

# Reform, Perform and Transform: A mantra for imparting Accounting education through Experiential Learning.

Ms. Elizabeth Kanade  
Assistant Professor  
Head department of Accountancy  
St. Mira's College for Girls, Pune.

Jayat  
Principal Incharge  
St. Mira's College for Girls, Pune

## Abstract:

Accounting education in undergraduate colleges is generally stuck in the classroom teaching- concepts backed by numerical problems solving than focusing on the industry requirements. This necessitates gaining an insight into teaching, learning and evaluation process in order to increase the chances of employability of commerce graduates.

An Action research was conducted to reap the benefits of experiential learning through internship programme for commerce students and their willingness to undertake internships in Chartered Accountancy firms. 196 third year commerce students were surveyed to gauge their preparedness and reasons for them undertake internship. This study indicates that students are willing to undertake internship projects during their regular undergraduate programme and are willing to sharpen their skills through experiential learning which will benefit them to decide their future career options or enrol for higher education in the chosen field.

**Key words:** Accountancy Curriculum, Autonomy, Internship program and experiential learning.

## Introduction:

Changing face of education, globalisation, quality consciousness, and continuous reforms by the Universities Grants Commission (UGC), National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC), National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) has paved way for reforms in the education arena. Learner centric education, ICT enabled learning backed by experiential learning, skill development, employability of the student and academia industry partnership are the buss words. The concept of undergraduate accounting students gaining professional practical experience while studying at university is not new (Teed & Bhattacharya 2002; Thrope-Dulgarian 2008; Ali, Heang, Mohamad & Ojo 2008): as far back as 1952 "the American Accounting Association (AAA) acknowledged the benefit of a period of practical experience incorporated into the academic preparation of an accountant" (Schmutte 1986, p227). One method used to provide professional practical experience is though internship programs where students have an opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge gained through formal classroom learning in a structured environment (Swindle & Bailey 1984) which cannot be replicated in a normal class setting (Beard 1998; Beard 2007).

"Integrate academic knowledge with practical applications, improve job/career opportunities after graduation, create relevance for past and future classroom learning, develop work place social and human relations skills, and provide the opportunity for students to apply communication and problem-solving skills" (Beard 1998, p515).

This calls for a pressing need to incorporate in undergraduate education experiential learning through internships. Schmutte's findings that students undertaking internship programs are able to better "clarify their career objectives before graduating and ... can provide students with additional input to allow better informed career decisions before their graduation" (1986, p228). Internship programs allow students to



improve their career prospects (Teed & Bhattacharya 2002; Burnett 2003, Thorpe-Dulgarian 2008), take a deeper understanding of the discipline back to the classroom, and develop other profession-relevant skills such as communication and problem solving (Burnett 2003).

### Review of Literature:

American Accounting Association (1986) and Arthur Anderson & Co. (1989) suggested that without significant change to accounting education, future accountant will not receive the preparation they need to meet the emerging needs of business. Pattom and Williams (1990) recommended that the fundamental law in the accounting education and research is that it has remained static while in the era of globalisation and liberalisation the business profession has changed now. They acknowledged that accounting education is becoming increasingly irrelevant if changes are not made according to current requirement of the business organisation, employer will be compelled to turn graduates in other discipline. Boyer(1990) stated that teaching is a dynamic endeavour that must be continuously examined, critiqued and discussed. Deppe et al (1991) in their study explained that accounting education must change to meet the requirement of the changing profession of various business organisations and also suggest that accounting students must develop competencies in seven areas; communication skill, information development and distribution skill, decision making skill, knowledge of accounting, auditing, tax, knowledge of business environment, professionalism and leadership development. Flaherty and diamond (1996) indicates that accounting education programmes should prepare students to become professional, so they can develop professional skills, fundamental accounting and business knowledge and learn how to attain these different skills which could be able to meet the requirement of various business organisations.

Beard(1998)Integrated academic knowledge with practical applications, improve job/career opportunities after graduation , create relevance for past and future classroom learning, develop workplace social and human skills and provide the opportunity for students to apply communication and problem solving skills. According to Albert and Sack (2000) despite warning dating back more than decades, accounting education, overall, is still woefully inadequate. Course content and curriculum are too narrow and outdated. Pedagogy lacks creativity. To ensure that the accounting profession and accounting education do survive, accounting departments and school must engage in more discussions about teaching and curriculum. Internship programs allow students to improve their career prospects Teed & Bhattacharya (2002).

Boud & Falchikov (2007) to be prepared for workforce students need to develop their own repertoire of assessment - related practices that they will be able to use when confronted with learning challenges throughout their working lives. Beyond the construct of formal education, students need to engage in work and life as active learners, and they have to determine what is to be learned, how it is to be learned and how to judge whether they have learned it or no Boud (2007).Sin et al (2012) Learning not only teaching knowledge but also the transferable skills that can actually be transferred from the learning environment to work environment. Datt (2012) Role play is an important technique to bring things to life and make students aware of others and for assessment purposes can be either observed videoed or record. Field trips and internship brings students into the world of work and help them bring to assimilate the codes and values of the professions and communities of practices to which they aspire primordial factors such as ethnicity, customs, belief, values and religion all results are dependence to current practices Kakavalakis and Edward (2011);Tongue and Willett(2012).

### Problem Statement:

Employability of Commerce graduates by accounting firms, skill development among students and transferability of knowledge and skill from the learning environment to work environment and to assess the outcomes of a programme the student has enrolled for. In the light of these issues the paper strives to achieve the following objectives:



**Objectives of the Study:**

- To analyse the current situation of Accounting education in Commerce stream for undergraduates.
- To investigate the reasons for low rate of employability of B.Com students in accounting firms.
- To find out the corrective measures required for enhancing the skills and employability of B Com graduates.

**Research Methodology:**

This study is an action oriented research undertaken at St. Mira's College for girls, Pune, an Autonomous college. Primary data was collected from 196 third year commerce students in July-August 2018. On the basis of the survey results an action research was initiated by the department of accountancy to experiment with internships as a means towards experiential learning in the field of accountancy for undergraduate commerce students.

**Significance of study:**

The accounting education at the B. Com level transacted by educational institutions are not substantial to meet the challenges of a volatile job market. Employer seek Commerce graduates who are competent in Accounting, Auditing and Taxation knowledge, Good communication skills, expertise in MS Word, Excel, Power point, Tally and with the advent of GST knowledge of GST and its filing. Critical thinking skills, problem solving and decision making skills. A B Com graduate possesses theoretical knowledge of Accountancy, Auditing and Taxation. Due to lack of infrastructure and restricted freedom undergraduate commerce colleges are not in a position to horn in the skill sets required in the present set up. This action research study was undertaken to charter less travelled terrain and introduce in regular B Com curriculum Internships, Tally Credit Course, Certificate course in Internship and Certificate course in Goods and Services Tax which will facilitate students and prospective employers to attract right talent and generate gainful employment, thus increasing the employability of commerce graduates in Accounting firms and companies. This calls for a reform in the teaching learning and evaluation process of accounting curriculum in order to bring out a win win situation for all the stake holders.

**Analysis and Discussions:****Present Scenario of Accounting Education at Undergraduate level in Commerce Stream:**

- **Curriculum:** The curriculum shows that accounting education provided by Indian universities for imparting accounting knowledge to their student to make them able to get good job opportunities in business and industry. The accounting education curriculum of some of the schools, colleges and universities provide commerce education in India (Grover, 1998). The curriculum treats accountancy as a single course in the main stream of the commerce whereas other course likes management, law, taxation, banking, insurance, economics, organization behaviour and some other related course are also imparted. There is very less specialization in accounting course curriculum which is being offered to their students by some educational institutions in graduation level, post-graduation level as compare to the professional institutions like ICAI, ICWA and ICSI offered specialized accounting course to their students in their professional level (Khandelwal, 2000). The accounting education in India is restricted to only class room teaching as well as solving of numerical problems. This teaching technique lacks up gradation of technology in effective teaching of accounting education. The traditional system of teaching can be replaced with case studies, market survey, group assignment, audio video teaching, teaching aid through project, computerized accounting procedure so that the student of accounting education can be well versed with professional accounting system (Grover, 1998).
- **Teaching Learning and Evaluation:** Nelson (1996) explained that accounting has been taught in same manner since the beginning of the profession; therefore he recommended that it is time to re-think the way accounting is taught and to make dramatic changes. The institutes of management (IMA, 1994; 1996; 1999) in a series of projects found work ethic, analytical/ problem- solving skills,



interpersonal skills, and listening skills to be the most important knowledge, skills and abilities for work as a corporate accountant. The American Institute of Certified Public Accountant (AICPA, 2000) need core competency framework for entry into the accounting profession which supports a paradigm shift from a content driven to a skill driven accounting curriculum. They recommend and suggest that accounting education must possess functional competencies (decision making, risk analysis, measurement, reporting, research, and leveraging technology); personal competencies (professional demeanour, problem solving and decision making, interaction, leadership, communication, project management and leverage technology) and broad business competencies (strategic/ critical thinking, industry/ sector perspective, resource management, legal perspective, marketing and leverage technology).

- **Employability of Commerce graduates:** Commerce has always been regarded as one of the best academic streams in getting excellent employment opportunities. While many B.Com graduates choose the much tried and tested path of CA, CS and other related fields of study, many who are unable to make the cut for these programmes are left in a lurch with respect to employment opportunities (Carcello, et al. 1991). There are several other options, which B.Com graduates, can opt for jobs such as Accountant, Accountant Executive, Chartered Accountant, Company secretary, Cost Accountant, Finance Analyst, Finance Planner, Finance Manager, Finance Controller, Finance Consultant, Investment Analyst, Stock Broker, Portfolio Manager, Tax Auditor, Tax Consultant, Auditor, Statistician, Economist. Other than taking care of people's savings, financing projects, and extending loans and credit services, banks have diversified their activities into a range of corporate and personal financial services, and non-banking financial services including housing finance, leasing and hire purchasing, bank deposits, mutual funds, stock markets, venture capital, insurance schemes and portfolio management more or less, all the organizations have financial managers, treasurers, controller, credit manager, and other financial staff who made their financial reports for tax (Philip, K. L. 2010). One of the most promising avenues for commerce students is Insurance. With increased business activity and entry of foreign insurance companies, insurance offers lucrative opportunities for commerce students with appropriate knowledge and training. The employment opportunities in commerce fields are lucrative, both private and public organization is open for commerce graduates. Moreover, with the increasing entry of foreign banks and their aggressive marketing, job opportunities have grown significantly. For nationalized banks, most of the selection is done through the Bank Probationary Officers exams conducted by the respective Nationalized Banks (Doucet, M.S., Doucet, T.A. and Essex, P.A. 1998).

#### Reconturing Accounting teaching learning experience:

- **Stock Taking:** Academic Autonomy paved way to bring in reforms in the curriculum, flexibility, innovations in the teaching, learning and assessment process. A need was felt to bring in experiential learning while transacting the curriculum. A survey of 196 T.Y. B Com students was undertaken to gauge their views on Internships. The survey reflected the following results.

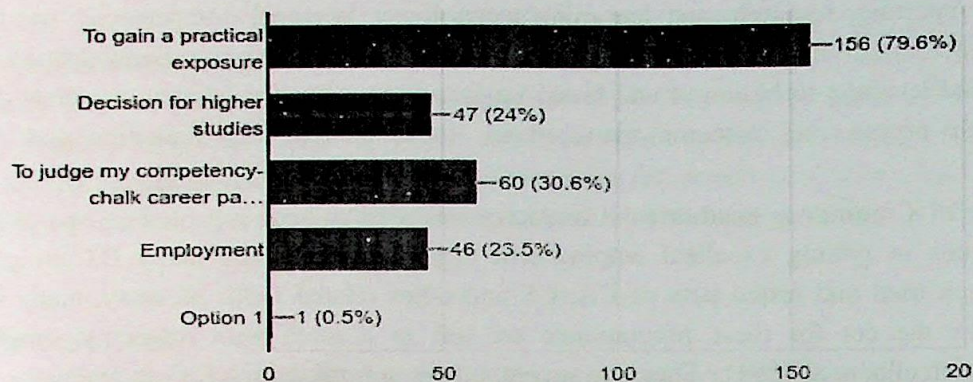




Chart1.1- Student perception about Internships

What is your idea about Internships?

196 responses

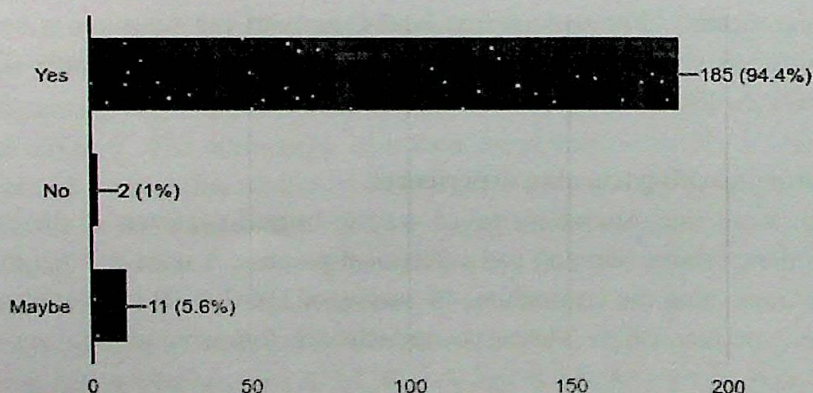


It is evident from the above survey that 79.6% students want to take up internship programme to gain practical knowledge/exposure. 60% of the students for chalk career path, whereas 47% felt the need to take up internship to facilitate them for make wise decision regarding higher studies. Seeking employment opportunities 46%.

Chart 1.2- Internships a part of CoLamerce Curriculum

Do you think Internship should be introduced for Commerce students?

196 responses



94.4% respondents felt Internships to be introduced for commerce students.

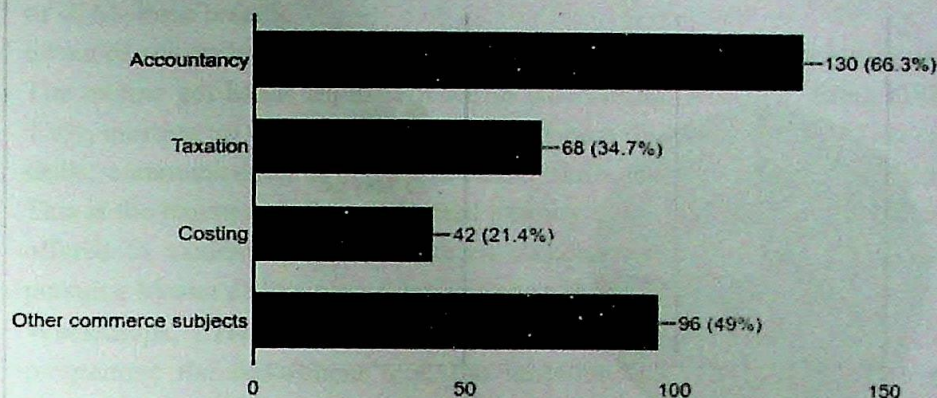




Chart 1.3- Internship preference – Accountancy domain and other commerce subjects

In which of the following areas would you like to take up an Internship?

196 responses

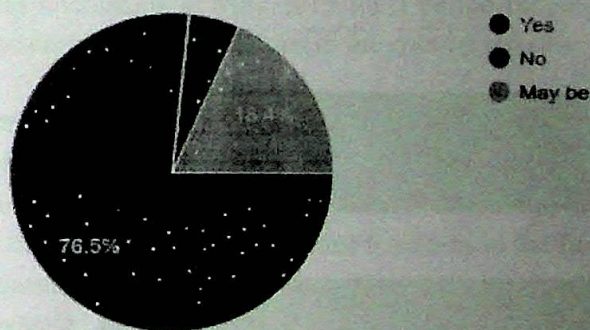


Out of 196 respondents from commerce stream students preferred to take up internships in subjects relating to Accounting domain- Accountancy, Taxation and Costing.66.3% for accountancy, 34.7% for Taxation, 21.4% for Costing vis a vis 49% for other commerce subjects.

Chart 1.4- Willing to enrol for an Internship course

Would you like to take up a course which will facilitate you to get an Internship with an Accountancy firm?

196 responses



76.5% of the respondents expressed their willingness to take up an Internship course in order to gain internship with Accountancy firm

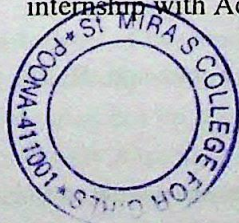
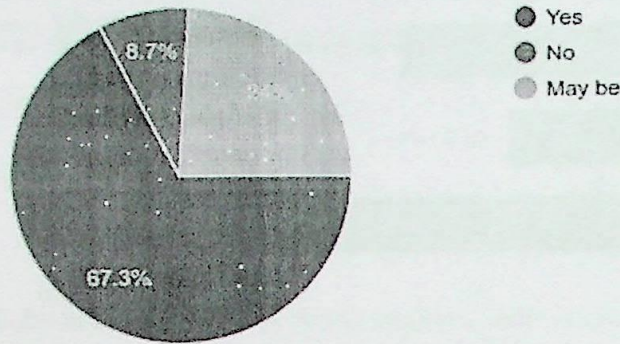




Chart 1.5- Internship Course – willing to wait after college hours.

Are you willing to wait after regular college hours for the Internship program?

196 responses

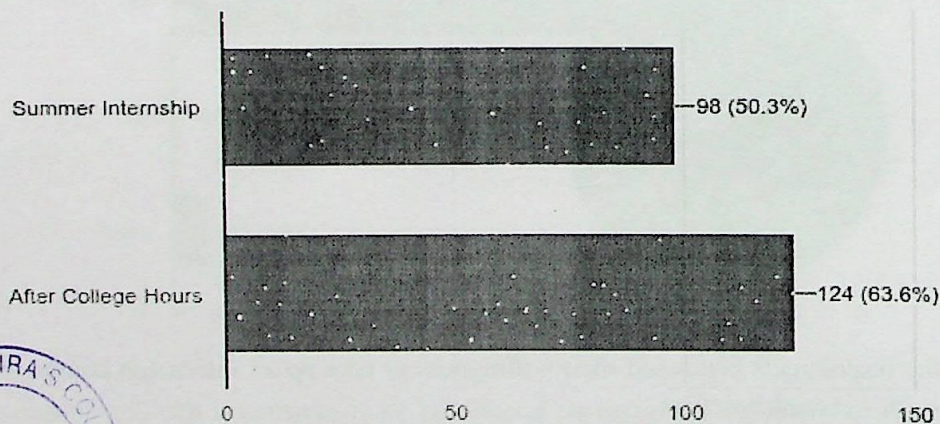


67.3% of the respondents expressed willing to wait after regular college hours to take up internship course and 24% were not sure.

Chart 1.6- Student perception about Internship timings

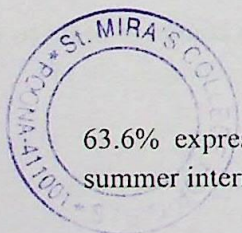
Your preference for Internship

195 responses



63.6% expressed willing to take up Internship program after college hours and 50.3% preferred summer internships.

The survey highlighted the willingness of students to enrol them for internship course and also take up internship programme with accounting firms. It also pointed out the need to incorporate practical aspects of the subject in the curriculum thus making student's corporate ready.





- **Action taken:** On the basis of the survey results the department of Accountancy drafted a curriculum for internships. This was ratified by Chartered Accountants and a decision was taken to launch this course in February- March 2019. In the mean while 46 students had enrolled for five days workshop on Goods and Services Tax organised by Savitribai Phule University in Collaboration with ICAI in July 2018. Within a span of four months students pursuing final year B Com at St. Mira's college were selected for internship programme with Chartered Accountancy firms in Pune city with the assistance of ICAI- Pune branch.

Seven of our students took up paid internships ranging from 3 months to 9 months.

The interns got hands on experience in Accounting, Auditing, filing GST returns, Accounting with Tally, meeting up with clients, cracking business deals, negotiating. This enhanced their inter personal skills, communication skills, presentation skills, decision making skills and problem solving skills. This is the beginning of an uncharted journey by an undergraduate commerce college. Internships are offered to students pursuing Chartered Accountant programme (Articleship students) and students pursuing Master of Business Administration (MBA).

- **Workshops, Credit courses and Certificate Courses:** To enrol more students for the internship programme the department took the initiative to organise workshops on career guidance, GST, Professional Ethics. Forum- a platform for dialogue and deliberation was organised which gave students a platform to come forward and discuss the latest developments in the field of accountancy, express their views on various scams and frauds which were guided by experts thus enhancing their critical thinking skills, presentation skills and public speaking and report writing skills. Credit course in Tally gave an edge to students to secure internship assignments and Goods and Services Tax Certificate course with GST return filing to be introduced in the coming academic year.
- **Cluster and Associations:** This activity of experiential learning would not have been possible without Industry Academia association. The college partnered with Chartered Accountancy firms in Pune city with the help of CA Akshai Oake and CA Rutha Chitale who were our guiding light to tie up with Chartered Accountancy firms who mentored our students.
- **The Road Ahead: Internship Project-** Eleven of Second year Bachelor of Commerce students have taken up paid internships in May 2019 for a period ranging from 3 months to 9 months. Many more students to be enrolled for internships in the coming months.

#### Recommendations:

- Making experiential learning a part of the teaching and learning process.
- An in built system in undergraduate curriculum where every student must take up internship in the chosen subject for at least 6 months in the final year of graduation.
- Continuous assessment system the evaluation and assessment of internship project may be reevaluated and grades may be assigned.
- Students undertaking internship projects may be granted extra credit.
- Strong academia and industry interface .

#### Limitations of the study:

This study was conducted in an autonomous college. The academic flexibility, assessment and evaluation system may not be applied in a non-autonomous undergraduate college. The progress of the students will be tracked only after the results and the future academic endeavours of the interns as the internship project is still on for the first batch which started in December 2018.



**Conclusion:**

The need of the hour is to incorporate experiential learning in the curriculum and also to devise an effective assessment system where internship projects undertaken may be evaluated and graded. Academia industry interface will enhance the learning process and create brighter chances for employability of commerce graduates.

**References:**

- American Accounting Association (1996) Committee on the future structure, content and scope of accounting of accounting education future accounting education :preparation for the expanding profession issues in accounting education,169-95.
- Arthur andersen &Co. Arthur Young, Coopers & Lybrand, Deloitte Haskins & Sells, Emst & Whinney, peat Marwick main & Co. price Waterhouse, Touche Ross(1989).Perspective on education :Capabilities for success in the accounting profession, New York.
- American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (2000). AICPA Core Competency Framework for Entry into the Accounting Profession. www.aicpa.org.
- Ali, A M, Heang, L T, Mohamad, R & Ojo, M 2008, 'Internship and audit expectation gap among undergraduate students in Universiti Utara Malaysia', Journal of Financial Reporting and Accounting, vol.6, no.1, pp55-74
- Beard, D F 1998, 'The status of internships: cooperative education experiences in accounting education', Journal of Accounting Education, vol.5, no.2/3, pp496-405.
- Beard, D F 2007, 'Assessment of Internship Experiences and Accounting Core Competencies', Accounting Education, vol.16, no.2, pp207-220.
- Burnett, S 2003. 'The future of accounting education: A regional perspective', Journal of Education for Business, vol.78, no.3, pp129-134.
- Carcello, J.V., J. E. Copeland, R. H., Hermanson, dan D. H. and Turner. (1991). A Public Accounting Career: The Gap Between Student Expectations and Accounting Staff Experience. Accounting Horizons, 1-11.
- Flaherty, R.E., and Diamond, M.A. (1996). Position and issue statements of the accounting education change commission, Accounting education change commission and American accounting association, Accounting education series, (13).
- Deppe, L.A., Sonderegger, E.O., Stice, JD., Clark, D.E., and Streuling, G.F.(1991). Emerging competencies for the practice of accounting. Journal of Accounting Education, 9(2), 257-90. Pattom, R.J., and Williams, D.Z. (1990). There's trouble- right here in our accounting programs: the challenges to accoring educators. Issue in Accounting Education, 5(2), 175-79.
- Daff, L. (2012). Lessons from successes in medical communication training and their applications to accounting education Accounting Education. An International Journal, 21(4), 385-406.
- Doucet, M.S., Doucet, T.A., and Essex, P.A. (1998). Competencies for the introductory accounting sequence. Journal of Accounting Education, 16(3/4), 473-96.
- Grover, R. k. (1998). Accounting education: need for professional approved by university. Indian journal of commerce, 5(1).
- Institute of Management Accountants (IMA) (1994). What Corporate America Wants in Entry-Level Accountants. Montvale, NJ. www.imanet.org
- Institute of Management Accountants (IMA) (1996). The Practice Analysis of Management Accounting. Montvale, NJ. www.imanet.org
- Institute of Management Accountants (IMA) (1999). Counting More, Counting Less. Montvale, NJ. www.imanet.org.
- Kakavelakis, K., and Edwards, T. (2011). Situated learning theory and agentic orientation: a relational sociology approach. Management Learning, 43(5), 475-494.
- Nelson, A.T. (1996). The future for accounting education: a view from the rocking chair. Journal of Accounting Education, 14(2), 245-54.



- Philip, K. L. (2010). A Theory of Reasoned Action Model of Accounting Students' Career Choice in Public Accounting Practices in the Post-Enron. J. Applied Accounting Res., 11(1), 58-73.
- Schmutte, J 1986, 'Accounting internships: the state of the art', Journal of Accounting Education, vol.4, no.1, pp227-236.
- Swindle, C B & Bailey, E R 1984, 'Determining the feasibility of an internship program in public accounting', Journal of Accounting Education, vol.2, no.1, pp155-160.
- Teed, D G & Bhattacharya, T K 2002, 'Benefits of an accounting and finance internship program to students, business organisations and universities', Journal of Accounting and Finance Research, vol.10, no.2, pp95-102.
- Thorpe-Dulgarian, T 2008, 'The impact of internships on accounting students: A Bowie State University study – 2007', The Business Review, Cambridge, vol.10, no.1, pp281-288.
- Tonge, R. and Willett, C. (2012). An audit learning experience: a pilot project through cooperation with a third sector organization. Accounting Education: An International Journal, 21(2), 171–186.

