

Incorporating Information Communication Technology Skills in Accounting Education

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ABSTRACT

Information and communications technology (ICT) is widely utilized in the accounting profession and has transformed the accounting functions in business and the role of accountants. Acknowledging the significance of ICT skills in accounting education, many employers and professional associations are calling for integration of accounting curricula with ICT. Therefore, it is vital for potential accounting professionals to be equipped with the most current ICT skills pursued by employers. This study searches the current job market to capture a snapshot of the most in demand graduate skills, in particular, ICT skills. Furthermore, it also lists a number of software systems for accountancy solutions and their supplier firms.

KEYWORDS

Accounting and Finance, Employment, ICT Skills, Learning and Teaching, University

INTRODUCTION

The accounting profession worldwide has come under close examination due to changing technology and globalization of the world economy. Technology has created competitive pressure within the accounting profession that has led to expectations that accounting graduates should develop non-accounting skills with increasing importance given to information communication technology skills. Accounting software and computer technology are considered essential to career by accounting graduates and employers (Kavanagh and Drennan, 2008). There is also more focus on technological skills during academic studies in the guidance published by Accounting associations and standard setters including the American Accounting Association (AAA) and the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), and the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) (Willis, 2016). Most organizations now require ‘Hybrid Accountant’ i.e. combining IT/IS competencies and mainstream accounting capabilities. “Hybrid” accountant blends different skills and knowledge of business management and information management (Ahmed, 2003). Universities across the world are now increasingly conscious of this trend and have been responding with suitable initiatives within the operational framework of degree programmes to develop both the necessary and in-demand interpersonal and applied skills that will make their graduates employable in their chosen field of study.

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Interestingly, the impact of the skills challenge has a different dimension in different parts of the world. While many Western nations are faced with the challenge of too many graduates and too few jobs, Middle East countries are trying to reduce their reliance on foreign nationals by developing more local nationals capable of tackling the highly skilled jobs in fields such as accounting and finance and information and communication technology. Several countries in the Middle East, including Qatar have initiated national programmes focused on the development of human capital and the movement towards a knowledge economy. To equip graduates with the required skills in all fields including in Accounting and Finance, Qatar's government launched an initiative known as Qatar National Vision 2030 (QNV 2030). The initiative foresees that in the transition towards knowledge-based economy; future economic success will depend increasingly on the ability of the Qatari nationals to deal with an international order that is knowledge-based and extremely competitive. The vision will allow Qatar to develop its human capital as well as provide an effective example of how to re-skill workforce with up-to-date skills and competencies that will foster analytical and critical thinking as well as creativity and innovation to cater to the changing and complex needs of industry and commerce. In order to achieve sustainable development and maximise the success of related supportive initiatives, it is necessary to start at least from a graduate education perspective. The starting point is therefore a deeper understanding of the gaps and needs that affect the present settings of the graduate education system as well as graduate attributes when analysed against the skills and competencies demanded by employers. As this study is focusing on the importance of ICT skills in accounting education, it is vital to understand the current trends in the field and examine the job market to recognize if ICT skills is one the main areas that are required from accounting graduates. This study will be the first attempt to profile the use of ICT in accounting from a general perspective as well as from a GCC perspective. Given the significance of the finance and accounting profession in Qatar, this paper seeks to capture an overview of the accounting job market and current accounting software solution development. The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. The next section reviews existing literature on ICT skills in accounting education. Thereafter, it highlights the importance and the requirement of ICT Skills in Accounting Job Advertisements and then it identifies the current software's that are in use by accounting firms. Finally, it presents the discussion and conclusion section that outlines the findings and implications of this study.

THE ROLE OF ICT SKILLS IN ACCOUNTING EDUCATION

In the current business environment, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills are given prominence by several authors who identify competency in using various applications and tools as an important strategic differentiator for potential accounting and finance graduate-employees. Technological skills reflect graduates' ability to select and use appropriate technology to address diverse tasks and problems in their work environment (Jackson, 2014a, 2014b). The ability to use common software applications used in accounting and finance is an obvious skill that employers look for in graduates. Cox et al. (2013) offer a more streamlined understanding of it, as graduates' expertise in effectively using ICT, and describing the IS and ICTs of core relevance to understand their practical application. Graduates' ability to adapt to technology is also defined as their ability to use current technology, to be able to learn, and be capable of solving the problem at hand. Employers often highly value technical field-specific knowledge (Hernández-March et al., 2009). Literature argues that most graduates lack the necessary computing skills required by the employers, and these graduates suffer from poor perceptions of the skills expected at the workplace (Gibbs et al., 2011; Gaviria et al., 2015; Ezeani & Akpotohwo, 2014). While some studies recommend joint efforts from universities and companies in technology transfer agreements to lessen the gap between higher education and labor market requirements (Hernández-March et al., 2009; Ogundana et al., 2015), others suggest that graduates should receive formal tuition to improve their technological skills to prosper at work (Gibbs et al., 2011). Ragland and Ramachandran (2014) investigated the Excel functions that

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