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Generic Skills in Accounting Education in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

This study examines the development of generic skills in the Saudi Arabian accounting education. The lack of generic skills among accounting graduates is an issue of ongoing concern as the gaps between the needs of employers and the skills of graduates hinders the economic development in Saudi Arabia. This concern over the development of generic skills in accounting education in Saudi Arabia provided the motivation for this study.

Based on International Education Standards (IES) 3 and 4, this study examined five categories of generic skills: intellectual, personal, organizational and business management, interpersonal and communication, and ethics. Further, using Bui and Porter's (2010) theoretical framework, the study assessed within-group constraints gap of three stakeholder groups (final year students, accounting graduates and educators), and the factors hindering the development of generic skills (i.e. constraining factors). The within-group expectation-performance gap of employers and between-group comparisons of the expectation gap and performance gap (educators vs. employers) were also explored. Finally, this study compared the expectation gap and performance gap between groups (students, graduates, employers, educators). Interviews and survey questionnaires were used to collect the data for the perceptions of the four stakeholder groups in Saudi Arabia.

The results show that all stakeholders considered all generic skills as important for accounting graduates to be successful in employment with ethical skills being rated as most important. In addition, they perceived that graduates should acquire a reasonably high level of competence in all five skills categories. The stakeholder groups believed the level of competence that have been acquired by graduates is lower than the level of competence that should be acquired suggesting that there were constraints gap and expectation-performance gap. This finding indicates that accounting education in Saudi Arabia is not producing graduates with the competencies needed in the workplaces. A number of constraints were found to have hindered the development of generic skills in accounting education and they were mostly institutional related (e.g., content oriented curriculum; large class sizes and insufficient time), and student related (e.g., students' own motivation and lack of ability).

This study contributes to the literature on generic skills in non-western nations, where not much of the current literature is focused on. The results provided evidence of skills gaps, highlighted

areas of concern in the Saudi graduates' skill development in accounting education and had implications for the human capital of the nation. Some suggestions for improving graduates' skills development were provided.

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List of Acronyms

AAOIFI	Accounting and Auditing Organization for Islamic Financial Institutions
AECC	Accounting Education Change Commission
ACNRS	ACNielsen Research Services
AICPA	American Institute of Certified Public Accountants
AACSB	Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business
AAGE	Australian Association of Graduate Employers
ASCPA	Australian Society of Certified Practising Accountants
CPA	Certified Public Accountant
GAAP	Generally Accepted Accounting Principles
KAU	King Abdulaziz University
KFUPM	King Fahd University for Petroleum and Minerals
KFU	King Faisal University
KKU	King Khalid University
KSU	King Saud University
HEC	Higher Education Council
ICAA	Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia
IAESB	International Accounting Education Standards Board
IES	International Education Standard
IFAC	International Federation of Accountants
IFRS	International Financial Reporting Standards
IMAMU	Imam Muhammad Bin Saud Islamic University
MOHE	Ministry of Higher Education

NZICA	New Zealand Institute of Chartered Accountants
OBM	Organizational and Business Management
PMU	Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University
PNU	Princess Nora bint Abdul Rahman University
RESA	Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia
SAA	Saudi Accounting Association
SAMA	Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency
SOCPA	Saudi Organisation for Certified Public Accountants
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
WB	World Bank
WFB	World Fact Book