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RESEARCH

Incorporating Integrated Reporting into Accounting Education: A Case of Mauritius

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ABSTRACT

PURPOSE: This paper aims to evaluate the extent to which Integrated Reporting (IR) has been incorporated into Mauritius's accounting tertiary education system.

METHODOLOGY: Content analysis was used to analyse the current accounting curriculum across eight Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Mauritius. Moreover, quantitative and qualitative data were collected from fifty questionnaires administered to accounting academics from the eight institutions.

FINDINGS: The study found a lack of IR topics in the current accounting curriculum; a content analysis and questionnaire responses have supported this. Chi-square tests showed no significant associations between variables (P>0.05), suggesting all academics perceive these competencies as necessary for students, regardless of their characteristics.

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RESEARCH LIMITATIONS: The research, limited to Mauritius' HEIs, is exploratory and has a small sample size of 50 participants. It also lacks a comprehensive understanding of the conditions in Mauritius' education systems, which are often considered factors in causing a lack of faculty uptake.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS: It is suggested that those in charge of curriculum development collaborate with industry experts to improve accounting education by incorporating relevant competencies that are considered important by employers into the course.

ORIGINALITY/VALUE: The paper is useful to practitioners and academics in accounting and reporting. The research provides some initial insight into how integrated reporting should be embedded into the curriculum across universities in Mauritius to keep up with foreign universities.

KEYWORDS: *Accounting Education; Integrated Reporting; Mauritius; Curriculum Development*

BACKGROUND

In recent years, there has been an urgent need for economies to achieve the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As a community, academia is looking for ways to contribute substantively to global transformational development. Within the accounting disciplinary context, although there is an increasing demand for relevant sustainability-related disclosure, reporting, and assurance, work towards achieving the SDGs has been relatively slow. One of the reasons for this slow progress is the competency gap that exists between accounting practice and tertiary education (He and Wang, 2023).

One of the major sustainability related accounting initiatives in recent years is IR. Some studies have highlighted that, although professional accounting bodies (such as the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) and the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA)) have incorporated IR into their curriculum since 2014 (Adhariani and de Villiers, 2019), little is known about the integration of IR into university curriculum, especially in developing countries such as Mauritius (Giorgino *et al.*, 2023). The university accounting curriculum tends to remain traditional and resistant to change. Course components of the accounting curriculum focus on financial accounting, reporting, and auditing; they seldom involve topics in the environmental, social, and sustainability accounting field, despite the prominence of sustainable development in the business world. The wide adoption of IR requires significant developments in HEIs' accounting curriculum.

Therefore, the current study aims to evaluate the extent to which IR has been incorporated into the accounting curriculum across HEIs in Mauritius, with the intention of bridging the competency gap in the literature and preparing accounting graduates for their professional career pathway, the future business world and global transformational development.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The following research question (RQ) was developed to fulfil the research objective, and the most appropriate data collection methods were selected to answer the RQ.

RQ: To what extent has IR been incorporated into the accounting curriculum across HEIs in Mauritius?

To meet the research objective, the researchers downloaded unit outlines from eight local university websites in Mauritius. The contents of the unit outlines were thoroughly analysed to understand whether the new topics emerging in accounting are currently being covered in the existing syllabi: the final sample consisted of 56 unit outlines. The unit outlines of some foreign universities were also evaluated to enhance the comparison so the researchers could discover how far behind Mauritius' HEIs are in IR education and curriculum development to bridge the identified gap.

A questionnaire was designed for accounting academics from the eight selected universities to confirm the information in the unit outlines. The questionnaire also helped obtain accounting academics' perceptions of how HEIs respond to the move towards IR. The survey was emailed to fifty academics across the eight selected HEIs in Mauritius, and all fifty surveys were completed and returned.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Influence of IR on SDGs

Mauritius, although considered a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), has made significant progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and has recovered well from the COVID-19 pandemic, although gaps and challenges remain to achieve the SDGs. Whilst Mauritius is an upper middle-income country, it continues to experience persistent inequality even in the current year, hindering progress towards achieving many of the SDGs, one of which is education (SDG 4). Whilst the education system is strong in Mauritius, a gap appears to exist between the education that is offered and the skills required for jobs in the country.

The emergence of IR is believed to have changed both the business environment overall and the role of accountants. Previous research suggests that companies that have implemented IR have good and consistent conditions and are preferred by investors; if a company does not strive to

contribute to sustainable development then it will be unable to compete with companies that are able to implement IR (Putri, 2022). Therefore, companies are motivated to implement IR and this has now given rise to requirements for new competencies; these requirements mean significant implications for accounting education and the accounting curriculum at both the professional and HEI level (Rodrigue *et al.*, 2024).

Although the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has set some targets to ensure all the SDGs are fully met by 2030, Education, being a fast growing sector, requires a great deal of attention. Stakeholders are increasingly demanding that sustainability reporting is on a par with financial reporting, compelling companies to prepare and produce integrated reports (PwC, 2022). Therefore, accountants should be shaped not only to produce such reports but also to understand the organisational responsibilities and the future business world.

IR as Part of Accounting Education

IR is a concise communication about how an organisation's strategy, performance, governance and prospects, in the context of its external environment, lead to value creation over the short, medium and long term. As specified in the framework, IR aims to (IIRC, 2021):

- "Promote a more cohesive and efficient approach to corporate reporting that draws on different reporting strands and communicates the full range of factors that materially affect the ability of an organization to create value over time.
- Enhance accountability and stewardship for the broad capital base (financial, manufactured, intellectual, human, social, relationship, and natural) and promote understanding of interdependencies.
- Support integrated thinking, decision-making, and actions that focus on creating value over the short, medium, and long term."

Professional bodies have responded to calls for curriculum change by incorporating IR into their curriculum. ACCA's Curriculum Policy Statement affirms its belief that:

> *"Sustainability issues should be fully integrated into the professional examination curriculum so that future accountants are better equipped to recognise sustainable development's challenges to their organisations. ACCA also believes that accountants must understand how sustainability matters will permeate their future business careers – whether through environmental taxation considerations, investment appraisal decisions, financial reporting of carbon assets, risks and liabilities, and managing reputational risk."*

In 2014, ACCA developed more IR content within its syllabus, especially at the professional level (ACCA, 2014). CIMA also confirmed its recognition and support for IR by revising its syllabus for 2015, enshrining IR in the curriculum at the professional level (CIMA, 2014).

In the same context, universities, especially in developed countries, have been interested in integrating IR into accounting curricula. To provide evidence, the researchers selected a sample of foreign universities that have embedded IR into their accounting degrees. These were three universities from Australia (UNSW, RMIT and Griffith University) and two from New Zealand (University of Auckland and University of Otago). This sample will be compared with HEIs in Mauritius so that researchers get a clear picture of what is missing in the local syllabi and how to keep up with the foreign universities. A summary of the analysis of the foreign universities' curricula is discussed below.

The University of New South Wales (UNSW), ranked 19th in the 2024-2025 QS World University Rankings, offers a new undergraduate accounting degree unit, ACCT 5925. This unit aims to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to work effectively in an IR environment and promote value creation in organisations (UNSW Business School, 2024).

The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) and Griffith University, ranked in the top 1% of global universities, offer IR courses. RMIT teaches Contemporary Financial and Integrated Reporting, while Griffith University provides students with an understanding of Australian entity regulation, conceptual framework, and key accounting standards affecting financial reporting by all Australian businesses (Griffith University, 2020; RMIT, 2024).

The University of Auckland's ACCTG780 course explores the role of sustainability accounting and integrated reporting, its evolution, and the determinants of the supply and demand for non-financial reporting. It also introduces students to business sustainability and its impact on corporate behaviour (University of Auckland, 2024).

The University of Otago's ACCT421 Financial Accounting and Reporting course has incorporated IR, whereby students are taught financial accounting concepts, technical skills for financial statements required to prepare and analyse financial statements, and New Zealand and international financial reporting regulations. It also covers the use and limitations of financial accounting information and current reporting issues, including integrated reporting (University of Otago, 2024).

In conclusion, the foreign-level curriculum analysis shows that IR topics are taught separately or incorporated into existing units at institutions such as UNSW and RMIT. These institutions focus on up-to-date accounting competencies, creating a reporting spirit in students. From this perspective, the next section will look at the curriculum of HEIs in Mauritius and ways they can follow the pathway of foreign HEIs.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The content analysis of the accounting curriculum in Mauritius' HEIs (Table 1) shows a mix of first, second, and third-year accounting units offered by the eight universities in Mauritius. None of them is an elective subject; this ensures that accounting students must effectively fulfil all these accounting units to be eligible to graduate.

From the analysis, it can be deduced that a unit on accounting systems, essential in an accounting degree, is offered by all HEIs except for Middlesex University. Another unit that many HEIs do not provide is the Corporate Governance/Sustainability unit. Of the eight universities, only two cover sustainability as a stand-alone unit, while one university offers it partly in an introductory accounting unit. It is worth noting that sustainability accounting continues to grow in prominence worldwide, and not teaching the topics to students will certainly be detrimental to them and their career prospects.

From the content analysis, it has also been deduced that IR and its relevant technologies are lacking in the current accounting curriculum in Mauritius: none of the HEIs seem to teach IR topics. This lack of IR content gives a good reason for curriculum developers to review and adapt the accounting curriculum to better prepare accounting graduates to meet employers' expectations.

Table 1: Compulsory Accounting Units on Offer

University	*Course Name*	*Basic Accounting*	*Management A/C*	*Financial A/C*	*Financial Reporting*	*Corporate Governance/ Sustainability*	*Auditing*	*Accounting Systems*
UTM	BSc (Hons) Accounting with Finance	ACCF1125	ACCF2118	ACCF1126	ACCF2124/ ACCF3114	ACCF2315	ACCF1105/ ACCF2113	MMIS3210
UOM	BSc (Hons) Accounting (Minor: Finance)	DFA1001 / DFA1000			DFA2000/ DFA3000	Not on offer	ACF3003	CSE3203
OUM	BA (Hons) Accounting and Finance	OUba001113	OUba001221	OUba001121	OUba001322/ OUba001421	OUba001413	OUba001311/ OUba0011321/ OUba001423	OUba001223
UDM	BSc (Hons) in Accounting and Finance	Principles of A/C	Management A/C I/II	Financial A/C	Financial Reporting, I/ II	Not on offer	Auditing	Computerized Accounting
Curtin	BCom Accounting and Finance (double major)	ACCT1000	ACCT2002	ACCT2005	ACCT2006	Partly in ACCT1000	ACCT3000	ACCT2000
Middlesex	BA (Hons) Accounting and Finance	Financial/ Management A/C	Advanced Management A/C	Advanced Financial A/C		Not on offer	Audit and Assurance	Not on offer
YK Business School	Bachelor of Commerce Accounting	Accounting 1	Management Accounting and Finance (Year 2 and 3)	Financial A/C (Year 2 and 3)		Not on offer	Auditing (Year 2 and 3)	Accounting Information Systems
Rushmore University (Mauritius)	BA (Hons) Accounting and Finance	Introduction to Accounting	Management Accounting / Intermediate Management Accounting	Introduction to Financial Statement Preparation	Producing and Interpreting Group financial statements	Not on offer	Audit and Assurance	IT for accountants

Source: Constructed by authors

The results of the content analysis were supported by the respondents' answers to the questionnaire, which included the following:

Demographic characteristics

Of the overall eligible responses (N=50), 76% of the respondents were male and 24% female. The majority of the survey was completed by a population aged between 30-40 years (n=14), followed by those aged under 30 years (n=10), 40-50 years (n=10), 50-60 years (n=10), and over 60 years (n=6).

Type of institution

The sample was dominated by employees from state-owned universities (n=36). Of the eight HEIs, four were state-owned institutions with more extensive faculties, implying they have more academic staff than the private local and private international universities, where only six and eight respondents, respectively, completed the survey.

Position and years of experience

Of the 50 respondents, 26 held a lecturer position at their institutions, 16 were senior lecturers, and the remaining 8 were Associate Professors. Most respondents (26 out of 50) had over 10 years of experience, implying they were well-experienced in their field; 8 had 6-10 years of experience, 8 had 4-5 years of experience, and the remaining were new academics.

IR awareness among students

Of the respondents, 64% agreed that the current syllabus does not contain sufficient IR concepts to create student awareness; only 36% answered this question positively. However, considering IR is a new concept, the literature states that much more must be done to create awareness among accounting students.

Courses that embed IR concept

As shown in Table 2, only 32% of the respondents answered 'Yes' to whether their faculty offered any courses that embed the IR concept, while 20% answered 'No'. The remaining 48% believe IR will be embedded in the accounting course sometime in the future, which seems optimistic. The cross-tabulation also helps to analyse further the type of institutions the respondents are from (state, private local, private international). Of the 16 respondents who mentioned that IR had been embedded in the accounting course their institutions provide, 8 come from state-owned HEIs, 2 come from private local HEIs and 6 from private international HEIs.

Table 2: Courses that Embed the IR Concept * Type of Institution

		Type of institution			Total
		State-owned	Private (local)	Private (international)	
Does your faculty offer any courses which embed the IR concept?	Yes	8	2	6	16
	No	6	4	0	10
	Maybe in the near future	22	0	2	24
Total		36	6	8	50

Source: Constructed by authors

A chi-square test was carried out to see if the 16 respondents from HEIs offering IR-related courses were associated with the type of institution they were from. As shown in Table 3, the Pearson chi-square statistic is 19.086a, and the p-value is less than 0.001. Therefore, at a significance level of 0.05, it can be concluded that the association between the two variables is highly statistically significant.

Table 3: Chi-Square Test: IR Course Associated with the Type of Institution

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	19.086[a]	4	<0.001
Likelihood Ratio	20.010	4	<0.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	8.168	1	0.004
N of Valid Cases	50.0		

Note: a – 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5

Source: Constructed by authors

Relevant competencies required for accounting graduates

Table 4 lists the competencies academics perceive as crucial for future accountants. This information was captured via an open-ended question in the questionnaire, for which the respondents were allowed to recommend more than one competency. It can be seen that the majority of the respondents showed a great interest in reporting and digital competencies, as they perceive these to be relevant for accounting graduates to possess, considering the latest developments in the accounting profession.

Developing some of these competencies requires a mix of theoretical, organisational, and experiential knowledge. For example, the three most perceived competencies are reporting (52%), digital (32%) and governance and sustainability (20%); these require both knowledge and skills to be transferred to students for them to do well in the workplace. On this basis, the researchers support that IR should be incorporated in the accounting curriculum at the HEI level because a majority of

students enrolled in accounting degrees are future accountants who will work in organisations; they can, therefore, relate the concepts in IR to their organisations if they are taught in this area as part of their degree.

Table 4: Relevant Knowledge and Skills

Relevant Competencies	*No. of respondents*
Generic	9
Reporting	26
Analytical	7
Digital	16
Governance and Sustainability	10

Source: Constructed by authors

Chi-square tests (significance level of 0.05) have been carried out to see if the academics' perceptions towards relevant competencies (categorical dependant variables) vary according to the respondents' characteristics (categorical independent variables); the results are presented in Table 5. The characteristics of the respondents are gender (male/female), their role (lecturer, senior lecturer, and associate professor) and their years of experience (1-3, 4-5, 6-10 and above 10 years).

Table 5: Chi-square Results: Perceived Competencies based on Academics' Characteristics

	Value	*df*	*Asymptotic Significance (2- sided)*
Generic * Gender	2.515[a]	1	0.113
Reporting * Gender	0.254[a]	1	0.614
Analytical * Gender	0.421[a]	1	0.516
Digital * Gender	0.013[a]	1	0.91
Governance and sustainability * Gender	0.110[a]	1	0.741
Business communication * Role	3.063[a]	2	0.216
Reporting * Role	5.043[a]	2	0.08
Analytical * Role	4.559[a]	2	0.102
Digital * Role	0.421[a]	2	0.81
Governance and sustainability * Role	5.679[a]	2	0.058
Business communication * Experience	4.008[a]	3	0.261
Reporting * Experience	11.053[a]	3	0.011
Analytical * Experience	1.923[a]	3	0.589
Digital * Experience	3.514[a]	3	0.319
Governance and sustainability * Experience	6.010[a]	3	0.111

Note: a – 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5
Source: Constructed by authors

It can be concluded that there is no statistically significant association between gender, the respondents' role, and the perceived competencies; that is, irrespective of their gender and positions, they equally perceive these competencies as necessary for students to possess (P>0.05). The same has been observed between the perceived competencies and the academics' years of experience; that is, no matter how experienced the academics are, the competencies they perceive are the same. The exception is reporting competencies that seem to be associated with the respondents' years of experience, as p-value is 0.011 (P<0.05). The result can further be explained by the cross-tabulation shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Crosstab: Reporting Competencies * Experience

		Experience				*Total*
		1-3	*4-5*	*6-10*	*over 10*	
Reporting	Yes	6	0	5	15	26
	No	2	8	3	11	24
Total		8	8	8	26	50

Source: Constructed by authors

Incorporation of IR in the accounting curriculum

All 50 respondents answered positively to the question, Should IR be incorporated into the accounting curriculum? They all understand the importance of IR and agree that it should be incorporated into the curriculum. A total of 60% of the respondents stated that elements of IR should be incorporated into Financial Accounting/Reporting, while 24% prefer IR to be taught as a stand-alone unit (separate). The remaining 16% prefer that IR be taught in accounting systems, management accounting, corporate governance, and CSR. The results were further spread to understand if their choice was associated with the type of institution they were from. Most HEIs, whether state-owned, private (local), or private (international), prefer to embed IR in the existing Financial Reporting subject, while their second option is to have IR as a separate unit.

This element was further examined to see whether academics' perceptions of incorporating IR in a specific course subject differed based on their characteristics. Table 7 shows no significant difference in their perceptions, using gender, years of teaching, level of understanding, and institution as grouping variables (P>0.05). Respondents agree that IR should be embedded primarily in the Financial Reporting syllabus. However, respondents' perceptions of the grouping variables 'role at the institution' and 'highest qualification' differ significantly. The cross-tabulation (Tables 8 and 9) explains this.

Table 7: Academics' Perceptions towards the Subject into which IR should be Incorporated

Grouping variable	*Value*	*Df*	*Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)*	*Interpretation*
Gender	3.216[a]	4	0.522	No significant difference
Your role at the institution	16.186[a]	8	0.040	Significant difference
Years of teaching	15.673[a]	12	0.207	No significant difference
Your highest qualification	29.074[a]	12	0.004	Significant difference
Level of understanding of IR	4.313[a]	4	0.365	No significant difference
Institution	3.843[a]	8	0.871	No significant difference

Note: a – 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5

Source: Constructed by authors

Table 8: Crosstab: Subject and Respondents' Role

		Your role at the institution:			*Total*
		Lecturer	*Senior Lecturer*	*Associate Professor*	
In which course subject should IR mostly be taught?	Financial Reporting	18	8	4	30
	Standalone	4	6	2	12
	Management Accounting	2	2	0	4
	AIS	2	0	0	2
	Corporate governance and CSR	0	0	2	2
Total		26	16	8	50

Source: Constructed by authors

Table 9: Crosstab: Subject and Respondent's Qualifications

		Your highest qualification:				Total
		Doctoral	Post-graduate	Professional-ACCA	Post-Doctoral	
In which course subject should IR mostly be taught?	Financial Reporting	10	18	2	0	30
	Standalone	4	2	0	6	12
	Management Accounting	2	2	0	0	4
	AIS	0	2	0	0	2
	Corporate governance and CSR	2	0	0	0	2
Total		18	24	2	6	50

Source: Constructed by authors

IR topics to be incorporated into the accounting curriculum

The bar chart shown in Figure 1 illustrates the topics the respondents perceive as necessary in the IR curriculum.

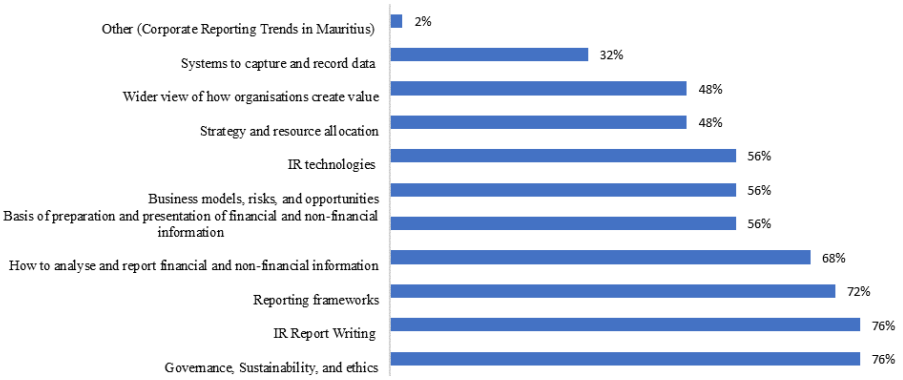

Figure 1: Topics to be Covered in the IR Module

Source: Constructed by authors

Considering the number of topics that need to be taught to prepare students in the IR field, it is not wise to overload the Financial Reporting unit, although most academics would prefer this option. This could demotivate students, seeing the unit as bulky, especially when preparing for their final exams. Considering all these factors, having a stand-alone IR unit seems to be a promising idea. Some may argue that the accounting course is already crowded and adding a new curriculum will not be helpful. However, having a stand-alone curriculum that only focuses on the main IR topics relevant to the accounting profession would benefit students as they can concentrate on specific issues and not be burdened with studying and memorising concepts for their exams. IR

should be taught as a stand-alone unit as the financial reporting unit is already so hard-wired by financial aspects with a high concentration on Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) and International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) that it would be challenging to incorporate non-financial reporting aspects.

Current competencies provided by HEIs

This part of the study evaluates academics' perspectives on whether the HEIs provide relevant competencies to students that align with the industry. The competencies are categorised into relevant knowledge and relevant skills. The knowledge comprises a list of core/main accounting units that cover the required knowledge that students should possess. The second category is relevant skills, incorporating the most appropriate technical and digital skills needed for future accountants to excel in the workplace.

Relevant knowledge

As shown in Table 10, all relevant knowledge, except for Integrated Reporting (mean=2.56), has mean scores greater than 3.50 on a 5-point scale, suggesting that the HEIs provide students with the most relevant knowledge. Financial accounting was the most taught unit across all HEIs (mean=4.36, SD=0.749). This was followed by financial reporting and management accounting (both having a mean of 4.12).

Table 10: Item Statistics: Relevant Knowledge Provided at HEIs

	Mean	*Std. Deviation*	*N*
Management Accounting	4.12	0.824	50
Auditing, Assurance and Risk Management	4.08	0.752	50
Financial Accounting	4.36	0.749	50
Financial Reporting	4.12	0.918	50
Integrated Reporting	2.56	1.072	50
Tax Accounting	3.72	1.011	50
Accounting Information Systems	3.60	0.990	50
Sustainability, corporate governance, and ethics	3.56	1.033	50
Company Accounting	3.96	0.968	50

Source: Constructed by authors

Relevant skills

The participants reported an average mean of 3.07 regarding how the relevant skills in line with the industry were provided to students. The most imparted skills in students across HEIs are the use of word processing tools (mean=3.84), followed by the use of advanced Excel and spreadsheet tools (mean 3.52), as shown in Table 11. It can also be concluded that the means of 'Expertise in big data

analysis, advanced modelling techniques and SQL', 'Knowledge of business intelligence software (e.g., IBL Cognus)', 'Enterprise Resource planning (ERP)', 'Accounting software packages' are below 3, implying that, although these skills are perceived as relevant for future accountants, HEIs are not providing them. On this basis, the researchers support the idea that these skills should be incorporated into the curriculum of HEIs' accounting courses so that HEIs can be aligned with the requirements of accounting practitioners.

Table 11: Item Statistics: Relevant Skills Provided at HEIs

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Advanced excel ability and other spreadsheet tools (statistics tools)	3.52	0.995	50
Expertise in big data analysis, advanced modelling techniques and SQL	2.68	1.168	50
Word processing tools	3.84	0.976	50
Presentation Graphics Tools	3.48	1.147	50
Knowledge of business intelligence software (e.g., IBL Cognus)	2.48	0.909	50
Enterprise Resource Planning Tools (e.g., SAP, Oracle)	2.52	0.953	50
Reporting Technologies (for analyst and reporting roles)	3.08	1.140	50
Accounting software packages (MYOB, QuickBooks)	2.96	1.049	50

Source: Constructed by authors

Competency Gap Between Industry and HEIs

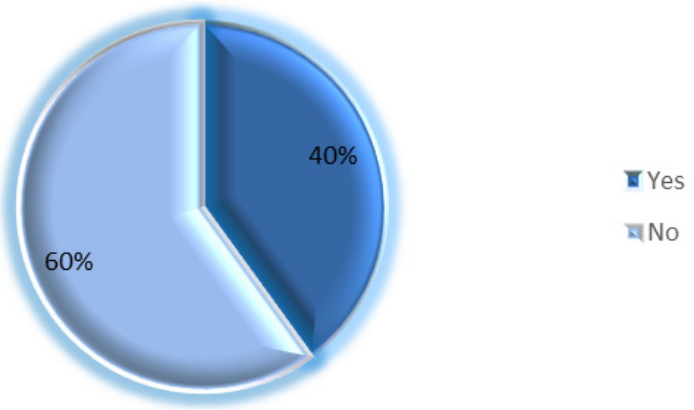

Figure 2: Provision of Relevant Competencies to Accounting Students

Source: Constructed by authors

The pie chart shown in Figure 2 illustrates that 60% of the respondents denied that their faculty provides relevant and most up-to-date competencies to accounting students, which align with the industry. This aligns with a study by Bachoo (2019), whereby accounting practitioners perceived a

lack of relevant competencies among accounting graduates. Therefore, both stakeholders' perceptions confirm the gap between what is currently being taught at the university and what is relevant to the workplace.

To support the quantitative findings, the respondents were asked to give specific details to their 'Yes/No' answers (Table 12). Some open-ended responses were collected and summarised below as conveyed by respondents to the question: According to you, is your faculty providing the most relevant and up-to-date knowledge and skills to the accounting students, as expected by employers? Please specify.

Table 12: Responses from interviews

No	Programmes need to be revamped to meet the industry's requirements.
Yes	Up-to-date with industry standard, but still, there is room for improvement.
Yes	In terms of reporting financial information, the faculty is in line with what is expected by employers. However, there is room for improvement regarding the reporting and basis of preparation of non-financial information. First and second-year students do not sufficiently appreciate the importance of reporting non-financial information as a proxy for a company's willingness and commitment to create value, provide greater clarity on issues faced, thus enhancing stakeholder relationships and improve corporate reputation. As a starting point, IR should be embedded in the curriculum, and for it to be relevant to students, reference must be made to local corporate reporting trends. Also, it may be impractical for all students to get a WIL project with corporates. As such, another way of enabling students to apply whatever they have learned on IR is by devising an assignment requesting them to write or present on a local company that has implemented IR, the benefits of integrated thinking, but also the challenges in leaping annual financial reports to fully integrated reports.
No	Much Improvement needed
No	As per the curriculum - yes, but we need to align with the industry requirements.
No	The weak connection between practice and theory
No	I perceive that we lack in many areas, and employers take it upon themselves to complete the education process with those they hire. (Some accounting firms have explicitly stated that they do not care about the skills, knowledge, or grades of a prospective hire as long as they meet the education requirements for the ACCA/ CPA exam; they explicitly have stated that they just want a body. Because of this approach, my institution's accounting graduates tend to get jobs in the field but are poorly paid compared to their peers.) I also perceive that most higher education institutions' incentives are misplaced because the emphasis is on student satisfaction (AKA student evaluations) and student retention and graduation/completion rates instead of first-time pass rates for professional exams and skills, resulting in high demand (as measured by starting compensation) by employers (not simply employers seeking a body).

Source: Constructed by authors

Based on the responses collected, it can be concluded that much improvement is required in accounting education to align it with industry requirements. This was also evidenced in a previous study (Bachoo, 2019), whereby accounting practitioners perceived that the HEIs were not in line with industry requirements. Accounting practitioners want to recruit graduates with a broad education, while HEIs focus on technical knowledge. This aligns with the literature (Adhariani and de Villiers, 2019; He and Wang, 2023).

Previous studies have suggested that changes in accounting education are needed to meet the dynamically expanding demands of the profession (He and Wang, 2023). Graduates entering the accounting profession should be more broadly educated, switching focus from learning technical knowledge to developing a continual learning process, and from a narrow definition of accounting to a broad information development dissemination (Chen and Fok, 2013). This goes some way to meeting the recommendation of Lawson *et al.* (2017), that students must be competent to carry out external reporting and accounting analysis and possess at least a basic level of technological skills.

Moreover, it has been recommended that accounting principles courses include an introduction to Extensive Business Reporting Language (XBRL); this is because of its increasing use in the transfer of financial data, as described by Debreceny and Farewell (2010). Allowing students to use XBRL in the classroom not only enables them to download enormous volumes of financial data from the footnotes speedily and then use technology-specific software to view and analyse it, but also offers an optimal vehicle to bring Big Data analytics and technology to first-year accounting students, further meeting the recommendation by Lawson *et al.* (2017).

Students could also be tasked with accessing data from accounting systems to conduct profitability analyses and the range of procedures used to measure business value. Similarly, Intermediate accounting courses would benefit from the introduction of tuition in technological tools and the use of Big Data. Educators should lead discussions on how an XBRL platform can gather data from multiple sets and sources to facilitate IR on an organisation's governance, business model, risks, strategic direction, and other elements (Monterio, 2013).

In addition to the content, HEIs should also review many factors in teaching and learning strategies (He and Wang, 2023). In their study, Chen and Fok (2013) stressed that accounting academics should have the right teaching skills, abilities, and knowledge. Moreover, they need to use effective methods to make students active learners in the learning process and make decisions in both structured and unstructured environments where relevant information cannot be readily identified and gathered (Chen and Fok, 2013).

By regrouping the results of the current study, it can be concluded that although academics are well aware of the new competency requirements and are willing to teach IR topics to students, HEIs are not responding sufficiently to a move towards IR. Academics' move towards IR is reflected by their responses to which IR topics they perceive should be incorporated into the curriculum and how they should be taught to students. The way academics perceive IR should be incorporated into the curriculum, tested by Chi-Square tests, is influenced by the role of the academics and by their highest qualification. Therefore, there is sufficient evidence to accept Hypothesis 1.

CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the lack of transfer of essential competencies for future accountants by HEIs to students, leading to a misalignment between HEIs and industry. There is sufficient evidence that IR should be incorporated into the accounting curriculum, and therefore, those responsible for developing accounting graduates need to take decisive action by incorporating specific steps inside and outside the classroom. Different approaches can be taken to bring those competencies to students; for instance, HEIs could collaborate with employers to develop internships, and industry experts could deliver sessions on IR to students as part of the course. Overall, improving human capital within the accounting profession is vital to meeting the demands of the knowledge economy. However, to make any changes in the accounting pedagogy, it is important to understand whether the HEIs' current conditions can sustain changes in the accounting curriculum. Future studies in the context of Mauritius could include a study to evaluate students' and academics' perceptions of HEIs' conditions, as these are often regarded as factors that cause a lack of faculty uptake.

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