

THE IMPROVEMENT PROCESS OF THE ROMANIAN EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTING SYSTEM TOWARD A GLOBAL ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT – A SHORT DESCRIPTION OF A RESEARCH PROJECT

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Through this paper we intend to disclose our actual research project focused on evaluation of the actual stage of Romanian academic accounting education in order to support the national university reform which has began in 2005. The research is meeting the international trends oriented to improve the academic process of accounting graduates. In this way, by determine a correlation degree between international trends: globalization, regionalization and the evolution of Romanian accounting system and by evaluation of the actual stage of Romanian accounting academic system from the point of view of actors involved (graduates, teachers and employers) we intend to determine the connection between the appliance of public requirements with the actual level of graduates' professional knowledge. Then we will offer constructive solutions, empiric validated, which will help the accounting graduates in their way to accounting profession. The research is interdisciplinary and its originality is give by the pioneering work performed at national level by the research team who is developing such a theoretical and practically complex approach.

Keywords: accounting education, professional development, academic education, accounting profession

An overview of the project

In recent years, at least three major factors had a significant impact on the business environment for which teachers prepare graduates: technology, globalization and the increased concentration of power among certain markets investors. In this circumstance, the future of the accounting education depends on how proactive teachers are and on the way universities can meet the necessities of the economic world's ongoing change. High trade literature (Albrecht and Sack in 2000 and 2002, Dusch and Wambsgans in 2006, Hurt in 2007, etc) reflects concerns regarding the perilous academic accounting education is. Moreover, the accounting profession's organisms (IFAC, IAAER, UNCTAD, GAE, AAA, ACCA, etc.) are demanding changes in accounting education to be made before the image of the profession will be affected.

The proposed research's topic is based both on a fundamental and applicative research. The fundamental research focuses on analyzing information by description, offering the useful instruments in order to perform analyze, launching ideas and believes. It allows, based on existing theories and concepts, to draw essential guidelines in the accounting education domain which assure the pre-requisite of the research.

The applicative research is meant to identify the actual stage of the Romanian academic accounting education concerning the accounting graduates' level of knowledge. Its results will have a great impact on verifying the hypothesis developed by fundamental research and also on identifying new problems, stages or particular cases for Romania. Using both of the research methods will contribute to establishing the connection ratio between the application of public requests and the actual level of accounting graduates' knowledge.

The transdisciplinary feature of this project is proved by involving within the research project both Romanian's professional organisms and top management of the most important audit and accounting companies. Their implication will add value to our research by bringing a practical and different vision and ideas. In this way, the hypothesis developed throughout this research will be larger. Since the subject of the research affects the public interest, the participative approach is a must.

The structure of the research underlines its' interdisciplinary feature: firstly, we are going to investigate the actual stage of the accounting curricula in relation to the requests of the professional organisms on the necessary knowledge an accounting graduate must have: accounting, finance and related knowledge, organizational and business knowledge and IT knowledge [IES 2, p.3]. Being indispensable to assure a minimum base in gaining knowledge process of the accounting graduate, these areas of knowledge will be analyzed in order to identify the degree of correlation in between at curricula level. Moreover, we will analyze other significant aspects like teaching methods, educational models, technology and the development stage of Romanian university.

Research's objectives are:

- O1: To identify the accounting education public requests made by the professional organisms and professional organizations at international, European and national level and the factors that affect them.
- O2: To determine the degree of correlation between the nowadays trend: globalization and the evolution of the Romanian academic accounting education system.
- O3: To evaluate the national academic accounting education by deeply analyzing the accounting graduate's level of knowledge.
- O4: To determine the extent to which the professional organisms' public requests are connected with the accounting graduate's level of knowledge.
- O5: To issue new pragmatic approaches and to offer constructive solutions for achieving a higher accounting graduates' level of knowledge.

The research methodology and methods used

The research methodology is based on scientific epistemology. A critical and mostly inductive research will generate the obtaining of verifiable knowledge which contributes through their value to the development of the scientific knowledge in this area. Our vision is to build new hypothesis and opinions supported by the preliminary analyze of the present knowledge and specific phenomena and to test further the validity of the hypothesis and issued opinions. The testing process for the obtained data validity will consider only scientific methods. Besides inductive research, deductive research will also play an important role in the consolidation process of the research's results.

The research methodology implies gathering all possible existing theory, concepts, ideas and opinions of high rated specialists and a comparative approach of different visions on two levels: conceptual (literature and existing regulations) and de facto (the actual stage of academic accounting education in Romania).

The first important step is represented by identifying the knowledge area in this field, which will be achieved through a harshly documentation over the most recent publications: articles in journals, governmental acts, reports, standards, recommendations issued by international and national professional organisms. The documentation process followed by observation will help us to use a comparative approach on three different levels (International, European and National) in order to identify the requests of the most active professional organisms. By offering explanations on similarities and differences observed in our effort to establish a causality relation, based only on valid theories, we can build a necessity's perimeter of academic accounting education in Romania.

The Academic accounting system (AAS) is influenced by external and internal aspects. One of the external aspects which play an important role is the globalization/regionalization process (Mathews, 2001, Hilton, 2005, Needles, 2005, Pekdemir, 2007). We will look closely at this factor in order to identify its impact on national AAS. On the other hand, AAS is influenced by the evolution of social, economic, cultural and not at least political factors. We will identify and investigate their influence using the holistic analyze because the effect of each factor's evolution is representative only if it is analyzed on the whole. The issued hypothesis will be empirically tested to reach trustable conclusions from scientific point of view.

Having the goal of evaluating the actual stage of national AAS we will apply four questionnaires in order to assess the accounting graduate's knowledge in Romania. The questionnaires which will be applied are based on those used by Steve Albrecht S and Bob Sack in 2000 and published in their remarkable study: „Charting the Course through a Perilous Future”. The reasons for using their questionnaires are as follows: they were drawn by a team of specialists whose professional probity can't be questioned; the trade literature didn't identify any doubts regarding their quality, although their study was analyzed and commented by many specialists; the questionnaire's scope is the same: to evaluate the academic accounting graduates' knowledge; the questionnaires are available at <http://aaahq.org/pubs/AESv16/index.html> with no restriction to be used. Even so, we will not use the same questionnaires' working methodology: few amendments will be considered regarding the nature and number of analyzed subjects. Moreover, some additional questions will be added in order to clarify some specific aspects. The results will be processed with SPSS 16.0 using descriptive statistics. The practical approach of the research is essential by permitting us to assess both the actual stage of the academic accounting education system and its results which will guideline our research to reach and offer practical solutions of the studied phenomena. By doing so, we can connect the theoretical research's results with those resulted from the applicative study in order to establish a correlation ratio between public requests and the actual stage of accounting graduate's knowledge. All these new results will be managed using the instruments of the inductive research. This stage of the project contributes to the reality's deep knowledge of the studied topic and permits us to identify and explain different problems or specific identified situations and phenomena. The tools used in this phase will permit us to draw scientific conclusions which will be empirically validated. Based on the achieved results and using observation and direct analyze we can identify new approaches and offer constructive solutions with the purpose of raising the performance of the Romanian academic accounting education. In order to reach the proposed objectives, the documentation process will be focused on ongoing bases and oriented to the recent journals' publications.

The originality and the novelty of the proposed research topic

It is for the first time that such a deep analyze of the actual stage of the Romanian accounting academic education is taken into consideration, with the specific purpose of bringing a contribution to its development. By proving preoccupation in improving the academic education system, this project will confer Romania a special status among the UE countries. In addition, we have to underline that none of the European country has performed a similar research. The international echo of the project will be sound, Romania becoming one of the few countries who had tried to move on to be competitive in this domain, and this way showing its preoccupation regarding the faith of accounting profession. Such complex research, approached both theoretical and practical are extremely valuable because it tests the identified subject as a whole. Since now, partial researches which focus on accounting curricula ((Malciu, 1998, Tiron si Mutiu, 2007) and accounting regulations (Diaconu, 2006) have been done, but they are not so detailed and can't offer a global picture of the Romanian academic accounting education; moreover, they can't offer a constructive solution regarding the entire system. These are the motivations that show the originality and the novelty of the proposed research topic.

The functioning chart of the consortium

The consortium comprises research teams from the most well-known Romanian universities with a long tradition in accounting education. Each research team is run by a coordinator whose election was made based on a mix of several reasons: the level of expertise, professional and scientific achievements. The coordinator is in charge to select the research team's members except one amendment: team members have to be young researchers (masters and PhD students) which can assure by their background and knowledge the research will be carried through its final stage at the highest possible standards. The teams' structure has to be revised every time it is considered to be necessary, so that therefore, the professional knowledge of the researchers which are involved can successfully assure the achieving of the research's goal.

The project will be run by teams' coordinators and by the director of the project. The administration process of the project will be done by a person who is not involved in research.

Every team is involved actively in achieving every objective, as it is shown in the table from below. Their role is a major one, the work they perform being indispensable for the proposed research project. Based on the written procedure issued by the project's director, every team has specific tasks regarding the

documentation process, obtaining and analyzing data, in order to build hypothesis and to test them. Advancing hypothesis, results interpretation and designing the conclusions will be done by the coordinators, assisted by the representatives of the Romanian professional organisms and business environment. The representatives' participation in this project will be voluntarily and no claims for any financial reward will be possible. The team's contribution is presented below according to the project's objectives:

| <i>Scientific objectives of the project</i> | <i>Team's contribution (%)</i> | | | | <i>% from total</i> |
|--|--------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| | <i>UBB</i> | <i>ASE Bucuresti</i> | <i>AI Cuza Iasi</i> | <i>UV Timisoara</i> | |
| <i>O1: To identify the accounting education public requests made by the professional organisms and professional organizations at international, European and national level</i> | 42,5 | 19,5 | 19 | 19 | 100 |
| <i>O2: To identify the accounting education public requests made by the professional organisms and professional organizations at international, European and national level and the factors that affect them</i> | 31 | 23 | 23 | 23 | 100 |
| <i>O3: To determine the extent to which the professional organisms' public requests are connected with the accounting graduate's level of knowledge</i> | 31 | 23 | 23 | 23 | 100 |
| <i>O4: To issue new pragmatic approaches and to offer constructive solutions for achieving a higher accounting graduates' level of knowledge</i> | 31 | 23 | 23 | 23 | 100 |
| <i>% on objectives</i> | 33,9 | 22,1 | 22,0 | 22,0 | 100 |

Table 1. The team's contribution according to the project's objectives

The research's results

The research's results will have a great positive impact and will represent an important milestone for the national academic education system because the result will identify new approach directions characterized by a high level of pragmatism, offer new development's solutions of the national academic educational system and allow designing new strategies whose main role will increase the performance of the accounting graduates and the prestige of Romanian accounting academic system at international level. The results of the research will constitute a reference point for future similar research both at national, regional and international level. Moreover, they will permit an ongoing analyze of the national education system's performance.

The utility of the project is claimed by the international trend that emphasize the power of academic accounting education has to increase in order to help its bigger sister: the accounting profession. The results of the research will follow this trend by proving to be a part of the effort made by international professional organizations: (IAAER, IFAC, ACCA, etc.), well known accounting and audit companies (KPMG, PricewaterhouseCoopers, etc.) and researchers (Albrecht and Sacks, 2002, Bennet 2005, Hurt, 2007, Cheng, 2007, etc.) in their way to improve the accounting educational system. Going further, our belief is that the results will be applied into practice since their existence will be circumscribed with the direct interest of the university in increasing the quality of the education process.

Our research will most definitely add value in this field because it both identifies the actual stage of national academic accounting education and offers ways to improve it, this way contributing to the development of the accounting educational strategy. We consider that a strong connection exists between the high quality of accounting profession and the high quality of the accounting education system. Because

of that, the future imagine of the accounting profession depends on the improvements made in the quality of the education system.

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