

COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN ACCOUNTING IN LEBANON

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to show the competencies and skills developed for the undergraduates and postgraduates' degrees in accounting education in the Lebanese universities. It emphasizes the role of the universities that is essential in developing the economic reforms. It seeks to address the job offers needed in the accounting departments for major employers in the public sector. The study focuses on the accounting education in the context of IPSAS adoption. The research adopted the qualitative methodology by using interviews with the Lebanese higher education senior officials in universities.

Keywords: accounting education, IPSAS, public sector

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1. INTRODUCTION

Good and proper accounting education contributes to the development of accounting system in countries. There is a very important relationship between the accounting education and the type of accounting systems locally and internationally (Booth, Luckett & Mladenovic, 1999). This study aids as a good guide towards understanding accounting education in the context of IPSAS in the public and private higher education in the universities in Lebanon.

Lebanon is considered as one of the developing countries in MENA. In fact, accounting profession in Lebanon has developed in many areas, however, accounting education has not followed the pace. Hence, there is a widening gap between accounting education and accounting practice in the light of the international accounting work (Siegel et al, 2010). It is very clear that we are troubled with limited accounting education that doesn't meet the international environment (Parker, 2001). As a result, fresh graduated are not empowered with the skills and competencies required for the accounting job market. Studies show that many accountings educations schools lack to provide the graduates with the required issues starting from skill development, curriculum, pedagogy, course content, technology, etc. (Albrecht & Sack, 2000).

In this study, there is an investigation for the gap between accounting education and accounting practice in the context of IPSAS in Lebanon as a case study for a developing country that is integrated with the international market. This paper also investigates the job offers in the public sectors. In fact, the Lebanese Association of Certified Public Accountants (LACPA) is a member of the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) so the Lebanese accounting profession is also interwoven with international bodies since. This issue set Lebanon in the center of the global market the thing that helps investigate the accounting education and profession in the context of IPSAS. Thus, the questions below are asked.

1. Where does Lebanon stand in bridging the gap between the accounting higher education and accounting profession in the light of the international accounting standards?
2. Could this gap be narrowed to meet the Lebanese Labor market locally and globally?
3. Do the job role requirements of accounting meet the international standards?

This paper aims to show data from international academic literature and local interviews in order to highlight the skills and competencies in the accounting higher education in the private and public universities in Lebanon examining the international context, as well focusing on the job offers demands in the Lebanese market.

The study is organized as follows a literature review on the higher education in the context of IPSAS learning and job offers in the public sector. Then there is a description of the research method and analysis. The last part of the study is the conclusion part.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to a study made by Albu and Albu (2009) in Romania, the accountant's profession has changed over time within organizations, and this development is presented in different countries in literature. Scapens et al. (2003) documented the change in many domains from bookkeeping, organizational policeman or financial historian towards a business partner, having responsibilities in strategic decision making. In this study, there was an investigation on the evolution of the accounting profession (Tiron Tudor et al., 2007). The researcher highlighted the impact of various economic and social phenomenon upon the accounting education and profession in addition to the limited analysis of competencies and training (Albu, et al., 2011).

Albu et al. (2011) and Albu and Albu (2009) investigated the impact of these changes on the accounting profession specially in the light of the International Accounting Standards, International Financial Reporting Standards (IAS/ IFRS) and Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems, as models relating to international organizations. In addition, Albu and Albu (2009) analyzed through conduction interviews the changes of the roles and competencies skillful accountants in business. This thing drives us to the gap between the accounting higher education skills and competencies and the job market required competencies in the context of the International Accounting Standards.

According to a study by Albu and Albu (2009), in order to get a general understanding of the accounting case in any country's context, we need to analyze job offers announcements per Bollecker (2000) and Jarvenpaa (2007). Thus, there is a need to gain a good understanding of the job offers ads in the formal center for job application: The Civil Service Board (CSB). Data were collected by monitoring job advertisements on the most popular and representative job advertisements in national websites such as The Civil Service Board (CSB) There was a selection of advertisements that detailed the mains skills, competences, and knowledge for major employees. The advertisements must make either direct or indirect reference to the required competencies.

Another study cited by (Tiron Tudor & Rodica Blidisel 2007) analyzed the important role of the human resource centers. Thus, the initial role depends on the accounting departments of public higher education institutions that should develop the skills and competencies required for the job market locally and internationally.

3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research methodology is to collect information that will help in answering the interview questions. The quantitative data was collected through an interview. The paper was made by interviewing three accounting professionals in three universities in Lebanon. Notes were taken during the interviews.

This is a case study attempting to describe and explain the competencies and skills in higher education in accounting in Lebanon. The interviews were decided in advance and some of the topics occurred during the discussions. The duration of the interview varied from a minimum of 40 minutes to a maximum of 60 minutes and took place at the workplace of the interviewees. Notes were taken while conducting the interviews. It was led in order to identify the main themes and observations that were discussed by the author and to eliminate possible misunderstandings. After that, analysis of the content was made. There was no use of qualitative data analysis software and the number of interviews was not voluminous.

4. RESULTS

Data analysis

The table below shows the job offer advertisements for the Civil Service Board in Lebanon. It gives details to a government entry position in accounting in the public sector in Lebanon. It displays the entrance exam needed requirements for some jobs in the public sector.

Table: Job offers and descriptions in the public sector

Job offers	Certificate	Major	Required Subject
Accountant- Tax Auditor -The Head of the Financial Management	Graduate – BBA program	Accounting Finance Audit	General Accounting Cost Accounting Financial Analysis Review and Audit Accounting
The head of the financial management and fund	Graduate – BBA program	Accounting Finance	General accounting Financial Analysis

The Head of the Financial Management	Graduate – BBA program	Accounting Financial sciences Finance Audit	General Accounting Financial Mathematics
Accountant- The Head of the Financial Management	Graduate – BBA program	Accounting Finance Audit	General Accounting Cost Accounting International Accounting Standards Financial Analysis Review and Audit Accounting
Accountant in a Housing Public Organization	Graduate – BBA program	Accounting Audit	Cost Accounting
The Chief of Managerial Accounting	graduate – BBA program	Business administration Accounting Financial sciences	General Accounting Financial Mathematics
Chief Cashier	Graduate – BBA program	Accounting Audit	General Accounting Financial Mathematics
Accountant in all Organizations	Graduate – BBA program	Accounting	Cost Accounting Technical Accounting Financial Mathematics
The Chief of Accounting - Ministry of Energy and Water	Graduate – BBA program	Business administration Accounting	General Accounting Cost Accounting International Accounting

		Financial sciences	Standards Financial Analysis
The chief of the Financial Management- Litani River Authority	Graduate – BBA program	Accounting Finance	General Accounting Cost Accounting International Accounting Standards Financial Analysis

Interview results

In this section, we describe the results of the study. It consists of a theoretical investigation of curriculum and its incorporation of IPSAS. It also highlights the qualitative analysis of the gap through interviews with university seniors in private and public higher education accounting departments. The third point consists of a quantitative study of the gap through the analysis of the job offer requirements in the public sector.

The findings of this paper explain the gap between the accounting education and global market.

To start with, there is a big similarity among the university mission concerning the accounting graduates in the Bachelor degree. It aims at educating students the broad concepts and principles governing accounting, taxation and auditing. The program is designed to provide students with both theoretical and practical accounting knowledge as well as strong analytical skills to prepare them for undertaking different positions in the dynamic world of accounting.

The majority of the interviewees have agreed on the importance of incorporating IPSAS and IFRS in the education curriculum in the public and private higher education. Modifying and developing the curriculum happens between 3 -5 years. According to some of them, they review the curriculum every year but without updating the content. Through the interviews with the private universities, we found out that they prepare their graduates for the CPA and CMA in the international context. They also agreed on helping the graduates to possess and develop the skills of leadership in addition to updating them with everything new in the international universities. What was distinguished in the Lebanese Public University is that they don't modify the curriculum unless they take the counseling and guidance of LACPA and the need of the job market.

All universities incorporate IFRS in their bachelor and Master degrees. However, the only university that incorporate IPSAS is the Lebanese Public University in the Master

degree and it is presented briefly in the last year of graduation. It is introduced with not enough competencies about this topic. The study implies that accounting programs and curriculum want to consider incorporation international accounting standard.

In analyzing the job offers in the public sector, it seems that they don't require the skills and competencies needed for the international accounting standards. So, the major employers and employees lack these skills in addition to information. According to the Lebanese University, the graduates are skillfully prepared for the local and for MENA work market. Hence, the don't possess the international competencies. However, the private universities, prepare the graduates in a different way. They are able to work in the international context. It was also concluded that the Private higher education work more on the needs of the private sector.

5. CONCLUSION

Briefly, our results indicate that the accounting education do not meet the international accounting standards with respect to required job competencies. We conclude that Lebanon needs to update too adjust the accounting program curricula. It is needed to be reviewed to ensure that the students are provided with the necessary skills for career advancement in today's international accounting environment. Thus, the Lebanese accounting job market is in extreme need of updating the accounting curricula because fresh accounting graduates do not possess the required skills and competencies in the context of IPSAS.

A worth mentioned point is that the accounting students are equipped with a diversified set of skills related to communication skills, presentation, self- confidence, and decision making. In addition to a general business knowledge by training them for different topics such as marketing, management, finance etc. They give them a well deep training on accounting topics by obliging each accounting student to take 5 concentrating courses.

Hence, in this paper, we set out to characterize the gap between accounting education and practice in Lebanon and generate insights to bridge it.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

As such, the researcher has the following recommendations:

- Spreading awareness on the importance of teaching IPSAS at all levels in undergraduates and postgraduates' degrees.

- Accounting graduates must be enabled to speak a unified international accounting language.
- Multiply awareness on the importance of the permanent updating of curriculum of higher education according to the international universities.
- Trainings for implementing IPSAS for employees working in accounting in the public sector.
- Working on the development of the curriculum in the universities concerning the part covering IPSAS.
 - Coordination between the demand of the international market and the education curriculum in the universities in Lebanon.

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