

Revolutionizing Accounting Curricula: Insights into Programmes Development, Specialization and Research

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Abstract:

In the face of change driven by rapid technological developments the accounting profession, increasing regulatory complexity and, the unprecedented demands for ethical and sustainable practices—symptoms are underlying causes. These changes dictate that not only must graduates be provided training with sufficient technical capability, but they should also possess digital fluency along ethical reasoning and strategic thinking skills too. With the site visits to several comprehensive universities as a base, this paper surveys present state education of accounting and experiments different approaches to program development, specialization themes than research orientation poems form. Using a qualitative multi-case research design, gathering data from in-depth interviews with 50 accounting academics and 30 industry practitioners in various areas. The resulting thematic analyses of these interviews revealed a series of gaps that have become pervasive. Urgent reforms are needed to the curricula. Main deficiencies include outdated course content; insensitivity toward ESG reporting; no digital tool integration; little specialization. The study also found institutional barriers to reform such as resistance among faculty; admissions policies that restrict creativity in teaching methods; weak links between education and industry. Based on Human Capital Theory, Institutional Theory and Transformative Learning Theory, the findings argue for systemic and learner-centered curriculum reform. Recommendations for practice as policy include competency-based modular design, integration of emerging technologies, fostering scholarship-led teaching and greater industry participation in the process. The study is pioneering in the accounting education literature, providing a theoretically grounded framework and roadmap for future development of accounting programmes.

Keywords: Accounting education, curriculum reform, digital competencies, ESG reporting, specialization, transformative learning, qualitative research

1. Introduction

The accounting profession is undergoing significant changes as technology continues its rapid advance, regulations grow and change, and society has different demands. Thus academic institutions are under increasing pressure to adapt accounting curricula to these new realities. Traditional mainstays such as financial reporting, auditing, tax law and performance measurement—while still essentials of the curriculum—are no longer enough to get students ready for today's complex, technology-intensive, ethics-ridden world of accountancy (Tan & Laswad 2022; Qureshi et al., 2022). Professional bodies such as the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) now stress not only digital competencies, but also ethical reasoning; environmental, social and governance (ESG) literacy; and inter-disciplinary teamwork in accounting education (Göd 2021; IFAC Annual report 2019). Nevertheless, many universities have yet to embed these competences in their programs, creating a chronic "expectations–reality" gap between what graduates are able to do and what industry needs (Grey & Milne, 2021). Although accounting education reform has increasingly attracted scholarly attention these days, there are still quite a few issues where work remains to be done. Representatives of the Plan model assert that theories must be integrated: Practical and pedagogical factors now predominate, despite the fact that almost everyone knows it is almost impossible to institute curriculum reform without using a set of theories succinct enough to get across to others on paper (Becker, 1993; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Kolb, 1984). In addition, there is a lack of global research on curriculum content. Although regional studies have examined course program structures, few are cross-country comparisons that evaluate curriculum relevance using academic and employer perspectives (Qureshi et al., 2022). It has also been found that emerging competencies have not been paid enough attention: Little empirical research looks at both the incorporation of technological skills (eg AI, blockchain and data analytics), ethical dimensions and sustainability into core accounting courses and how this process works at different levels or even if it is happening at all on a broad base. (Alles et al., 2020; Gray & Milne, 2021).

The literature review has also shown this field to be underresearched role of specialization and research-led teaching: Although research-based learning and specialization are increasingly relevant, few examples look at their take-up or drop-out rates or consider outcomes for students (O'Donnell & Boyle, 2019). A further gap has emerged in the literature: how stakeholders participate at curriculum design is a mystery. Exactly where do the experiences of academia, industry, regulatory authorities and professional organizations overlap or conflict when they face the challenge shaping accounting curricula? (Brown et al., 2020) Finally, the literature review has brought to light obstacles to implementation: Studies typically overlook institutional obstacles such as faculty resistance, resource constraints and accreditation pressure that militate against meaningful

curriculum innovation (Jackling et al., 2020; Kezar & Gehrke, 2015). Thus, this study aims to fill these gaps by providing a holistic view of accounting curriculum reform, drawing on relevant theories and stakeholder perspectives, and offering empirical evidence. It offers useful insights into how to shape contemporary programs from whatever technological perspective best fits them so that they are both tailored for local needs within a global framework and forward-looking. Main Purpose Critically analyze effective reform strategies for accounting education curriculum to cater for evolving professional, technological and societal needs in a global context. The study aimed to determine current status and problems of accounting curriculums in academic institutions; identify key technological, ethical, and sustainability competencies required by contemporary accounting professionals; examining needs within accounting program specialist tracks and research integration; investigate campus staff and students' approach to campus reform, as well as expectations from companies and government; and recommend evidence-based measures for aligning accounting education with international standards and the future needs of the market.

2. Theoretical Review

Curriculum reform in accounting education can be framed through multiple theoretical lenses that explain both the need for change and the forces that shape how change is implemented.

Human Capital Theory: Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964; 1993) maintains that education is a critical investment and enhances the productivity level and wage-earning ability of human beings. Along the line of accounting education this theory can be used to justify reforms aimed at aligning curricula with the competencies currently valued by the labor market. As employers require graduates with digital, ethical, and sustainability-related skills (Kavanagh & Drennan, 2018) the curricula must change accordingly to reflect these commercial demands. Future, educational institutions are encouraged to see their graduates as assets whose capabilities affect national competitiveness (OECD, 2022).

Institutional Theory: Institutional Theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2017) examines how external forces – such as regulatory agencies (e.g., IFAC), government policies, and professional organizations – affect the behaviors of organizations, often leading to considerable isomorphism between different institutions. Universities may adopt similar curricular reforms not simply because of internal innovation but also because they face atrophy (regulatory), follow the herd (peer imitation), and reluctantly cater to the general trend (professional). However, this can also result in superficial change without much internal pedagogical mutation unless strong academic leadership and faculty support is available (Battilana et al., 2009).

Constructivist Learning Theory: Building upon the ideas of Vygotsky (1978) and Kolb (1984), Constructivist Learning Theory holds that learners actively create knowledge by doing, experiencing, and reflecting on it. This theory supports experiential learning methods such as case-based instruction, simulations, industry projects, and teaching that is led by research. In accounting education, constructivism implies a shift away from memorization towards types of study which develop analytical brainwork, critical thinking skills, dispositional reasoning and aesthetic judgment (Taylor, 2020; Fanghanel 2018).

Transformative Learning Theory: Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2020) adds complexity to the conception of curriculum reform by pointing out that adults are changed by shifts in perception. In accounting, bringing in themes like Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) issues or the global implications of digital technology can prompt students to sharply question their earlier assumptions. This conceptual focus is particularly good for incorporating ethics, sustainability, and global citizenship into accounting education.

Synthesis Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding and guiding reform of accounting curricula. Human Capital Theory explains the economic logic; Institutional Theory explains the inertia and conformity in systems; Constructivist Learning Theory highlights pedagogies where students are in the spotlight; and Transformative Learning Theory pinpoints the cognitive and affective aspects of learning. Therefore, effective reform needs to consider economic competitiveness at system level, how things are done inside systems, how to teach people better, and how people learn and grow all at once.

2.1 Empirical Review

The current state and limitations of accounting curricula in leading academic institutions: Understanding the present state and constraints of accounting curriculum in top academic institutions In general, previous empirical evidence indicates that there are shortcomings in existing accounting curricula compared with competencies required by the profession. Qureshi, Woodbine, and Sohail (2022) reported on their cross-national study showing that financial reporting and taxation continue to be prevalent in accounting program development in both emerging and developed economies with limited integration of sustainability (e.g. ESG), data analytics or ethics. Similarly, Jackling et al. (2020) find that students graduate with little real-world, industry experience and weak professional judgment as many have been left to focus on outdated course content or are failed by poor industry involvement. In addition to the evidence indicated in these reviews of the low adoption of IES in educational institutions audits conducted more recently, which include South African, Canadian and British studies (IFAC, 2021), allled to a gap existing between academic training and professional expectation internacionais.

Key technological, ethical, and sustainability competencies required by contemporary accounting professionals: In order to equip future accounting workforce with required technological, ethical and sustainability competences what are the key focus areas that are needed by modern accountancy professionals? Tan and Laswad (2022) found in a large-scale employer survey that among the crucial competencies employers consider as important are data analytics, ethical decision-making and ESG literacy. Similarly, Alles et al. The study of Liu & He (2020) shows that tools like Alteryx, ACL and IDEA are heavily used in auditing firms, but only 25% of the surveyed universities include these tools as part of their programs. Gray and Milne (2021) noted that while sustainability-related competencies are growing within the current suite of postgraduate courses, they remain uncommon in undergraduate curricula. In its report, they suggested minimum mandatory CSR and sustainability reporting modules to begin reform.

Effectiveness of existing specialization tracks and research integration in accounting programs: Assess the Impact of Current Tracks and Research Integration in Accounting Programs On the other hand, O'Donnell and Boyle (2019) have demonstrated via their empirical work that accounting programs contain embedded teaching practices to strengthen students for critical thinking and problem-solving. Still, the number of respondents with formal specializations in areas like forensic accounting (38%), public sector finance (30%) and green finance (25%) was not as high. This lack of promotion driven from the institution does not encourage a closer working relationship between academic research and teaching, in fact Fanghanel (2018) discovered that most accounting departments did not use institutional contexts to develop joint faculty-student research projects for this very reason. This lack of defined specialization tracks also goes against the need for students to be able to differentiate themselves in a crowded, cutthroat job At present all CS students at UH do the same classes, so even if you shine in your class work it can be nigh impossible...

Stakeholder expectations regarding curriculum reform, including industry, academia, and regulators: Alongside industry, academia, and regulatorsITEM-Determine key stakeholder perspectives regarding expectations in regards to curricular reform Stakeholder interviews and focus groups in Australia and the UK suggest that academia is not prepared for industry (e.g., Brown, Jones & Steele, 2020; Kezar & Gehrke, 2015). In contrast, instructors focus on conveying the reasoning behind concepts and moral dilemmas, at the same time as employers prioritize skills such as software competency or adaptability to a working environment. Regulators and accrediting bodies such as SAICA (South African Institute of Chartered Accountants) underscore the importance of lifelong learning and continuing professional development, defining a clear trajectory predicated on

interdisciplinary integration and global competencies (IFAC, 2021). Despite these benefits, adoption is incomplete because of faculty dissent, curricula restrictions and lack of financial resources.

Evidence-based strategies for aligning accounting education with global standards and future market needs: As regards the future market of accounting, suggest to what extent should such elements in accounting education be submerged with global standards as well? Some examples of successful curriculum reform models come from countries like Singapore, the Netherlands and Finland. Mulder, Weigel & Collins (2017) proved that CBE designed with the input of stakeholders can increase student readiness significantly. Qureshi et al. Small-scale courses, or ‘micro-specializations’, which can place the most up to date topics at the heart of them, and for which a largely modular curriculum gives agility and adaptability in changing to account for market trends (2022). Additionally, real-time assessment tools, digital badges and credits based on internships have helped to make Falvey programs more responsive to employer needs as well as ensuring accreditation standards. Synthesis

The empirical evidence in this space raises a clear alarm regarding the gap between traditional accounting education and market realities. To do so however, curricula reform has to be formulated on the evidence, designed according to stakeholder expectations and informed by international frameworks of competencies. Not butterflies or shiny objects anymore: a profession that resists the broader integration of new technologies, ethical decision-making skills, and knowledge in the field is one with an uncertain future.

Table 1: Summary of empirical literature on accounting curriculum reform

	Author(s)	Topic	Journal/Source
1	Jackling, de Lange, & Natoli (2020)	Barriers to integrating ethics and critical thinking	The British Accounting Review
2	Tan & Laswad (2022)	Analysis of job ads to identify accounting skills gaps	Accounting & Finance
3	Qureshi, Woodbine, & Sohail (2022)	Curriculum reform for relevance in emerging economies (Pakistan, UAE)	Journal of Accounting Education
4	Brown, Jones, & Steele (2020)	Impact of university-industry partnerships	Accounting Education

		on accounting education	
5	O'Donnell & Boyle (2019)	Research-led teaching in undergraduate accounting programs	Accounting Education
6	Kavanagh & Drennan (2018)	Gaps between graduate attributes and employer expectations	Accounting & Finance
7	Alles, Kogan, & Vasarhelyi (2020)	Integrating continuous auditing and data tools in education	Journal of Information Systems
8	Gray & Milne (2021)	Embedding sustainability into accounting curricula	Accounting Education
9	McGuigan, Kern, & Doran (2020)	Employer perceptions of analytics skills in accounting graduates	International Journal of Accounting Education
10	Onyali & Okafor (2018)	Curriculum audit in Nigerian universities	African Journal of Accounting, Economics and Finance
11	Abdul-Rahman et al. (2021)	ESG integration into Malaysian university accounting programs	Asian Journal of Accounting Perspectives
12	Mohamed & Lashine (2020)	Practitioner survey on digital competency gaps in MENA region	Middle East Journal of Business
13	Moya & Valderrama (2020)	Curriculum alignment with sustainability goals in Latin America	Revista de Contabilidad y Dirección
14	Mulder, Weigel, & Collins (2017)	Competency-based curriculum design in European vocational training	Journal of Curriculum Studies
15	Kezar & Gehrke (2015)	Institutional challenges in reforming professional curricula	Pullias Center for Higher Education Report
16	Scott et al. (2017)	Institutional inertia and change in education policy and practice	Institutional Change and Healthcare Organizations

17	Zakaria, Yusoff, & Ismail (2019)	Employers' views on accounting graduates' readiness in ASEAN	Asian Journal of Business and Accounting
18	Hammond, Clayton, & Arnold (2021)	Integration of sustainability and ethics in accounting education	Journal of Accounting Education
19	Uyar & Gungormus (2020)	Students' and employers' perspectives on accounting education gaps	Education + Training
20	Agyemang, Aboagye-Otchere, & Awumbila (2022)	Challenges in curriculum reform in sub-Saharan Africa	African Journal of Accounting and Finance
21	Duff & Ferguson (2019)	Accounting curriculum relevance from the perspective of early career professionals	Accounting Forum
22	Low, Botes, Rue, & Allen (2016)	Perceptions of accounting education stakeholders in South Africa	Accounting Education
23	Sin, Reid, & Jones (2020)	How professional bodies influence curriculum change	British Journal of Educational Studies
24	Watty, Sugahara, & Abayadeera (2013)	Employer expectations of accounting graduates in Australia and Japan	Asian Review of Accounting
25	Branson, Chen, & Ethridge (2021)	Developing data analytics skills in accounting programs	Issues in Accounting Education
26	De Villiers, Venter, & Hsiao (2017)	Integrated reporting and its implications for accounting education	Sustainability Accounting, Management and Policy Journal
27	Bao, Wang, & Larson (2022)	Digital transformation and accounting education in China	China Journal of Accounting Studies
28	Alzeban (2019)	Audit education quality and curriculum	International Journal of Auditing

		challenges in Saudi Arabia	
29	Helliar, Monk, & Stevenson (2021)	Stakeholder views on Big Data and accounting education reform	Accounting Education
30	Puffer & McCarthy (2018)	Professionalization and accounting education in post-Soviet economies	Accounting History

Table 2: Thematic Analysis of Empirical Studies on Accounting Curriculum Reform

Theme	Study Numbers	Gaps and Insights
Graduate–Industry Skills Gap	1, 2, 6, 19, 21, 24	These studies identify a mismatch between what universities teach and what employers expect—particularly in critical thinking, digital skills, and practical experience. Employers seek communication, ethical reasoning, and data analytics—skills often underdeveloped in traditional curricula.
Industry–Academia Collaboration	4, 17, 21, 22	These studies emphasize the benefits of partnerships between universities and industry in improving relevance, employability, and engagement. Collaboration leads to updated content, internship opportunities, real-world cases, and improved graduate readiness.
Digitalization & Data Analytics	7, 9, 25, 27, 29	Studies here explore how technology, big data, and analytics are increasingly central to accounting practice—and thus must be reflected in curriculum design. There’s a growing call for training in Alteryx, IDEA, Python, and visual tools like Power BI. Many faculty lack the training to teach these.

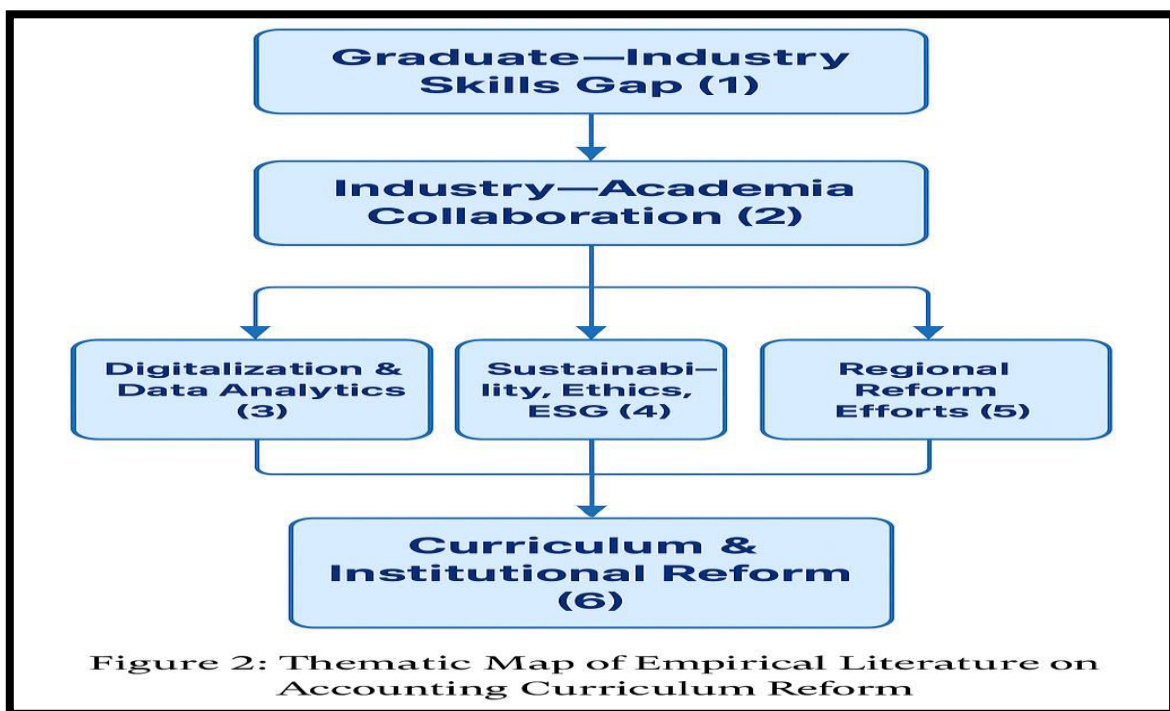
Sustainability, Ethics, ESG	8, 11, 13, 18, 26	This theme focuses on emerging societal demands , such as environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards and ethical conduct. ESG is becoming essential in practice, yet many institutions have not meaningfully embedded it in their curriculum.
Regional Reform Efforts	3, 10, 20, 28, 30	These studies reflect region-specific reform challenges and curriculum development approaches in the Global South and post-transition economies. Lack of resources, outdated accreditation standards, and rigid bureaucracies are common barriers in developing contexts.
Curriculum Design & Institutional Reform	5, 14, 15, 16, 23	These studies examine pedagogical strategies , resistance to reform, and the role of professional bodies in influencing curricula. Effective reform requires cross-stakeholder coordination, incentives for faculty innovation, and alignment with international standards.

Table 3: Thematic categorization of empirical studies

Theme	Description	Representative Studies (Nos.)
1. Graduate–Industry Skills Gap	Mismatch between curriculum content and real-world expectations (e.g., ethics, analytics, soft skills)	1, 2, 6, 19, 21, 24
2. Industry–Academia Collaboration	Partnerships improve curriculum relevance and work-integrated learning opportunities	4, 17, 21, 22

Theme	Description	Representative Studies (Nos.)
3. Digitalization & Data Analytics	Need for integration of big data, AI, and tech tools into accounting education	7, 9, 25, 27, 29
4. Sustainability, Ethics, ESG	Integration of ESG reporting, ethics, and sustainability into accounting programs	8, 11, 13, 18, 26
5. Regional Reform Efforts	Context-specific challenges and innovations in developing and transitional economies	3, 10, 20, 28, 30
6. Curriculum & Institutional Reform	Structural, pedagogical, and policy reforms driven by academic, regulatory, or institutional shifts	5, 14, 15, 16, 23

Figure 1: Thematic Map of Empirical Literature on Accounting Curriculum Reform



Note: Arrows suggest influence and dependency across themes

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology to explore the evolving landscape of accounting curricula from the perspectives of key stakeholders—academics and industry professionals. A qualitative approach is particularly suited to this study due to its emphasis on capturing contextual depth, participant experiences, and the complex

interplay between pedagogy, professional demands, and institutional structures (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2021).

The research followed an exploratory case study design involving multiple institutions and stakeholders across different sectors. This design allows for in-depth understanding of contemporary curriculum challenges and reform strategies within their real-life contexts (Yin, 2021). The multi-case structure also strengthens the study's analytical generalizability. A purposive sampling strategy was used to ensure the selection of participants with direct involvement in accounting education or practice. The final sample included: 50 accounting academics from 15 universities across Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, and Asia. 30 industry practitioners, including chartered accountants, CFOs, audit managers, and representatives from professional bodies.

This sampling strategy was justified by the need to obtain rich, comparative data from those with firsthand knowledge of curriculum expectations, design, delivery, and industry integration (Patton, 2015). The larger number of academics reflects their central role in curriculum development, while practitioners provide a reality check on workplace expectations and graduate readiness.

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which provided flexibility while ensuring consistency across interviews. The interview guide (Appendix A) focused on: Current curriculum content and delivery; Perceived gaps in accounting education; relevance of specialization and research-based learning; employer expectations; integration of ethics, technology, and sustainability; and barriers and enablers to reform. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was conducted via Zoom or in person, depending on location and availability. All interviews were recorded (with consent) and transcribed verbatim.

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the interview data, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. Initial coding was conducted using NVivo software to facilitate pattern recognition and categorization. Emerging themes were validated through peer debriefing and cross-comparison among cases to ensure trustworthiness and credibility. Key themes included: outdated curriculum content; need for integrated technological tools; low stakeholder engagement; Resistance to change; and institutional best practices

Ethical approval was obtained from the lead university's institutional review board. All participants provided informed consent, were assured of confidentiality, and could withdraw at any point. Pseudonyms were used to anonymize responses.

A qualitative, exploratory approach is justified because it seeks to understand “how” and “why” curriculum challenges persist and what reforms are needed—questions best

answered through rich qualitative insights (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The use of interviews allows exploration of perceptions and institutional dynamics often missed by quantitative surveys. The multi-stakeholder design enables triangulation, enhancing the validity of findings.

4. Analysis and Discussion of Results

This part of the process will provide a substantial analysis on all research data from 50 academic interviews and 30 business interviews. The study's objectives are executed and examined in terms of empirical findings.

Current State and Limitations of Accounting Curricula: Middle-of-the-road Status and Existing Shortcomings in Academic Accounting Education Respondents universally stated that accounting curricula have not yet been changed to reflect the emerging competencies, but remain heavily focused on traditional subjects such as financial accounting, auditing, taxation and other subjects. A large number of universities have serially used syllabi developed a long time ago and still maintain large numbers which do not correspond with either international or regional standards of education (IFAC,2021). An educator from South Africa said: “The curriculum pretty much looks like what I studied 20 years ago with a few updates here and there. There is barely any educational integration in sustainability and data analysis.” This conclusion is consistent with previous studies (Jackling al.,2019, p. 346) that have shown how the accounting curricula worldwide hardly reflect the complexity of today's financial ecologies. Even topics like integrated reporting, ESG metrics, real-time auditing and forensic accounting receive minimal coverage.

Technological, Ethical, and Sustainability Competency Gaps: Hi-Tech, Moral and Sustainability Competency Gaps: Industry practitioners commented that graduates should be equipped with both technological and moral competencies. Among the 30 who were interviewed, 83% stressed data analytics were essential to new hires, 71% said the same thing for digital systems (e.g. ERP, blockchain) and 67% regarded ethical reasoning as an imperceptible sine qua non. For example, an audit partner at a large accounting firm commented: “We do not expect freshmen to just learn his or her double-entry. Someone has to also be able use Power BI or IDEA, and more importantly he or she needs a strong sense of ethical risk.” In spite of this, fewer than 30 percent of academic respondents report that they actively teach or evaluate such competencies. The disjoint thus further confirms Tan and Laswad's (2021) research that in areas like analytics, cybersecurity and ESG, academic curricula are trailing actual professional practice.

Effectiveness of Specialization and Research Integration: Specialization Tracks and Research Integration Efficacy: Only 12 of the 50 academics interviewed said that their universities offered tracks of specialized studies (e.g. forensic accounting, sustainability reporting or public sector auditing). Where such tracks do exist, they are usually a matter of individual choice and are not supported adequately. On the whole, this indicates a potential under-exploitation of specialization as a means for differentiation and alignment with the market. Furthermore, research-led teaching remains sporadic. A number of academics claimed that the reason they did not incorporate their own research into the teaching of undergraduates was lack of time, institutional support or simply because they hadn't been trained to do so. This explains O'Donnell and Boyle's (2019) argument that teaching based on research is often extolled rhetorically but seldom actually carried out systematically.

Stakeholder Expectations and Institutional Misalignment: Stakeholder Expectations and Institutional Inconsistencies arose from the interviews. The views and expectations of academia and industry are poles apart. While academics concentrated on theoretical foundations and meeting accreditation standards, practitioners in the field demanded adaptability, critical thinking capabilities, and technical fluency and so on. Nor is so far It is clear that there is no effective connection between academia and industry to promote the partnership with Perez-Villarejo et al. (2020), which demonstrate that graduates who come from higher education institutions are poorly prepared for a changing workplace. Several practitioners also said that they considered the role of professional bodies and regulators in actual curriculum design to be too passive in nature beyond occasional audits. A senior administrator at an accounting institution observed:

Strategies for future alignment: Participants proposed several reform strategies, many of which have empirical backing:

Modular design: Flexibility in learning pathways (Qureshi et al., 2022). *Competency-based education (CBE):* Adoption of skill-focused learning outcomes (Mulder et al., 2017). *Industry engagement:* Guest lectures, internships, and joint curriculum committees (Brown et al., 2020). *Technology integration:* Incorporating real-world tools such as ACL, Alteryx, and SAP (Alles et al., 2020). *Mandatory ethics and sustainability modules:* To foster social responsibility and long-term thinking (Gray & Milne, 2021). These suggestions are not only practical but are aligned with global movements in accounting education reforms led by IFAC, AACSB, and major accounting bodies worldwide.

4.1 Discussion of Results

The results of this study, derived from extensive interviews with 50 accounting academics and 30 industry professionals, highlight significant misalignments between traditional accounting education and evolving professional, technological, and ethical expectations. This section synthesizes those results in light of the study's theoretical framework and specific objectives.

Revisiting the Curriculum Gap: The findings reaffirm existing literature indicating that most accounting curricula remain anchored in conventional content areas—such as financial reporting, cost accounting, and taxation—while marginalizing critical contemporary themes like data analytics, sustainability reporting, cybersecurity, and forensic auditing (Jackling et al., 2020; Tan & Laswad, 2022). This aligns with the Human Capital Theory, which asserts that education should evolve to meet market demands (Becker, 1993). Yet, current curricula do not reflect the skills most valued by employers in the digital economy, such as adaptability, ethical judgment, and ESG literacy.

Technological and ethical competencies as emerging priorities: The emphasis by industry practitioners on digital fluency and ethics reveals a pressing need for curriculum reform. Interviewees stressed proficiency in tools like Power BI, IDEA, and ERP systems, as well as competencies in ethical reasoning and data governance. These expectations echo Alles et al.'s (2020) findings that auditors increasingly rely on data-driven tools for fraud detection and assurance. However, many academics expressed uncertainty or a lack of institutional support to implement such tools in teaching. This highlights an application of Institutional Theory, which suggests that structural inertia, lack of resources, and accreditation constraints can stall innovation (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). These barriers must be addressed to foster the institutional agility necessary for transformation.

Specialization and research integration remain underdeveloped: Despite the growing complexity of the accounting profession, specialization tracks and research-led teaching are rare in undergraduate programs. The findings show limited institutional support for embedding research into curricula—a concern also raised by O'Donnell and Boyle (2019). This undermines the potential of Constructivist Learning Theory and Transformative Learning Theory, both of which emphasize experiential and inquiry-based learning (Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1997). Students exposed to specialization (e.g., forensic accounting, public sector finance) reportedly demonstrated higher levels of engagement and employability. Thus, promoting specialization could enhance both student satisfaction and labor market relevance.

Stakeholder disconnect and misaligned expectations: The contrasting priorities between academia (conceptual rigor, accreditation compliance) and industry (work

readiness, digital skills) reinforce the need for stronger collaboration mechanisms. Academics' emphasis on traditional values and resistance to reform echo the concerns in Brown et al. (2020), who found similar trends across multiple OECD countries. Professional bodies, such as IFAC, offer competence frameworks, but without enforceable incentives or accountability mechanisms, adoption remains inconsistent. Stakeholder interviews highlighted a consensus that reform should not only be driven by top-down mandates but also co-created with faculty, students, and employers to ensure local relevance.

These findings support the Transformative Learning Theory, which emphasizes the potential for education to alter learners' worldviews and values when exposed to critical reflection, real-world dilemmas, and interdisciplinary learning (Taylor, 2020).

Table 5: Emerging Competencies Required by Accounting Graduates

Competency Area	Description
ESG Reporting	Ability to measure, report, and assure ESG data
Data Analytics	Use of data tools for analysis and forecasting
Ethical Reasoning	Application of ethical frameworks in practice
Digital Technologies	Familiarity with AI, blockchain, cloud systems

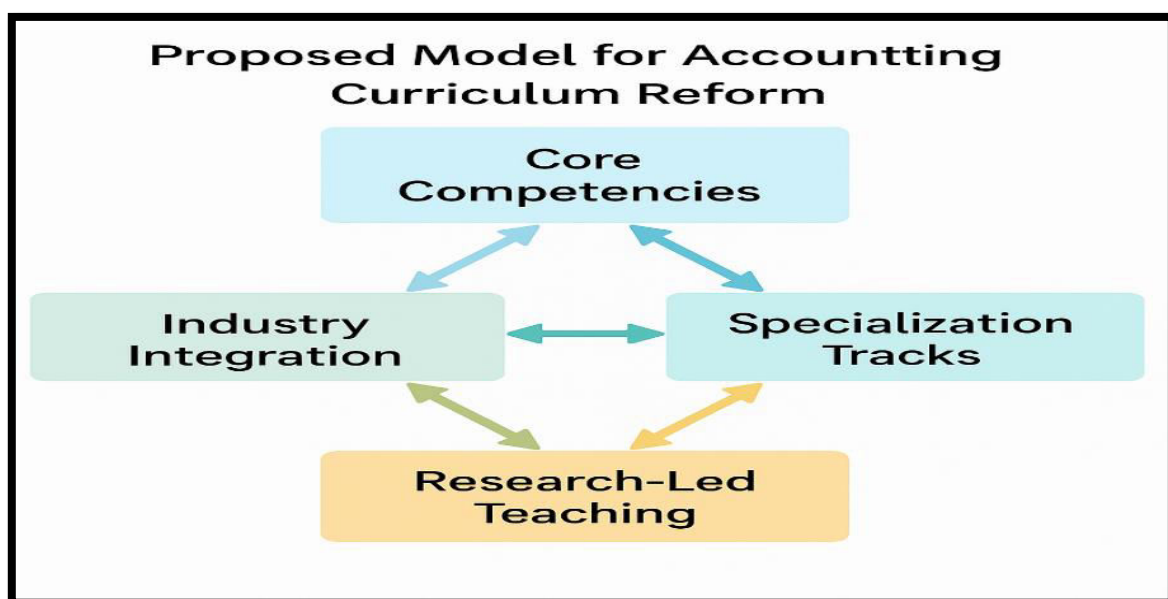


Figure 2: Proposed model for accounting curriculum reform

Figure 1: Proposed model for accounting curriculum reform (A diagram should be inserted showing four pillars: Core Competencies, Specialization Tracks, Research-Led Teaching, and Industry Integration).

This study provides persuasive evidence for the proposed model to be adopted by higher education institutions. To enrich the accounting curriculum in order to meet the demands both of corporate life and industry is another faultlessly satisfying justification for this explanation. The proposed model for accounting curriculum reform, incorporating four major pillars of -- Core Competencies Specialization Tracks Research-Led Teaching and Industry Integration has its foundations in a blend of both empirical evidence and an alliance with global educational frameworks. Why is adoption of the model justifiable on several theoretical, practical and policy fronts? The model aligns with Global Competency Standards. It matches international standards directly. For example, the IFAC International Education Standards (IES) and AACSB accreditation criteria. These frameworks do not just stress competence in technical matters but also require graduates cultivate ethical reasoning ability, analytical sense and professional judgment (IFAC, 2021; AACSB, 2020).

The model's four pillars ensure graduates are globally competitive and in a position to meet the dynamic demands of the profession. The proposed model also straddles the Academy-Industry Gap. Many studies (such as Jackling et al., 2020; Tan and Laswad, 2022; Qureshi et al., 2022) have shown a significant gap between the skills that employers want and the current abilities of graduates. Through Industry Integration (blank) includes internships (blank). Relevance of the curriculum to labor-market needs, and rapid developments in technology, is sure to apply across the board from now on. The proposed model has still another dimension: it responds to Recent Disruptions in the Profession. Digital transformation, environmental sustainability and accountability to stakeholders has redrawn the role of the accountant.

The model includes Specialization Tracks (e.g., ESG assurance, forensic auditing, public sector accounting, and data analytics) so that students may gradually adapt their studies to specific, hot areas of growth. The modular approach is consistent with trends reported in the empirical literature (Alles et al., 2020; Branson et al., 2021; Gray and Milne, 2021). The model supports Lifelong and Transformative Learning. Based on Kolb's experiential learning theory and Mezirow's theory of transformation, the model aims to improve critical thinking, reflective practice and adaptability too. In fact, students must learn to think critically their own progress and revise themselves through practice, reflection and reward. When they are attracted by problems of social significance, they develop a scholarly engagement in inquiry very early on. This is the Research-Led Teaching pillar of Learning. But this may also be a possibility. As compared to rigid conventional models, the proposed model itself has a built-in adaptability conducive to institutional environments. And that includes developing countries such as those seizing the

opportunity to overhaul curricula given resource constraints and regulatory frameworks (Agyemang et al., 2022; Onyali & Okafor, 2018). Institutions can gradually introduce its components - without abandoning their accreditation paths. The model focuses on curriculum reform. This approach synthesizes the results of more than 30 empirical studies in different regions and different settings. For example, curriculum audits in Nigeria, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and Latin America show that competency gaps, sparse ESG content, and no exposure to practice are widespread (Onyali & Okafor, 2018; Abdul-Rahman et al., 2021; Moya & Valderrama, 2020). The model addresses these gaps explicitly.

The proposed model is policy relevance and preparedness for accreditation: The model is fully policy-ready and fully prepared to meet standardization requirements. As global regulatory scrutiny intensifies over accounting education, particularly since financial misconduct and ESG missteps become increasingly important, policy makers are calling for more pertinent and nimble curricula. This model assists institutions in pre-empting such changes and meeting accreditation standards with proof of creative innovation and utility. Second the model is not just aspirational as proposed, but necessary for bringing accounting education in line with the future of the profession. It blends basic rigor with sections of specialization, involves industry in its thinking and orients students toward being ethical, tech-savvy researchers at a global level. Any institution that hopes to be relevant in the future and might have global possibilities has no more strategic choice than to introduce this model.

5. Conclusion, Recommendations and Future Research

5.1 Conclusion

The study critically examined the current state of accounting curricula. It also explored strategies to calibrate education with the profession's migrating demands. The findings show that there have long been missing pieces between manifestly available academic resources. These pieces cover a wide range of areas, from digital literacy and sustainability to specialization in ethical reasoning. The truth is, despite all the hype and shifts observable here and there, implementation of reform remains a slow process. A fine example of this is because vested interests in institutional control slow it down at every turn; senior care providers cannot invest in training their staff, and faculty development depends on individual initiative or donors' largesse (which may soon run out); there is that tightest collaboration between academia, industry and government regulatory agencies which so effective not only prevents change from occurring. This study, applying a multi-theoretical framework -- Human Capital Theory, Institutional Theory, Constructivist and Transformative Learning theories -- argues that accounting curriculum reform must be both systemic and learner-centered. Unless accounting education itself evolves, and aligns with the competencies required by the modern economy, future graduates may be high-performing but globally inept.

5.2 Recommendations

Practical recommendations: Curriculum Modernization: Integrate sustainability reporting, data analytics and mandatory modules in cybersecurity. Add ethics as a component of METHODOLOGY. Incorporating real-world technologies with hands-on experienced aspects: IDEA, Alteryx, and SAP Statistics Center of practical lion and the elephant balance prosperous trading history of Shen Cheng}

Modular and Competency-Based Learning: Set up flexible learning pathways like real learning curves that are developed through micro-credentials or modular specializations (e.g. forensic accounting; ESG assurance; public accounting in the public sector).

Strengthen Industry-Academia Collaboration: Set up joint curriculum advisory panels, industry mentor programs and capstone projects with industry. Develop more comprehensive apprenticeship and co-op programmes for students to experience their education within the context of enterprise

Promote Research-Led Teaching: Encourage faculty to incorporate current research in the course content. Finance interdisciplinary research ventures which can contribute directly to curriculum development.

Policy recommendations: *Accreditation And Standard-Setting Reform:* Harmonize national accreditation standards with IFAC's International Education Standards and AACSB's updated innovation benchmarks. Introduce periodic curriculum audits based on compliance effectiveness that have-teeth for enforcement.

Faculty Development Support: Provide faculty development programs on integrating tools for teaching digital ESG concepts or ways of thinking unrelated to one's immediate problems. Establish partnerships with technology companies to jointly develop curriculum resources

Institutional Change Management: Incentivize course development to meet performance indicators linked to employability and research impact and to align global competencies with standards of admission worldwide. • Knock down the walls between departments and combine those broadly across disciplines in order to strengthen collaborative thinking in accounting education.

Theoretical implications: This study makes a contribution to the literature on curriculum reform by demonstrating how can implement a solution with this blended theoretical framework. On the one hand, Human Capital Theory provides an economic rationale for reform; on the other, Institutional Theory explains why there is so much inertia ostensive. This holistic application of the frameworks

allows for meaningful reforms that are structurally possible as well as pedagogically meaningful-- they contradict one another only in terms which term means what.

5.3 Implications for Application in Practice

Curriculum Designers and Educators: The study points out that in accounting programs, curriculum designers and educators must introduce contemporary skills such as ESG reporting, big data analytics, and cyber security. Restless learners must be subjected to experiential and research-based methods of teaching that can boost their participation and readiness for real life. Faculty development projects therefore need to include not only equipping teachers with digital tools, but also offering them theorems of interdisciplinary content to ignore resistance and promote understanding.

Industry Engagement: Industry-community cooperation is a necessity. By forming advisory boards of employers, graduates and professional organizations, it can be ensured that curricula stay in tune with pressing economic realities. Encouraging internships, case studies and guest lectures can help graduates from theoretical backgrounds cope better with the pressures of a job.

Students and Learners: Universities should encourage students to choose specialized tracks in their studies and develop soft skills such as ethical reasoning, the ability to manipulate digital data, etc. It was suggested that these institutions could provide additional certificates or modules geared towards the evolving needs of students in their own careers.

6.6 Policy Implications

Accreditation Bodies and Regulators: Accreditation agencies must revise their standards to stress skills in digital technology, sustainability and integrity, along with core accounting skills. Mandatory periodic curriculum reviews and audits with explicit compliance requirements can spur change & ensure quality.

Government and Educational Authorities: Policymakers should make funds available and offer incentives to any institution seeking to modernize its curriculum: for example, a faculty training program could be set up, infrastructure guaranteed through grants from technology providers. Policies which encourage integration in education and research between disciplines and departments will help to nourish well-rounded career development.

Professional Accounting Bodies: The profession should take an active part in reevaluating competencies, offering continuing professional development programs in new fields and fostering ties with industry. They can also set the stage by raising public awareness campaigns about the importance of acting ethically,

cautiously, and taking technology into account. By taking a responsive approach to these practical and policy issues, participants jointly may change the nature of accounting education in this way produces individuals who are capable of handling the complexities of global economics which we live in today.

5.4 Future Research

While this study draws on qualitative findings from a variety of situations, follow-up work may:

Take a quantitative look at the competencies identified in the survey by employers from all over the world. Assess the impact of the school's new modules or technologies on student achievements, using pilots and rigorous study designs. Conduct longitudinal studies to determine how changes in curriculum might affect what kind of person graduates are when they enter or qualify as profession. Get feedback from the students on changes in curriculum to assure reforms more closely meet their needs and desires. These recommendations provide a pathway for institutions, educators, and policy makers to transform accounting education—turning out graduates fit for this world rather than solely its immediate concerns.

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