims and implies a specific area that has to be covered in the limited time frame. An example of objectives would be 'to introduce a student to governance components, policies, and management' or 'students would be able to understand the geopolitical consequences of the French Revolution'. '*The aim of a module gives the broad purpose or general teaching intention of the module, whilst the objective gives more specific information about what the teaching of the module hopes to achieve*' (Kennedy, Hyland, Ryan, 2006, p.5).

However, writing '*learning objectives*' lacks clarity and a unified approach, as they can be written either as a teaching intention or, as statements of expected learning. Therefore, it is not clear whether they belong to the teacher-centered or outcomes based approach (Kennedy, Hyland, Ryan, 2006). The result may be confusing as the description of the objectives can include teaching intent and/or learning outcome. Lack of formulation agreement has resulted in avoiding the '*objectives*' description of the modules or courses in favor of formulation of learning outcomes, which have more precision and clarity than objectives according to those who were involved in writing them (Kennedy, Hyland, Ryan, 2006).

Though the term '*objective*' has been side-lined and '*learning outcome*' has taken over, the two are not to be misused as synonyms. Terminological confusion is rooted in the history of the two terms as both were interchangeably used to connote a purpose of learning. Nowadays, learning outcomes express the achievements of students, not the teaching intentions, although they cannot be completely excluded. According to Elliot Eisner, a known social-constructivist and pragmatist, learning outcomes are '*what one ends up with, intended or not, after some form of engagement* (Eisner, 1979, p.103)'. He argues that learning experience depends on a student, subject in matter and teacher, which he referred to as the '*trichotomy of outcomes*' (Prøitz, 2010). Outcomes are broad results of learning that do not exclude the intention but limit the specificity that objectives should have (Allan, 1996).

For teachers, formulation of learning outcomes should begin with the reflection of their teaching attention and explore its connection to what students will actually learn (Allan, 1996). Definitions of 'objectives' usually express educational intention, and looking back from the aspect of behaviorism and the work of Tyler, the term was accompanied with the descriptor 'educational' to indicate changes in students' behaviour as a result of institutional efforts. In other words, educational objectives referred to specific pre-defined and observable products of learning. In addition, he distanced the definition of objectives from content and topics of the course as they could not subsume the result of learning, what does one do with the content.

The term 'educational' objective was substituted with 'instructional' by Mager (Mager,1962; Allan, 1996), to indicate a shift from the general statement and holistic approach of learning experience to more specific statements. The achievement of 'learning objectives' was a result

of given instruction to the student. He did point out the necessity of having more specific statements of learning objectives, but also emphasised that objectives are what a student will learn at the end of the course, rather than show teaching intentions. Hence, the descriptor '*instructional*' refers to the role of the teacher and the course, although he differentiates between an objective and the description of the course (Allan, 1996).

Learning outcomes can be divided into two sub-categories:

- Subject specific outcomes related to specific knowledge and skills of any discipline and
- generic outcomes, which relate to any discipline, for example, problem-solving and critical thinking (Adam, 2006).

Learning outcomes are usually expressed with active verbs that should precisely point to the specific knowledge, skill and competence an individual will acquire upon completion of a process of learning. A common starting point of writing is Bloom's taxonomy of learning and unambiguous action verbs connected to those levels. He identified six categories of learning: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Bloom, 1956, in Adam, 2006, p.7, Kennedy et al 2006, p.8).

Learning outcomes and competences

Competences and learning outcomes are two associated terms and subjects of confusion at the same time. ''*Competence' can broadly refer to aptitude, proficiency, capability, skills and understanding*' (Adam, 2004, p.6), or more narrowly as skills an individual obtains as a result of training. They include theoretical knowledge and understanding, the capacity to apply the knowledge in practice and values necessary for living and interacting in the social context (Tuning, 2007). '*A competence or a set of competences means that a person can demonstrate a certain capacity or skill and perform a task in a way that allows evaluation of the level of achievement*' (Adam, 2004, p.6). In addition, ECTS Users' Guide (2005) distinguishes between subject related and generic competences, just like learning outcomes are subdivided. Formulated like this, competences bear more than a slight resemblance to the term *learning outcomes*, and the latter seems to have pushed the first term out of use according to Kennedy, Hyland and Ryan (2006). It is argued that the lack of terminological clarity of 'competence' in related literature has made learning outcome a primary choice when describing what an

individual is expected to know, understand and demonstrate at the end of a course/module or programme.

1.6 Criticism of learning outcomes

The introduction of learning outcomes is followed by both academic praise and criticism due to a few concerns regarding their advantages and disadvantages. Educationalists that face the concept with skepticism raise two main objections:

1. Philosophical/conceptual objection,
2. Practical/ technical one (Adam, 2004).

The philosophy behind the criticism of learning outcomes objects to pre-formulation of learning outcomes diminished the role of a teacher and learning outcomes as a feature of vocational education, not academic studies. First and foremost learning is an open-ended process, and the liberal concept of education does not acknowledge predefined and pre-formulated statements of learning outcome which would limit the learning experience. Such specifications are profoundly antithetical to traditional functions of the university (Adam, 2004; Allan, 1996; Hussey, Smith, 2008). Moreover, by constraining the learning process, teachers' role becomes diminished to the mere facilitator and service provider. The consequence of this instrumentalist approach to education would decrease the diversity of education. Lastly, educationalists who oppose to *the learning outcomes* concept usually emphasise the difference in vocational and academic studies, perpetuating the gap and following the tradition of binary educational systems. Learning outcomes are useful to vocational studies that focus courses mainly on acquisition of the wide range of skills and competences. On the contrary, nature of academic studies is different, cannot be reduced to the skills and competences approach and the culture of box ticking (Adam, 2004).

Practical/Technical issues involve the processes of formulation and implementation, potential staff resentment, staff development and money problems. The implementation of learning outcomes is a formidable task that involves substantial amounts of money, time and staff development (Adam, 2004, 2006, 2008). For instance, it may take several years to transform and express the curricula in terms of learning outcomes. Moreover, academic staff may

disagree with the reform prerequisites to identify, define and formulate learning outcomes, as introduction to involuntary changes to teaching, learning practices and assessment techniques. Another technical obstacle to the introduction of learning outcomes involves formulation. They may be over- or under-described, ultimately limiting learning or dumbing down teaching if they are written as threshold statements. Learning outcomes may lead to module overload if they are improperly linked to a number of course/module credits and content within the assigned time frame of learning.

The main criticism of learning outcomes points to the diversification of meanings and applications of the term in practice (Hussey, Smith, 2008). What constitutes a successful implementation depends much upon what aspect of learning outcomes is being considered. They distinguish between intended and emerging learning outcomes, with a continuum which includes contiguous, related and incidental outcomes. In addition, they define predicted outcomes, based on the level of expertise and experience of the teacher and their perception of what constitutes an outcome and unpredicted learning outcomes. The latter emerge in a classroom setting, after teacher-student engagement in the learning process and activity which might differ from the initial teaching plan. Moreover, learning outcomes may be desirable and undesirable. Another issue associated with formulation might refer to types of students learning outcomes are formulated for, an average or the best student?

According to Hussey and Smith (2008), learning outcomes reside on a false sense of clarity, and the further individual teaching event from other units of activity, the lesser the value and utility of the concept. They argue that realistic goals of learning outcome formulation can only be accomplished in an individual teaching context, for example, class or seminar, but defy any kind of precision. In addition, they assert that a direct measurement of knowledge, skills and competences is unlikely in any assessment exercise.

Course and module learning outcomes are broader and specify areas of knowledge larger than those from teaching units, ultimately broader in scope as well. Academics define and formulate them as part of requirements in official university documents as components of degree programmes. The language of these learning outcomes follows the standards and guidelines of descriptors devised for the purpose.

According to Hussey and Smith (2003, 2008), learning outcomes are often misused as a managerial tool and performance indicator, a measurement of both teacher and the 'taught'. They attribute learning outcomes as the byproduct of the commodification of knowledge and the rise of bureaucratization of higher education. In addition, teaching process becomes monitored and potentially audited, as teachers must adhere to transparency and write precisely what will be covered (Hussey, Smith, 2003). Ultimately, the emphasis on transparency and accountability in higher education might be the reason why many academics resent the idea of formulisation and defining learning outcomes.

1.7 Research problem and research questions

The interpretation of learning outcome policy may vary according to higher education governance levels, actors, behaviorist or social-constructive approach to learning, and the expected function or purpose they assume within a specific concept. In addition, implementation and practical use of learning outcomes have shown to be problematic, due to the low level of understanding (Adam, 2006).

The purpose of the thesis is to identify the key perspectives essential for understanding learning outcomes in the context specific setting, in this case, the University of Belgrade in Serbia. Secondly, the plan is to use in-depth interviews with academics and academic leaders to specify how learning outcomes are interpreted and embedded at the University and lastly, to point out possible perceptions of change processes that might occur as a result of the application of learning outcomes in practice.

Instead of formulating a single research problem, I have opted for three research questions that follow in a logical sequence and are relevant to the paper's concept building and the choice of methodology. The questions are formulated in the following manner:

1. *What are the key perspectives for understanding learning outcomes?*
2. *How are learning outcomes interpreted and embedded at the University of Belgrade?*
3. *What are the perceived change processes associated with the introduction of learning outcomes at the University of Belgrade?*

The first research question aims to frame the key perspectives for understanding learning outcomes, not only with respect to the types of approaches but also to include explanations to why variations exist. The second question takes the inquiry one step further into the interpretation and embeddedness of learning outcomes at the University of Belgrade. Finally, the third question points to perceived change processes associated with the introduction of learning outcomes.

1.8 Thesis outline

Chapter II will introduce theoretical propositions and propose the Prøitz model as an overarching tool for analytical purposes. The model enables analysis of diverse interpretations of learning outcomes and spans over learning orientations as well as the potential purposes of the concept on the institutional level. In addition, organisational responses to policies and their adaptation may vary depending on how policies are being interpreted by academics and academic leaders as institutional actors. The third chapter illustrates the empirical context of the study, followed by detailed explanation of methodological approach. Next, chapter four presents the data and outlines the possible answers to the research questions. The discussion is the last chapter, where research questions, choice of analytical framework and findings will be reflected upon on in a critical manner. Finally, the conclusion will attempt to point out possible future research directions and summarise the study.

2 Theoretical propositions and analytical framework

2.1 Theoretical propositions

Learning outcomes are not a straightforward easy concept to define and operationalise as an object of enquiry, mostly due to lack of theoretical clarity (Adam, 2004, Prøitz, 2010) and difficulties with finding stable measurements for knowledge, skills and competences. Operationalisation of this concept may follow different paths, thanks to diversified interpretations of definitions and purposes of their possible impact.

The interest of the study is to map up different perspectives of understanding of learning outcomes, the scholarly interpretation, and embeddedness in practice and last, to point out to possible change processes that might occur. Moreover, it will use the institutional theory to explain why the context might be important as well as how different actors within the institution are expected to perceive learning outcomes and why variations in perception might occur.

First, the Prøitz model will be introduced to offer conceptual background to identifying different perspectives of understating learning outcomes, as well as a conceptual backdrop necessary to answer the first research question. Additionally, it will be employed as an analytical tool for the second and third research question, to show how learning outcomes are interpreted and embedded within this particular institution. Lastly, theoretical propositions of institutional theory will complement the Prøitz model and attempt to identify whether and how the interpretation and embeddedness of learning outcomes may vary according to the academic community as institutional actors.

2.2 Prøitz model and defining learning outcomes as an object of enquiry

Prøitz has developed her model on the social-constructivist premise that language has a 'constitutive role in institutional reality' (2010, p.120) and steered her research towards

scholarly written documents on learning outcomes. Moreover, a phenomenon becomes an institutional fact only if the members of a collective attribute value and function to it through agreement and acceptance. We can understand learning outcomes as highly dependent on the acceptance of the University, community or even the national educational system, if we think about it regarding EQF, a systematic effort towards standardisation and common understanding of learning outcomes. She uses an approach Searle (1995) articulated to identify how scholars understand agreed-upon definitions, and the logic goes 'X counts as Y in context C' (Prøitz, 2010). In learning outcomes approach, X is the understanding of learning outcomes, Y the expression of LOs in documents and C is the context.

In chapter one, the history of learning outcomes was outlined to show the two parallel schools of thought, behaviourism, and social-constructivism, as well as their approach to learning outcomes. According to Prøitz, the two perspectives do not exclude one another but represent two opposite poles of a continuum and the range of possible views of the nature of outcomes and orientations to learning. She uses the work on learning outcomes by Elliot Eisner, pragmatist and social constructivist (Allan, 1996), to indicate one pole of a continuum, where learning outcomes happen after a form of engagement and characterises them as 'process-oriented, open-ended and with limited measurability' (Proitz, 2010, p123). The second pole of the continuum characterizes learning outcomes as 'result-oriented, full-ended and measurable'(Prøitz, 2010, p.123), and is based on research of behaviourist, Robert Gagné (1974), who stated that learning outcomes are measurable and can contribute to the precise planning of the instruction. Gagné was predominantly interested in the instructional design and specific learning necessary to complete required task, while Eisner emphasised the role of curriculum and wrote about the 'trichotomy of outcomes', where learning is impossible to specify with terms. It depends on the learner and their capacities, the subject in the matter and the teacher's instruction (Prøitz, 2010).

She adds yet another dimension to the analysis of definitions looking back on the history of the term learning outcomes and concepts regarding their purpose, mainly the pragmatist movement and assessment approach that uses 'defined learning outcomes as a measure of institutional effectiveness' (Proitz, 2010, p.122). The purpose dimension was also perceived as a continuum that places learning outcomes 'as a tool for educational and instructional planning and curriculum design' (2010, p.123) on one side and a tool for 'measuring

effectiveness and accountability' on the other. The pragmatist movement focused on the development of specific learning objectives in elementary and secondary schools in the early 20th century and carried on well into the 1960s and 1970s with the massification of HE. A range of college programmes was competency-based, had narrative transcripts instead of grades and students were assessed on the basis of predefined criteria for different levels of abilities (Ewell, 2005). On the opposite, assessment movement began in the late 20th century as a response to the governmental urge to evaluate the effectiveness of HEI funding. The emphasis was on the measurement of educational outcomes and their correlation to educational inputs, by focusing on the dynamics of teaching and learning process and identification of variables that are the key to raising the effectiveness in education (Biesta, 2009). This movement had a deep impact on the practice in higher education, as well as all levels of policy making, from supra-national, down to the local level as it enabled the discussion based on the data obtained by research. Her model can be presented graphically as follows:
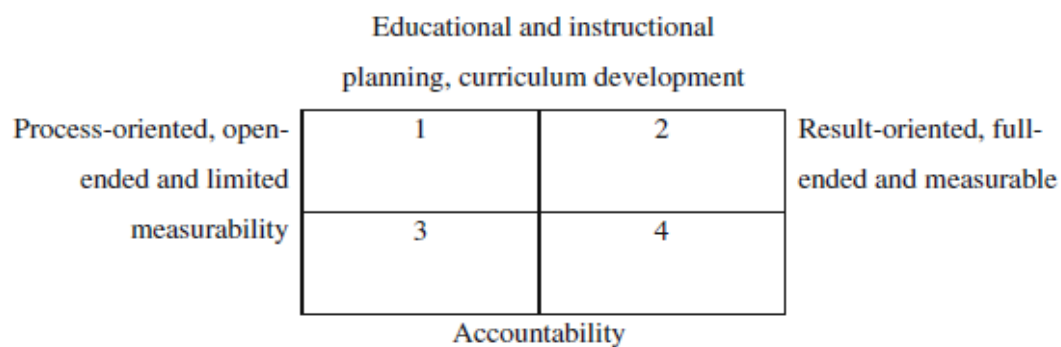
Figure 1 : The Prøitz model (2010)

This is a practical tool for mapping out a variety of interpretations of learning outcomes in this particular context with respect to nature and the purpose, allowing the definitions to include both dimensions, creating a matrix of four quadrants of combinations.

In addition, it can be employed not only for the collection and comparison of learning outcome definitions, but to explore how the concept of learning outcomes is perceived in specific national setting, specific disciplinary culture, to see the learning orientation traditions and the purpose they might hold in one country. Furthermore, it is an excellent starting point

18

for policy makers and higher education institutions to reach an agreement as to what and how they understand the concept before engaging in any discussion revolving around it. Therefore, it is a point of departure in the analysis in all of the research questions.

However, while this thesis does intend to explore interpretations and embeddedness of learning outcomes at the University of Belgrade, using the Prøitz model as an analytical tool; it also attempts to find out why interpretations and embeddedness of learning outcomes policy may vary from the perspective of institutional theory and respective institutional actors. Lastly, a kind of changes institutional actors perceive might happen upon the implementation of learning outcomes. Institutional change is a complex concept which usually requires a longitudinal comparative study and is well beyond the reach of the thesis.

2.3 Learning outcomes as a policy/ Conceptual analysis

Higher education systems in Europe have been under the great influence by two major initiatives, the Bologna process, and the Lisbon strategy, often referred to as the two pillars of institutional integration in HE (Maassen, Musselin, 2009). Learning outcomes may be perceived as the operationalisation of different measures to support the integration, harmonization, and alignment of practices in higher education systems. They were pivotal for the creation of the European Qualifications Frameworks, an instrument applicable to every higher education institution and crucial to the more comparable, transparent degree programmes (Adam, 2008). Moreover, the outcome approach promises to be more responsive to the societal needs and lead a transformation in teaching practices, module and course designs and content. The overall perception indicated that learning outcomes became a prominent feature of the reform process, and the main aim was to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of higher education systems (Kennedy, Hyland, Ryan, 2006).

However, research has pointed out the discrepancy between the narrative and actual application, and Adam (2008) has noted that learning outcomes application has been slow and difficult. In addition a CEDEFOP study (2012) confirmed that interpretations of the concept vary throughout Europe, even within individual institutions (Dobbins, Brooks, Scott,

Rawlinson, Norman (2014). Research indicates that application of such a broad concept may cause a variety of interpretations, even misconceptions, and misuses.

In general, the problem with reform rhetoric and changes that follow, are empirically unverified beliefs and assumptions of reform policies (Maassen, Olsen, 2007). Some policies are expected to be adopted even if they lack empirical verification, normative agreement and clear theoretical propositions (Maassen, Olsen, 2007). The progression of learning outcomes in higher education literature and the diversity of debates of their application might suggest that they should have been accepted and insitutionalised, however, the process has proven to be slow and not without difficulties.

If learning outcomes are put in a context of policy, then, several theoretical propositions might be offered to clarify how their understanding, interpretations, and embeddedness may vary in a specific institutional context. Finally, how learning outcomes are embedded in practice can refer to institutional changes that happen as a result.

Learning outcomes policy exemplifies how a policy debate throughout Europe has the tendency to become more similar, despite different traditions and varieties between the countries, implying the strong influence from the supranational level agencies and willingness of national actors to follow the new terminological fashion (Teichler, 2004). It is observable how the concept evolved, from initial reference as the teaching and curriculum aid, into the device decisive to the success of the Bologna reform.

The institutionalisation of the European educational agenda on national levels for some scholars appears to have the purpose to create a particular governance system, with common institutions and lines of authority that would implement binding policies (Olsen, 2002). An argument towards this line of thought would be the Lisbon agenda, and its promotion of the European model of society creation, with a supplementary goal to reach the ambition of socially and environmentally sustainable economic growth (Gornitzka, 2007). The latest fashion among universities in Europe is to emphasise the 'European perspective', as new modes of governance have been introduced, supra-national processes of cooperation established with a multiplicity of actors and issues involved. New perspective emphasises that

universities need more autonomy and accountability, therefore, new structures have to be introduced (Maassen, Olsen, 2007).

There are two challenges resulting from the emergence of global policy field, one, the concept of educational policy had more than national character and two, the educational policy field has heterogenic power sources. The latter claim argues that under the conditions of globalization, economic policies subsume educational ones to an extent, under the pretext that education now has an increased role in economic growth and innovation (Lingard, Rawolle, Taylor, 2005). The relevance of the global level rose in part by the increased influence of international agencies, the World Bank, and the OECD. The term *global* denotes the level above national, though other references may provide the same connotation, for example, international, supra-national, etc. Lingard, Rawolle, and Taylor argue that '*structure, scope and function of educational policy have changed with the attention paid to the role of education in economic growth and innovation*' by the above-mentioned agencies (2005, p.760).

It can be argued that the learning outcome approach supports the reform process based on New Public Management ideas and notions that public institutions, including universities, need to improve their performance efficiency and greater response to societal needs. Bologna process may be interpreted as a system reform embedded in new institutional theory and management theory, and that line of new educational policies have restructured public sector vertically and horizontally (Christensen, 2010). Increased managerialism was politically pushed, however, the changes in practice 'have varied quite a lot in line with differences in structural constraints, cultural traditions, and environmental pressure' (Christensen, 2010, p.504). However, general educational reforms might be difficult to implement unless they are compatible with organisational and cultural traditions of the higher education institutions, especially if they do not reflect the academic freedom and specialised professional knowledge.

In addition, studies on policy making in higher education point out that policies are often 'messy' and that their interpretation and adaptation often depends on context and 'actual' recipients. They are often complex, with conflicted interests, dependent on the distribution of power and authority and shaped by compromise and negotiations (Gornitzka, Kogan, Amaral,

2005). Policies may also be understood as dynamic objectives that are molded and remolded in the implementation phase by different policy actors, depending on the context and interaction between the structure and the agency (Sin, 2014).

Approaches to policy analysis

Within the study, the *policy* will be referred to as '*a public statement of an objective and the kind of instruments that will be used to achieve it*' (Gornitzka, 1999, p.14). These statements are usually objects of political choice, an approved decision at the national level (Gornitzka, 1999). Possible perspectives in policy analysis vary upon the understanding of the direction of policy making process, whether it is a top-down or bottom-up process.

A top-down perspective assumes linearity of the policy making process, decided upon the legislature level and followed by administrative execution without interaction between multiple actors and authorities (Gornitzka, 1999). This approach follows the rationalistic logic within the institutional theory, implies clear, consistent policy objectives to achieve its goals, as well as certain causality that will allow the unhampered flow of processes (Cherych, Sabatier, 1987). Rationalistic approach excludes the institutional level actor capacity to adapt the model to own needs and purposes, rather, assumes automatic implementation without any interaction. Governments usually tend to adopt this model, despite the 'mechanistic approach to change' (Sin, 2014, p. 436) and lack of concern for the responsiveness of the actors involved.

The hypothesis of the rationalistic approach is that universities are on a path of greater formalisation of structures to align with global tendencies and environmental standards as well as international rankings (Christensen, Ramirez, 2013). Within this perspective, learning outcomes have a structural-instrumental role to impact the changes of universities (March, Olsen, 2005; Christensen, Lægreid, 2001a; Christensen, 2010). Basically any decision making is governed by the logic of appropriateness, leading to institutional isomorphism and in practice, this rationale relates to increased social responsiveness of the university, increased access and rationalization of governance structures (Ramirez, 2006).

Rational decision making is close to the administrative logic, with the increase of specialization of structures, administration becomes more complex. For an organisation to

administer large-scale tasks, many of the individual activities need to be coordinated. If and when practices become standardized and predictable, the organisation becomes more effective and efficient (Birnbaum, 1991). Another characteristic of increased bureaucratization of an institution is the creation of the standard operating procedures which are guided by rules and regulations. According to this hierarchical perspective, the reform process is limited to a closed group of leaders (political, administrative/institutional) who have the 'know how' and the control over the reform (Christensen, 2010).

Due to the engineering approach of the rational model of policy analysis and the fact that institutional actor involvement in the policy formation and processes are ignored, many actor-theories emerged as a response. The first assumption of these concepts is that a scenario where policy travels linearly through different levels of governance and remains unchanged is highly unlikely, implying that policy gets adjusted during implementation process (Gornitzka,1999). On the other hand, it does not mean that policy is disembedded from the formation process; rather, there are multiple interpretations and adaptations by the actors on the institutional level. Moreover, these theories of bottom-up approach indicate that power distribution, different levels of authority and interests as well as a compromise are relevant to policy processes and point out that there is a mismatch between policy decisions and practice.

These arguments relate to the cultural-institutional perspective on educational reforms and the importance of institutional traditions (Christensen, 2010) and the fact that most of the public organisations abide by informal rules and values which lead to the process of institutionalisation. With respect to learning outcomes, cultural perspective is useful to examine the underlying principles, norms, and values of the idea and measure them against the cultural traditions of the specific institution. In addition, we can look into the aims of the learning outcomes and whether they want to change the university culture or not. The institutional theory asserts that policy processes might attempt to affect values and beliefs on nature and knowledge production of the HEI and its role in the society. For example, depending on the extent of deviation from existing behavior, norms, and values, organisations will either resist or adopt a particular policy.

Deliberate attempts to change organisations, especially with wide spectrum reforms, are expected to be met with resistance if new policies are not aligned with traditions, norms and

beliefs of the organisation. Organisations combine conformity to the expectations of the environment while maintaining stability (Gornitzka, Kogan, Amaral, 2005). Most of the changes that do occur are results of routine responses of organisations to the expectations of the environments with a purpose to obtain legitimacy in the field and survive (Di Maggio, Powell, 1983). According to March and Olsen (2006), organisations with stable values, interests and norms show inertia to reform. On the contrary, if those changes are compatible with organizational culture, they are adopted routinely, as standard operating procedures. That change implies normative match between suggested initiative and values and beliefs, traditions of the organisation. Large reform attempts, however, usually involve resistance.

In the context of the Bologna process, initial policy research did indicate negligence of academics and institutions as relevant actors in the process of implementation (Sin, 2013). Furthermore, Neave and Amaral's (2008) research on Bologna reports and documents have indicated that institutional actors entered into policy implementation spotlight after 2007. The fact is that there was a gap between national level acceptance of Bologna principles and their institutional implementation, implying that institutions have the key role of actually enforcing the changes. Moreover, if there was a talk of change, its indicators should include values of the academic profession (Gornitzka, Kogan, Amaral 2005).

However, the academic profession is specific, and many argue that belief systems differentiate academics by the discipline, enterprise, profession and system; therefore it cannot be subsumed into one profession. Academic heterogeneity has to be taken into consideration in the analysis and discussion of the paper, especially if some perceptions of the academics are reflection of the nature of their discipline. Therefore, any deductions from the data will be taken with caution, since the attempt of the study is to add to the empirical base of academics as policy actors on the system level, rather than their association to the specific discipline.

Context/ Process of translation

Another important dimension in policy adaptation besides the direction of policy making and relevant institutional actors presents the context. The concepts of the policy translation (Sahlin-Andersson, Wedlin, 2008) and travel of ideas (Czarniawska, Joerges, 1996) provide insights on how a particular policy is accepted and picked up within particular settings. The

application of the concept suits the European policy setting and the Bologna process, as supra-national ideas are conceived and then disembedded from that setting, travel through space and time, and get translated locally into a new practice.

One of the main mechanisms through which organisations get exposed and open for ideas is imitation (Sahlin-Andersson, Wedlin, 2008). They are not diffused through a vacuum but transferred by different actors, context, traditions and institutions themselves. 'Ideas change as they flow' (Sahlin-Andersson, Wedlin, p.5), and become either adapted to existing practices or are modified or completely reshaped, and become new forms as they flow through context among different actors.

During the process of translation, ideas are edited and evolve in several directions, they may lead to homogenisation as institutional theory claims, and in addition, to variation and stratification (Sahlin, Wedlin, 2008). The editing process is a concept introduced to translation analysis to add clarity to how ideas travel and transform. Although it may appear to be a creative process, it is bound by social control, traditions and conformity (Sahlin, Wedlin 2008). These rules do not imply literal written instructions, rather how institutional setting has formed the translation. Reform ideas tend to be presented in known terms and existing templates, examples and concepts so they appear sensible and understandable to the reader or listener.

The main idea which differentiates traditional institutional theorists from Scandinavian institutionalists is that the homogenisation is not an only process that occurs as a response to external pressures to the organisation, but that diffusion of ideas may also lead to *variation* and *stratification*. In addition, effects of idea circulation adoption are more than ceremonial and have proved to have an effect on both formal structures and practices (Sahlin-Andersson, Wedlin, 2008).

Research in the circulation of ideas recently started to focus on the types of ideas that circulate and how their nature might change as a result of institutional setting changes and as ideas circulate (Sahlin-Andersson, Wedlin, 2008). 'We can describe this change as a shift in focus from ideas as prototypes to ideas as templates' (Sahlin-Andersson, Wedlin, 2008, p.23). The prototype is the original idea that travels, gets translated and put into practice through

imitation. Organisations that tend to pick those kinds of ideas are the ones that try to align their practices with the successful organisations. The idea is carried from one setting to another, translated through imitation and edited to what is presumably a thriving model.

Moreover, institutional setting templates may be used as assessment tools and for practice comparison within sub-units. For example, they are targets of frames that circulate so actors could benchmark their activities. In other words, templates become success stories. 'Templates serve as currency, the medium of abstraction used to assess, monitor and present practices' (Sahlin-Andersson, Wedlin, 2008 p.23). These ideas may be standards of what organisation aspires to keep pace with. Based on this process, identities are shaped, or reshaped, organisations identify with a particular group of organisations they want to be affiliated with.

The academic community

The introductory part of the thesis pointed out the main specificities of learning outcomes concept, including the multiplicity of meanings and purposes this concept may assume in a particular setting. Accordingly, it is essential to keep in mind the importance of the context and the policy actors' belief system, in this case, the belief system of academics as policies are a result of negotiation and interpretation on different levels and among diverse stakeholders. Moreover, this particular policy is only one of the Bologna process action lines or its instruments, so, if the assumption that Bologna is open to 'interpretative dispersion', then its subunit the learning outcome policy is open as well (Neave, Veiga, 2012).

Academic standpoint on learning outcomes is one of the main niche groups in the academic community, as they represent direct recipients and at the same time agents of policy responsible for reshaping and applying it in practice. It can be argued that the 'shop floor', departments, faculty and university, is subsequently critical for the final shape of the policy.

Academic profession has not remained untouched by the changes in the last couple of decades, as new tasks appeared and were brought upon higher education institutions, ones that are not necessarily in line with traditional practices and work roles (Enders, 2007). The societal demands from universities have challenged the traditional norms, especially in teaching and research, as there is pressure to accommodate to higher access, structural

26

diversification, curriculum reform, especially focus on generic skills and competences and lifelong learning philosophy.

'Faculty are the heart and soul of higher education and research. But they are not one heart and one soul' (Enders, 2007, p.9), implying that although there is a sense of belonging to a particular profession, regarding being part of collegium with common beliefs and purpose, it is highly contested that academic profession can be subsumed as a single profession. Differentiation starts with separation according to discipline or academic enterprise, belonging to different institutions divided by internal ranking system and national differences, all of which may have an impact on the academic culture, practices and even structure (Enders, 2007; Clark, 1983; Teichler, 1996). Although members of academia might share the general ideas and culture in a sense of belonging to the academic community, their belief systems are not unified, and we can distinguish between four types of belief systems within higher educational subcultures: disciplinary culture, the culture of the enterprise, the culture of the profession and system culture.

Disciplinary culture predominantly relates to distinct and different knowledge domains and intellectual tasks, traditions and codes of conduct. 'As recruits to different academic specialties, they enter different cultural houses, there to share beliefs about theory, methodology, techniques and problems' (Clark, 1983, p.76). The culture of the enterprise relates to the university as an individual entity and its unity in creating common symbols and values. The capacity to forge symbols depends on the structure and size of the organisation, where smaller entities tend to build more unified ideologies. The culture of the profession is ambiguous and harder to differentiate as it indicates a sense of belonging to the academic community and holds ideals of what it means to an individual to be an 'academic' (Clark,1983). To academic profession, the highest ideals are personal autonomy, mostly with respect to teaching and research, right to be self-governed and commitment to realise the functions higher education is supposed to provide to the society. Differentiation by the discipline and enterprise are the two most common aspects of how the academic profession is discussed in the literature. According to Becher (1994), the academic profession is fragmented into tribes, where discipline determines the substance of inquiry, the perception of self as an academic, modes of communication as well as interaction within the institution and with the external world.

Having in mind the premise of social constructivism, that reality is a product of social interactions of a specific context, group characteristics and beliefs of academics in particular disciplines are likely to be relevant to the understanding of the policy object of learning outcomes. Using Biglan's (1973a) classification, disciplines can be grouped into four broad categories: hard pure, soft pure and hard applied and soft applied (Becher, 1989). The primary distinction of pure versus applied disciplines refers to the aim and purpose of the research.

Academics in hard pure fields generally commit intensively to research and not as much to teaching. Moreover, the nature of the hard pure field knowledge domain is more or less straightforward, linear and does not demand a heavy investment time wise into course preparation. In addition, the introduction of new courses and review of the ones are not seen as particularly problematic (Neumann, Becher, 2002). On the contrary, as the knowledge domain of soft pure fields is loosely structured, commitment to research activities is less demanding and competitive, while the focus is rather on teaching activities. Inquiry in soft pure fields is more individualistic and solitary, a subject matter open for interpretation implying that course preparation demands more time. Moreover, justifications of the particularities of the program are greater than in hard pure fields, and academics in these disciplines spend most time on teaching preparation (Neumann, Becher, 2002).

Hard applied fields follow a similar pattern with hard pure fields when teaching and dedication to research are concerned. Although they prefer research than teaching, in most cases they agree when collaborating with colleagues. A lot of attention is put into course planning, mostly due to the importance of external accreditation, however, since their knowledge base is more or less fixed, the programme review does not take that much time. Although they spend the least amount of time on teaching preparation, they use the same time as a soft pure professor on face-to-face teaching and general substantive coverage of curricula (Neumann, Becher, 2002).

For professors in soft applied fields, for example, education studies and management, teaching prioritises research, whereas programme review additionally is of concern due to accreditation. The nature of applied professions enables professors to be accessible to collaboration in teaching, as there is a substantive need to cover both theoretical grounds as

ensuring that students also acquire practical skills, a prerequisite in hard applied fields too (Neumann, Becher, 2002).

2.4 Analytical framework

The first research question, 'What are the key perspectives for understanding learning outcomes?' aims to ground the discussion on learning outcomes within the local context of the University of Belgrade and identify the leading approaches towards the concept. The focus of the question remains on the definitional level and attempts to find out how the concept is understood by academics, academic leaders and University-related documents. The term *understanding* connotes two interpretations within the paper:

1. It refers to clear terminological demarcation among 'learning outcomes', 'aims', 'objectives' and 'competences'.
2. Addresses the variance in meanings and purposes of the concept, described by Prøitz (2010).

The Prøitz model (2010) becomes a useful analytical tool to include all of the variations in the meaning and the purposes of learning outcomes within the University. It is presented by axis 1, which refers to the nature and orientations of learning and axis 2, which encompasses different understandings of learning outcome purposes. The model is presented in the following manner:
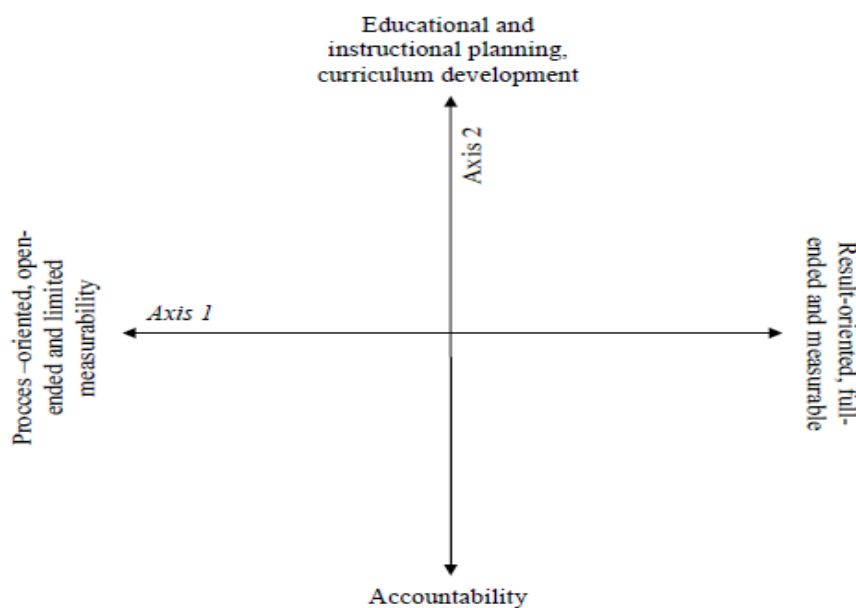

Figure 2: Analytical framework

The learning orientation of the model should indicate how institutional actors perceive the learning outcomes concept, by examining and categorizing their definitions of the concept. In operational terms, all of the respondents will be asked a series of questions to comment how they would describe and understand learning outcomes. Moreover, the author will try to explore how learning outcomes are understood and described within legislative, University and Faculty level documents. The main objective is to investigate what kinds of definitions are represented within the organisation.

The purpose orientation covers two separate sub-categories: one where learning outcomes are useful for educational and instructional planning and curriculum development and the other, learning outcomes as an accountability tool (Prøitz, 2010). Learning outcomes can encompass both categories, but for the sake of analysis, those will be treated individually. The term *accountability* 'comprises political accountability, legal accountability, bureaucratic accountability, professional accountability and market accountability (Prøitz, 2010, p.124, Darling-Hammond, 2004).

Opinions and definitions of learning outcomes may vary in the academic community and the discussion in chapter 1 shows the relevance of having consensus over understanding and perspective followed either by educationalists or administration, otherwise any type of discussion may lead to wrong assumptions and even misappropriation of the concept. Therefore, according to this premise, the aim of the analysis is to point out to how academics and academic leadership might define learning outcomes and apply their opinions to the analytical framework.

It is interesting to point out that within written literature definitions of learning outcomes vary from established to alternative, and that the established ones rest on the ideas of behaviorism while the alternative are offered by social-constructivism. This fact leads to the logic that there is a consensus within the academic community that learning outcomes need to be measurable, pre-formulated and result-oriented. However, research has shown that practice learning outcomes have yet to be institutionalised because there is still disagreement on their value and purposes among different academic actors.

30

While the first research question attends to the overall understanding of learning outcomes, the objective of the second and third question aims to explore how learning outcomes are interpreted in practice, by observing the axes of the Prøitz model and discussing what the expectations and the reality of learning outcomes application on the institutional level are.

Moreover, the paper aims not only to identify the perspectives and possible variances of meanings, but also to consider potential explanations to why variances occur. For that purpose, a set of institutional approaches towards policy adaptation will try to reflect on how actors who assume different roles and positions within the organisation may understand the concept of learning outcomes, or how the context may be relevant to the policy adaptation as well. These perspectives will complement the Prøitz 'purpose' axis to shed additional light on reasons for the variance in understanding.

Categorizing policy adaptation processes

For analysis purposes, three types of policy adaptation processes are distinguished: top-down (Gornitzka, 1999; Christensen, Ramirez, 2013), bottom-up (Christensen, 2010) and a third that refers to the contextual adaptation and policy translation (Czarniawska, Joerges, 1996; Sahlin-Andersson, Wedlin, 2008). The third category encompasses both top-down and bottom-up approach, to indicate how certain elements of policy might be passed down to implementation without prior discussion as well as how policy is reshaped and adapted by the very recipients on the institutional level.

The top-down perspective follows the rationalistic logic within the institutional theory, implying that universities are on a path of greater formalisation of structures to align with global tendencies and environmental standards (Christensen, Ramirez, 2013) and any kind of decision making is governed by the logic of appropriateness. In practice this rationale relates to the increased social responsiveness of university, increased access and rationalization of governance structures. Within this perspective, learning outcomes have a structural-instrumental role to impact the changes of the universities (March, Olsen, 1983, Christensen, Lærgeid, 2001a, Christensen, 2010). The administrative logic usually follows this line of policy adaptation. The consequences are a specialisation of structures, coordination of

activities and standardisation of operating procedures, often defined by law. The hierarchy of the perspective implies that reform processes are limited to a closed group of institutional leaders and in the context of the study academic leaders at the University have the authority to administer reforms.

The bottom-up approach to policy process asserts that most organisations abide by informal rules, values which lead to institutionalisation. Values and principles of any idea have to be congruent with the principles of the institution in order to be accepted; otherwise they will encounter resistance and even defiance. With respect to learning outcomes, the cultural-institutional perspective is useful to explore what kinds of underlying principles and values lie behind the idea and compare them to the culture and tradition within the University of Belgrade. The bottom-up approach indicates how power distribution, levels of authority, different interests and compromise are relevant to policy processes and highlight the mismatch between policy decisions and practices. Academics and academic leaders represent the interest groups in the study.

The policy translation concept asserts how ideas flow and change respectively (Sahlin-Andersson, Wedlin, 2008), get transferred by actors, context, traditions and even institutions themselves through the process of editing. For learning outcomes policy, this means either adaptation to already existent practices, modification or reshaping, or even becoming a completely new form as it flows through the context.

The following table will attempt to categorize the top-down and bottom-up processes in learning outcomes policy adaptation mostly with respect to their purpose/expectations according to the perspectives. The policy translation perspective is not presented in the table because policy adaptation integrates elements of both perspectives. However, the topic will be further assessed in the findings and discussion chapters of the paper.

Learning outcomes policy adaptation approaches	Top-down, Rationalistic approach	Bottom-up, Cultural-Institutional perspective
Activities associated with the two approaches	1. Emphasis on leadership 2. Formal reporting (Quality Assurance) 3. Evaluations 4. Formalistic approach 5. Documentation of results 6. Links to strategy	1. Collegial discussions on curriculum design 2. Formative evaluations 3. Competence building 4. Training 6. Establishment of meeting places for dialogue 7. Disciplinary orientation

Table 1: Learning outcomes policy adaptation approaches

3   Empirical Context, Research design and Methods

3.1 Background information

Higher education system in Serbia

The Bologna Process provided an impetus for system-wide changes in the higher education institutions in Serbia since the country joined the Process in 2003. These changes included the adoption of the new Law on Higher Education (2005) and its subsequent amendments in 2008, 2010 and 2012/13. Law regulated the new three study cycle system, introduced the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and diploma supplement (LoHE 2005, Eurydice, 2016). Study programmes have been reformed completely and starting from 2007/8, newly enrolled students have begun their studies according to them.

In addition, a large number of policy instruments appeared to reflect the Bologna Process action lines especially related to the quality assurance (QA) (Vukasović, 2014, p.197). From 2006 to 2007, standards for accreditation, self-evaluation, and external control have been adopted, followed by the process of accreditation of higher education institutions (HEIs), programme accreditations and external institutional evaluations. Considering that HEIs had an organisational level task to prepare accreditation documentation, internal QA procedures were developed as well.

The government formulated the Strategy for the development of Education is Serbia until 2020 (2012), with the objective to identify specific goals, directions, mechanisms and developmental instruments in the education sphere. The improvements of educational outcomes do not present a novelty in transitional countries, moreover, the political milieu emphasises the necessity to create better links between the higher education and the labour market, primarily by introducing new innovative programmes and encouragement of entrepreneurship (Branković, Maassen, Stensaker, Vukasović, 2014). However, these educational trends in the form of new programmes tend to come with a price for HEI,

34

especially regarding breaking or at least challenging the traditions and norms of the nature and purpose of higher education institutions.

Types of tertiary education institutions

Three types of higher education institutions operate in Serbia: universities, colleges of applied sciences and colleges of academic studies. Universities are the only institutions that offer all three study cycles (see Appendix 1). Faculties have the status of separate legal entities, with the autonomy to organise business activities, however, they cannot exist independently, but as an integrated constituent of the University. Currently, seventeen universities operate in Serbia, of which seven are state funded, and the other seven are private for-profit organisations. Colleges of applied sciences provide the first and a form of second cycle higher education, and since 2009, 69 colleges have been accredited (Tempus report, 2012d). Faculties are chosen as embedded sub-units of the University because they are academically oriented, as opposed to professional orientation colleges assume.

Structurally, courses of professional studies in relation to the number of ECTS contain the following groups: academic education-15 percent, professional-40 percent and professional and applied-45 percent (EHEA, 2015). For basic academic studies, programme structure includes 15% of academic courses, 20% of theoretical and methodological courses, 35% scientific professional and 30% of professional applied courses (EHEA, 2015).

Distribution of responsibilities

In the Serbian higher education system structure (see Appendix 2), the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development assumes the highest level of the authority to recommend policies and strategies to the Government. Other tasks relate to development planning, allocation of resources and overall monitoring of the higher education system (TEMPUS Report, 2012d). The National Council of Higher Education was established as an independent body in 2005 to oversee the development of higher education and its comparability to European standards. Moreover, the Council suggests higher education policies to the Ministry, sets standards for both internal and external quality assurance, establishes the standards and procedures for the accreditation of institutions and programmes

respectively (LoHE, 2005). All of the members are appointed and recommended by the Parliament, twelve members are eminent professors from different faculties, two are the professors in professional studies, seven are prominent individuals in science, culture, art and business and lastly, two are student representatives appointed by the student conferences.

Quality assurance matters were delegated by the National Educational Council to the Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA) in 2006, a formal and independent body responsible for external quality assurance in the higher education of Serbia (CAQA, 2013). Responsibilities of CAQA include assisting the National Council of Education in the design of accreditation standards, standards and procedures for accreditation of HEIs and individual programmes. Furthermore, they formulate self-evaluation and quality assessment standards of the HEIs, standards for external quality assessment. CAQA assists individual education units promotion of quality practices, implements the accreditation procedures, issues accreditation certificates.

Student and University conferences participate in the governance of higher education as well. University Conference was established in 2005 to coordinate common interests, policies among universities, propose candidates for the National Council of Education and Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee.

The University of Belgrade

The University of Belgrade is a flagship university and *alma mater* to other higher education institutions in Serbia, with the leadership role in the policy arena discussions. The university is specific for its structural fragmentation along the traditional disciplinary lines and resistance to 'functional integration' processes (Vukasović, Elken 2013). In practice the fragmentation is visible in decision-making competences, particularly when quality assurance ones were to the university level structures but remained at the faculty level as well. Legally, faculties operate under the University as their umbrella organisation, but with their name according to the University Statute and the law. They are independent legal entities, with the right to organise the structure, programmes, budget plans and receive funding from the state, without the University management as an intermediary body. However, the University's responsibilities towards faculties extend over giving the assent to the curricula, creation of the universal criteria and the control of their work. Likewise, the University has the authority to

empower faculties to organise undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral studies. The Ministry of Education and Science funds all of Serbia's HEIs and issues operating licenses in the form of accreditation certificate which specifies the accredited programmes, a number of teaching staff, students and facilities. Funding is allocated according to the number of enrolled students (LoHe, 2005).

Nevertheless, the law also states that faculties cannot exist separately from the University, and this regulatory aspect is a strong rationale for treating the faculties as embedded sub-units within one organisation. Moreover, the traditionally strong disciplinary focus within faculties is taken into account and respondents are chosen upon different disciplinary groupings. The aim is to explore how respondents from different disciplinary cultures react to learning outcomes in terms of interpretation and practical use.

3.2 Research design

The research methodology of the thesis was decided upon after extensive literature review and the very nature of learning outcomes as a complex phenomenon without clear theoretical propositions and measurements. The research design of the paper follows the embedded single-case study principles. Case study as a method of inquiry is an 'all-encompassing method-covering the logic of the design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis (Yin, 2014, p.17)'. Yin (2014, p.16) offers a twofold definition which includes the scope and features of a case study as an empirical inquiry:

- investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real world context, especially when,
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident.

In terms of bounding the case and defining the unit of analysis, the University of Belgrade is considered to be an embedded case study. According to the law of higher education in Serbia, the term university is dual as it denotes the association of faculties or a separate institution as a legal entity with business independence and functions. Any higher education institution has a university status if it organises academic study programmes at all levels, within at least three fields and areas (LoHE, 2005). Although legal interpretation allows seeing faculties as

separate entities, within the study they will be observed as a sub-unit integral to the University as a whole. Interpretation of findings will relate to the University level, but on its subunits as the role of faculties and departments is critical to the final shaping of policies.

The research questions try to cover understanding of the learning outcome phenomenon and its embeddedness within a particular context. Hence, an embedded case study design follows the rationale of choosing a common case (Yin, 2014) in order to capture circumstances of an everyday situation, and try to extract lessons of particular social processes relevant to theoretical propositions. The University of Belgrade epitomizes a broader category of sub-units and provides an apt context to examine key social processes (Bryman, 2012).

3.3 Definition and selection of the case

Looking back at the research questions, how learning outcomes may be understood and embedded in the institutional setting would allow any higher educational institution in Serbia to become a potential case. However, the University of Belgrade considers itself a leading higher education institution in the region and plans to maintain this position with preparedness to adapt to modern challenges while maintaining the traditional values. Moreover, the mission statement clearly emphasises its role in providing an exceptional education and knowledge to students, both subject specific and general, towards enhancing qualities of an individual in their personal growth and ethical values.

Main educational and research activities of the University of Belgrade are of public interest, regulated by law since it is a state funded institution. From the political point of view, higher education institutions need to align the practices with the Bologna process initiatives as one of the prerequisites of the ascension of the country into the EU. The fact that it was entrusted with the leading role in preparing the draft of the higher education law in 2004 solidifies the University of Belgrade as a relevant exploratory case.

3.4 Data collection and analysis

Sources of evidence

Understanding and interpretation of learning outcomes may vary respectively to the perceived learning orientation and purposes of the concept among the academic community who assume different functions within the University. Thus, it is essential for the study to explore the perceptions of academics and academic leaders to answer the research questions. Empirically, the chapter builds on semi-structured interviews, conducted to find out the scope of interpretations and relevant discourses within a member of academia with respect to disciplinary differences and positions within the department, faculty and university. Additionally, relevant university and legislative documents will be analysed and triangulated with the interviews to strengthen the validity of the findings.

The following sources of evidence are being used in the study:

- Semi-structured interviews
- Documents related to learning outcomes published by the University
- Documents mentioning learning outcomes published by the Faculties and departments
- Legal documents

3.5 Interviews

The interviews present the core of the study, as they attempt to shed light on the meanings and interpretations of learning outcomes across different institutional levels and disciplinary contexts. Moreover, academics are largely responsible for the enactment of any practice related to learning outcomes and therefore they are the niche of inquiry (Dobbins, Brooks, Scott, Rawlinson, Norman, 2014). The semi-structured interviews have the capacity to provide insights into how participants perceive reality (Bryman, 2012) and for learning outcomes, they are particularly useful due to the fact that literature points out a variance of interpretations of purposes and uses across the sector (Dobbins, Brooks, Scott, Rawlinson, Norman, 2014). In addition, interviews offer in-depth analysis of academic opinions on the use of learning outcomes in practice.

Twelve one-to-one interviews were conducted among academics across three disciplines in order to respect the academic diversity and disciplinary related distinctive cultural characteristics (Becher, 1994). Additionally, respondents were chosen in relation to the positions they assume within their respective department and faculty to reflect four types of

belief systems within higher education sub-culture: disciplinary culture, the culture of the enterprise, the culture of the profession and system culture (Clark, 1983). The selection of the respondents reflected the classification of disciplines into four broad headings: hard pure, soft pure, hard applied and soft applied (Becher, 1989, Neumann, Becher, 2002).

In order to gain perspective from academic leaders and academics, the course of action included selection and contacting vice deans of education first. The rationale behind choosing vice deans lays in the position they hold within the Faculty. As a prerequisite to becoming a vice dean for education, they would have had to possess the sufficient teaching experience. Technically, they represent the management of the faculty, performing the administrative work and setting the strategic plans for the future, but also, they are held responsible for keeping track of teaching processes, as well as participating in innovation, reshaping of curriculum and study programmes. Hence, their insights on learning outcomes were valuable from both the management and academic perspective. In the paper, they would be referred to as academic leaders.

There was a concern whether they would respond to the interview invitation, therefore I had to make sure to obtain a positive response in order to start sending out emails to other academics within the same faculty just to have the consistency in the faculty's choices. The choice of Faculties was ultimately decided upon ensuring a green light for participation among vice deans of education first. The only criterion needed to be followed through was to ensure that faculties did not fall under the same disciplinary categorisation. Chosen respondents were from soft-pure, hard-pure and hard-applied faculties respectively. Three respondents were academic leaders, and nine were academics from three faculties, three from each.

Hierarchically speaking, academics assumed different positions within departments, from experienced professors and heads of departments to younger academics who were lecturers. Due to ethical reasons, the identities of the respondents are confidential, bound by informed consent signed by both the author and respondents. To maintain the anonymity, the information about respondents will only include the position within the faculty and the discipline they belong to, coded with letters and numbers in the following manner:

40

Position	Level	Disciplinary categorisation	Code
Academic leader	Faculty	Soft-pure	SPL1
Academic leader	Faculty	Hard-pure	HPL2
Academic leader	Faculty	Hard-applied	HAL3
Academic	Faculty/department	Soft-pure	SPA1
Academic	Faculty/department	Soft-pure	SPA2
Academic	Faculty/department	Soft-pure	SPA3
Academic	Faculty/department	Hard-pure	HPA1
Academic	Faculty/department	Hard-pure	HPA2
Academic	Faculty/department	Hard-pure	HPA3
Academic	Faculty/department	Hard-applied	HAA1
Academic	Faculty/department	Hard-applied	HAA2
Academic	Faculty/department	Hard-applied	HAA3

Table 2: The interview overview

The protocol for approaching potential interviewees was identical at all faculties and included contact via email by introducing the researcher, rationale and overview of the topic and requesting the interview. As mentioned above, it was essential to confirm and organise interview dates with the vice deans for education first, in order to contact other academics afterwards. The response rate was low in the beginning, with one vice dean agreeing to participate in the interview but denying to be recorded. That prompted another round of emails offering anonymity within the study which effectively resulted in positive responses. Finally, three out of five vice deans contacted responded positively, and nine out of seventeen academics agreed to participate in the study.

According to theoretical propositions, academics and academic leaders might have different perceptions of learning outcomes due to the different belief systems and positions they hold within the institution, therefore two interview guides were developed to reflect the position as well. Planned duration of an interview was 45 minutes, however, the length ranged between 35-120 minutes; one interview was carried out via Skype, the other eleven one-on-one in person. In addition, eleven of the interviews were recorded, and one vice dean refused to be recorded but agreed to speak slower to enable detailed note taking. Although interview guides were developed in English, interview meetings were held in Serbian, it being the native

tongue of both interviewer and interviewees. For details about the interview guide structure and questions, consult the appendices section of the paper which includes both English and Serbian version. Upon the agreement of anonymity, interviews were anonymized by awarding codes, completely transcribed in Serbian and responses were divided into categories for analytical purposes. Ultimately, the categorised responses were translated into English and included in the results chapter of the paper.

3.6 Documents

The selection of publications associated with learning outcomes was based on online search. At first 'blind search' was attempted by using search queries *learning outcomes* and *outcomes of learning* in Serbian. The results were expectedly broad, so the next search strategy focused on official documents derived from the state, most prominently the law of higher education, official documents published by the University, general regulatory and strategic documents, and programme/course descriptions. Moreover, reflecting on theoretical propositions, quality assurance documents were reviewed, including accreditation standards, and self-evaluation reports. Categorisation of documents relied on the development of a reading guide focusing on documents that include learning outcome definitions, learning orientation or purpose of the concept.

Although the level of analysis is institutional, not all of the documents were published by the University or the Faculties. The rationale behind the decision to include the documents on the national level, for example, the LoHE or the external quality assurance reports published by CAQA, was the substantive nature of the documents, on which the University's functioning, was dependent. In addition, the University is state-owned and subject to control and accountability, therefore, these particular documents may be used for additional analysis of the learning outcomes perspectives on understanding and purposes. Other valuable sources of information were annual national reports on the Bologna process implementation, as they contained information on the definitions and uses of learning outcomes at the University.

On the other hand, documents were triangulated with interview statements, as a supplementary source of data, to strengthen the findings (Yin, 2014). Most of the documents are official and of public interest, concluding that the error and distortion rates are low,

therefore they are considered representative and authentic (Bryman, 2012). In order to avoid bias, a list of documents was selected upon reviewing the governance structure of the University, more specific regulatory and decision-making bodies responsible for publishing normative documents.

The author leaned on the analytic technique of pattern matching to compare the empirical evidence to theoretical propositions, expecting to find patterns in the data. At the same time, due to the diverse nature of learning outcomes and multiple theoretical propositions behind the concept, the phenomenon was partly treated as a 'black box', as it was difficult to determine whether learning outcomes would appear in the selected documents or not (Yin, 2014). Therefore, the search strategy and analysis relied on theoretical propositions, and expectations where the learning outcomes concept would be written about.

Type of document	Original title	Translated title	Publisher
Legislative	Zakon o visokom obrazovanju	The Law on Higher Education	The official Herald of the Republic of Serbia
Strategic	Strategija razvoja obrazovanja u Srbiji do 2020.godine	Educational development strategy in Serbia 2020	The official Herald of the Republic of Serbia
Evaluative	National report regarding Bologna Process implementation 2009-2012, 2012-2015		EHEA
Regulatory	Zbirka važnijih propisa Univerziteta u Beogradu	The Collection of important regulations of the University of Belgrade	University
Steering	Statut Univerziteta u Beogradu	The Statute of the University of Belgrade	The University
Regulatory	Statuti tri fakulteta	Statutes of the three Faculties	The SP, HP, HA Faculties

Strategic	Politika kvaliteta Univerziteta u Beogradu	The Quality Policy of the University of Belgrade	The University
Strategic	Strategija obezbedjivanja kvaliteta	Quality Assurance Strategy	The University
Descriptive	Opisi programa, modula	Programme, module descriptions	Faculty/Departments
Descriptive/ Course descriptions	Ciljevi i ishodi učenja osnovnih studija	Goals and learning outcomes of undergraduate studies	Faculty/ Departments
Steering	Rules and regulations of accreditation standards for Higher Education Institutions and their study programmes		The National Council for Higher education NCHE
Evaluative	Samovrednovanje i procena kvaliteta 2015/2016	Self-evaluation and quality assessment report, available only for HAF	Hard applied Faculty
Assessment	University and Faculties Accreditation reports		CAQA
Assessment	Izveštaj o spoljašnjoj proveri osiguranja kvaliteta	Report of external quality assurance assessment	CAQA, reports for HPF, HAF, SPF report not available
Declaration	Deklaracija o postavljanju studenta u središte procesa učenja	Declaration of student-centred process of learning	The University Conference of Serbia

Table 3: Documents used for analysis

3.7 Criteria for the interpretation of the findings

The following section addresses the research design's quality against the four sets of criteria: construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability, common tests to all social science research (Bryman, 2012, Yin, 2014). Since research design should follow a logical set of statements, quality may be judged according to these logical tests accordingly (Yin, 2014).

Construct validity

For a researcher, ensuring construct validity presents one of the main challenges in the design of a case study. First and foremost, the study of any phenomenon starts by identifying an operational set of measures after extensive literature review and theoretical propositions that follow. For learning outcomes, operationalisation process included defining learning outcomes according to the dual nature and purposes of the concept in higher education institutions. The thesis applies the detailed characterization of learning outcomes outlined in a framework by Prøitz (2010), to include all aspects of possible uses and interpretations of the concept. In addition, propositions of how policy process may be interpreted offer theoretical background to how different institutional actors according to their position within the organisation might interpret and use learning outcomes.

Defining learning outcomes as a variable includes the operationalisation of different definitions of the nature and purposes of the concept within the University, followed by interpretations and embeddedness of the concept by the academic community. Hence, the construct validity is strengthened by defining the phenomenon in detail, accompanied by operationalisation of variables (Yin, 2014).

Internal validity

The test of internal validity deals with avoiding spurious effects of the study and is mostly a concern for explanatory case studies which attempt to prove causality between two events, without knowing whether a third factor may be responsible for the event (Yin, 2014). This logic is not applicable to this study, as it is of exploratory nature.

For an exploratory case study, internal validity deals with making inferences about an otherwise unobservable event. To illustrate, academics and academic leaders might have different interpretations of the learning outcomes concept due to different positions they assume within the organisation. Furthermore, the differentiation of the academic community within one organisation results from the different disciplinary cultures or academic enterprise. Therefore, it is essential to develop comprehensive theory based propositions to compare the findings against them and match the patterns in case they appear.

Diversified data sources and their triangulation enhance the internal validity of the study. Yin (2014) argues that case study research benefits from using data triangulation to strengthen the findings. Multiple sources of data are cross-checked in the course of the analytic process and validity of the findings increases with the convergence of the evidence. Then, the aim is to find patterns in empirical findings and compare them to the predicted patterns prior to data collection.

External validity

For a case study, a test of external validity refers to analytic generalisations, that differ from statistical generalisation greatly. In other words, the focus of external validity is to what extent the findings may be generalisable beyond the study. It is not possible to make inferences applicable to the entire population and treat the case as a representative sample. In qualitative research, especially case studies, external validity deals with formulations of research questions, aiming to answer the 'how' and 'why' questions, followed by early identification of appropriate theoretical propositions. Addressing the external validity starts early on in the case study research and sets the groundwork for analytic generalisations later on by expanding and generalising theories (2014).

In the context of the study, interpretation of findings will either corroborate existing theoretical propositions or point to a new potential research direction. Thus, learning outcomes definitions and interpretations are expected to vary across different levels of academic positions, disciplinary context, and academic enterprise.

Reliability

The objective of reliability test is to develop precise case study protocol, meticulously document all the procedures to enable other researchers to do a follow-up study by replicating all of the steps and hopefully reaching the same results. The replication refers to the procedures and not results, as that is highly unlikely within a social research study. The goal is to eliminate bias, minimise errors in the study by presenting documented procedures for each step of the research design, describing the choice of the case, data collection, and analytical strategies.

4 Results

The first step in the analysis was the extraction of information from the data acquired during the interviews and compared against the relevant documentary sources of the respondents' respective faculties. Stage one of the analysis addresses the identification of learning outcomes perspectives at the University of Belgrade and three chosen Faculties. The information on learning outcome definitions, meaning, and purpose from different sources was mostly coherent and could be perceived as an indicator of findings validity. The interviews were particularly helpful elaborating interpretation and embeddedness of learning outcomes in section two of the analysis. The second and third research questions heavily rely on the interpretations, therefore responses of academics and academic leaders are shown extensively throughout the chapter. Analysis of data shows patterns anticipated by the theoretical propositions and categorises the findings in sections marked by sub-headings of the chapter, namely learning outcomes and: programme restructuring, curriculum design and course descriptions, teaching practice and accountability. The last section of the results refers to the perceptions of change upon the introduction of learning outcomes, and uses the data from interviews to try to pinpoint the respondents' statements on changes.

4.1 Learning outcomes perspectives and definitions

Section one of the analysis addresses the identification of learning outcome understanding perspectives, by creating three categories of identification: defining learning outcomes, learning orientation and purpose orientation as set by the Prøitz model (2010). These categories refer to a variety of meanings and an attempt to investigate the understanding of the terminology by respondents. In addition, the respondents' statements are cross checked with the documents related to defining learning outcomes from the course/module level, to the programme and degree description. Lastly, learning outcome definitions are sought after in the legal documents, regulatory documents of the University and respective Faculties to pin down the official definitions which circle around the higher education system, specifically in the local context of the University of Belgrade.

4.1.1   Learning orientation and definitions

The definitions and descriptions of learning outcomes provided by the respondents and relevant University documents give an indication to how learning outcomes are perceived in the study context. Moreover, they help categorizing the learning orientation and the axis 1 of the Prøitz model.

The interview contained a series of questions associated with definitions of learning outcomes, where they appear in the work of the respondents. Moreover, they were asked to comment on the EQF definition of learning outcomes, a widespread and well-established definition which circulates throughout EHEA, to try to explore how they relate their definitions to it. Lastly, respondents commented on terms 'learning outcomes', 'aims', 'objectives' and 'competences'.

In the context of the study learning orientation indicates the nature of learning outcomes and definitions vary from process-oriented, open-ended and with limited measurability (social-constructivist approach), to result-oriented, full-ended and measurable (behaviourist approach). The objective of this section is to find specific patterns in academic and the leaders' perspectives with respect to the discipline, profession and context.

Academics and academic leaders present the niche group of the ultimate recipients and main agents of a learning outcomes policy. It is essential to keep in mind the diversity of disciplinary cultures and academic enterprise when discussing learning outcomes policy, because they might affect definitions, interpretations and expectations across the sector. The issue will be further assessed in the discussion chapter, but it is an important one to keep in mind while reading the findings.

4.1.2   General awareness of the concept

Most of the respondents do accredit the Bologna reform to the period of when they have actually started to hear about the term of '*learning outcome*', but point out that outcomes of learning are by no means a new concept and that all of them had in mind what a student is supposed to learn after a specific course, or what kind of graduate they are expected to

become. The following examples illustrate how interviewees relate to the awareness of the term:

'The term didn't appear until the faculty started the Bologna process study reform even before the University, and when we received these forms we had to fill out what the outcomes of every course are (HA2)'.

'I heard about the term within the educational chair of our faculty around the time when the Bologna reform began...We were supposed to make new educational plans in accordance of learning outcomes (HP1)'.

'For us who used to work in schools, the concept of writing annual reports, teaching plans, defining goals, teaching methods and delivery procedures are not a novelty (SP2)'.

'I heard about them for the first time while browsing through the foreign universities' syllabuses, even before the Bologna introduction, and I loved the idea of the students being prepared for the course plan and what they can expect in terms of knowledge acquisition after the formal ending of the course (HA3)'

'...how students apply the knowledge they acquire during the course, or study period today certainly differs from how they would thirty years ago, but even then, it was necessary or targeted that students become able to apply the knowledge gained at the university. Maybe it was called differently but it was the primary goal of education, to apply the knowledge they gain (HP3)'.

Likewise, academic leaders' responses were in congruence with academics' awareness of the concept, but added the difficulty they encountered on the transition path towards definition and application of learning outcomes once they became a prerequisite of the accreditation process. They indicate that the demand for expressing learning outcomes was real, but guidelines were scarce and vague in terms to what learning outcomes apply to exactly. Academic leader HAL1 explains how they have initially defined learning outcomes for the study programme as a whole, but encountered negative feedback from foreign accreditation agency where they applied for accreditation, that it is not sufficient only to define them at the programme level, which is why individual courses must be focused on as well.

'Up until the transition to the Bologna (process) - and that was practically defined by the law in 2006- our faculty did not operate according to learning outcomes, rather according to the context and content of the subject. It was after European countries

and the US switched to defining courses and their learning outcomes, that the national accreditation agency demanded the definition of learning outcomes for the first time (HAL1)'.

4.2 Defining learning outcomes

In order to differentiate possible learning outcome perspectives, the meaning orientation of the Prøitz model offers two possible directions towards the interpretation of learning outcome definitions. In practice, what she refers to by *well-established definitions* rest upon the behaviorist perspective and have three main characteristics: outcomes are pre-formulated, assessment criteria pre-developed and definitions similar in formulation. On the other hand, the social-constructivist perspective disputes the narrative of measurability and explicit formulation and asserts that learning is an open-ended process where measurability is limited and learning outcomes cannot be pre-defined.

When analysing steering university documents, the aim was to find specific statements and definitions of learning outcomes. Since the learning outcome concept has permeated into national and institutional setting as an educational policy close to the Bologna process, the expectant definitions in documents were those similar to the well established definitions in various EU documents, especially the ECTS Users' Guide definition (2005, p.47). Definitions which circulate in the university steering documents showed remarkable congruence to the well-established definitions, and one of them was a literal translation of the ECTS Users' Guide definition.

The University has issued a formal declaration of the 'student-centred' approach to learning and offers two similar definitions of learning outcomes concept.

1. Learning outcomes are statements used to express the kind of required competences for work students are supposed to have, and how they are expected to show those achievements.

2. Learning outcomes are statements of what students are expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after the completion of a process of learning (Declaration,2011, p.2)

3. Student learning outcomes are defined in terms of the knowledge, skills and abilities that students have attained as a result of their involvement in a particular set of educational experiences (EHEA report, 2012, p.12)

Definitions vary in formulation a bit, but without a doubt indicate the behaviorist perspective and focus on student achievements rather than on teacher' intention. All of the definitions have a common denominator, introducing precision to what a student actually acquires at the end of the learning process (Adam, 2004).

Although interviewees provided similar responses, the variation ranged from not being sure what learning outcomes were to the questionability of their measurability and formulations. Moreover, disciplinary differences emerged as a relevant indicator of a variance in the learning approach, because academics of hard-pure and hard-applied disciplines knowledge domain is more or less linear and straightforward, as opposed to the more 'loose structure' of soft-pure academic disciplines (Neumann, Becher, 2002). In addition, professors at the soft-applied faculty pointed out that defining learning outcomes for a theoretical course is an extremely difficult task and question whether it is even possible to formulate and limit the knowledge outcome. The following definitions demarcate the stances of respondents in hard-pure and hard-applied faculties:

'As any member of a technical profession, I define them as a result needed to be achieved with students at every of three levels, in terms of their competences, skills and their achievements once they listen through and pass the course, and end up in higher levels, doing master projects or research in doctoral studies (HA1)'

'My definition would be, what they learned in my course, that they'll be able to apply directly either in further education, or when they start to work (HA2)'

'I am not completely certain, but my idea is, you are preparing the student for something and it is up to you (the professor) to come up with a learning outcome, so they end up ready for the very thing you are preparing them for (HP1)'.

'I have to admit that I haven't thought about any definition. For me, it is the acquired knowledge, respectively; the skills student obtains at a specific course (HP2)'.

The soft-pure faculty respondents reflected on the delineation of the terms 'aims' and 'learning outcome' in the formulation of definitions and although definitions do not vary much from the ones respondents of 'hard' disciplines offer and define them in terms of knowledge, skills and competences a learner is about to acquire, respondents question the generalisability and applicability of these definitions in practice.

> *'Learning outcomes present socially valuable contents of work, directed to appropriate gains of the learner, the gain relates to a specific corpus of facts, concepts, principles of the discipline in question, adopted through a process of learning (SPL1)'.*

> *'It drives me crazy, because my desire to explain collides with the obligingness to reduce it to two and a half sentences. So, you have the aim, what is the outcome? One cannot sometimes concretize, and if I have a problem explaining, it is not good. As a professor, I shouldn't have a problem explaining what an outcome is, but realistically we have a problem sometimes, therefore we hold on to stereotypes and I can openly say that…More or less, aims and outcomes will be written stereotypically. For us, the content is the most important (SP1)'.*

> *'The outcome is a sort of anticipation of what the student is supposed to have, and what kind of results need to be accomplished (SP2)'.*

> *'I use the term 'outcomes' because we are obliged to do so, but how do I understand it? The question remains whether I understand it properly, but obviously I must do it somehow, because you have something that students will be led by. 'Aims' are for students, 'outcomes' are for me. Aims will be defined for them to learn what they have to, the material, the content is defined, but what they achieve, they are unable to anticipate. My assumption is what they'll accomplish; those are outcomes for me (SP1)'.*

Moreover, respondents agree how theoretical knowledge in the humanities is fluid, hence the resulting outcomes in students are harder to capture, and one cannot easily measure their accomplishments, especially after passing the exam, so a professor argues: *'Someone would say, outcome happens after the aims are outlined, teaching is realised and a student passes an exam. However, if a grade is a reflection of knowledge, then the difference is flagrant between*

a theoretical subject like mine and for example a machine construction subject in applied
sciences (SP1)'.

> *'The more theoretical the course, the more theoretical the approach one has of what*
> *the outcome would be, because even in exams, you cannot clearly demarcate. For me,*
> *grades 6, 7 imply that I listen to you and grade your knowledge, for 9, 10 I ask you!*
> *Why? Because for 9 and 10 they have to think, for 6, 7 you do not go very deep into*
> *the students' understanding, where is the outcome there, I wonder? (SP1)'.*

In addition, all of the respondents were asked to comment on the EQF definition, because the
exact translation occurred in the document check as a most prominent one in the national and
university related documents, and expectedly, most of the respondents, no matter the
discipline or position within the University agreed it was too broad and non-binding.

> *'Definitions are always problematic when you attempt to push the essence in 'three*
> *words' (SP3).*

> *'Well, statements about... I have to admit that this definition is a bit loose, and*
> *completely non-binding (HP2)'.*

> *'...After a period of learning can include a topic, whole course or a group of*
> *interrelated subjects... I see that the definition is broader than the ones used before,*
> *for example, students actively apply their knowledge, I would agree with that. I see the*
> *terminological difference, but not the substantial one (HP3)'.*

> *'Essentially, that's it, one does not become a re-telling machine, but a conscious*
> *individual who learned something and is capable to apply it (SP3)'.*

4.2.1 Understanding the purpose orientation of learning outcomes

The purpose orientation in analytical framework developed by Prøitz (2010) and applied in
the context of the study, distinguishes two poles in continuum of the perceived purpose of
learning outcomes. These dimensions were developed by observing the history of the term
learning outcomes with respect to their purpose, respectively, the pragmatist movement and

54

assessment approach. Hence, one side of the purpose pole represents the pragmatist movement and includes definitions of learning outcomes as 'tools for educational and instructional planning and curriculum design (Prøitz, 2010, p.123)'. The opposite pole of the purpose orientation, defines learning outcomes as 'measures of institutional effectiveness (Prøitz, 2010, p.122)', the definition based on assessment approach developed in the late 20th century as a response to governmental urge to evaluate the effectiveness of HEI funding. The emphasis of this approach was measuring educational outcomes and relating them to educational inputs, by identifying variables within the teaching and learning process essential for raising effectiveness in education (Biesta, 2009).

The findings outlined within this section of the paper offer an overview of learning outcome purposes found in University steering documents, study programmes, curriculum and course descriptions of the sample Faculties. In addition, to increase the validity of findings, EHEA reports of higher education in Serbia and quality assurance documents, primarily self-evaluation reports and external quality assurance reports written by CAQA validate the university document statements.

The aim of the first research question is to identify the main perspectives crucial for understanding learning outcomes, and is of more a theoretical nature. Hence, the findings are descriptive. The in-depth analysis of learning outcome purposes, will be presented in the result section for research questions two and three, and will include academic and academic leader perspectives on the interpretation and practical use of learning outcomes.

By applying analytical framework, purpose orientation definitions fall under the following two sub-categories:

- learning outcomes as tools for educational, instructional planning and curriculum design,
- Accountability tool (political, legal, bureaucratic, professional and market accountability)

Educational and instructional planning and curriculum design

The starting point of the analysis was the premise of a paradigm change and learning outcomes as a tool to enable the shift toward student-centred learning. Furthermore, the

University of Belgrade embraced general principles set by strategic EU documents, namely the Communiqués discussed in chapter one and declaratively adopted the student-centred approach in the learning process (University of Belgrade, 2011). The declaration further asserts how formal description of learning outcomes is not enough and advocates further teaching and learning development in order to achieve expected results within the educational reform.

The Universities' declaration on the student-centred approach indicates future institutional action lines and plans, to promote the concept. Although the declaration was published in 2011, EHEA reports 2009-2012, 2012-2015 still point out to uneven implementation of learning outcomes in practice. It also indicates that the university analysis shows how in many cases implementation was executed only formally (EHEA 2012-2015).

Although the Law on Higher Education, and bylaws for defining standards for accreditation and external quality assurance have included learning outcomes, the level of analysis of the study is institutional, hence the documents are only reviewed to guide the search for institutional documents.

Programme structure and purpose

In order to determine how learning outcomes have been regulated within steering documents, all the relevant documents that define learning outcomes and point out to their purpose were browsed through hierarchically. First and foremost, learning outcomes have been mentioned in the Law on Higher education, in terms of being integral to the study programme structure. According to article 28 of LoHE (2005, p.19), some of the components that define the study programme include:

1. The name and aims of the study program
2. Type of studies and learning outcomes
3. Professional, academic, scientific profile
4. Conditions for enrollment to the study program
5. List of mandatory and elective study areas, or subjects with content description
6. Methods and required time
7. Courses assigned with number of credits

LoHE defines other components of study programmes, but here only those categories are listed that relate directly or indirectly to the practical use of learning outcomes. Websites of the three participating faculties confirm that study programmes definitions include these components, and explicitly show that study programmes have defined learning outcomes on the programme level.

For example, the engineering faculty - coded HA- developed a study guide with defined learning outcomes for BA study programmes in engineering, following the EUR-ACE framework standards of engineering programmes[1]. Similarly, the natural sciences faculty - coded HP- describes in detail the aims and learning outcomes of study programmes on its website. Lastly, the humanities faculty -coded SP- states aims and learning outcomes of their study programmes.

Moreover, study programmes have transparently defined objectives, first and foremost directed to the students as guidelines in the education process. Secondly, study programmes cater to societal needs and demands by offering content relevant for the acquisition of the desirable competences. Besides objectives, study programme specify goals which focus on methodological approaches necessary to achieve generic and subject-specific competences, skills and knowledge. University, Faculty and programme goals are declaratively congruent with the review of mission and goal statements in University and Faculties' statutes, and programme descriptions of individual departments.

Study programme standards define generic and subject specific competences upon the completion of Bachelor studies. The HA faculty developed a study guide according to the European standards for engineering programmes which include the following competences:

- Knowledge and understanding of the scientific principles
- Ability of basic engineering analysis
- Ability to carry out engineering designs
- Experience in practice
- Acquirement of transferable skills

---

[1] OECD (2011), "A Tuning-AHELO Conceptual Framework of Expected Desired/Learning Outcomes in Engineering", *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 60, OECD Publishing. http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5kghtchn8mbn-en, pp.35 and 48-54.

On the other hand, the natural sciences faculty (HP) did not have explicit definitions of competences in the study guide, although they described the desired learning outcomes for each of their study programmes. However, section five of the faculty's development strategy relating to studies, sets the operational definitions of first degree general competences:

- Basic knowledge and content understanding
- Routine problem solving
- Ability to work in laboratory conditions
- Generic skills: use of IT skills

In addition, the Faculty defines typical/optimal competences for an undergraduate student:

- Subject-specific knowledge
- Solid grasp of concepts
- Logical problem solving
- Ability to perform experiments
- Developed practical skills in laboratory conditions
- General skills
- Acquired knowledge and competences necessary to enroll in second degree studies

The humanities faculty (SP) has four study programmes and each programme has a description of goals, learning outcomes, and within the learning outcome description, competences, skills and knowledge graduates are expected to attain. Descriptions are short, but include specific professional positions and competences necessary to perform the job in question.

Curriculum design, course descriptions and learning outcomes

The Accreditation standards, EHEA reports on HE is Serbia for the period 2009-2012 and 2012-2015 state that the curricula contain lists and structures of obligatory and elective courses' descriptions. Course descriptions include: name of the course, type, year and semester, number of ECTS credits, name of the teacher, objectives/aims and expected learning outcomes, literature list, content, teaching methods and assessment criteria. Assessment criteria were developed on expected knowledge and grading system.

All of the interviewees confirmed to have participated in formulation of learning outcomes on curricular and course level and the respondents' entire department web-pages corroborate their statements. However, a deeper check of web-page descriptions of other departments has shown inconsistency in formulating aims and learning outcomes of courses. This was specifically noticeable in the humanities faculty. The cross check confirmed the statements of EHEA reports that implementation of learning outcomes is not linear across the higher education institutions.

In the review of accreditation standard 4 for higher education institutions (2006), for the University of Belgrade regarding generic and subject specific competences, standard 4 describes following desired generic competences:

- Analysis, synthesis and result anticipation
- Mastering methods, procedures and research processes
- Development of critical thinking
- Application of knowledge in practice
- Development of communication skills
- Professional ethics

In addition, after completion of study the program students should acquire the following subject-specific competences:

- In-depth comprehension and understanding of particular discipline
- Application of scientific methods and procedures in concrete problem solving
- Knowledge synthesis and application
- Professional application of new tendencies
- Development of skills and proficiency of specific area knowledge application
- Use of IT in mastering knowledge of specific area

ECTS and learning outcomes

According to EHEA report 2009-2012, ECTS have been formally introduced at all HEI in Serbia, but mentions that ECTS have not been appropriately defined across the sector and point out the problem of workload-number of credits relationship. For students, increased

workload results in lower exam pass-rate. The University has put in efforts to solve the problem by introducing tuning of ECTS credits for study programmes.

The Statute of the University of Belgrade assigns 180-240 ECTS points to the undergraduate studies and determines each subject's number of ECTS points. 60 points correspond to an average student work in a 40-working-hour week during one academic year' (Statute, p.48).

Student work includes (Statute, p.49):
- Active learning in classes, seminars, practice, mentoring, projects etc.
- Independent work
- Colloquia and exams
- Final paper
- Informal learning

Each course has a determined number of credits, and students acquire them upon passing an exam. It is important to keep in mind that learning outcomes are relevant to the course description and directly on student assessment procedures. Student monitoring in successfulness of passing a course is performed continually during classes and after an exam. Students can accumulate up to 100 points per course and are graded accordingly:
1. 5- F-failed
2. 6 –D-satisfactory
3. 7-C-good
4. 8-B-very good
5. 9-A-excellent
6. 10-A+-excellent, remarkable

Accountability and learning outcomes

The accountability purpose of learning outcomes at the University of Belgrade is not de-facto defined within the documents, although some of the respondents indicated that there was a sense of 'must' in the formulation and application of learning outcomes. Moreover, respondents implied that heads of the departments were managing the process of formulation, even if the process itself was a result of cooperation at the department. Detailed findings will follow in section two of the findings that relates to research question two.

The assertion of assessment approach is measuring educational outcomes and relating them to educational inputs, by identifying variables within teaching and learning processes essential for raising effectiveness in education (Biesta, 2009). With respect to raising the effectiveness of the higher education, university strategy, quality assurance policy and quality assurance strategy sets university missions, goals and plans for perpetual development, monitoring and evaluation of those goals.

The University of Belgrade quality assurance strategy defines long-term organisational goals (p.2):

- Strategic planning of HE activities aligned with market needs
- Quality enhancement of HE
- Increase of study efficiency
- Promotion of lifelong learning
- Increase of technological transfer, application and commercialization of scientific, research and artistic results
- Increased internationalisation and international cooperation
- Contribution to economic, cultural and academic development

Quality assurance measurements at the University of Belgrade comprise of internal and external quality assurance control, accreditation of the University and organisational sub-units, organisation and promotion of study programmes responsive to market needs and technological-scientific developments. Moreover, they refer to the continuous enhancement of study processes, efficiency of learning processes and applicability of learning outcomes, by applying modern teaching methods. Quality assurance measurements also involve continuous data collection on acquired competences by feedback of graduate students as well as promotion of cooperation with the employers.

The following areas are continuously included in self-evaluation and external evaluation of quality assurance reports (QA strategy, p.8):

- Study programmes
- Study processes
- Teachers and associates
- Students
- Study literature

- Scientific and research activities

- Resources

- Financing

- Management

4.3 Interpretation and embeddedness of learning outcomes at the University of Belgrade

While the first research question attends to the overall understanding of the learning outcomes phenomenon, the aim of the second and the third research question are the in-depth analysis of practical use of learning outcomes, their embeddedness and perceptions of change by scholars in the study context. The categorisation of learning outcomes will follow the propositions of the Prøitz model, to allow the analysis of purpose and learning orientation.

The meaning and learning orientation allowed the analysis of definitions academics and academic leaders use when describing learning outcomes. Their opinions and definitions on the phenomenon give indication on how they understand the concept of learning outcomes. The purpose orientation caters to the definitions of learning outcomes with respect to their purpose, but can also be relevant as an analytical tool to point out the practical use and embeddedness within the study context. The interviewees and documents might suggest how learning outcomes are used in practice, in the continuum between educational and instructional planning, with curriculum development on one side and accountability on the other. In the context of the study, *accountability* stands for legal, political, bureaucratic and professional and market accountability, to maintain the consistency of the analytical framework Prøitz initially developed (Prøitz, 2010).

In order to add another level of analysis and offer potential explanations to why variances in perceptions of purpose might occur, learning outcomes purposes were categorised according to two approaches of policy processes, top-down rationalistic approach and bottom up, cultural-institutional approach. The categories are divided for analytical purposes, but the study does not claim the 'purity' of models in any way. It only uses the theoretical propositions to operationalise the 'purposes' of learning outcomes academics, academic leaders and university as an organisation might hold.

Several sub-categories relating to educational and instructional planning and curriculum development purpose of learning outcomes were added to add precision to the analysis. Hence, learning outcome purposes include:

- Description of modules, programmes and degrees
- Curricula reform: with the purpose to endorse student-centred learning
- Curricula design: developing the credit system and student workload based on LOs, development of assessment techniques, use of LOs for better link between T-L-A
- Strategic tool: changing teaching strategy for the better delivery of learning outcomes
- Describing and expressing subject-specific and generic skills and competences
- Staff development: training, partner collaborations

On the opposite side of the continuum, the accountability as a purpose of learning outcomes was complemented by relating sub-categories of possible applications of the concept:

- LOs as quality assurance tool: Transparency, Comparability of Standards between and within qualifications, Creating common methodologies related to universal standards and QA procedures
- Mobility and recognition: LOs as course descriptors relevant in transparency for students, evaluators and employers, Qualifications described with LO simplify the evaluation process and recognition
- Qualifications frameworks: NQF, level and qualifications descriptors, simplified internal and external evaluation, guides for curriculum designers to establish standards
- Development of assessment criteria, linking teaching-learning-assessment

4.3.1 Educational, instructional planning and curriculum development

Learning outcomes and programme restructuring

In terms of programme restructuring most of the respondents agree that learning outcomes have become a priority content of study programmes and curriculum. However, they also point out that an organised system of teaching and learning on every level, has always implied the planning of appropriate goals and outcomes respectively. Moreover, they reflect on

learning outcomes as relevant components of programme descriptions as parts of standards for accreditation and quality assurance reports.

> *'We operated with the ultimate outcome, a competitive graduate in the market, which was necessary to offer as an outcome of graduate studies. We did this without previous experience (HPL1)'.*

> *'Learning outcomes help improve study programmes or rather enable study programmes to be improved and changed so in the next accreditation we can develop them according to our needs, while simultaneously plan and organise study programmes to secure those improved, needed and desired outcomes (SPL1)'.*

> *'Learning outcomes are very useful, because if they don't work out, it is easy to check what programmes lack (HPL1)'.*

For students, transparent study programme descriptions with included learning outcomes enable access to information on what they'll be able to do upon the completion of their studies. Respondents see learning outcomes as dynamic categories which should be changed and improved via evaluation in practice.

> *'Within the new accredited study programmes, learning outcomes have become part of the material which we sent to accreditation commissions, but have also become significant for pointing out one important fact within the science, science to be led by certain aims in practice, and enabled students to have closer information about what they'll be able to do upon completion of their undergraduate and graduate studies. What kind of knowledge, skills and competences they will gain and take into practical life, or become competent for further science studies or profession (SPL1)'.*

> *'The formulation of learning outcomes is continuous, I believe they have to be innovated after every five years, it does coincide with the accreditation cycle, but I do it constantly (HA1)'.*

> *'I think learning outcomes can be formulated better, and need to be re-evaluated during study programmes evaluations, to check whether they are reachable within available time and then be changed internally, within the study programmes (SPL1)'.*

'We changed everything, but you have something for the paper and something called practice. On paper we tried to make our programme and plans look, well not pretentious; but according to arriving students, and think in the next 4,5 years what kind of professional we want them to become and what they are supposed to know. For theoretical courses we had to reduce the content significantly (SP2)'.

Curriculum design, course descriptions and learning outcomes

When asked about learning outcomes in terms of their educational practices, all respondents spoke about learning outcomes in the context of course description and curriculum re-design. Additionally, they reflected upon the problems of content and student workload, the limitations they face because of the time restriction to deliver entire courses and how that negatively relates to the quality of education.

'Every teacher at our faculty participates in the formulation of aims and outcomes with respect to the courses they teach, in complete co-operation with their assistants or colleagues they share the course with; especially in the first year we have a lot of students, therefore we have two teachers per course, and we try to put the most experienced professors in the general educational subjects. We define everything in agreement (HP2).'

'Our department is pretty compact discipline-wise, so we found a common ground when formulating learning outcomes and aims (HA3)'.

For professors, one-semester courses became a challenge time wise, because what they consider to be a mandatory content for a core of the course turned out to be virtually impossible to accomplish. Furthermore, they continuously introduce course changes, by revision of literature content or even assessment methods, but stipulate how maintaining assessment criteria emerged as a main problem as a result.

'The hardest part is to change the teaching process, implementation is hard, students lag behind and it brought our very own version of the Bologna system (HPL1)'.

'That is my main criterion, I conceive the outcomes in vain, because then I have a problem deciding on the course literature from which they will study for the exam, when it is questionable how much they comprehend and apprehend, those are our

limitations, especially in general theoretical courses, where we had to lower the criteria drastically, not because we wanted to, but because it became acceptable that a student with 51 point passes the exam (SP2)'.

'When our course was two-semester, course content was wider, and we had much clearer outcomes, than now, when course lasts one semester under the new study programme and revised curriculum. So we decided to teach them basics in the elementary course, because they can't progress without them and decided to keep the more defined outcomes in post-graduate courses (HA2)'.

'In 2006 when we started applying 'Bologna' and what we agreed at the department learning outcomes, aims, methods would be, already then all went down the hill, even if we did have three years of adjustment; then in 2009 we started with the accreditations and we had people to turn to and ask, but we had a problem, because I had to stop myself and lower my expectations from students. They were high in the beginning, and as time passed by they lowered, so now I can say that my biggest outcome is when student does the test for 'miserable' passing grade (SP2)'.

'I don't think about learning outcomes consciously while I'm teaching, but in the planning, organizing of lectures and classes, it has to be known what I desire to accomplish after those 45 minutes, one or five hours, depending on the group (SP3)'.

Academics responded negatively to structural changes of programmes, and the shift to one-semester courses. For some, this change meant the negative impact on core course content and inflation of electives that weren't really well thought through and lacked coherence.

'Currently, we are at 50% of our old course, by class numbers and then you are expected to teach very wide content-wise, which is impossible (HA2)'.

'We steer our students with the limited choice of elective courses, in order to avoid making an 'all-over-the-place' student who attends courses otherwise not connected at all. We tried to define our department strategy into forming a student profile to reflect the degree they will gain in the end. The fact remains, that you have to talk to the students directly, because certain information sources are hard to get, some departments have only written declaratively on the webpage, so you have a kind of obstructive strategy (SP2)'.

66

'It's useful when students have this information, on the other hand it might be overwhelming because we have a lot of courses, even we can get a bit lost (HA3)'

In addition, lecturers assert how the lack of external department co-operation led to content overlap or in terms of allowing students to steer their education by choosing electives without guidance, overall quality was affected.

'The problem lies in the lack of departmental cooperation; even if you wanted to create a course to correspond to one similar to yours you couldn't (SP2)'

'Students could choose any elective course, we had 25, and something we hadn't been paying attention to happened. Students would choose completely unrelated courses. The problem was, students would need to have a lot of pre-knowledge in order to follow the particular electives. Bologna was a novelty; we didn't know everything and learned through error (HAL1)'.

'We agreed to reduce the number of the electives, and agreed that every chair under realistic assessment, and in order to keep the learning outcomes cannot suggest less than three, or more than four subjects. There is a list of the elective courses, a chair meeting is organised, the head of department, and the department members say, ok this makes sense (HAL1).'

However, for academic leaders transparent description of learning outcomes was a positive development, especially in terms of the review of the course content in the internal quality assurance evaluation and accreditation process. For them, learning outcomes are valuable guidelines for professors on deciding upon syllabus, but the formulation stays within the frame of the new system.

'Learning outcomes have a big advantage, because with them, we stop the uncontrolled course content making (HAL1)'.

'Learning outcomes are not taken seriously; they are a very important segment of the organisational system. The Faculty would function more easily (HPL1)'.

'After the criticism of an international accreditation agency, we have defined learning outcomes for every course individually, with the main goal not to reflect on what is included in the content, which mattered less, because every professor could pile or not

whatever, and then leave it to personal assessment whether to cover certain topics or not, but they had to write what the student is going to be trained to practically perform, upon the completion of the course (HAL1)'.

'We defined learning outcomes for individual courses, study programme outcomes, what a person will be able to do as an engineer with this degree. It was a very useful remark by the foreign accreditation agency, because we advanced the entire system by adopting learning outcomes, we were obliged to adopt them and we even corrected the elective courses (HAL1)'.

Teaching practice and learning outcomes

When respondents were asked to reflect on learning outcomes in terms of their teaching practices, answers were polarised and ranged from either embracing the idea of learning outcomes to not even acknowledging their relevance. They do however, contemplate on the core content of the courses and what they want to accomplish by the end of teaching period.

'During the lecture, I think about what is important, and make an effort to deliver the core or substance of the course; I have a plan, but often act upon a moment of inspiration. Every year I try to change the mode of delivery in some ways. I enjoy when students are motivated, I enjoy these lectures, especially when I get feedback, nothing can beat that (HA3)'.

'I suppose, if we have a clear idea for what we are preparing our students, what they are supposed to do when they graduate, then, it should influence the specific course they attend in reverse, and for all of these courses define outcomes individually. That is a methodology to follow, I am not sure whether it is followed today (HP1).

'Personally, I have not changed anything drastically in my teaching approach, because my attitude is that these are only phrases, and phrases are not important, the essence is. So, for me to now separate the aim from an outcome, I mean, is it really so important to define the first, the second and third, I believe that the basic point of teaching is to teach these students what they are supposed to know, to enable them to think independently and not only cram facts. I mean, I am not satisfied, things could be done a lot better, but somehow I manage to make them think in a particular field, so

they get the idea of the types of problems that exist out there, what logic to pursue, to identify the key terms (HP1)'.

'Maybe I am old fashioned, most of us here who teach are, but good students need to master the knowledge, and knowledge is universal, and we don't want to align it towards the average student, because pretty soon we would be stuck. They will either climb this mountain or learn something, or... (HP3)'.

'Learning outcomes at our faculty are a column you have to fill in, and you write whatever you want; I check the learning outcomes in postgraduate studies to find out whether they are able to solve a task, formulate the problem together, and see where we go from there. Do we even recognize the problem? (HA2)'.

4.3.2   Accountability and learning outcomes

With respect to conceptual propositions of assessment approach, there are no direct and explicit statements on learning outcomes as performance indicators and monitoring devices. However, standards for quality assurance include evaluation procedures in the form of surveys students are now obligated to fill-in with respect to courses and teaching practices.

'I wouldn't be able to draw conclusions based on students only, but at the same time we don't want to administer the evaluation as a type of control. It would be: Are you checking up on me? It would be taken very personally by the professors; it would be a real war (HPL1)'.

'Certainly, it is verifiable whether a cycle of learning is successfully finished, if we look at the modules separately. The most banal check, the survey among graduated students can also contribute to this process. I don't think that any evaluation during the course of studying is good, it cannot oversee all the aspects of learning (HPL1)'.

Moreover, a long-term goal of the University strategy is to perform system evaluation analysis of graduates and their perceptions on the outcomes of the educational process. For now, the student responses are scarce and unsystematic, professors reach out informally or students return and give feedback on how they cope professionally in the market with respect to skills, knowledge and competences gained after completing the studies. For now,

monitoring and evaluation of programmes and courses is based on inputs such as pass-rate of the exams, number of enrolled and graduate students.

Indirectly though, interviewees repeatedly asserted that formulating learning outcomes is a 'must' at all institutional levels. In that respect, it might be an indication of a hierarchical implementation of the policy and a learning outcome being a tool for extended steering or even oversight. Moreover, the organisational structure of the departments functionally allowed the head of the department to lead the process of formulating of learning outcomes sign the departmental evaluation reports and pass them up for approval.

> *'We provided templates for everyone, but we took a detailed approach to template creation templates in detail, by looking at leading universities in Europe and US, then decided on what is the most appropriate content for them, so people would comprehend, then we created a template, for example 'student should be able to... (Gives an example from the course book) (HAL1)'.*

> *'As head of the department I was formally responsible for the writing of learning outcomes, but I haven't done it alone; I always understood how one is supposed to do the evaluation, and it is the hardest. People didn't understand in the beginning that the number of credits has nothing to do with the grade, moreover it must not relate to the course rating. I don't know how painful it was in the other countries, but here it was very painful, because there were people who deemed their courses as the most important, therefore had to be given 15 or even 30 credits, and then we developed the credit system. (SP1)'.*

> *'That was the basic idea, that is why we have student surveys, in case there are problems, in which we see the professors not sticking to course plans, I discuss it with them, first nicely, then less nice, but overall, you need to point out to the problem and most of the times situation resolves itself, but you can administer certain measures (HAL1)'.*

> *'I'll say yes and no, we provided them to a necessary extent, but you have to keep in mind that the study programmes had enough experience, to assess what has proven to be the best from the scientific and teaching tradition and incorporate those practices to new restructured programmes, and fully conscious that, with new requirements and disciplinary developments, new outcomes appear (SPL1)'.*

70

Respondents agreed that they had the autonomy to formulate learning outcomes, but with consultation with the head of the department. In addition, standards and guidelines for accreditation included general guidelines on how learning outcomes are supposed to look and what they should include. The ultimate formulation was left upon the course lecturer.

> *'Well, I don't want to say that freedom was complete and absolute, but I think that every professor wrote what they wanted (HP1)'*

> *'The head of department managed the process, but we had the full liberty to express ourselves and put whatever we considered necessary into the formulation of learning outcomes (SP3)'.*

> *'We have a head of department who steers activities, and coordinates them with faculty activities, but mostly it comes from the vice-dean of education (HP2)'.*

> *'The Chair of education has done the part of clarification of terms, taught the professors how to formulate them. Our methods department gave the writing instructions, all that was left was to trust them (HPL1)'*

Learning outcomes may be perceived as strategic tools, if executed properly they can help accomplish the University's mission and long-term goals. Although the University's strategy defines goals and missions, interviewees agree there is a mismatch between theory and application.

> *'I believe in the faculty strategy and what learning outcomes are supposed to realise, but the problem is the application. I can't say the percentage because I haven't been dealing with that, but whatever that is; it is still unacceptable, for strategy to be realised. Well, if I, in the fifth year of the programme, have to review the learning outcomes of previous courses within one semester, in order for students to achieve my outcomes, then we have a problem. I wouldn't want to believe that outcomes have been realised and then the next user, whether the scientific research organisation or the economy say that my student doesn't have satisfactory learning outcomes (HA1)'.*

> *'I think it is forgotten what a faculty strategy stands for, because we became so dependent on the money ministry gives us, and they do pay us per enrolled student, so now we are in a position to lose what is supposed to be primary, a high quality*

product for Serbian economy, a qualified engineer. We are in a race to have students, salaries, and to survive from professors pay. I think that our profession is very humiliated by the fact that we get paid by the number of enrolled students (HA2)'.

Learning outcomes as qualification, degree and course descriptors have to be properly written and then would possess the value of institutional and international recognition. The University's mission is to align its practices with EHEA and quality of programmes and outcomes present one aspect of mission achievement.

'The sum of all study programmes at the faculty, gives an overall University perspective and enable University of Belgrade to perform better and rise on the Shanghai list first and foremost, where our University is among the better ones in the region. I attribute that to the reformed programmes, co-operating with students and our experiences improved (SPL1)'.

4.4 Perception of change processes associated with the introduction of learning outcomes

Systemic analysis of change processes requires a longitudinal study and is well beyond the scope of this thesis. Findings extracted from the data attempt to group the academics' and academic leaders' perceptions of changes upon the introduction of learning outcomes at the University of Belgrade. The responses scholars provided were divided into several categories of reccurring patterns relevant to the theoretical propositions.

However, the last research question is of highly subjective nature, as it expresses individual perceptions of systemic changes by the scholars. Therefore, all of the inferences have to be taken into account with caution, especially with respect to two criteria of research design's quality: internal and external validity.

It is not unusual for an exploratory study to infer the otherwise unobservable events and the author took precautions to enable them, by purposive sampling of scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds and academic enterprise. Moreover, the triangulation technique was avoided to prevent the researcher's potential bias to perceptions of change, so the findings could not be strengthened by other data sources. The only included document in the findings

is the 'Declaration of student-centred process of learning' as a strategic University document of future intent towards introduction of series of changes at all University levels.

Similarly, the study's external validity with respect to the last research questions has limitations, as the sampling method does not claim representativeness of the entire scholar population whatsoever. Any analytic generalisations beyond the study are not possible. External validity within the study is addressed by careful formulation of research questions and identification of appropriate theoretical propositions. Hence, the last question attempts only to shed light on perceptions of change, not actual institutional change processes at the University of Belgrade.

The following findings reflect on the perceptions of change upon introduction of learning outcomes:

- Uncertainty of the usefulness and relevance of the concept
- Accreditation requirements
- Structural changes in programmes, departments, teaching-learning-assessment activities (trial and error), General impression of lowered assessment criteria and assessment techniques
- Transparency and accountability

Usefulness of learning outcomes

Interviewees raised concerns over the overall usefulness of the concept and argued that learning outcomes are still misunderstood, formulated in unsatisfactory manner and how the University does not take into account opinions of employers while defining learning outcomes. Including employers was a prerogative especially to the academics of hard-pure and hard-applied disciplines, because they emphasised the learning outcomes on programme level and the imperative to facilitate learning process optimal for acquisition of subject-specific and generic competences. Generally, academics and academic leaders point out the necessity of proper formulation of learning outcomes as key for their successfulness.

'I believe that classes become more purposeful, you know what students need to know in the end and then insist on that. If you do have a learning outcome, you need to have ranking from most to the least important topics (HP1)'.

In addition, scholars objected to the 'must' in the requirement to formulate learning outcomes, and asserted how they are welcome as guidelines. The system's rigidity causes the resistance and classification of the learning outcomes as unnecessary and 'empty' inflexible phrases for several respondents. For some academics, the process of defining learning outcomes, led to stereotypical formulation, as a response to the perception of futility of the concept, and they question whether their formulation makes a difference in the overall educational plans and intention. On the other hand, interviewed respondents who believe in the usefulness of learning outcomes, still expressed the difficulties of aligning their practices to the Bologna reform requirements and admitted the 'trial and error' period before learning outcomes were formulated properly. The following statements assert the above mentioned inferences:

'I don't have anything against defining learning outcomes and writing them somewhere, but I am not convinced that someone will give better lectures just because somewhere on a piece of paper they have filled in what their learning outcomes are. I don't think that the fact someone has made my colleagues write LO for their subjects, has actually made them give lectures in a better way (HP1)'.

'Now they are understood, but before, we have had sentences that haven't really explained anything. We have copied, changed the sequence of words just because we didn't get the meaning of learning outcomes. We just tried to satisfy everything written in the forms. It was hard to explain this way of thinking (HPL1)'.

'I think we need the guidelines, but not a box we have to move around in; basics are put in place, like a skeleton and add whatever needs to be added (SP3)'.

'The biggest flaw of learning outcomes is to 'cement' them and declare 'these are learning outcomes', and not have the flexibility to change them (HA2)'.

'The significance of defined learning outcomes is not understood well enough, the employers don't have a say in this matter. A graduate needs to be competitive in the market, the university is not a state, they need competence to survive (HPL1)'.

'There is a resistance, first because we have a hard time establishing what learning outcomes are as a definition, as theory, and then to formulate and stick to it, because if you have a problem understanding something, and not being able to explain it, we'll have a problem. If a lecturer can't explain what their outcomes are, how will they apply them? (SP1)'.

'We are obliged to define them by programme requirements, therefore you create stereotypes; you create models (SP1)'.

Learning outcomes as accreditation procedure requirement

The majority of respondents attribute the requirements of accreditation standards and procedures to their efforts to define, formulate and apply learning outcomes. While some argue that learning outcomes formulation and application would never be part of the professional activity if they weren't obligatory, others believe in the concept and argue that learning outcomes enable departmental and programme goal achievements. The disciplinary context appeared not to have a role in the academic perceptions, although academic leaders and respondents who happen to be heads of departments emphasised the importance of learning outcomes formulation as a prioritised departmental and faculty level activity. The writing and reflection on learning outcomes was especially relevant before re-applying for the new programme accreditation, every five years.

'My department strictly defines learning outcomes, not because we must according to the accreditation procedure, but because of the agreement we reach with the department and set the goals (HA1)'.

'We are obliged to define them by programme requirements, therefore you create stereotypes, and you create models (SP1)'.

'I believe there is resistance to the obligation to formulate learning outcomes, although as an accreditation reviewer I see improvements in accreditation

procedures. People now know it's not only for accreditation purpose, but we have to keep in mind the external quality evaluation as well (HA1)'.

'I think, the most effective way is to take one unit, teach it the way you think it needs to be taught and set the wheels in motion far more than with analysis of learning outcomes, purpose and aims of learning (HP1)'.

Structural changes and teaching-learning-assessment activities

Respondents were asked to comment whether any kind of change had taken place at the university, faculty or on department level according to their opinion, and most of the scholars spoke about structural changes as direct consequence of the Bologna reform. Expectedly, the answers were very broad, so probe-questions were posed with the aim to delineate changes with respect to learning outcomes, as a Bologna reform action line, to add the precision.

'Essentially the department has changed, the programmes are restructured, but in reality we still set the same goals, to achieve certain knowledge, skills to use their own head and apply that knowledge accordingly (SP3)'.

'You can define curriculum however you want, but if a student doesn't learn to think independently, it is all in vain (SP3)'.

'I mean, I have used learning outcomes intuitively before, so practically I don't think so, unfortunately, my impression is that the only thing that has changed with Bologna process is the lowering of criteria (HP1)'.

The most evident changes according to scholars were structural in terms of creating a three cycle system, programme changes and interdepartmental departmental cooperation increase. Interviewees discussed programme learning outcomes and the necessity to focus on enabling students to acquire 'survival' competences in the professional world. Additionally, learning outcomes have made an impact on teaching, learning and assessment techniques. Theoretical propositions suggest that in practice most of the academics would talk about learning outcomes with respect to the curriculum development and instructional planning, the unexpected patterns emerged upon commenting on the overall assessment criteria and quality

of education. Lastly, they addressed the problem of designing courses with expected versus real learning outcomes.

> *'We have adjusted the syllabus, according to the role-model syllabi from abroad, but we haven't copied them. The course I teach is mandatory and obligatory for all students and the course content is core, it's the same everywhere, so it was easy for me to continue what I was doing. I changed lectures a bit, but my approach remained the same, the curriculum is the same, with the same titles, formulas and expressions (HA3)'.*

All of the interviewees agreed that the time has become their biggest constraint as a result of programme and course restructuring. Most of the core courses are now one-semester and lecturers argue it is virtually impossible to ensure course level learning outcomes. Moreover, the direct consequence of decreased time frame for core subjects has made them change assessment techniques and they agree the assessment criteria are lowered.

> *'We have a frame to orientate within, but sometimes, we set them too ambitiously especially now when all of the courses are one-semester (HA1)'.*

> *'In theory you anticipate a lot from the students and a course, but the flaw is the course content, we have to accommodate it to the 'average student'… Without the definition of what an average student is; 'I changed assessment techniques with elective courses and started organising colloquiums (SP2)'.*

> *'I think that nothing has changed, there is slightly more work being done with students, with certain repetitions that have been introduced in my department, for my first year subjects, but in essence, only the exam passing rate is higher, but I don't think it's happening because of the work with students, but because of the lowering of criteria and that is not good(HP1)'.*

On the contrary, some academics believe that the formulation and practical use of learning outcomes brought clarity for both lecturers and students. The course planning activities are more transparent and teachers can avoid overlap. At the same time, students now have an idea of what a particular course or programme will have to offer.

'If you have a clear idea about what students are supposed to learn in particular subject, then you can plan the class accordingly. Of course, I believe that classes become more purposeful, you know what students need to know in the end and then insist on that. If you do have a learning outcome, you need to have ranking from most to the least important topics (HP1)'.

'If teacher and student have a clear goal and expectation from the end of the school year, that is a big plus' (SP3)'.

'Now we know who does what, we don't have the overlap anymore, which is a huge waste of energy and time; it is visible within departmental documents and on the faculty level. We try to innovate before the beginning of each school year and discuss them in the educational-scientific committee meetings. Now every professor does it individually, so we can check up on each other and verify whether we carry out the initial plan or not.

I trust my colleagues and they trust me, but it is better now when it's (course plan and learning outcomes) written explicitly, which wasn't the case before. The overlap is eliminated, which is so important nowadays with the courses being one-semester and when every minute counts.

We don't have enough classes, but still have very ambitious learning outcomes in order not to embarrass ourselves later on with knowledge, skills and competences our future engineers acquire. I would be profoundly unhappy if someone called my graduate incompetent, or fire them after three months of probation work. There is always a fear of maintaining the pre-Bologna quality level. (HA1)'.

One of the practical issues academics encountered while defining and formulating learning outcomes was deciding for whom they are intended: an average or the best student? Moreover, they agreed that learning outcomes should be revised continually because students every year come with different threshold of knowledge, so the expectations of teachers have slowly lowered, to their disappointment. Academics argue that the present university entrance policy is unsustainable, due to their impression that not every student who passes an entrance

exam should be eligible to study a specific programme, a add how the state still funds faculties per number of enrolled students is a practice they want changed.

'We try to formulate learning outcomes according to the average student, and push the limits from average to maximum efforts, but realistically it never is, not all the students have the same threshold of knowledge (HA3)'.

'Passing grade is satisfactory knowledge, but for whom? I always demand maximum from my students, 10 is an achieved outcome (HA1)'.

'We formulate learning outcomes to present the maximum of knowledge, when we write the aim of the course, those are the expectations, all the knowledge is bulleted, and we do have this grade scale from which we start. For example in the second year, we say, student needs to be competent for that and that level in an ideal case (SP3)'.

Transparency and accountability

So far, faculties have introduced student evaluations of courses and teachers indirectly as a measure to continually improve the teaching and learning process. Student surveys became regular in practice as a part of quality assurance standard procedures and requirements for programme and faculty accreditation. Respondent SP3 exemplifies the content of the departmental student survey, which includes the student impression of the level of mastering the course, satisfaction with the teacher, general feedback, including criticism.

In addition, academic leaders argue that monitoring learning outcomes of the graduate students would be the best manner to evaluate programmes and faculties respectively. Graduate feedback has been informal so far, so the teachers hear the individual stories, but there are no systematic University attempts to organise such collection of data.

'I hope the development will be taken seriously, learning outcomes are a basis of a realisation at the end of a study programme, that show we'll measure the successfulness of a system as a whole. You can't do it through one subject, it is the forest that matters (HPL1)'.

'Learning outcomes are very useful, because if they don't work out, it is easy to check what the lacks of a programme are. We should check the knowledge but of graduated

students. It is very important to connect and network the knowledge, only the final
information matters; the one after completion of studies (HPL1)'

Moreover, student surveys might be useful as an indirect accountability tool for measuring the efficiency of the teacher. One academic leader states that the student evaluations are useful to check up on the teacher as a way to ensure they are doing what they are supposed to do, but does not specify what that means, especially in the case when a teacher appears to get continuous negative feedback from the students.

> *'Learning outcomes are left upon the conscience of the lecturer, I can speak for my*
> *courses, but we have meetings with professors, and we point out in scientific*
> *educational council and follow-up on student surveys to check whether lectures do*
> *what they are supposed to, they have regular consultations, give handouts in classes*
> *(HAL1)'.*

Interviewed academics mostly referred to learning outcomes and change in the curriculum and course content change. Observing change requires time, one or two generations need to go through in order to measure the effect of the change, whether learning outcomes have been accomplished and whether programmes function well.

> *'We introduced new courses as part of the educational reform and depending on*
> *responses on your suggestions you adjust either the content or the course (HP3)'.*

> *'You always have to polish things, but I believe that in the last 8n years, we have*
> *accomplished a lot, rough mistakes were corrected within the first year, but it is a*
> *process, Bologna helped a lot to focus more on the outcomes than on aims, aims are*
> *the mechanism (SP1)'.*

> *'The advantage of learning outcomes is their quality to define the curriculum and the*
> *course plan, and if a student masters the material, they should gain the knowledge and*
> *outcomes of learning (HA3)'.*

5 Discussion

5.1 Perspectives of learning outcomes

The aim of the first research question was to identify relevant learning outcome perspectives and explore whether any of them are dominant within the University`s documents or views of the respondents. The research has indicated how the implementation of learning outcomes has proven to be slow and uneven across Europe and individual national higher education institutions. Perhaps, the common issue of learning outcomes application is the lack of conceptual understanding which ultimately leads to wrong assumptions and sometimes even misappropriation of the concept. Therefore, the findings of this section focus on the perspectives and definitions of learning outcomes.

First and foremost, the learning outcome concept integrates two debates: of the nature and the meaning of the concept and the second, the purpose approaches debate. According to Prøitz (2010) the dominant debate involves the ongoing disputes of two classical perspectives of learning, behaviourism and social-constructivism. Namely, the behaviourist tradition suggests that learning and outcomes should be measurable, pre-formulated and result oriented. On the opposite, social-constructivism asserts that learning is an open-ended process, with limited measurability and process-orientedness.

Findings indicate the divergence in the formulation of learning outcome definitions between the academic community and University documents. The official documents use well-established definitions, formulated by behaviourist propositions which emphasise instructional planning and the specific learning activities one must engage in order to complete a required task (Gagné, 1974). The common denominator of all of the documented definitions is precision to specific knowledge, skills and competences a student actually acquires at the end of the learning process (Adam, 2004).

Interviewees provided similar responses, although assertions varied from uncertainty what learning outcomes are, to the questionability of their measurability and formulation. The uncertainty originates from the following premises:

- The fashionable term is de facto an old familiar concept
- Confusion between the terms 'aims' and 'outcomes'

- Philosophical objections, especially by the soft-pure faculty respondents.
- The formulation guidelines were vague and scarce

The concept may have permeated into the national and institutional setting of Serbia as a Bologna reform action line, but many respondents argue that the purpose of education has always been to enable students to apply the knowledge acquired at the university. The terminological confusion and the relatedness to learning outcomes as an 'old' concept may be rooted in the history of learning outcomes concept and research towards the improvement of teaching, learning and training methods of the vocational education (Allan, 1996, Adam, 2004). It was common to interchangeably use 'aims', 'objectives', 'goals' or 'intent' with 'learning outcomes' given the fact the latter presented the methodological tool for curriculum development at the time. For Allan (1996), it was a consequence of the liberal use of the terms which later on contributed to the confusion of statements of purpose that essentially operate on different levels of specificity, therefore were mistaken for synonyms.

Furthermore, disciplinary differences appeared to emerge as relevant indicators of the learning orientation perspectives in defining and formulating learning outcomes at chosen faculties respectively. Academics and academic leaders of hard-pure and hard-applied disciplines were more likely to agree with the well-established definitions of learning outcomes, and focus on ultimate results and achievements after completion of the course, programme and studies. Moreover, professors agreed it was their responsibility to anticipate learning outcomes, so students '*come out ready for the very thing you are preparing them for* (HP1)'.

Academics of the soft-pure faculty paid more attention to the delineation between the terms '*aims*' and '*learning outcomes*', but have questioned the applicability and generalisability of the concept. First and foremost, how does one formulate learning outcomes for 'soft' disciplines when the knowledge domain is so fluid and student achievement cannot easily be measured? 'The more theoretical the course, the more theoretical approach one has of what the outcome will be (SP1)', exemplifies one respondent who teaches theoretical 'core' courses at all three study levels. According to Neumann and Becher (2002), the knowledge domain of soft-pure disciplines to an extent has a '*loose structure*' in comparison to the linear and straightforward domain of 'hard' disciplines.

The reported findings provide empirical support for concerns part of the academic community expresses over philosophical and practical objections towards learning outcomes. Learning in general is considered an open-ended process, particularly in the context of soft-pure disciplines that object pre-defining and pre-formulation of learning outcomes that could limit the learning experience. Aforesaid specifications of learning outcomes would be profoundly antithetical to traditional functions of the university (Adam, 2004; Allan, 1996, Hussey, Smith 2008). Open-endedness, limited measurability and orientation to process are qualities of a social-constructivist paradigm, according to which learning takes place when an individual constructs the meaning from the social environment, with limited impact of the instruction on the process (Prøitz, 2010). Practical issues that have appeared include the trial-and-error period to express the curricula in terms of learning outcomes, over- and under-formulation and most prominently, the uncertainty of for whom the outcomes are formulated, the average or the best student?

The foundation of the Prøitz model and ultimately the study lies upon the social-constructivist assumption that language has a 'constitutive role in institutional reality' (2010, p.120) and a phenomenon becomes institutional fact only after members of collective attribute value and functions to it, through agreement and acceptance. The survival of learning outcomes in the institutional setting depends on the acceptance of the university and more specific academic community. Without a doubt, interviewees relate to learning outcomes in the wider context of Bologna reforms context, not so much with respect to the 'paradigm shift', as much as the formality fulfillment in the accreditation process. Therefore, the next step discusses the other central debate of learning outcomes, the *purpose perspectives* of the phenomenon.

In terms of purpose, learning outcomes perspectives depend on two diametrical approaches, the pragmatist movement and assessment approach. According to the pragmatist movement, learning outcomes serve as tools for 'educational and instructional planning and curriculum design (Prøitz, 2010, p.123)' and was a popular concept throughout the 20th century in elementary and secondary schools, and later on with massification of higher education at the universities. Assessment perspective appears as a response to governmental urge and pressures for more accountability and increased effectiveness of higher education. The premise of the approach is the measurement of educational outcomes and their correlation to educational inputs and identification of variables which could measure effectiveness in education (Biesta, 2009).

The following section of the discussion will reflect on the purpose of learning outcomes in more detail with respect to the second and third research question. However, the understanding of learning outcomes would not be complete without inclusion of purpose perspectives in the discussion of definitions and formulations of the phenomenon. Findings in documents and interviews undoubtedly provide empirical evidence that learning outcomes are employed as tools for educational, instructional planning and curriculum design. The triangulation of the multiple sources of information: university steering documents, legislation, faculty and departmental documents and programme description and external quality assurance reports, as well as national reports of higher education system state that learning outcomes are utilised in the descriptions of programmes and individual courses. Study programmes define generic and subject specific competences, and try to assign number of ECTS according to learning outcomes. A national report from 2012-2015 however, asserts that in practice defining ECTS has encountered practical problems in the terms of workload-number of credits assignment.

On the other hand, from the assessment standpoint, higher education institutions have to be held more accountable for the educational outputs and strive to raise the effectiveness of education. Hence, outcomes of education should be measurable and correlated to educational inputs (Biesta, 2009). Findings reported in legislation and official university steering documents fail to provide empirical support to the explicit formulation and definition of learning outcomes as accountability tools in neither of the accountability categories: political, legal, bureaucratic, professional and market (Prøitz, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2004). Nevertheless, some of the respondents objected to the 'must' as a requirement to formulate and define learning outcomes as accreditation committee requirement. Although the process results from departmental co-operation, heads of departments steer and manage partly as a requirement by the function they perform. At the same time, several professors act as members of Faculties' accreditation committees and their attitudes towards learning outcomes mostly praise the concept and highlight its utility to other colleagues and offering guidance towards their use.

5.1.1 Summarising the four perspectives

Observing the overarching learning and purpose orientation axes, four distinct perspectives direct the possible understanding and definition of the learning outcomes phenomenon. The

emphasis of the first research question was to explore whether any of these perspectives seem to dominate the context of the University of Belgrade. According to Prøitz (2010), definitions possess the power to express the value of what one institution perceives as important. The study did not focus on the values of learning outcomes, but on establishing what kinds of definitions circulate within the university. 'Different perspectives on learning imply different values as do different orientations towards learning outcomes (Prøitz, 2010, p.135)'.

Neither of the perspectives can contribute solely to the understanding of learning outcomes, but all four together provide a holistic overview of the concept's complexity. Relying on the results of the Prøitz's own study finding patterns relevant to the understanding of learning outcomes, in favor of the upper left and lower right quadrants of the model were expected. Learning outcomes are very likely to be understood as a tools for curriculum and teaching planning and development, formulated to provide guidelines, with limited measurability and being open-ended. On the other hand, they are bound to have an instrumental role, as an accountability tool, suitable for monitoring and evaluation purposes, often pre-formulated, measurable and result-oriented.

The empirical evidence shows a slightly different distribution of patterns, and encompasses the upper-right quadrant of the model as well. University steering documents have pre-formulated learning outcomes by the principles of behaviourism, oriented towards those results of the education process which can be clearly measured through the assessment. These findings were congruent to the statements of respondents of both hard-pure and hard-applied faculties, however, academics in the soft-pure field were more critical towards the philosophy of pre-formulation, rejecting the capacity of learning outcomes as a means to frame and measure knowledge. Academic leaders were also inclined to talk about understanding learning outcomes through the prism of dual functions: the managerial as vice deans of education, and teaching function, as members of specific disciplinary culture.

Disciplinary differences matter in the discussion of perspectives of understanding learning outcomes, and prove that 'Faculty are the heart and soul of higher education and research, but they are not one heart and one soul (Enders, 2007, p.9). Academics might share common ideas and culture of belonging to the academia but their belief systems differ according to four subunits: disciplinary culture, enterprise, professional and system culture (Clark, 1983).
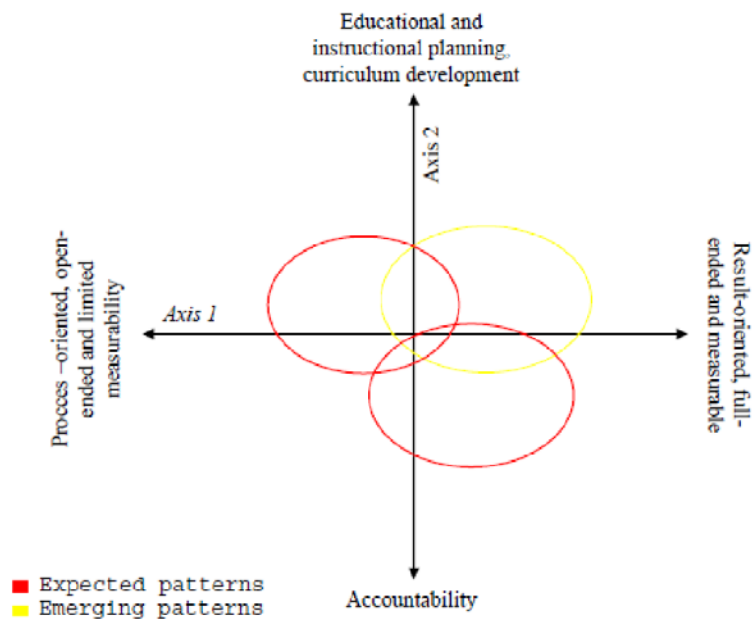
Figure 3: Findings

5.2 Interpretation and embeddedness of learning outcomes at the University of Belgrade

The second research question aimed to explore interpretation and embeddedness of learning outcomes in the institutional context of the University of Belgrade. Theoretical propositions relevant to the research interest utilised the ideas of the pragmatist and the assessment movements that place learning outcomes purposes in the continuum as tools for educational, instructional planning and curriculum development, and learning outcomes as accountability tools. Analytical strategy followed the stances of these perspectives and results were organised according to the purpose categories of learning outcomes.

Additionally, policy re-shaping and adaptation within the institution might depend on the direction of the decision-making processes, and ultimately identify which of the activities related to the institutional perspective respectively might occur in practice. The results encompass learning outcomes and the role they play in programme restructuring, curriculum design, course descriptions, teaching practice, assessment and institutional accountability. At the University of Belgrade, the primary association of the learning outcomes concept is

86

closely connected to the Bologna reform, formulation on the programme/degree and course/module levels as accreditation requirements.

According to the study findings, academic leaders interpret learning outcomes in the context of the 'ultimate outcome', referring to the result of study programme completion- a competitive graduate in the labour market. This inference may be explained by the managerial function of vice-deans of education, who perform administrative activities, participate in the setting of the faculty's strategic plans and keep track of teaching processes and curriculum changes. Moreover, their responses are in line with the narrative of the outcome approach that calls upon the University/faculty to be more responsive to the societal needs, by continuous improvement of study programmes. Hence, they are more likely to interpret learning outcomes in a wider context of policy agendas. Emphasis on the improvement of the educational outcomes is often notable in transitional countries, because of increased political pressures to create better links between the higher education and labor market (Branković, Maassen, Stensaker, Vukasović, 2014).

Academics interpret learning outcomes in the context of curriculum design, course descriptions, teaching methods and assessment. First and foremost they addressed the question of formulation and professional autonomy, emphasizing the individual efforts for the course level defining and interpretation, except for the shared courses, when all of the participating academics cooperated and discussed the ultimate course design. It is relevant to mention that decision making agreement on the course and department is essential to all of the academics, no matter the years of experience or disciplinary orientation. Hence, cooperation on the departmental level can be attributed to the same belief systems, as they share disciplinary and professional cultures (Clark, 1983).

For the organisational level though, these inferences might be misleading, due to the system fragmentation of the University of Belgrade. From the cultural-institutional perspective, the acceptance of an idea depends on the congruence of its intrinsic values, norms and principles with the organisational culture. Although universities' declaration of the student-centred approach (CONUS, 2011) praises the merits of the learning outcomes, it cannot be inferred whether the concept is accepted or rejected by the institutional actors, and whether it is on a path of institutionalisation. Given the fact that the declaration was issued by the Conference of the Universities of Serbia, as a strategic plan to promote the concept and organise trainings for the academic community, it can be concluded that University of Belgrade intends to

introduce essential organisational changes to enable the 'paradigm shift' as the University's strategic goal. According to the cultural-institutional perspective most public organisations are run by informal rules and traditions, which can eventually lead to the institutionalization of learning outcomes. If we look at the aims of the learning outcomes policy, the intent to change the current culture of the university exists. Depending on the extent of the deviation from existing norms and values, organisations will either resist or adopt policy. Academics object to the vagueness of learning outcome definitions, and the fact they must formulate them, they compensate by interpreting them by their existing knowledge and experience (Hussey, 2002).

To return to the course/module level of learning outcomes application discussion, academics pointed out practical problems encountered since the introduction of learning outcomes. Namely, the problems do not refer to learning outcomes directly, but to the programme's structural changes, to the perception of lowered assessment criteria and the impression that learning outcomes acquisition is highly questionable. According to the data, academics agree that teaching practices had to be accommodated to the new programme structure and the new one-semester length of the courses. However, respondents have not clarified whether courses are designed according to syllabus content, literature and number of direct contact hours, or by learning outcomes. Looking at the online descriptions, with clearly formulated aims and learning outcomes, it can be deducted that the learning outcomes directly impact the course or module design, but not with certainty since the academics did not say it directly.

While core subjects remain a challenge for academics due to the lengths of the courses and the knowledge-width and content volume, academics use elective courses to steer the students learning experience and cover subject-specific knowledge relevant to the acquisition of the degree learning outcomes. In addition, after the introduction of the Bologna reforms, departments went through the trial-and-error period, before aligning course contents within and outside departments. Initially, inter-departmental cooperation was low, leading to content overlap.

Respondents, specifically academic leaders, emphasised transparent descriptions of learning outcomes on the course/module level present a positive development for students, academics and the content review for the internal and external quality evaluation processes. Moreover, the audit and monitoring of the course content for academic leaders prevents the uncontrolled

course content piling, and steers the focus on actual attainment of intended knowledge, skills and competences.

In terms of teaching practice, the views of respondents were polarised, from complete disregard of learning outcomes as empty, meaningless phrases, a column to fill in (HA2), to envisioning the degree learning outcomes and working in reverse down to the individual courses, to make sure they acquire them in the end. The academic statements with respect to teaching practices reveal the omnipresence of the traditional approach and maintaining the focus on the content and teachers intentions. The teacher's responsibility rests upon the decision to decide on the content relevance, and they object to phrases and reject the definition of learning outcomes and aims.

5.2.1 Accountability

The assessment movement in higher education started out as governmental urge to evaluate the effectiveness of higher education institutions funding, by measuring educational outcomes and correlating them to educational inputs, by focusing on the dynamics of teaching and learning and identifying the variables that are the key to raising effectiveness in education (Biesta, 2009). The approach had a deep impact on the practice of higher education and all levels of policy making. The empirical evidence does not point to specific statements on learning outcomes as performance indicators and/or monitoring devices. However, closer looks at the documents, specifically at the standards for quality assurance classify student surveys as evaluation devices, obligatory practice after completion of the course.

For academic leader HPL1, student evaluations might indicate the successfulness of the course, but the course only as it cannot oversee all the aspects of learning. Furthermore, the leader (HPL1) disagrees with the premise of evaluation as a type of control over academics, and concludes that professors would resent the slightest attempt in that direction. More purposeful evaluation would be the system administered survey among the graduates and their perceptions of the educational process. At the moment, programme and course evaluation is based on inputs as the 'pass-rate' of the exams, number of enrolled and graduate students.

Indication of the utility of learning outcomes as a device for oversight and evaluation of academics does not surprise, especially as critics of the concept describe learning outcomes as 'vital components of the new managerial regime' (Hussey, Smith, 2002, p.222). According to

Hussey and Smith (2002), they are misappropriated by the managerial regime in the auditory purposes of the quality assurance processes, by for example measuring the pre-specified learning outcomes of the module against the lecturer's performance (Avis, 2000; Dobbins, Brooks, Scott, Rawlinson, Norman, 2014). Critics of the learning outcomes concept attribute managerialist agenda to the misappropriation practice in higher education, and to the apparent academic ambivalence towards the application of the concept in practice (Hussey, Smith, 2002).

 Without exception, all of the interviewees repeatedly asserted that the formulation of learning outcomes was a 'must' at all institutional levels. The 'must' implies an obligatory activity and hierarchical implementation of the policy. Rationalistic logic within institutional theory assumes the linearity of the policy making process, decided on the legislative level and followed by administrative execution without interaction with multiple actors and authorities (Gornitzka, 1999). Governments tend to adopt this approach without the concern of the actors' involvement and responsiveness (Sin, 2014). In the context of the study, the University aspires to achieve greater formalisation of structures, in order to align with the global tendencies and environmental standards (Christensen, Ramirez, 2013). Decision making is governed by the rule of appropriateness, leading to institutional isomorphism and in practice increased social responsiveness of the university, increased access and rationalisation of governance structures (2006). All of the respondents interpret learning outcomes in a wider context of the Bologna reform and accreditation process requirement.

Empirical evidence suggests that the organisational structure of the departments, functionally allows heads of departments to lead process defining and formulation of learning outcomes, sign the departmental evaluation reports and pass them for approval. The academic leadership had the role to create the templates and distribute them to everyone, by observing the leading Universities practices abroad and left to the individual departments to formulate and interpret learning outcomes as they see 'fit' for the respective unit.

Learning outcomes are defined within strategic documents, standard operating procedures, standards for quality assurance and accreditation. Hence, they could be perceived as strategic tools, if executed properly they could accomplish the University's missions and long-term goals. Although the University of Belgrade has defined goals and missions in the strategy, interviewees argue there is a mismatch between theory and application. Moreover, the call for 'proper' formulation at the all institutional levels emphasises the University's mission to align

the practices with EHEA and quality of programmes and outcomes present one aspect of mission achievement.

5.3 Perceptions of change processes

The aim of the last research question was to find patterns in the perceptions of change among the academic community upon the introduction of learning outcomes at the University of Belgrade. Exploring institutional change processes and potential institutional responses are beyond the scope of the study, but would be an interesting follow-up longitudinal study to provide in-depth insights into the process of learning outcomes policy institutionalisation.

The subjective nature of the question, will take all the inferences with caution to the internal and external validity of the study, even though it is common for an exploratory study to infer on otherwise unobservable events. Several main themes relating to the research question emerged: uncertainty of the concept's usefulness, change to accreditation requirements, structural changes, teaching – learning – assessment activities, transparency and accountability.

Categorisation of 'usefulness' as perception of change is a vague statement that lacks theoretical and empirical support. First and foremost, the category presents the subjective assessment of any concept's value and cannot be generalisable for the University as an organisational unit. Usefulness emerged as a pattern from the interviews, since a number of respondents expressed concerns over the overall utility of the concept, due to perception of misunderstanding, unsatisfactory formulation and exclusion of employers' opinions. The concept of policy translation (Sahlin-Andersson, Wedlin, 2008) might provide insights to how the idea of learning outcomes as a widespread policy is adapted to the specific institutional setting.

If learning outcomes are understood as Bologna action lines, then they are expected to perform several functions in national higher education systems, 'in recognition of prior learning, the award of credit, quality, learning plan, key competences for life, credibility for employers, etc., as well as modernizing the governance of education and training as systems are reformed to encompass lifelong learning (CEDEFOP, 2012, p.10)'. These ideas serve as prototypes, original ideas that travel, get translated and through imitation edited in practice into what appears to be a successful model. Ideas travel and 'change as they flow' (Sahlin,

Wedlin, p.5) and get either adopted by the existing practices, get modified or even completely reshaped and become new forms as they flow through another context. The empirical evidence suggested that the task of defining and formulation of learning outcomes was passed down from legislation through hierarchical organisational structures of the university to the department level and ultimately to the individual courses/modules. As they are translated, they can lead to either homogenisation according to institutional theory, or to variation and stratification (Sahlin, Wedlin, 2008).

For some academics, the pressure to formulate learning outcomes is understood as bureaucratic exercise but with no substantial value to the learning and teaching process. In addition, academics who claim to either not fully understand the concept, or object to the vagueness and -according to them- emptiness of the concept, will just turn to stereotypes and write them in very generic fashion, only to satisfy formal requirements. The application of learning outcomes depends on the clarity of formulation and specification of the knowledge, skills, abilities and understanding (Hussey, Smith 2002). The problem with definition lies in the fact that all the attempts to specify them are futile, 'as they will always remain ambiguous, whatever descriptors are used' (Hussey, Smith, 2002, p.225). For example, knowledge has degrees and can be described as precise, crude or vague (Hussey, Smith, 2002).

The second change perception was the formal requirement of accreditation standards and procedures to define, formulate and ideally, apply learning outcomes. Again, perceptions of the academics are subjective and polarised, from complete rejection of the concept to believers, who argue that departmental and Faculty goals can be achievement by the proper implementation of learning outcomes. On the contrary, academics who see no or little merits of the concept claim with certainty that the concept would never become professional practice, if it weren't an obligatory task. Although disciplinary context did not appear to be relevant to the academic perceptions, academic leaders praised the learning outcomes as prioritising activity.

The Bologna reform lead to incremental structural changes at the University and interviews see learning outcomes in the wider context of the reform. To them, learning outcomes made an impact on the programme's goal setting, achievement of knowledge, skills and competences to apply them accordingly. Moreover, they emphasised the inter-departmental increase of cooperation especially with respect to the programme level formulation of learning outcomes. In addition, academics emphasised the role learning outcomes have in

92

curriculum development, instructional planning and assessment criteria. Lastly, they discussed the time constraint as a negative effect of one-semester course designs and ultimately the issue of for whom learning outcomes are intended, the average or the best student? On the other hand, the positive aspects of learning outcomes introduction had an impact on the increased transparency of own and others' activities, relevant especially to avoid content overlap and provide guidance to students with respect to the expectations of the courses, programmes and ultimately degrees.

Lastly, as part of the quality assurance strategy and rules and regulations of accreditation standards for the higher education institutions and their study programmes, student evaluation in the form of the survey was introduced to the University of Belgrade. Now, they have become the regular practice, often including statements of the overall student satisfaction and impressions on the course and the teaching. In addition, academic leaders believe that learning outcomes have the capacity to become useful programme and course evaluation devices, but of the system as a whole. While academic leaders discussed the system evaluation of the programmes, academics see the impact of learning outcomes made on the curriculum and course content change.

6 Conclusion

Research on learning outcomes phenomenon was bound to be challenging from the start. The concept's definitions are diverse, followed by the fragmented theoretical propositions and general difficulty to operationalise it as an object of enquiry. Moreover, the concept is multifaceted with respect to its meaning, purposes, and levels of application. Then why do it all?

First and foremost, the concept carries a powerful idea of a necessity of a 'paradigm shift', a change of focus of learning process and responsibilities from the providers of knowledge, the teachers, to the recipients, the students (Adam, 2006). The shift would imply the evolution of the teachers' role, from the central figure to being a facilitator of the learning process and steer it towards the students as the ultimate users of education.

The second rationale for choosing this topic involves the ontological positions of the author, for whom, the social phenomena are constantly shaped and reshaped by the social actors through interaction (Bryman, 2012). From the social constructivist point of view 'language has a constitutive role in institutional reality' (Prøitz, 2010, p.120), implying that phenomenon becomes an institutional fact only if the members of a collective attribute value and function to it through agreement and acceptance. Therefore, the interest for the research included exploring the 'language' behind learning outcomes, identifying the four distinct approaches necessary for understanding the concept. The matrix of perspectives suggested by Prøitz (2010), encompasses the behaviorist and social perspective on one side, and pragmatist and assessment movement on the other, to provide insights on both the meaning and the purposes of the phenomenon.

This research has demonstrated that neither of the perspectives can contribute solely to the understanding of learning outcomes, but all four together provide a holistic overview of the concept's complexity. Learning outcomes are very likely to be understood as tools for curriculum and teaching planning and formulation of guidelines. On the opposite, learning outcomes can assume the instrumental role as well, as an accountability tool, suitable for monitoring and evaluation.

Making inferences on the institutional level, which is the thesis' unit of analysis is challenging because disciplinary differences matter in the discussion of the perspectives on learning outcomes. Academics might share common ideas, and the culture of belonging to the academia, but their belief systems differ. Findings demonstrate the alignment of practices on the University level, with respect to standardisation of degree, programme and course descriptions with clearly pre-specified learning outcomes. University Steering documents have pre-formulated the learning outcomes by the principles of behaviourism, oriented towards results of the education process which can be clearly measured through assessment. These findings were congruent with the statements of the interviewees from 'hard' disciplines, but academics of the 'soft' field were more critical towards the philosophy of pre-formulation.

Two limitations appear from the inferences mentioned above. One, generalisability to the unit of analysis the University might be limited due to the undetermined contribution of disciplinary differences to the opinions of the respondents. Two, the dual function vice deans hold as the managers of the Faculties and teachers at the same time.

To come back to the relevance the social-constructivist premise that social phenomena are shaped and reshaped in the context, by the interaction of social actors, the study also includes the two approaches to policy adaptation. The rationalistic approach, and cultural-institutional perspective to indicate the direction of policy making decisions and categorise the possible institutional activities associated with them. In practice, academic leaders tend to contemplate on the concept as an 'ultimate' outcome, the competitive graduate in the labor market. Moreover, they praise the course and programme descriptions and point out to the transparency and formal reporting done more efficiently.

All of the respondents reflect on the learning outcomes with respect to the accreditation requirements and the obligation to write them. The empirical evidence does not point out to defining learning outcomes as performance indicators, or monitoring devices, but standards for quality assurance classify student surveys as evaluation devices, as an obligatory practice after the completion of the course. Expectedly, learning outcomes for the academic present the tool for aiding the curriculum design, course descriptions, teaching models and assessment. The learning outcomes have contributed to the inter-departmental collaboration and discussions especially with respect to course content, due to time limitations and programme restructuring which resulted in all of the course to become one-semestral.

Whether learning outcomes have the pivotal role to induce a 'paradigm shift' at the University of Belgrade or not, is beyond the reach of this study. However, several patterns emerged from the findings. Respondents perceptions of change include usefulness of the concept, change of accreditation requirements, T-L-A activities, transparency, and accountability.

In general, this case study can contribute to the body of literature relevant to the understanding of learning outcomes at a University from a country in transition. Moreover, its focus was mainly on academic community and their interpretations of the concept, a research topic not explored enough, and finally to the perceived perceptions of change as a result of the introduction of learning outcomes to the University of Belgrade. It would be interesting to look into disciplinary differences and the value of learning outcomes, as well as do a longitudinal follow-up study to see how learning outcomes would be institutionalised at the University.

References

Adam, S. (2004). *Using learning outcomes, A consideration of the nature, role, application and implications for European education of employing 'learning outcomes' at the local, national and international levels.* Presented at the United Kingdom Bologna Seminar, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, Scotland, Available at: http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2004/09/19908/42704

Adam, S. (2006). An introduction to learning outcomes: A consideration of the nature, function and position of learning outcomes in the creation of the European Higher Education Area. Article B.2. 3-1. In *EUA Bologna Handbook*, ed. Froment, E., Kohler, J., Purser L. and Wilson, L. Berlin: Raabe.

Adam, S. (2008). *Learning outcomes current developments in Europe: update on the issues and applications of learning outcomes associated with the Bologna process.* Prepared for the Bologna seminar: Learning outcomes based higher education: The Scottish experience, 21-22 February 2008, at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, Scotland.

Allan, J. (1996). *Learning outcomes in higher education.* Studies in Higher education Vol.21 No.1. 93-108.

Avis, J. (2000). Policing the subject: learning outcomes, managerialism and research in PCET. British Journal of Educational Studies, Vol.48 No.1. 38-57.

Becher, T. (1994). The significance of disciplinary differences. *Studies in Higher Education.* Vol. 19. No.2. 151-161.

Becher, T. (1989). *Academic Tribes and Territories.* Milton Keynes, Open University Press.

Biesta, G. (2009). Good education in an age of measurement: on the need to reconnect with the question of purpose in education, *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accouuntability.* Vol. 21. No. 1. 33-46.

Biglan, A. (1973a). *The characteristics of subject matter in different scientific areas.* Journal of Applied Psychology, 57, pp. 195–203.

Bingham, J. (1999). *Guide to Developing Learning Outcomes*. The Learning and Teaching Institute Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University.

Birnbaum, R. (1991). *How Colleges Work: The Cybernetics of Academic Organization and Leadership*. Josey-Bass inc. U.S.

Bloom, B. S., Engelhart, M., D., Furst, E.J, Hill, W. and Krathwohl, D. (1956). Taxonomy of educational objectives. Volume I: The cognitive domain. New York: McKay.

Branković, J., Maassen, P., Stensaker, B., Vukasović, M. (2014). *The re-institutionalisation of higher education in the western Balkans: the interplay between European ideas, domestic policies, and institutional practices* (eds.), Higher Education Research and Policy, Peter Lang GmbH

Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods*: Oxford university press.

CAQA (2013). *CAQA strategy 2013-2017*, Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance. Available at:

http://kapk.org/images/stories/dokumenta/CAQA_Strategic_plan.pdf

Cedefop. (2012). *Curriculum reform in Europe: The impact of learning outcomes.* Research paper No.29. Luxembourg: Publications office of the European Union. Available at: www.**cedefop**.europa.**eu**/files/5529_en.pdf

Cerych, L., Sabatier, P.,(1987). *Great expectations and mixed performance: The implementation of higher education reforms in Europe*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books for European Institute of Education and Social Policy.

Christensen, T. (2010). University governance reforms: potential problems of more autonomy?*, The International Journal of Higher Education and Educational Planning*, Vol.62. No.4. 503-517.

Christensen, T., Lægreid, P. (2001a).A transformative perspective on administrative reforms. In T. Christensen & P. Lægreid (Eds.), *New public management*. The transformation of Ideas and Practice. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Christensen, T., Ramirez. F. (2013). The formalization of the University- Rules, Roots, and routes, *Higher Education*, Vol.65(6), 695-708.

Clark, B. (1983). *The higher education system, University of California press*, Berkeley

Czarniawska, B., Joerges, B. (1996). *Travels of ideas*, in Czarniawska, B., Sevon. G. (eds.), *Translating organisational change*, Berlin.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2004). *Standards, Accountability, and school reform*. Teachers College Record, 106 (6), 1047-1085.

DiMaggio, P. J. and Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields. *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 48. No. 2. 147-160.

Dobbins, K., Brooks, S., Scott J.J.A., Rawlinson, M. and Norman R.I. (2014). Understanding and enacting learning outcomes: the academic's perspective, *Studies in Higher*

Education, DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2014.966668, Available at:
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.966668

Eisner, E.W. (1979). *The education imagination. On the design and evaluation of school programs.* Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc New York, Collier Macmillan publishers London

EHEA (2001). Prague Communiqué. European Higher Education Area. Available at:
http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/PRAGUE_COMMUNIQUE.pdf

EHEA (2003). Berlin Communiqué. *European Higher Education Area*. Available at:
http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/Berlin_Communique1.pdf

EHEA (2005). Bergen Communiqué. *European Higher Education Area*. Available at:
http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/Bergen_Communique1.pdf

EHEA (2007). London Communiqué. *European Higher Education Area*. Available at:
http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/London_Communique18May2007.pdf

EHEA (2009). Leuven Communiqué. *European Higher Education Area*. Available at:
http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/Leuven_Louvain-la-Neuve_Communiqu%C3%A9_April_2009.pdf

EHEA (2010). Budapest-Vienna Declaration. *European Higher Education Area*. Available at:
http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/Budapest-Vienna_Declaration.pdf

EHEA (2012). Bucharest Communiqué. *European Higher Education Area*. Available at:
http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/%281%29/Bucharest%20Communique%202012%281%29.pdf

EHEA (2015). Yerevan Communiqué. *European Higher Education Area*. Available at:
http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/SubmitedFiles/5_2015/112705.pdf

Enders (2007) The academic profession in *Forest, J.J.F. and Altbach, P. G.(eds.), International Handbook of Higher Education,* 5–21. Dordreht, Springer Netherlands

European Commission (2009). ECTS Users' Guide- European Credit Transfer and Accumulation system for Lifelong Learning. *European Commission*. DG Education and Culture. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/docs/ects-guide_en.pdf

European Commission (2015). ECTS Users' Guide- European Credit Transfer and Accumulation system for Lifelong Learning. *European Commission*. DG Education and Culture Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ects/guide_en.pdf

EURYDICE (2016). *Higher Education in Serbia*, European Commission, Available at: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Serbia:Higher_Education

Ewell, P. (2005). *Applying learning outcomes concepts to higher education: An overview. Paper* prepared for the Hong Kong University Grants Committee. National Center for Higher Education management Systems (NCHEMS).

Gagné, R.M. (1974). *Learning for instruction*. Illinois: The Dryden Press Hinsdale.

Gornitzka, Å. (1999). Governmental policies and organisational change in higher education. *Higher Education*, Vol. 38. No. 1. 5-31.

Gornitzka, Å, M. Kogan, and Amaral, A., (eds.) (2005). *Reform and change in higher education. Analysing policy implementation.* Dordreht: Springer.

Gornitzka, Å. (2007). The Lisbon Process: A supranational Policy Perspective. In Maassen, P. and Olsen, J.P. (eds.), *University Dynamics and European Integration*. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands. 155-178.

Hussey, T., and P. Smith. (2002). The trouble with learning outcomes. *Active Learning in Higher Education* Vol. 3, No. 3 220-233.

Hussey, S., Smith, P. (2003). The uses of learning outcomes. *Teaching in Higher Education*, Vol.8. No.3., 357-368.

Hussey, S., Smith, P. (2008). *Learning outcomes: a conceptual analysis*. Teaching in Higher Education, Vol.13. No. 1. 107-115.

Kennedy, D., Hyland, Á. and Ryan, N. (2006). *Writing and Using Learning Outcomes: A Practical Guide*. Article C 3.4-1. In: *EUA Bologna Handbook – Making Bologna Work*, edited by E. Froment, E., Kohler,J., Purser, L. and Wilson, L. 1–30. Berlin: Raabe Verlag

Law on Higher Education (2005) Available at: http://www.bg.ac.rs/files/sr/univerzitet/glasnik-zakoni/Zakon-visoko-obrazovanje.pdf

Lingard, B. , Rawolle, S.,Taylor, S. (2005). Globalizing policy sociology in education: working with Bourdieu, *Journal of Education Policy*, 20:6, 759-777. Available at:j http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02680930500238945

Mager, R. (1962). *Preparing Instructional Objectives,* revised 2nd edn (Belmont, CA, David Lake Publishers).

Maassen, P., Musselin, C. (2009). European Integration and the Europeanisation of Higher Education. In: Amaral, A., Neave, G., Musselin, C. and Maassen P. (eds.), *European*

Integration and the Governance of Higher Education and Research. Springer Netherlands. 3-14.

Maassen, P., Olsen J.P. (2007). University *Dynamics and European Integration*, Dordrecht: Springer.

March, J. G., & Olsen, J. P. (1983). Organizing political life. What administrative reorganization tells us about government. *American Political Science Review*, 77, 281–297.

March, J. G., & Olsen, J. P. (2006). Elaborating the "new institutionalism".*The Oxford handbook of political institutions*, *5*, 3-20.

Moon, J. (2002). *The Module and Programme Development Handbook*. London: Kogan Page Limited.

Neave, G., Amaral, A. (2008). On Process, Progress, Success and Methodology or the Unfolding of the Bologna Process as it Appears to Two Reasonably Benign Observers. *Higher Education Quarterly*,Vol. 62, Issue 1-2, 40–62.

Neave, G., Veiga, A. (2013). The Bologna process: Inception, 'take-up' and familiarity. *Higher Education,* Vol.66. No.1. 59-77 Springer Netherlands. Available at: http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10734-012-9590-8

Neuman, R., Becher T. (2002). *Teaching and Learning in their Disciplinary contexts: A conceptual analysis,* Studies in Higher Education, Vol.27. No.4, 405-417. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0307507022000011525

Olsen, J.P. (2002). *The many faces of Europeanization*. Journal of Common Market Studies. Vol. 50 No.5. 921-952.

Prøitz, T. (2010). Learning outcomes: What are they? Who defines them? When and where are they defined?, *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, Vol. 22. No.2, 119-137.

Ramirez, F. O. (2006). The rationalization of universities. In Djelic, M.-L. and Sahlin-Andersson, K. (Eds.), *Transnational governance: Institutional dynamics of regulation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sahlin-Andersson, K., Wedlin, L.(2008). Circulating ideas: Immitation, Translation and Editing. In Greenwood, R., Oliver, C., Suddaby, R., Sahlin-Andersson (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of organisational institutionalism* 218-242. London: Sage.

Searle, J.R. (1995). *The conctruction of social reality*. New York: The Free.

Sin, C. (2013). Lost in Translation: the Meaning of Learning Outcomes Across National and Institutional Policy Contexts. *Studies in Higher Education* 1–15.

Sin, C. (2014). The policy object: a different perspective on policy enactment in higher education. *Higher Education,* Vol.68 (3) 435-448.

Teichler, U. (1996). The changing nature of Higher Education in Western Europe, *Higher Education Policy* Vol.9. No.2, 89–111.

Teichler, U. (2004). The Changing Debate on Internationalisation of Higher Education. *Higher Education*, Vol.48. No.1. 5-26, Available at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/4151528

Tempus (2012d). *Higher Education in Serbia*, Available online at: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/participating_countries/reviews/serbia_review_of_higher_education.pdf

Tuning (2007). Reference points for the Design and Delivery of Degree Porgrammes in Education. *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe*. *Available* at: http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/images/stories/documents/General_Brochure_final_version.pdf

Vukasović, M. (2014). Quality Assurance in Croatia and Serbia: Analysis of Changes of Policy and Internal Organisational Practices. In Branković, J., Maassen, P., Stensaker, B., Vukasović, M. *The re-institutionalisation of higher education in the western Balkans: the interplay between European ideas, domestic policies, and institutional practices* (Eds.).

Vukasović, M., Elken, M. (2013). Higher education policy dynamics in a multi-level governance context: A comparative study of four post-communist countries. In: Zgaga, P., Teichler, U, and Brennan, J. (eds.), *The globalisation challenge for European higher education. Convergence and diversity, centres and peripheries*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag. 261-286.

Yin, R.K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5 ed.): Sage.

Documents used for analysis

EHEA (2012). National report regarding the Bologna Process implementation 2009-2012 Serbia. European Higher Education Area. Available at: http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/National%20reports/Serbia.pdf

EHEA (2015). National report regarding the Bologna Process implementation 2012-2015 Serbia. European Higher Education Area. Available at: http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/SubmitedFiles/4_2015/111442.pdf

Konferencija Univerziteta Srbije (2011). (The University Conference of Serbia (CONUS)) Deklaracija o postavljanju studenta u središte procesa učenja (Declaration of the student-centred process of learning) Available at: http://www.konus.ac.rs/files/Deklaracija.pdf

The National Council of Higher Education (2006). The rules and regulations of accreditation standards for Higher Education Insitutions and their Study Programmes. Available at: http://www.kapk.org/images/stories/pravilnici/2-Standards_of_accrd.pdf

OECD (2011). A Tuning-AHELO Conceptual Framework of Expected Desired/Learning Outcomes in Engineering", *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 60, OECD Publishing. http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5kghtchn8mbn-en, pp.35 and 48-54.

Politika kvaliteta Univerziteta u Beogradu (2013). (Quality Assurance Policy of the University of Belgrade). Available at: http://bg.ac.rs/files/sr/univerzitet/univ-propisi/Politika_kvaliteta.pdf

The Statute of the University of Belgrade (2006). Available at: http://www.bg.ac.rs/files/en/university/StatutUni_eng.pdf

Strategija obezbeđivanja kvaliteta (2013). (The Quality Assurance Strategy). http://bg.ac.rs/files/sr/univerzitet/univ-propisi/StrategijaObezbedjivanjaKvaliteta.pdf

Strategija razvoja obrazovanja u Srbiji do 2020.godine (2012). (Educational development strategy in Serbia, 2020). Available at: http://bg.ac.rs/files/sr/univerzitet/Strategija-obrazovanja-2020.pdf

Zakon o visokom obrazovanju, Službeni glasnik RS, br. 76/2005, 100/2007, 97/2008, 44/2010, 93/2012, 89/2013 (The Law on Higher education) http://bg.ac.rs/files/sr/univerzitet/glasnik-zakoni/Zakon-visoko-obrazovanje.pdf

103

Zbirka važnijih propisa Univerziteta u Beogradu, 2015. (The Collection of important regulations of the University of Belgrade)

http://bg.ac.rs/files/sr/univerzitet/univ-propisi/Zbirka_propisa_oktobar2015.pdf

The Following documents were retrieved from the Quality Assurance Accreditation Agency:
http://www.kapk.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=87&Itemid=75

- Reports on Accreditation Decisions- University of Belgrade and the three faculties in the study
- Reports on external quality assurance assessments of the three faculties.

Appendix 1: The HE system in Serbia

Source: Tempus (2012), Available at:
http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/participating_countries/reviews/serbia_review_of_higher_education.pdf

Appendix 2: the relevant bodies in the HE system of Serbia

Appendix 1 Relevant Governing bodies in HE system of Serbia, Source: Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA)
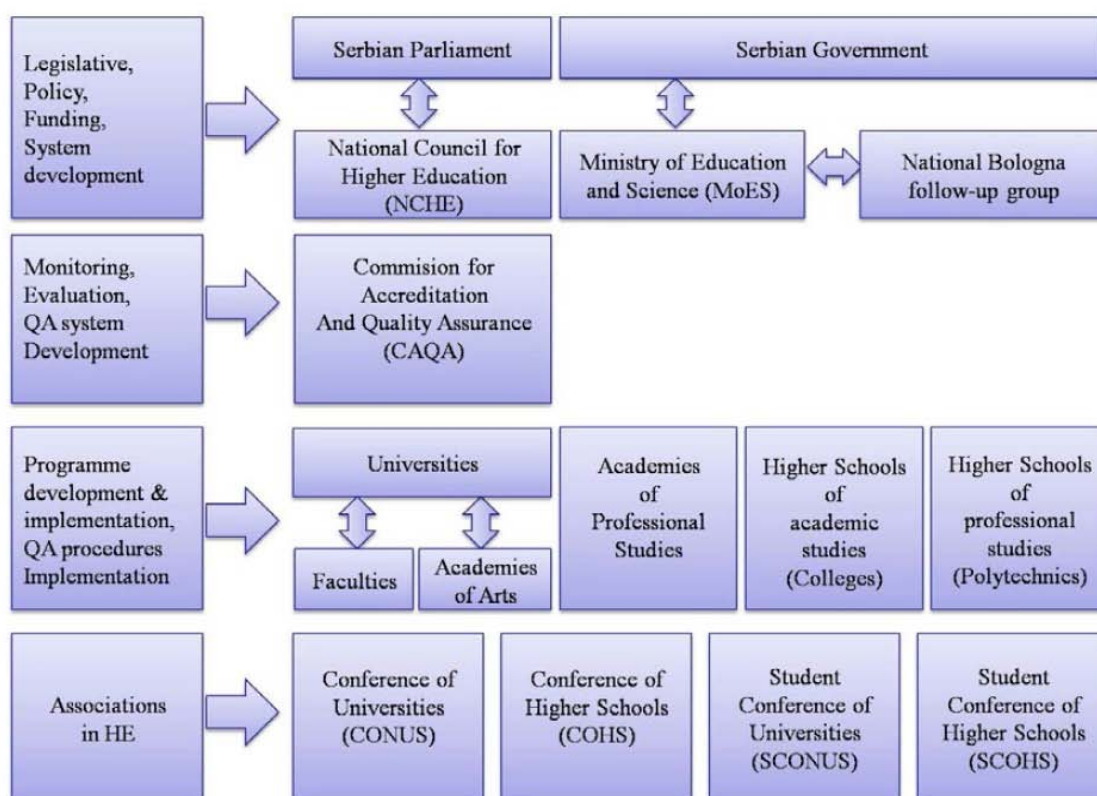
Appendix 3: Interview guide- Academic leaders

Interview guide
Academic leaders

Intro:
Hello and thank you for taking the time to meet. Interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes and I will ask you only questions related to the concept of learning outcomes and your perception of it.
With your permission I would like to record the conversation, for easier analysis of the interview. It will be heard only by me and after transcribing it, I will delete it permanently. I would like to encourage you to express your opinions on the matter as freely as you would like, as I intend to make all the responses anonymous.
I will start with short personal presentation and continue with the interview from there.
If it's ok with you, I would like to start the recorder and discussion.
Warm up:
- Can you tell me your name and your current position at the University?
- Do you remember when/where you first heard about the idea of learning outcomes?

Main body:

- How would you define learning outcomes?
- Do you think there is a common understanding on what LOs are?

Probes:
How/when are LOs used in your department?
Do you see them as tools for teaching and course planning?
What do you think about learning outcomes as performance indicators?

- How would you describe the link between learning outcomes and University's strategy?
- Why do you think LOs have been introduced/are becoming more of a feature in HE?
- Have you followed any specific set of rules or guidelines while writing them?
- Were any instructions or guidelines given to the individual departments on how to formulate learning outcomes?

Probes:

Did you mediate in any way?
Did you use other countries' or departments' practices as the 'success' examples?
Do you see any links between LOs and other reforms/changes happening in HE?

- Do you think the University is on a right path to align practice of LO with EU standards?
- Do you think that LOs have had any impact on programme restructuring?
- What do you think has changed since the introduction of LOs?
PROBE: practices in terms of in planning courses, teaching, assessment
- Do you have a formal team of staff who are regularly dealing with LO?
What are their responsibilities?

- How do you think their use might develop in the future?
Concluding the discussion:

This would be the end. Would you like to add anything that you might think it important to the whole discussion and that is left out? If yes, what? Why? If no, thank you very much once again for agreeing to participate in the interview. I will stop the recording now. Bye

Appendix 4: Interview guide- Academic leaders (Serbian version)

Intervju Vodič
Prodekani za nastavu

Uvod

Dobar dan i hvala Vam što ste izdvojili vreme da popričamo. Intervju će trajati između 45 i 60 minuta i isključivo ćemo razgovarati o konceptu ishoda učenja i o tome kako ga vi doživljavate.
Ukoliko se slažete, volela bih da snimim ovaj razgovor, radi lakše analize intervjua. Snimak ću čuti samo ja, i odmah nakon transkribovanja ću ga obrisati. Želim da Vas podstaknem da slobodno izrazite svoje stavove jer će svi odgovori koje date biti anonimni.
Počećemo sa kratkim pitanjima i predstavljanjem i nastaviti sa interjuom odatle.
Ukoliko se slažete, sada ću uključiti diktafon i počećemo sa interjuom.

Zagrevanje:

- Da li mi možete reći koja je Vaša trenutna pozicija na fakultetu?
- Da li se sećate kada ili gde ste prvi put čuli za ideju o ishodima učenja?

Glavna pitanja

- Kako biste Vi definisali ishode učenja?
- Da li mislite da postoji razumevanje među kolegama šta su zapravo ishodi učenja?

Kako se upotrebljavaju kod Vas na katedri?
Da li ih koristite u planiranju predavanja i kurseva/modula?
Šta mislite o ishodima kao indikatorima učinka?

Definicija evropskog okvira kvalifikacija glasi: Ishodi učenja su izjave o tome šta se od učenika-studenta očekuje da zna, razume i bude sposoban na kraju perioda učenja.
- Šta Vi mislite o tome?
- Kako biste opisali vezu između ishoda učenja i univerzitetske strategije?
- Šta mislite koliko su ishodi učenja zastupljeni u visokom obrazovanju?
- Da li ste imali neke smernice dok ste ih definisali i formulisali?
- Da li su katedrama davane instrukcije kako se pišu ishodi učenja?

Probna pitanja:
Da li ste posredovali na neki način?
Da li ste koristili prakse drugih zemalja ili katedri kao primer uspeha?
Da li vidite povezanost između ishoda učenja i ostalih reformi/promena u visokom obrazovanju?
- Da li mislite da je Univerzitet na pravom putu da uskladi praksu ishoda učenja sa evropskim standardima?
- Šta mislite da se promenilo od uvođenja I.U.?

Probna pitanja: praksa u smislu planiranja predmeta, predvanja, provere.
- Da li postoji formalni tim koji se bavi ishodima učenja redovno?
(koja su im zaduženja?)
- Šta mislite kako će se njihova upotreba razvijati u budućnosti?

Završetak diskusije

Ovo bi bilo sve. Da li želite nešto da dodate što smatrate da je važno za diskusiju a da je izostavljeno? Ako da, sta? Ukoliko ne, hvala Vam još jednom što ste pristali na intervju. Sada ću isključiti diktafon. Doviđenja.

Appendix 5: Interview guide- Academics

Interview guide
Academics

Intro:
Hello and thank you for taking the time to meet. Interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes and I will ask you only questions related to the concept of learning outcomes and your perception of it.
With your permission I would like to record the conversation, for easier analysis of the interview. It will be heard only by me and after transcribing it, I will delete it permanently. I would like to encourage you to express your opinions on the matter as freely as you would like, as I intend to make all the responses anonymous.
I will start with short personal presentation and continue with the interview from there.
If it's ok with you, I would like to start the recorder and discussion.
Warm up:

- Can you tell me your name and current role at the University?
- Do you remember when/ where you first heard about the idea of learning outcomes?

Main body:

- Where/How does the term or idea of learning outcomes come up in your work?
- How would you define learning outcomes?
- Do you have a sense of their role/ why they are being used?

EQF definition is: 'LO are statements of what learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do at the end of a period of learning'

What do you think of that definition?

- Is there a clear demarcation between the terms of LO and aims and objectives according to you?
- Do you see any link between LO and University's strategy/ other changes at the university?

- Have you been involved in formulating and implementing LOs?

- How much freedom did you have in formulating them?

Did you cooperate with other departments from the Faculty in formulating LOs?
Did you rely on the other faculties' practices (in the country and abroad) when you started introducing LOs?
- How do you use LO in your teaching work?

Are you aware of them while you teach?
Do you use them in course planning? (How?)
Is there training for writing learning outcomes?

- Do you see any pros/cons in using LOs in teaching and planning? What kinds of things?
- Have you noticed that your department/programme/modules have changed in any way since you have started using LO?
- What do you expect from them in the future?
- If there is resistance in using them in the practice, why do you think that happens?
- Do you think that the application of learning outcomes have contributed to the smoother functioning of the department?

Concluding the discussion:

This would be the end. Would you like to add anything that you might think it important to the whole discussion and that is left out? If yes, what? Why? If no, thank you very much once again for agreeing to participate in the interview. I will stop the recording now. Bye

Appendix 6: Interview guide- Academics

Intervju vodič
Profesori

Uvod:
Dobar dan i hvala Vam što ste izdvojili vreme da popričamo. Intervju će trajati između 45 i 60 minuta i isključivo ćemo razgovarati o konceptu ishoda učenja i o tome kako ga vi doživljavate.
Ukoliko se slažete, volela bih da snimim ovaj razgovor, radi lakše analize intervjua. Snimak ću čuti samo ja, i odmah nakon transkribovanja ću ga obrisati. Želim da Vas podstaknem da slobodno izrazite svoje stavove jer će svi odgovori koje date biti anonimni.
Počećemo sa kratkim pitanjima i predstavljanjem i nastaviti sa interjuom odatle.
Ukoliko se slažete, sada ću uključiti diktafon i počećemo sa interjuom.
Zagrevanje:

- Da li mi možete reći koja je Vaša trenutna uloga na fakultetu?
- Da li se sećate kada ili gde ste prvi put čuli za ideju o ishodima učenja?

Glavna pitanja

- U kom segmentu Vašeg posla se ovaj pojam pojavljuje?Gde i kako se ovaj pojam pojavljuje u Vašem poslu?
- Kako biste ga vi definisali?
- Šta je po vama njihova uloga? Za šta se koristi?

Definicija evropskog okvira kvalifikacija glasi: Ishodi učenja su izjave o tome šta se od učenika-studenta očekuje da zna, razume i bude sposoban na kraju perioda učenja.

Šta Vi mislite o tome?
- Kako razlikujete termine *ciljevi* i *ishodi učenja*?
- Da li smatrate da postoji povezanost između i.u. i strategije fakulteta/drugih promena na fakultetu?
- Kako ste bili uključeni u proces formulacije i primene ishoda učenja?
- Zanima me koliko ste slobode imali u formulaciji?

Da li ste saradjivali sa drugim katedrama na fakultetu u formulaciji?
Da li ste se oslanjali na praksu nekih drugih fakulteta u zemlji ili u regionu kada ste uvodili koncept?
Uspeh neke katedre?

- Kako koristite ishode učenja u svom radu? Da li dok predajete, razmišljate o njima? Da li ih koristite u planiranju nastave, modula? Kako?
- Da li postoji trening ili bilo kakva smernica za nastavni kadar za pisanje ishoda učenja?
- Možete li mi reći koje su njihove prednosti i mane u predavanju i planiranju programa?
- Da li ste primetili neku promenu na katedri, samom programu i modulima otkad ste počeli da koristite ishode učenja?
- Šta očekujete od njih u budućnosti?
- Postoji li otpor u njihovoj upotrebi u praksi po Vama? Zašto mislite da je tako?
- Da li mislite da je primena i.u. doprinela lakšem funkcionisanju katedre?

Završetak diskusije

Ovo bi bilo sve. Da li želite nešto da dodate što smatrate da je važno za diskusiju a da je izostavljeno? Ako da, sta? Ukoliko ne, hvala Vam još jednom što ste pristali na intervju. Sada ću isključiti diktafon. Doviđenja.