

# Performance of Professional Courses In Botswana: A Tutor Perspective

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Received: June 11, 2020

Accepted: October 21, 2022

Available online: October 27, 2022

doi:10.11114/aef.v9i4.5757

URL: <https://doi.org/10.11114/aef.v9i4.5757>

## Abstract

Globally, the performance of learners in professional courses is not pleasing at all. This paper aims at evaluating the performance of learners in ACCA and BICA qualifications in Botswana from a tutor's perspective. A structured questionnaire was administered to 45 respondents purposively (judgmentally) sampled from universities in Gaborone Botswana. This paper established that learner's attitude was viewed as the major factor contributing to poor performance in professional courses in Botswana. This paper recommends that training providers were urged to amend their academic entry requirements to professional.

**Keywords:** ACCA, CIMA, BICA, AAT, CFA, Performance, Botswana, Lecturers

## 1. Introduction

Professional courses Training providers assert that the passrate of professional courses are below standard and is of great concern. Extant literature shows that researchers around the world found out that the global performance of professional courses is overwhelming. Over the years the pass rates of ACCA and BICA in general have not been pleasing to both the administrators and students (BICA; 2017; 2018). Currently professional courses globally enrolled more than 2.8 million students (Pedley-Smith & Gonzalez, 2016), who are at different levels of completion. The qualified student's vis-a-vis the enrollment is insignificant. Different viewpoints surrounding the performance of ACCA, CIMA, BICA, AAT, CFA, CIPFA among others have been forwarded. However, little is known about the perspectives of the tutors or facilitators is scanty in the academic discourse. This paper was motivated by the poor performance of students in the ACCA and BICA courses in the year 2018/2019 in Botswana. Understanding the dismal performance of learners in various professional courses offered in Botswana is crucial as it will provide the basis of improvements and informing policy. This paper aims at evaluating the performance of ACCA and BICA qualifications in Botswana from a tutor's perception since transformation from paper based to computer-based examinations.

## 2. Literature Review

Professional courses differ from academic courses in that, the former focuses on work related application techniques (Pedley-Smith & Gonzalez, 2016; ACCA, 2019; AAT, 2016) while the later strives on the generation of knowledge (Benligiray and Onay, 2017; Kaplan and Evans, 1997; Gibbs and Coffey, 2004). Various authors outline some similarities and differences between professional courses and academic courses (Mzuza *at el.*, 2014; Gibbs and Coffey, 2004). Professional courses are regulated by professional bodies and the body is required to develop and moderate centralized global assessment tools (Pedley-Smith & Gonzalez, 2016). Professional courses review its syllabus every 3 to 5 years to ensure that the course is relevant to the economic situations at the times which also entails review of assessment (CIMA, 2007) and of late the introduction of computer-based assessments. There are various professional courses offered around the globe such as Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) (ACCA, 2019), Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA) (CIMA, 2007), Botswana Institute of Chartered Accountants (BICA) (BICA 2018), Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) (AAT, 2016), Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) and many others.

Professional courses are designed to address a specific field of activity or function of an organization, for instance CIMA addresses Finance & management Accounting and ACCA financial reporting and Auditing (CIMA, 2007). Different professional bodies prescribe the qualification materials (AAT, 2016) whilst with academic courses encourages more of research with institutional guided material. Academic courses are institutional based which *may* meet international best practice (Mzuza *at el.*, 2014; Kaplan and Evans, 1997) or are at variance while professional courses are regulated with specific International body (Briggs & He, 2012). One institution pursues its own assessment

criteria which differs from the rest of the world because of its vision and mission (Hanushek, 1997; Greenwald, 1996). In comparison between Academic and professional performance, Academic are usually ranked high (Benligiray and Onay,2017), since professional qualifications are believed to exercise a rigour of assessments.

Experts in the professional field ascertain that module wise pass rates varies from one module to another, depending on whether it's discursive or quantitative, with some modules recording more than 50% pass rates (ACCA, 2019) while others are below the standard (Lynch, 2019). Generally professional courses are perceived to be difficult worldwide which then requires intelligent and committed students in order to excel (Briggs & He, 2012; ACCA, 2017; Kaplan and Evans, 1997), however learners still choose professional qualifications because of their reputation, flexibility and global nature. This entails that weak or less gifted students struggle and may quiet the course along the way (Lynch, 2019) which results in low output. The criteria and the nature of the course justify the high failure rate and low pass rate across the world (Briggs & He, 2012; ACCA, 2017; BICA 2018; Lynch, 2019). Empirical evidence shows that there is no one fit all approach in order to pass (Briggs & He, 2012; Hendriks at el., 2010; Wolff, 2010; Hanushek, 1997; Greenwald, 1996). The most cited study criteria include self-study, group discussion, e-learning and traditional guided learning (Benligiray and Onay,2017; Mutsotso and Abenga, 2010; Wolff, 2010; Guloba, at el., 2010: Ali et al. 2013; Savasci &Tomul, 2013).

### 3. Methodology

A structured questionnaire was administered to 45 respondents purposively (judgmentally) sampled from institutions of higher and tertiary education in Gaborone Botswana. The target population comprises of tutors who were teaching any professional course in Botswana.

### 4. Results and Discussion

Responses from the questionnaire were analyzed as follows:

Table 1. Effective Method of teaching professional courses

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Classroom based teaching	8	17.8	17.8	17.8
	Group discussion	2	4.4	4.4	22.2
	E-learning	3	6.7	6.7	28.9
	Both classroom-based teaching and e-learning	29	64.4	64.4	93.3
	Self-study mode	3	6.7	6.7	100.0
	Total	45	100.0	100.0	

The majority of the respondents, 64% strongly believed that both classroom-based and E-learning is the most effective method of teaching professional courses while the traditional method of face to face appeared to be regarded as the second-best method. Group discussion, E- learning and self-study separately were not regarded as effective methods that enhance the pass rates. This might mean that some tuition providers are not fully supporting E-learning by providing all the ICT resources need to improve performance.

Table 2. Factors influencing performance on students

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Students negative attitude towards professional courses	35	77.8	77.8	77.8
	Transformation from paper based to computer based negatively affect the overall performance	5	11.1	11.1	88.9
	Lecturer approach does not have influence results	3	6.7	6.7	95.6
	weak entry qualifications of students will influence poor results	2	4.4	4.4	100.0
	Total	45	100.0	100.0	

From the analysis above, on factors influencing learner performance on students, this paper established that the majority of the respondents (77.8%) felt that student's negative attitude towards professional courses causes them to fail dismally while a handful (11.1%) of the respondents believed that the introduction of computer-based examinations also contributed to poor results in most institutions offering professional courses in Botswana. However, lecturer approach and entry qualification insignificantly have effects on the low performance of professional learners.

Table 3. Factors influencing learner performance

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Academic tutor teaching professional courses contribute to poor learner's performance	9	20.0	20.0	20.0
	Lack of institutional support has no effect on the pass rates	7	15.6	15.6	35.6
	Professional qualified tutors produce good results	4	8.9	8.9	44.4
	Specialisation is key to excellent results	17	37.8	37.8	82.2
	Too much lecturer load will generate poor results	8	17.8	17.8	100.0
	Total	45	100.0	100.0	

Varied factors that influence learner performance were cited by learners. The majority of the respondents (37.8%) were of the view that lecturer specialisation is key to positive results while 20% of the respondents believed that poor results was attributed to non-professional tutors teaching (17.8%). professional programme and lack of institutional support was viewed as negative influence on performance on the results.

Table 4. Overall past performance

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Qualifying learners increased	16	35.6	35.6	35.6
	An improved overall performance	4	8.9	8.9	44.4
	Module wise: Students are performing dismally	25	55.6	55.6	100.0
	Total	45	100.0	100.0	

An analysis from table 4 shows that there is no general improvement in performance of professional courses in Botswana, specifically ACCA and BICA for 2018 and 2019 years. Similarly, more than 50% of respondents alluded that learners were underperforming in individual modules and only less than half of the respondents indicates to the fact that qualifying learners (affiliates) were increasing.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper concludes that the performance of professional courses in Botswana is at stagnation and has an influence on the global pass rate. From the above discussion many reasons have been cited as feeders to overall poor performance. It is a blame game: tutors blaming learners and institutions while administrators shifted blame on the tutors. The debate is still on and inconclusive.

## 6. Recommendations

Based on this study, this paper recommends the following to inform policy and improvement of results:

1. Training providers are urged to revisit the entry requirements to professional qualifications.
2. The institutions should promote international and regional refresher courses as well as providing financial support.
3. Service providers should adopt specialisation of tutor's model. This is key to excellent results and will enhance performance for each module since tutors will be module experts.

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