
The perceived gap between academics and professionals about accounting education system in Iran

Bitra Mashayekhi, Roya Mohammadi

Faculty of Management, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran

Email address:

mashayekhi@ut.ac.ir (B. Mashayekhi)

To cite this article:

Bitra Mashayekhi, Roya Mohammadi. The Perceived Gap Between Academics and Professionals about Accounting Education System in Iran. *Science Journal of Education*. Vol. 2, No. 1, 2014, pp. 12-21. doi: 10.11648/j.sjedu.20140201.13

Abstract: The spread and acceptance of globalization and the great improvements in the information technology has caused incredible changes in the state of business. These changes have brought about new challenges not only in accounting as a career but also in its education. Schools educating future accountants are responsible for causing the gaps between adoptive skills in the universities and the perceived skills in the profession and worldwide markets. This research tries to identify the challenges that accounting education brings in educating students in regard to possessing knowledge and skill at a competitive level in response to the market's needs. These challenges justify why the competitive skills of the accountants must improve. Accounting education in its current situation and the skill level of the graduates of the field is not parallel to what is needed in the dynamic atmosphere of the world's trade. That is why it is necessary to search for a plan in order to fill the gap between adoptive knowledge and skills and the expected knowledge and skills so that it prepares the students facing the challenges in the new state of the global business. In this paper, accounting education challenges are scientifically investigated and a strategic plan is proposed in order to overcome them. This issue is addressed first by considering the curriculum of prominent universities around the world and then by evaluating the current Iranian curriculum for the accounting major at the master level using questionnaires.

Keywords: Accounting Education, Curriculum, Accounting Profession

1. Introduction

Accounting education is so important that its economic effects are indescribable and the result of which is like a path that leads to the advancement of the management of the society and economic development. The gradual perfection of accounting in education and as a career started decades ago. Over time many changes in social-economic factors and in technology has put the teachers and those working in the field under pressure to overcome the new needs. Promoting the accounting curriculum has always drawn the attention of the industrial countries of the west to itself and other systems such as the application of computers have been added to the syllabus. The syllabus for this major in any country must be compiled according to the country's social-economic factors and based on the carried out research and the needed investments. In this way it can truly answer the needs of the society. According to the belief that promoting knowledge and science is possible mostly through education, to promote accounting in Iran, the education of accounting should be considered

very important.

At this time no university or for that matter no faculty in our country has described their task or taken action in order to fulfill those tasks. It is the same in the graduate program. The output of an accounting system must be able to overcome the needs of consumers (people hiring and employing graduates). To make sure these needs are met, the input to the accounting organization should be revised. One of these inputs is the accounting education. In this research, with regard to the importance of education, especially with the changes in the world of business, the author has tried to provide an analysis of the current system of education for accounting at the MA level. In this analysis, the probable flaws are stated and in order to eliminate them some suggestions are made.

2. Statement of the Problem

Research and investigation is important in every academic field of study. One of the main branches of research which is very popular among academics is

research on the education of the field of study itself. Although it seems as if compared to other majors, educational research in accounting is not very favored. It can be argued that the importance of research on accounting education in comparison with other technical aspects of accounting is not known. Also, the financial support for such research has not been great. Every year, many academic research and theses are prepared in this field but unfortunately very few are related to accounting education. It is evident that promoting accounting through such research will have great economic effects. In addition to that, the changing context with regard to social-economic and technological advancements in which accounting plays a role, has caused different needs. That is why the specialists in the field must possess a proper educational disposition so that their work is effective. This requires the increase in expertise of those who work in education and lay the educational grounds. Hence, in order to promote accounting and its different branches like auditing, it is necessary to make sure that the chosen educational approaches are effective. This in turn is in need of serious commitment towards research on accounting education. Establishing balance among educational material in the MA course in a way that students receive adequate academic and occupational skills has always been the concern of the curriculum developers. Establishing balance means engaging in general subjects and humanistic sciences on one hand and knowledge of accounting and trade on the other. Reviewing the curriculum it is inferred that general knowledge and humanistic sciences are less dealt with. In today's world students need education on the changes in the conventional responsibilities and the background of accountants and also the changes in the expectations and needs people have from accountancy. In short the main purpose of a syllabus that is a balanced combination of humanistic sciences, business, accounting and etc., is to cultivate a mind which is able of independent thought. The gradual perfection of accounting as a job due to considerable changes in the social-economic factors and technology started years ago. While accounting education has not evolved at the same pace as accountancy, it has led to a gap between what professionals expect from graduates and what they learn. There have been at least three major advancements that have remarkably changed the commercial environment which graduates are prepared for. First of all technology has developed which makes the preparation and distribution of data cheaper. This technology entails hardware for creation and software for preparation and transmission of data to people who did not have access to that information before. This causes fast and cheap information processing. Today anyone with the right software can be an accountant and produce financial data. With this development, time, space and other temporary limitations of data has reduced and even in some cases resolved. Another development which has greatly affected business is globalization. Quicker ways of data transmission together with immediate and instant

information has transformed the world into a huge market. Consumers can now purchase goods from companies abroad as easily as from local shops. With the increase in access to cheap information, competitors are known and if one of them has some shortcomings the world will know and take action accordingly. Another major change is that certain investors have the reign of power. Institutional shareholders require the best performance and since access to information about all organizations is ready at hand, the only organizations which succeed and stay alive are really the best.

Change in consumer expectation and as a result the change of accountants' role in the labor market, and also the unchanging curriculum in universities has caused lack of conformity between graduates' knowledge and skills and the needs and expectations. Considering the existing gap concerning the level of graduates' preparedness for the labor market and the expectations of experts from graduates, it seems that research and investment in research relating to accounting education in order to eliminate or at least decrease it as much as possible is very necessary. So it appears as if carelessness towards the quality of education and lack of adaptation in the syllabus, accounting education will lose its relativity for the faculty, students and the employers who hire graduates.

3. Background

3.1. Theoretical Background

Universities have accepted the fact that bureaucracy isolates them from the real world. In fact a university can move in two directions: 1) towards change and relevant to the world of business, 2) towards indifference and isolation from other academic sectors. In recent years, experts, professors and students of accounting have emphasized the first route greatly.

Although in the past the role of higher education was considered a factor of national legitimacy, it must be pointed out that national performance in the vast domain of international competition and also national success or failure is to a great extent measured among and inside the international context. However there are various systems of higher education (maybe as many as countries), today the emphasis is on the market based system because if education is to be supported by the society it must conform to the society's expectations. Market based education is a system where the syllabus, students' activities, student-teacher relationship and teaching methods are made compatible according to whether the labor force has reached the level of knowledge needed for success in business or not (through programs directly related to the market) (Neave 1998). From 1950, many educational institutes formed that are trying to fulfill the market's demand. Changes in education are a response to important changes in the economic world and also due to relevant changes in organizational and divisional allocations of

occupations (Benton 1992, p.22). Furthermore education and occupational skills is considered a dominant competitive tool in the world market. Due to industrialization of the work place and the skills needed for a person to stay at the top of the market, to survive such competitive environment people must continuously learn a collection of such skills (Altbach 1991). Because of the social and economic conditions of the work place and other factors, education as an occupation has undergone major changes too. Not only should professors have theoretical and theorization knowledge but they must be able to present a functional syllabus too. So education must go hand in hand with the changes in business and technology so that it can answer the economy's need efficiently in due time and survive the highly competitive world of higher education (Kenneth and Heaney, 1997). Market-based education as the biggest higher education system as used in the US is now utilized as a criterion for other countries who want to improve educational models for their educational needs (Neave, 1998). Dewey (1985) argues that any education the most important focus of which is not on development and perfection of innovation, creativity and intelligence and administrative ability (in a way that people can control their own destiny) must be rejected (p.74). An education which is occupation-based focuses on technical skills of accountants and does not present an expansive liberal education which can prepare experts for critical thinking and performance in an ethical way. Accounting students are to be educated extensively so that they possess the necessary mental skills, moral principles, critical thinking, insight and wisdom for financial analysis.

3.2. Empirical Background

Research on accounting education is categorized as follows:

- Syllabus (courses)

- Educational technology

- Issues related to the accounting Faculty and academic staff

- Issues related to accounting students

Since this research is of the first type some of the similar researches in this area are stated below.

Schmidt et al (2009) discussed the importance of communication skills (writing, speaking, listening, interpersonal and technical skills) in accounting and business courses in a survey. The results show that all the skills are important with the listening being more important than the rest. In a descriptive study Riordan et al (2008) note on the carelessness towards collective thinking in accounting and make some suggestions regarding the matter. Ballantine and McCourt Larres (2007) investigated the impact of teamwork on the development of organizing, planning, and self-management and teamwork skills. According to the gathered data through questionnaires, students' view toward teamwork is positive. Bryant and Albring (2007) studied the literature of other fields (sociology, psychology, organizational behavior) for

establishing work teams in order to generate guidance for teamwork in accounting. McGowan and Lightbody (2008) describe a process in which students are taught about plagiarism. The results show that after the training, students have a better understanding of plagiarism. Smith and Crumbley (2009) studied 111 faculty members in the US who taught fraud auditing and forensic accounting courses. The results show that there is a tendency to establish fraud auditing as new and separate major. Blanthorne et al (2007) investigate the different views on the teaching of ethics (for example should ethics be thought about? How? And where?). This study presents evidence that teaching ethics and inserting it into the curriculum is very useful. It is argued that the recent financial scandals are a motive for including ethics in the syllabus. Feldman et al (2007) describe an educational course in which social responsibilities of companies is studied. Also the manner of entering this course into the curriculum is discussed. The data collected through questionnaires show approval of including such a course in the syllabus. Langmead and Sedaghat (2007) suggest designing and executing a voluntary educational course in which financial achievements and crises are discussed and some professional and ethical matters are pointed out. The authors believe such a course is useful for graduate students. Ramamoorti (2008) emphasize that the relationship between criminology, sociology and psychology must be entered in to the Fraud and Forensic Accounting educational course. In a descriptive survey Sikka et al (2007) state that accounting textbooks focus on technical subjects and this is not advantageous to the matters that promote students' social way of thinking (for example: ethics, globalization, recent scandals).

Also in Iran Some efforts have been made in order to analyze the curriculum and the need to revise it, but compared to other subjects the number is not many. Among them is Noravesh (2003) who investigated the elements of the process of curriculum change in accounting at the undergraduate level. With regard to the fact that decades have passed since the first curriculum was devised, he gives some suggestions for renewing the syllabus for this course. Also Noravesh and Mashayekhi (2005) in an article focus on how to insert new topics in management accounting education with regard to globalization and the increasing complexity of business and the dramatic advances in technology. In this article the difference of view between academics and the practitioners of the accounting profession is discussed.

4. Methodology

The aim of this research is to analyze MA accounting syllabus in Iran universities and to compare it with syllabuses from some great and eminent universities of the world. The outcome of this comparative study is finding the gaps in this syllabus and the changes that should take place to answer the need of the different interested parties. The

questions this research tries to answer are:

How is the status of the current graduate program in accounting in Iran?

What are the shortcomings of the current graduate accounting course and does it need to be revised?

In case of revision what suggestions would reduce the deficiencies?

In order to analyze the shortcomings in the current graduate accounting course, some educational programs from eminent universities of the world that are graded by the Accountants Society of America will be studied and considered. Also to ask the opinion of professors (faculty members) and students, a sample population of five top universities in Tehran is selected and a questionnaire is devised to get their views on this course. Poll taking from faculty members and students is useful to find information on the gap between the current syllabus and what is expected. The population aimed at this study is the universities in Iran that offer the graduate accounting course. The sample population from five universities in Tehran is chosen from University of Tehran, Allameh Tabatabaei, Tarbiat Modarres, Shahid Beheshti and Al-Zahra. The reason for this selection is that it can be claimed that they are among the best universities in Iran and the opinions of faculty members and students can be generalized to similar groups in other universities in Iran. The devised questionnaire for this purpose is extracted from Albrecht and Sack's comprehensive study (Albrecht and Sack, 2000). Through this questionnaire views on the required knowledge and skills that should be achieved from the graduate accounting program is gathered from faculty members and students. The measurement tool is a list of skills, knowledge and teaching methods. The participants are asked to evaluate the importance and the effect of these tools with regard to students' training. This study has gathered the views of the interested parties on the importance of knowledge and skills that the accounting students must possess. According to the changes in the commercial environment and technology, the expectation from accounting students as future experts is great. Therefore identifying the required knowledge and skills for the accounting profession in the present commercial environment and situation is an important matter. On the other hand the accounting training program and especially teaching methods are very distant from today's new and modern needs due to less developed education systems. As a result there may be a gap between the views of students and faculty members on the required knowledge and skills for the accounting students which can help the identification of necessary changes in the training program. Students' view towards the required skills and knowledge is another factor in the development of accounting education. It must be shown that what the interested parties consider as necessary knowledge and skill for the training of students may be different from what really is offered by the current training program. Scientific identification of the gap between interested parties' understanding and the

current syllabus not only reveals the problems of the program but also exposes the areas where revision is necessary.

5. Results

5.1. Some General Points on the Training Programs of the Prominent Universities in the World

In the current period of global trade, previous traditional borders between accounting, finance and management are fading away. Also the rules over financial disclosure and responsibility are becoming more complex. Technology is changing all the time. Hence graduate programs in most universities around the world are in search of required multifunctional tools and expertise to overcome these challenges so that a dynamic education with an extensive groundwork which increases career options is presented. The graduates of such training programs have the opportunity to be employed not only in auditing companies and organizations but also in investment banks, consultations, government agencies and etc. Generally the courses offered at the MA level in the accredited universities are in search of maximizing students' long term potential by providing enriched training on the principles, technology and cultural perspectives. The graduate program in such universities is mainly a 30-unit program which combined with the undergraduate program has special aims like preparing students for the CPA test. Such programs usually provide the necessary flexibility for the students since they supply enough adaptability to focus on accounting and other related fields of study too. This flexibility takes place by providing a chance for the students to choose optional courses according to their goal and interest. The programs offered in these universities are chiefly concentrated on four study fields which are: auditing, financial matters, government and taxation. In the domain of auditing, the focus is on creation, design and execution of accounting systems with emphasis on internal controls which seek fraud and billing court and techniques to investigate, detect and prevent fraud.

In the realm of finance, research methods for evaluating how accounting information effect business and decision making are studied. In this area subjects like the evolutionary nature of risk, risk management and the effect it has on previous actions is discussed. Also the connection between international accounting and world trade and investment decisions which include the effects of cultural, political and economic differences are investigated.

In the government, concepts like management accounting and financial accounting is used to manage government, quasi-governmental and non-profit agencies. Also in this domain the design and execution of information systems with the emphasis on internal controls is considered.

In the taxation part concepts, methods and information sources related to financial research are also studied.

Considering the analysis, the graduate program in the eminent universities of the world are seeking to enhance and advance the accounting theoretical and practical skills in professionals, researchers and professors and provide chances for improving their skills in theorizing, practice, research and investigation. According to the analysis these programs are designed with the aim of developing critical thinking and problem solving skills and setting a basis for the knowledge of accounting for work in the profession.

5.2. Problems of the accounting Education Course in Iran

As can be inferred accounting education has a number of problems some of which are as follows:

5.2.1. Training Program and the Content of the Class

The program is very limited and non-extensive and usually considered unrelated or outdated. These programs are commonly originated from the interests of faculty members and the market expectation is overlooked.

The program does not expose students to concepts like globalization, technology or ethics.

5.2.2. Educational Methods and Basics

The current system which is of a rule-based, memorizing, test taking characteristic is not enough and more importantly it does not prepare students for the vague business world they face after graduation.

The current teaching methods lack initiative and focus mostly on lectures and rely on textbooks and do not exercise student abilities for skill learning. The students are restricted and bound and are not required to make contact with the business environment.

5.2.3. Skill Development

The present educational models focus too much on content at the expense of skill development when our students must become successful professionals.

5.2.4. Technology

Accounting is taught in a way as though information is expensive. Information is not expensive at the moment and the part of the program relating to collection and recording of data is merely a waste of time.

Students are not adequately exposed to the effects technology has on business or the ways in which technology can act as a lever for business decision making.

5.2.5. Development Systems for Faculty Members

Faculty members are often separated from the professionals and the business people and so increasingly unrelated to the market and the competitive expectations.

Many studies in the area of accounting education which started with Bedford's report in 1986, warned that changes in the system are imperative. It seems as though the universities of Iran have not taken the problems of accounting education seriously and have not really tried for a reform or a revision, so similar research could elevate the

need of revision in accounting education.

5.3. Problems Investigated in this Study

If serious changes do not take place in accounting education, it will lose its relevance for the faculty, students and the employers who hire graduates. That is why in the next part the major problems that exist in the program are investigated.

5.3.1. The Problem of Content and Class Schedule

Critics believe that the content and schedule need an overall revision. Adding new classes or assignments is not enough. What is taught in the undergraduate program may create able accountants but the world of business is in need of good businessmen. The process of accounting profession is very innovative and ingenious whereas accounting education is not so. What is taught today does not conform to what is considered as real capabilities in the profession. According to items mentioned it seems that a proper response to the shortcomings in the graduate program is vital. One of the criticisms on the content of the class is that the subjects are discussed in great detail. In another word the current training programs are far too technical and profound, whereas extent and expanse of the subject is as important as the depth. Emphasis on details brings on some criticism on the accounting education program and the class content. Some of these are:

The lessons are presented as a collection of technical rules that result in a comparative view and approach.

The content and the program greatly emphasize higher degrees and reaching the correct answers.

The syllabus is very confined and the students are not exposed to extensive training and actual examples are not used enough.

The program does not have a global view or perspective towards teaching or education of accounting.

In the program values, ethics, honesty and honor are not adequately considered.

The program teaches more about what the accountants used to do and less about what they will do.

In the current program, the students do not learn the fact that technology has affected everything that happens in business, but it is presumed that they possess enough technical skills.

To help understand what subjects (content knowledge) is considered more important, the participants were asked to classify some subjects according to the grades below:

Not important (in no educational course)

Important to some extent (part of an educational course)

Moderately important (one educational course)

Very important (more than one educational course)

The results are shown in table 1.

According to the results, it is interesting to note that students consider 12 subjects more important than professors do. These subjects are: management accounting, service audit / validation, technology issues, taxation, information systems, e-commerce, business strategy,

international business, business law, human resource management / organizational behavior, supply chain management / operations, and marketing. These subjects are often comprehensive and extensive subjects that were not present in the accounting education program traditionally. The fact that students have been exposed to the changing expectations and demands of the world of trade after graduation may be why they consider these subjects more important.

Table 1. Ranking the Subjects According to Accounting Professors and Students.

Content Knowledge	Professors' responses (Ranked Averages)	Content Knowledge	Students' responses (Ranked Averages)
Accounting Theory	3.88	Accounting Theory	3.56
Finance	3.75	Finance	3.39
Managerial Accounting	3.50	Research Methods in Accounting	3.37
Auditing/ Assurance	3.50	Economic	3.15
Economic	3.38	Quantitative Methods	3.06
Information Systems	3.25	Managerial Accounting	3.00
Research Methods in Accounting	3.13	Auditing/ Assurance	2.87
International Business	2.63	Ethics	2.87
Business Strategies	2.63	Technology Issues	2.83
E-Business	2.50	Tax	2.80
Technology Issues	2.38	Information Systems	2.71
Tax	2.38	E-Business	2.64
Business Law	2.25	Business Strategies	2.60
Quantitative Methods	2.25	International Business	2.50
Ethics	2.13	Business Law	2.46
Human Resource Management	1.88	Human Resource Management	2.35
Supply/Operation Management	1.75	Supply/Operation Management	2.25
Marketing	1.75	Marketing	1.80

5.3.2. Lack of Skill Training

Students forget what they memorize. Content knowledge is out-dated and usually is not transferrable to different occupations. On the other hand critical skills rarely become extinct or inapplicable and are usually transferrable to different occupations. Accounting education has often been criticized for concentrating more on content and less on helping students develop skills that enrich their life and cause success and students are not educated to deal with conflict and uncertainty. Today we have to make decisions that are accompanied with risks or we must decide without enough knowledge. Therefore we have to focus on how people are educated and expose them to cases of uncertainty more often. Moreover method of interaction

has changed too which is because of the internet, email and voicemail. Students of today are known as the *dot.com* generation who interact with one another through email instead of verbal or visual communication. In fact change in communication methods has dominated people. To evaluate what skills are important for faculty members and students, participants classified the skills on a scale of one (no priority) to five (high priority). The results are shown in table 2.

Table 2. Ranking the Required Skills According to Accounting Professors and Students.

Skills	Professors' responses (Ranked Averages)	skills	Students' responses (Ranked Averages)
Foreign Language (English)	4.50	Decision Making	4.09
Critical Thinking	4.38	Risk Analysis	3.98
Decision Making	4.13	Foreign Language (English)	3.91
Research	4.13	Modeling for Business Decision Making	3.77
Continues Learning	4.00	Professional Behavior	3.72
Professional Behavior	4.00	Critical Thinking	3.69
Writing Skills	4.00	Continues Learning	3.67
Measurement	3.88	Leadership Skills	3.67
Oral Communication	3.88	Research	3.57
Negotiations	3.75	Change Management	3.53
Risk Analysis	3.75	Negotiations	3.52
Project Management	3.63	Team Working	3.42
Modeling for Business Decision Making	3.50	Interpersonal relationship	3.42
Leadership Skills	3.50	Customer Orientation	3.33
Team Working	3.50	Project Management	3.32
Change Management	3.38	Oral Communication	3.29
Entrepreneurship	3.38	Recourse Management	3.28
Interpersonal relationship	3.38	Measurement	3.18
Calculation Technologies	3.13	Calculation Technologies	3.18
Customer Orientation	3.13	Writing Skills	3.14
Recourse Management	3.13	Entrepreneurship	3.09
Selling Skills	2.25	Selling Skills	2.09

If these skills are taught effectively they will have an added value that cannot be gained by distance learning or other low-price training methods. So we must find ways to combine these skills with the training program.

5.3.3. Lack of Success in use of Technology

It is understandable that we need to expose and associate students with technology and use it in education, but do we realize that students need to learn it? The primary assumption was that technology means using different technical tools for problem solving, understanding control systems and maybe encoding and understanding technical lexicology. While understanding these aspects of technology is important but maybe more important and vital is understanding how technology has changed everything we do. For example students must know how technology has made information cheaper. Also professors must realize the meaning of cheap information for choosing their teaching method. Students must know the meaning of cheap information for the sake of the responsibility they

have as a professional. The need to learn technology also means that students must know how technology is used to facilitate and stimulate business (ranging from communication to decision making information). Technology has evolved everything in methods of living and working. This subject can be a cause for complete revision in what is taught. Technology has made business models and deals more complex and the life span of products shorter and is able of making dynamic changes in the world of trade. Technology has caused instant feedback and response. Students must know how technology has changed the ways in which information is made and used to make decisions. Although we did not intend to find an answer to the questions on the effects of technology on business, we did investigate the required skills in technology for accounting graduates. The participants were asked to grade the skills on the basis of 1 (not important), 2 (good to know), 3 (very important and vital). The results are in table 3.

Table 3. Ranking the Required Technology Skills According to Accounting Professors and Students.

Technology Skills	Professors' responses (Ranked Averages)	Technology Skills	Students' responses (Ranked Averages)
Search on the Web	2.75	Spreadsheets	2.79
Intranet/ Extranet	2.63	E-Business	2.72
Presentation Software	2.63	Search on the Web	2.63
Spreadsheets	2.63	Presentation Software	2.44
Information Systems Programming and Auditing	2.63	Phrasing Software	2.42
Information Saving and Recovering Management	2.50	Technology Management and Budgeting	2.42
Master Systems	2.50	Information Systems Programming and Auditing	2.41
Phrasing Software	2.50	Master Systems	2.38
Data Bank Software	2.38	Data Bank Software	2.37
Security and Control Technology	2.38	Intranet/ Extranet	2.36
Hardware and Software Systems' Management	2.25	Project Management	2.36
Technology Phrases	2.13	System Analysis	2.27
E-Business	2.00	Information Saving and Recovering Management	2.23
System Analysis	2.00	Communication software	2.12
Technology Management and Budgeting	2.00	Security and Control Technology	2.07
Communication software	1.88	Hardware and Software Systems' Management	1.80
Project Management	1.88	Technology Phrases	1.63
Hardware	1.75	Hardware	1.62
Graphic Software	1.75	Programming Languages	1.59
Programming	1.63	Programming	1.50
Programming Languages	1.63	Graphic Software	1.25

According to the results of the questionnaire and 2.50 being the cutoff point, faculty members consider eight skills and students consider three technical skills that absolutely cannot be ignored in the curriculum.

6. Conclusion and Suggestions

To adequately prepare students for the accounting profession educational institutes must consider different groups of beneficiaries. These groups can be the society in general, educational institution and its faculty members, students and professional accounting and business environments. Accounting graduates are expected to have basic skills of the educational institutes and the

professional societies. Accounting professors face these challenges: recognizing basic professional skills; defining an accounting program which is based on the educational institutes' values and at the same time enables students to acquire professional, technical and educational skills; and providing mechanisms that are effective for evaluating these skills. Designing a syllabus must be continuous, dynamic and interacting with professional societies and business so that it causes continual improvements and higher expectations. Authorities of accounting education are responsible for recognizing, combining and integrating basic professional skills in the syllabus. The faculty must form an advisory council consisting of managers and professionals who meet and convene to provide guidance

and assistance to ensure the relevance of the syllabus. In addition the members of this council must regularly take part in classes and so increase students' communication skills with the business society. Also members of the faculty should frequently meet with accounting institutes and organizations that employ graduates. Since the size and extent of the information present for eliminating shortcomings of the graduate program is so large and expansive that it cannot be included in the scope of the current section, it is suggested that these topics are composed in a separate semester or semesters with educational workshops. Below are the suggested important topics in the form of optional or compulsory courses. With regard to the current needs of the country and society and the religious-national culture in Iran and the economic conditions of the society some topics seem more important than others. Therefore addressing these issues in order to prepare graduates for entering the profession is a priority.

6.1. Training Communication Skills

Communication skill is a necessity for any person who wants to enter the accounting profession. These skills include presenting and defending oral and written opinions, effective listening and finding and organizing information from human and electronic resources. Since one way of communication is using the same language students must be adequately skilled in using the international language. Considering the fact that in Iran international language competency is not assessed before entering the graduate program – though in major universities such an assessment is a prerequisite to entering the program – entering a course of ESP in the syllabus is considered very helpful. On the other hand regarding the fact that every person's level of knowledge in technical subjects is shown through verbal and written communication, ability and skill in this subject is very important and entering an academic unit called the importance of communication in accounting into the program will be useful and effective. Nevertheless achieving these skills can be facilitated by holding self-management workshops managed by successful and experienced professionals and discussing and sharing real examples.

6.2. Teaching Critical Thinking and the Ability to Analyze

Being able to analyze is another skill an accountant must possess. This skill consists of asking suitable questions to gather complete, correct information, the ability to detect the importance of information and their application and the ability to apply logic and reason to clarify the relationship between subjects, events, people or different methods. So an accounting graduate must be able to gather correct information, analyze problems using logical reasoning and using problem solving methods for real world business problems. Also it seems as though the ability to think critically is an issue accounting education must greatly emphasize. Critical thinking comprises of the ability to get accountable results for the problems that cannot be solved

definitely or in situations where relevant information may not be accessible. In other words critical thinking is the ability to remember, process and use adoptive skills logically to help identify and solve problems. In fact the value of professionals for a society is basically determined according to their critical thinking ability, meaning their experience in understanding problems and showing judgment for their solution. Nurturing these skills can materialize through emphasis on situational studies in the educational workshops explained in the previous section.

6.3. Teaching Skills related to Technology

Advancement of technology means that knowing technology is not only useful but also necessary and vital. A person entering the profession is expected to be familiar with computer skills as well as other skills required for the work place. Having these skills does not only make the person inventive but it also helps him adapt more quickly with the new working environment. Using information technology, especially information processing and transmission is a necessity. Knowledge about accounting packages is not an advantage anymore but a need that should be emphasized in universities. Therefore it is suggested that in order for accounting education to be coordinated with IT advancement, important issues be presented under the name "computer application in accounting" or something like that. So forming educational workshops with highly qualified professionals in finance and business and experienced in computers can help materialize the above goals effectively.

6.4. Teaching Interdisciplinary Skills

The trend in the world market requires an accountant to possess a broader range of knowledge in the interdisciplinary subjects in addition to a profound knowledge in a specific field. With respect to the fact that teamwork has become an accepted trend in recent years if an accounting graduate is willing to effectively work in a multidisciplinary team he must have enough knowledge in finance, IT, economy and marketing. To cover interdisciplinary subjects it is suggested that the following courses be inserted into the educational program: finance, Investment, risk management and accounting services marketing.

6.5. Teaching and being aware of Global Issues

Because of globalization, the capability to keep up with social, cultural and political changes is necessary and adds to assigning and detecting abilities of people. An accounting graduate must have enough knowledge about international issues such as laws, ethics, standards and information resources. A lot of the students involved with multinational companies are required to work with different accounting standards. Being familiar with international finance laws like import/export laws, customs duties and business rules in general is essential for accountants. So

students must understand that accounting standards are affected by every country's culture and the goals set for that country's accounting information. In short it can be stated that globalization causes international accounting to be in the accounting educational program. It is suggested that to prepare graduates for working with international laws and standards, courses like "international accounting" and "the application of law in accounting" be included in the training program.

6.6. Development of Moral Character and Responsibility

Today few articles are found in the field of business that does not point to financial scandals. Enron, WorldCom, Microsoft, Tycho, and Sun Beam are only a few. The recent attention towards ethical issues of accountants in the news, profession and academic society, leads to questioning the moral values of the students who choose accounting professions. Scandals in accounting, has shook the profession in the first years of the current century. In addition, in recent years many instances of earning managements have been seen that accountants and auditors could not detect them before audited financial statements. Critics of the accounting profession often argue that in many of the failures, the slip and error of accountants in professional judgments was due to weakness in moral principles and responsibilities. Usually accountants do not have adequate knowledge or skill in analyzing issues effectively and when faced with an ethical issue cannot choose a way agreeable with values and laws and professional conduct. Accounting education can respond to the gap by revising the syllabus and covering subjects related to moral values and teaching of ethics and to answer concerns about ethical conduct and responsibilities in the accounting profession. To this end a course under the name "ethics in accounting" can minimize the defects of the training program in this area.

In the end it is important to mention that by accepting the fact that updating the training program to keep pace with the changes in the world of trade is inevitable, an effective educational strategy is always devising a flexible educational system that changes according to the market's needs.

References

- [1] Albrecht, W.S. & J. Sack, R. (2000). Accounting Education: Charting the Course through a Perilous Future. *Accounting Education Series*, 16. Sarasota, FL: American Accounting Association.
- [2] Altbach, P. G. (1991). Trends in Comparative Education. *Comparative Education Review*. 35, 491-507.
- [3] Benton, T. (1992). Adam Ferguson's critique of the 'enterprise culture'. In P. Morris and M. Heelas (Eds.), *The Values of the Enterprise Culture: the moral limits of markets*, London: Routledge.
- [4] Blanthorne, C., Kovar, S. and Fisher, D. (2007). Accounting Educators' Opinions about Ethics in the Curriculum: An Extensive View. *Issues in Accounting Education*, 22 (3), 355-390.
- [5] Bryant, S. M., and S. M. Albring. (2006). *Effective team building: Guidance for accounting educators*. *Issues in Accounting Education* (August), 241-265.
- [6] Dewey, J. (1985a). *Democracy and Education 1916 (The Middle Works 1899-1924)*, 9, Published by Southern Illinois University
- [7] Feldman, D.C., Folks, W.R. Folks & W. H. Turnley. (1998). The Socialization of Expatriate Interns, *Journal of Managerial Issues*, 10(4), 403-418.
- [8] Kenneth H. Brown & M. T. Heaney. (1997). A Note on Measuring the Economic Impact of Institutions of Higher Education. *Research in Higher Education*. 38 (2), 229-240.
- [9] Langmead, J. M., Sedaghat, A. M., (2007). Integrating Professionalism in the Business School Curriculum: The Development of a Course Examining Implications of the Financial Reporting Crisis on the Professionalism and Ethical Framework of Corporate Controllershship and Financial Officers, *Advances in Accounting Education*. 8, 135-157.
- [10] McCourt Larres, p. & Ballantine, J. (2007). Final Year Accounting Undergraduates' Attitudes to Group Assessment and the role of learning logs. *Accounting Education*. 16 (2), 1-21
- [11] McGowan, S. & Lightbody, M. (2008). Another chance to practice: Repeating plagiarism education for EAL students within a discipline context, *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, 14 (1), 16-30
- [12] Neave, G. (1988). On the Cultivation of Quality, Efficiency and Enterprise: an overview of recent trends in higher education in Western Europe, 1986-1988. *European Journal of Education*. 23 (1/2), 7-23.
- [13] Nikolai, L. (2001). Evaluation of an approach used to develop, implement, and monitor a 5-year integrated accounting program. *Journal of Accounting Education*, 19, 87-102.
- [14] Noravesh, I. & Mashayekhi, B. (2005). Management Accounting Education Needs and Priorities: Perception Gap between Academics and Practitioners. *Iranian Accounting and Auditing Review*, 12 (41), 133-161.
- [15] Noravesh, I. (1995). Designing a Bachelor Accounting Curriculum according to the profession's Needs and Priorities, a *PhD Dissertation*, The University of Tehran.
- [16] Ramamoorti, S. (2008). The Psychology and Sociology of Fraud: Integrating the Behavioral Sciences Component into Fraud and Forensic Accounting Curricula, *Issues in Accounting Education*, 23 (4), 521-533.
- [17] Riordan, M.P., D.A. Riordan and E. Kent St. Pierre. (2008). *Groupthink in accounting education*. *Advances in Accounting Education*. 9, 189-204.
- [18] Schmidt, D. A., Baran, E., Thompson, A. D., Mishra, P., Koehler, M. J., & Shin, T. S. (2009). Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPCK): The development and validation of an assessment instrument for preservice teachers. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*. 42(2), 27.

- [19] Sikka, P., Haslam, C., Kyriacou, D. and Agrizzi, D. (2007), Professionalising claims and the state of UK professional accountancy education: Some evidence . *Accounting Education: An International Journal*. 16 (1), 3-21.
- [20] Smith, G. and Crumbley, D. (2009). How Divergent Are Pedagogical Views Toward the Fraud/Forensic Accounting Curriculum? *Global Perspectives on Accounting Education*. 6, 1 - 24.