

Thesis title

**EXPLORING FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF THE VALUE OF ADVISORY
BOARDS IN ACCOUNTING EDUCATION CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT**

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<p>This study explores faculty members' perceptions of the value of advisory boards in accounting education curriculum development. Thus, the study explores the role of advisory boards in accounting curriculum development; the composition of advisory boards; and key barriers encountered by curriculum developers and advisory boards. This study is encouraged by the fact that there are inconsistencies in the appointment of advisory committees and in the roles they play in curriculum development, even though the University of Technology (UoT) has issued a clear policy directive on the appointment of academic advisory committees to ensure that the learning programs they support are of outstanding quality, professionally relevant, and aligned with the latest developments and technologies in use in the professions, businesses, and industries graduates will enter. The study follows a qualitative research method to gain information about the perceptions of HoDs, advisory board members, academic managers, and alumni/graduates of the role of the advisory board on maintaining curriculum relevance in UoT's Faculty of Economics and Finance. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from the participants. The study was limited to respondents associated with the UoT, and the results could be used to improve the practical effectiveness of advisory boards in the university, and to assess (and improve) the current policy on advisory boards based on the perceptions of the research participants. The findings could enhance the role and use of advisory boards in the Faculty of Economics and Finance at UoT.</p>	
Keywords: Advisory boards, curriculum, accounting education, university, graduate attributes	

Abbreviation

UoT: University of Technology

HH: Haaga-Helia

HoD: Head of Department

HEDS-RICH-REC: Higher Education Development and Support, Research and Innovation
Committee, Research Ethics Committee

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

In the last decade the University of Technology (UoT) has adopted a policy on advisory boards to facilitate transformation of the curriculum and to provide expert advice on teaching the transformed curriculum, and to assess its impact on students' learning experiences. Schwartz and Fogg (1985) define the advisory board/committee as a group of individuals who are appointed to provide advice and guidance to the academic management team on specific issues affecting the curriculum. The board/committee is generally made up of individuals from different areas of expertise who can offer a range of perspectives and insights on the issues faced by the departments. Advisory boards appointed by the UoT's Faculty of Economics and Finance have achieved significant compliance with the university's policy, supporting the need to maintain curriculum relevance, and implement work integrated learning, improve teaching and learning quality, and to contribute to improving the programs' standards so that accreditation with professional bodies is achieved/maintained. Taken together, advisory boards have had to provide support in a variety of areas where their specific skill set of leadership (Kearns, 2019) is able to assist the faculty to reposition, reinvent and rescale its teaching plans and strategies (Kilcrease, 2011; Mello, 2019). For context, the academic programs and teaching efforts have frequently been affected by unusual internal events (including violent student protests on campus), and external events (Beetham & Sharpe, 2019). Thus, these events required that the advisory boards advise and support the faculty in its efforts to deliver quality education (Kilcrease, 2011; Mello, 2019) in spite of the turmoil. Advisory boards support the education programme (McPeak, 2012; Gabbin et al., 2020; Albring & Elder, 2020; Berikol & Killi, 2021) through the identification of research opportunities (Kilcrease, 2011) and the maintenance of a community engagement programme (Boadi & Osarfo, 2019). Ultimately, the intention behind having advisory boards is to further advance academic standards and to support the quality of the programs (McPeak, 2012; Gabbin et al., 2020; Albring & Elder, 2020; Berikol & Killi, 2021).

The value of the role played by the advisory boards has often been underestimated, and critics have also contrasted boards' involvement with that of private individuals and public, professional

bodies in the management of teaching and curriculum development (Kilcrease, 2011; Zahra et al., 2011). According to Kilcrease (2011), advisory boards can provide new and effective insights into how academic programs can be brought about. The fact is that advisory boards influence the subjects' vocabulary (ensuring academia keeps its terminology accessible to professional practitioners), and this has led to the development of useful teaching terminologies. Many advisory board propositions do not really make changes the university policies, but through simplification, they enable multiple teaching and learning methodologies to be unified into a single useful process. This study then, explores the value of advisory boards specifically in accounting education at the UoT.

The literature on advisory boards in accounting education makes use of a variety of overlapping/interchangeable concepts (for example, see Gabbin, 2002; Kilcrease, 2011; McPeak, 2012; Gabbin et al., 2020; Albring & Elder, 2020; Berikol & Killi, 2021). And 'advisory boards' has become one of the most popular catchwords and research topics in the academic space. As with any term shared by a variety of authors from multiple academic disciplines, as well as being part of everyday language, 'advisory boards', as a term, is a concept overloaded by multiple definitions and contexts, trying to prescribe how the term should be used. The main thrust of the literature's research on advisory boards has been that they are a source of advice and support that is directed at building teaching and learning capacity. Yet, in researching this topic, the current study has found very little literature that specifically explores the value of advisory boards in accounting education and little in the way of explicit definitions of 'advice' and 'support' in the description. However, it can be safely said, with respect to advisory boards, that the 'advice' and 'support' they offer should be in the explanation of and motivation for curriculum development.

Curriculum debates have arisen in the major institutions as a response to aspects of discussions on the impact of societal development on academia (Yastrebov, 2016). Such debates have focused primarily on the form of professional advancement (Reid, 2013); career development (Healy et al., 2020); societal influence (Wrigley, 2018); technological change (Erstad and Voogt, 2018); field of knowledge (O'Connor, 2022); and commitment to specialized education (Sant, 2019). All these issues are still parts of a problem commonly connected with curriculum development, and particularly in the universities of technology. However, Willcocks (2017) states that this is not justified, because the curriculum should be used as a vehicle to empower students and graduates with the necessary proficiency, attitudes, and values to aid them in personal and career advancement. Thus, it should be seen as mandatory (not debatable) that a curriculum

meets societal expectations for sustainable development. It is generally accepted that advisory boards in the field of accountancy remain the 'movers and shakers' of accountancy curriculum development, always motivating for greater change/responsiveness to society's needs. Arguably, the movers and shakers of curriculum development are not always inside the classroom but are nevertheless still connected to an educational institution.

Historically, the role of advisory boards has frequently been ignored in curriculum debates and less formal discussions. However, times have changed, and the impact of external voices is now appreciated and recognised as a pertinent source of members for advisory boards and panels. The universities of technology now recognize that, to prepare their students and graduates for easier assimilation into the job market, and for their being better able to demonstrate expected graduate attributes, the advisory roles of the professional bodies are more important than the universities' internal policies on curriculum development. Thus, advisory bodies are beginning to realize their potential, and are playing an important role in curriculum design, standards setting, establishing networks for professionals to meet and discuss their field of expertise with faculty members and students, and to develop/issue a code of conduct to guide professional behaviors.

Through this involvement graduate attributes, insights and skills are extended, and the labor market is more likely to pay attention to/employ graduates from such universities of technology. In today's world of employment, employers are interested in recruiting graduates who can show a higher work ethic, and already possess a greater repertoire of skills than the 'normally' academically qualified graduates. Although Harms (1974) describes teachers as change agents in curriculum design and implementation, professional bodies are responsible for curriculum management and that significantly affects how the qualification program impacts the labor market with respect to the desired attributes of their graduates.

One of the simplest and most effective ways of getting advisory boards to participate in curriculum development is simply to take every opportunity to talk. Whether the onus is on curriculum designers in the field to initiate the conversations, or that the responsibility rests with board members is not particularly relevant here: it remains an obvious starting point to get excellent advice from the advisory board. Supporting this idea, Kilcrease (2011) conducted a study on faculty perceptions of business advisory boards, and the challenges of making use of their services. Kilcrease surveyed 1600 business faculty members about their experiences of advisory boards. The findings reveal that faculties are not directly participating in the activities of advisory

boards, and some do not even attend advisory board meetings, not even to simply listen to the board members' contributions.

1.2 Research Problem

Despite there being a clear policy directive at UoT on the need to appoint academic advisory committees to ensure that learning programs are of outstanding quality, relevant, and aligned to the latest developments and technologies in the profession, business, and/or industry (TUT, 2008; and TUT, 2022), there are still some inconsistencies in the appointment of advisory committees and in defining the role to be played in curriculum development. Scholars such as Kilcrease (2011), Zahra et al., (2011), Boadi and Osarfo (2019), García-Meca (2019), and Abeysekera (2015) continue to argue that the role of advisory boards in curriculum development remains limited. That said, there are substantial gaps in the current knowledge base about how academic advisory boards function (Milman, 2017). One such gap is as a result of the board members' low participation in curriculum development (Van Hoof et al., 2017). In theoretical terms, advisory committees exist as a symbolic structure to ensure that learning programs are relevant to future workplaces. Although the existing policy on advisory boards provides key functional activities, with significant guidance in guiding curriculum changes and program development, the current study sought to understand the perceptions of the HoDs, subject coordinators/lecturers, advisory board members, student house committees, curriculum designers and alumni/graduates about how well advisory boards complete their tasks. As all the faculty's departments have now appointed advisory boards, the key research question is this: How do departments view advisory boards' usefulness in [ensuring the relevance of] the accounting education curriculum?

This study's contribution is that it builds on the more recently published studies in the field of accounting education in South African universities. Although a few studies have examined the role of advisory boards in accounting education (see, Gabbin, 2002; Kilcrease, 2011; McPeak, 2012; Gabbin et al., 2020; Albring & Elder, 2020; Berikol & Killi, 2021), the focus on the value of advisory boards in accounting education curriculum development in South African universities has been muted at best. Thus, this study provides additional insight into the types of input which could be contributed by the advisory boards. Advisory boards have been constituted so as to be able to tap into private individuals' and senior public sector officials' current knowledge of the discipline, and thus to provide direction on curriculum development, and by bringing with them new terminologies to explain new ways of teaching and learning. This research differs from

previous studies in that it starts by identifying the gaps in the literature and the current practices which affect expectations of the role of advisory boards within the Faculty of Economics and Finance at the UoT. In addition, the research identifies how the current practice deviates from the university's policy on advisory boards. In doing so, the study draws strongly on the work of Kilcrease (2011), who quantitatively surveyed over 1,600 business studies' advisory boards and found that faculty members did not attend advisory board meetings, nor did they value the contributions and potential importance of advisory boards for their faculties.

There are very few published studies that have attempted to illustrate the role of advisory boards in the development of the accounting curriculum. Those few recent studies have used quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies in the study of academic advisory boards. These studies reveal that advisory boards primarily address risk management and curriculum content (Query, 2018), and that advisory boards have been able to improve accreditation standards and quality management (Richards et al., 2019).

The research shows advisory boards are usually asked to advise on curriculum content, to ensure that accounting graduates possess the skills needed by the market (Kilcrease, 2011; Zahra et al., 2011; Dewua & Barghatht', 2019; Snead et al., 2019; Gabbin et al., 2020; Albring & Elder, 2020; Berikol & Killi, 2021), and that advisory boards should therefore interact with curriculum committees and participate in faculty meetings (Norman & Bagranoff, 2019; Kilcrease, 2011). Thus, while these studies provide useful information on the key attributes desired of advisory boards, there may be other tasks and types of input that advisory boards could provide to positively influence curriculum development in the faculty.

Constructing a viable and pertinent curriculum is not a straightforward activity. It needs a broader perspective that can best be provided by involving a variety of stakeholders. According to Albrecht et al., (1994), university accounting programs have failed to recognize the extensive changes taking place in the outside world, largely brought about by new technology, changing societal values and government policies, and advancements in business practices and structures. As a result, current curricula do not address numerous skills and competencies that industry now believes should be taught in university accounting programs. Bonk and Smith (1998) identified the need for accounting departments to include higher order thinking skills in their curricula. A higher order thinking skill is referred to as something that is subject to lifelong learning, in that

new knowledge and skills necessary for successful adaptation to a changing world are continuously acquired throughout life (Forster, 2004).

Accountancy departments in some of the universities of technology in South Africa have established an effective relationship with their advisory boards. However, others are still struggling with the establishment of workable relationships (Imperial, 2005); the issue of the relatively low skill sets of members of advisory boards (Feld, 2002), and the challenge of attracting knowledgeable board members who are willing to give/donate their time (Yee, 2020) and knowledge to education (Rebele and Pierre, 2019), due to their 'day job' work commitments.

Tapis and Delaney (2017) remark that there is an existing gap between what academics deem necessary and appropriate to teach, and what skills practitioners require of their newly graduated employees: thus, the gap appears to be between the development of the curriculum (and the teaching of that curriculum) and what practitioners need/expect from recently graduated employees. This gap means that those who develop the curriculum are generally separate from those who employ the people who have been trained/educated according to the curriculum. According to Doyle (1992), the gap is seen as a separation of curriculum and teaching on one hand, from the required skillset of newly employed graduates. Graves (2021) warns curriculum developers to "mind the gap". Justifying this view, Tapis and Delaney (2017) observed that practitioners are dismissive of the current academic approach to curriculum development, and requested that advisory boards bridge the gap by advising and supporting the development of curriculum.

By inviting professional bodies (as representatives of industry) to participate in curriculum development ensures that graduates have abilities that fit the market demands (Trung, 2016). The recent relatively uncontrolled implementation of curriculum changes, without the input or approval of professional bodies, almost inevitably has had a negative impact on graduates' suitability for the job market. These professional bodies are therefore interested in, and essential for shaping key developments of the curriculum to meet industry's needs. Thus, for a curriculum to be successfully developed and implemented it needs professionals to oversee its compatibility with market needs.

1.3 Research Questions

In the light of the above discussion, this study aims to contribute to understanding the role of advisory boards by exploring faculty perceptions of the value of advisory boards in accounting education curriculum development.

The research questions were organized to explore three main areas:

- *RQ 1:* How do participants perceive the role of advisory boards in accounting curriculum development?
- *RQ 2:* What is the composition of advisory boards in the faculty?
- *RQ 3:* What are the challenges of the curriculum development in the faculty?

The responses to the above research questions were collected through electronic interviews (e-interviews) with the participants, the overall objective being to explore their perceptions of the value of advisory boards in accounting education curriculum development.

1.4 Aim of the Study

This study aims to explore faculty perceptions of the value of advisory boards in the development of the accounting education curriculum.

1.4.1 Objectives of the study

The specific research objectives to support the main aim of the study are:

- to determine the role of advisory boards in accounting curriculum development.
- to establish/determine the composition of advisory boards.
- to identify key barriers faced by curriculum developers and advisory boards.

1.4.2 *Rationale for the study*

This qualitative case study is important and needed for several reasons. Firstly, there is an existing gap in the literature: the perceptions HoDs, academic managers, lecturers, advisory board members, and alumni/graduates are not coherent in that there is not a uniform understanding of the value of advisory boards in curriculum development. The available literature has only focused on the role of advisory boards in curriculum development by studying the composition of the boards. In the main, such literature has been mainly focused on quantitative research. The current study therefore aims to explore the other side of the process, the faculty members' perceptions of the value of advisory boards in the accounting education curriculum development process.

Secondly, the study has made use of focused qualitative findings to gain an in-depth understanding of the faculty perceptions of how the advisory boards are used to improve the accounting curriculum. This study was conducted at the University of Technology, and focused on those programs falling under the Faculty of Economics and Finance at the UoT. The faculty uses the UoT's approved policy on the formation of academic advisory committees; however, the implementation of the policy throughout the faculty is not uniform regarding composition/membership of the committees, and neither are the roles of the advisory committees equivalent.

Lastly, the study provides base-line information for future researchers who wish to study the developing roles of academic advisory boards in accounting education and curriculum development.

1.5 **Outline of Thesis**

This thesis is divided into five chapters.

Chapter 1 provides a brief introduction to the study, presents the research problem, research objectives, and the rationale for the study, and finally, the rationale for using a qualitative research method.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the recent literature on the topic.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology followed. This is followed by an outline of the process of data collection, how data is analyzed, and the trustworthiness of the study data; and it confirms its compliance with UoT's research ethical procedures.

Chapter 4 presents the results of the case study. The identification of the themes and development of the categories of data is then described and linked with the literature.

Chapter 5 presents the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the data, and recommendations emerging therefrom. This chapter concludes with an outline of the implications of the study for academia and the profession, and suggests further research possibilities.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

A literature review was conducted to review recent research in the areas of the role of advisory boards; the characteristics of representation on advisory boards; and key barriers experienced by curriculum developers.

2.2 Role of Advisory Boards

Snead et al., (2019) recognise that accounting advisory boards play a role in commenting on the potential topics and pedagogical approaches to be used in the programme. In Kilcrease's (2011) view, the role of advisory boards is to share experiences that are pertinent to specific academic areas of curriculum and programme development. In sharing their experiences, Conroy et al., (1996) point out that advisory boards provide value through their advice on curriculum matters. Kaupins and Coco (2002) also observed that advisory boards are required to discuss curriculum issues, and to pursue ideas to promote programme accreditation. Zahra et al., (2011) conducted a study on academic advisory boards' contributions to education and learning, reviewing 31 academic advisory boards. The study recommends that specific attention should be given to teaching orientation, content, and the approach adopted by the entrepreneurship programme. Additionally, boards should assist in gauging student learning processes, identifying obstacles to board contributions, and ensuring appropriate emphasis is given to teaching the skills students will need in the profession.

Genheimer and Shehab (2009) also surveyed 90 industry advisory board members responsible for the operation and effectiveness of an engineering education programme. Their study found that effective boards have a clear understanding of their role in influencing curriculum development, motivating for engagement with students, programme accreditation, and encouraging alumni to contribute financial support to the program. Benigni et al., (2011) agree that universities must look externally for resources that will assist them with preparing students for recruitment into employment, and advise programme administrators on how to

introduce/include best practices into the curriculum. Arlinghaus (2007) states that advisory boards in accounting have a key role to play in ensuring that programs teach to business and industry standards. For example, Baker et al., (2007) studied the best practices of accounting department advisory boards, by conducting a survey of the chairs of accounting departments. Their findings reveal that in this instance, the accounting curriculum is endorsed and approved by the advisory board. This means that the boards have been given a key role in curriculum review, strategic planning, and providing internship opportunities for students. Baker et al., (2007) believe that advisory boards should be made up of alumni, and Hunt et al., (2017) too, expressed the view that advisory boards are successful when alumni are involved as members. Courtney et al., (2021) state that the composition of advisory boards should include professionals with expertise relevant to the education organization and the industry. Additionally, these professionals should be highly motivated to give their time, energy, and talents to providing coherent advice and support to the faculty (Baker et al., 2007; Hunt et al., 2017).

2.3 Composition of Advisory Boards

According to Boadi and Osarfo (2019), the composition of the board should reflect the diversity within society (involving people of different genders, race, and educational backgrounds), and have a diversity of educational, business and professional qualifications. An advisory board is a representative group of individuals whose experience and abilities represent a cross-section of those required in a particular occupation or profession (Kilcrease, 2011). The purpose of the advisory board is to assist academics in developing and evaluating their academic programs to ensure they serve the needs of students, business, and industry, and to provide expertise and guidance pertaining to technological changes in the field (TUT, 2008). Stensaker et al., (2021) state that advisory boards are established to be consulted on issues of importance to maintaining curriculum relevance. Kolev et al., (2019) mention that advisory boards should include specialist sub-committees responsible for performing critical functions for the advisory boards. Linked to this is the idea that program advisory committees should ensure they provide meaningful contributions to improving the quality of outcomes and employability of graduates (TUT, 2017). Thus, the composition of the advisory boards has the potential to deliver a significantly positive effect on the development of the curriculum, and the employability of the students. Enache and García-Meca (2019) studied the composition of the advisory boards in accounting and recommended that the advisory boards should be made up of outside directors (non-faculty), and appointed for the appropriateness of their skills, abilities, connections, and knowledge in the

industries they are working in. They could equally be drawn from the ranks of business experts, support specialists, and influential/respected community leaders.

2.4 Key barriers faced by curriculum developers and advisory boards

According to Correa Ruiz (2013), it is not enough to simply add new techniques into their professional curricula without enabling accountants to critically examine the ways of thinking and the impact of the techniques that have contributed to society's sustainability. At the UoT, the accounting curriculum, and its application through teaching and learning, is being shaped in accordance with the TUT Transformation Framework 2017: a key focus of this Framework is understanding what it means to be a student, and what role higher education is to play in society (TUT, 2017). Abeysekera (2015) recognizes that in accounting education there are several challenges, not least of which is the decision on which instructional methods to adopt to facilitate student learning. As Bonk and Smith (1998) point out, the consultative model of teaching can meet these challenges.

The accounting curriculum should be built/developed to produce graduates who are better-equipped to enter the job market (Heang et al., (2019). Illustrating this, Dehghani and Pakmehr (2011) studied challenges of curriculum implementation in higher education in interviews with 184 academic managers in the universities of West-Azerbaijan. Their findings revealed that their curriculums did not include managerial competencies, and that the existing curriculum problems faced by these universities did not stem from managerial regulations, but from curriculum implementation. To resolve curriculum challenges (the disconnects with the job market their graduates are about to enter), Correa Ruiz (2013) suggests that the curriculum should also give accountants a comprehensive appreciation of business models, organizational core values, governance risks, and sustainability perspectives. Thus, the accounting curriculum should prepare accounting students for a career in accounting (Dewua & Barghath', 2019).

In order to facilitate this, advisory boards should be consulted by academic departments and curriculum designers for advice on new developments in accounting, and in the business world in general, so as to ensure their graduates have the skills that guarantee employability. In other words, making use of advisory board members' connections with the fast-changing business sector will facilitate more effective transfer of knowledge of the sophisticated technological skills future accountants will require.

2.5 Summary of the Chapter

The major thrust of this thesis has been to explore faculty perceptions of the value of advisory boards in the development of the accounting education curriculum. Guided by the key research questions, the literature presented in this chapter presents the picture of very deeply immersed researchers who have produced widely researched work about the role of advisory boards; the characteristics that should be represented on advisory boards; and key barriers faced by curriculum developers across multiple universities' accounting curriculums. The literature shows that while there has been much research and discussion conducted on accounting curriculums, and the composition and duties of advisory board committees, there remains a lack of consensus on key elements of such boards' identity. The main purpose of the literature chapter was thus to review the work reflected in previous studies on knowledge sharing with respect to the role of advisory boards/committees on curriculum development.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methods and materials used to explore faculty perceptions of the value of advisory boards in developing the accounting education curriculum. The chapter specifically addresses the research paradigm, research design, case study research methodology, population and sampling techniques, data collection and data analysis. This study is based on a qualitative research methodology, in a case study research approach, and is informed by an interpretivism research design/paradigm.

3.2 Research Paradigm

This study uses the interpretivist research paradigm. Interpretivists assume that access to reality happens through social constructions, and that reality is subjective (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). According to Nicotera (2019), the interpretivist paradigm assumes that social reality lives internally through human interaction. From the interpretivist point of view, language and personal interpretations play important roles in society, and are essential to interpreting the meaning of data that can be collected around a phenomenon (Curry, 2020; Bevir & Hall, 2020; Jakubik, 2021). Kennedy (2019) states that the interpretivist paradigm fits well with the qualitative research approach. Therefore, it is through the interpretivist paradigm that this study explores faculty perceptions of the value of advisory boards in the accounting education curriculum at the University of Technology.

3.3 Research Methodology

According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), a research methodology provides a strategy by which the researcher can plot out a systemic process to understand a phenomenon. Research methodology simply refers to a research study's strategies and how they are applied practically (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). There are three broad approaches to research, namely: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. This study adopted a qualitative research method. According to Harrison et al., (2020), qualitative research can be characterized as the simultaneous study of

many aspects of a phenomenon, and the attempt to study things as they exist naturally. This approach uses inductive reasoning (Pope & Mays, 2020). Kuckartz and Rädiker (2023) acknowledge that inductive reasoning in research requires a logical thinking process that integrates observations with experiential information, and that enables one to draw a conclusion. Therefore, by using a qualitative research strategy, this study explores faculty perceptions of the value of advisory boards in developing the accounting education curriculum at the University of Technology.

An example of a current topic of debate/issue impacting students and future graduates is how to address IFRS. As Clay (2013) suggests in his qualitative analysis of an accounting curriculum, for accounting educators to be effective in addressing current issues in the classroom they need to be knowledgeable with respect to the contents and application of IFRS, and to have determined the best way to include these standards in the accounting curriculum. Similarly, in an earlier study by Larson and Brady (2009), they advise that accounting educators need to plan how to incorporate IFRS into their accounting courses. Van Noy et al., (2012) use a qualitative research approach to reach the conclusion key to curriculum development is the need to achieve programme alignment with the real-world students will shortly enter: thus, effective curriculum development requires prescription, information quality, and actively seeking advice on program development.

3.4 Case Study Research

Case study methodology enables researchers to conduct an in-depth exploration of one or more individuals' programs, events, activities, and processes (Priya, 2021). Yin (2009) describes a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context. Case study research methods are commonly used in social, educational, clinical, and business research (Dul & Hak, 2007; Yin, 2011). A good case study should provide new insights into the subject (Gerring, 2004); propose practical courses of action to resolve a problem (Flyvbjerg, 2006); and/or open new directions for future research (Beverland & Lindgreen, 2010). Making use of a case study research methodology, this study explores the characteristics, meanings, and implications of faculty members' perceptions of the value of advisory boards in developing the accounting education curriculum in the Faculty of Economics and Finance of the University of Technology in South Africa.

3.5 Population of the study

The population of the study was purposively identified, and the sample was selected based on the participants' level of knowledge and understanding of the subject. 'Population' refers to the total of all participants who could give information on the matter that is being reviewed (Babbie, 2020). The population consisted of 41 individuals (listed in Table 3.1) from the faculty of Economics and Finance at the UoT. From this population a sample of 10 participants was invited to participate in the study. These participants were selected from various environments within the faculty, and include the HoDs, academic managers, advisory committee members, and alumni/graduates (see Table 3.1). The rationale for using purposive sampling was that the listed participants met the criteria for the study – were familiar with the curriculum and with the accounting environment. Sampling is a process by which a part of a population is identified as able to represent the whole population (Gill, 2020). Choosing a suitable sample size in qualitative research "is an area of conceptual debate and practical uncertainty" (Vasileiou et al., 2018). For example, Creswell (2002) recommends a minimum sample size of between 3 and 5 members in a case study using qualitative research methods, to reach data saturation, while Stake (2006) recommends researchers conduct between 4 and 10 interviews with participants to achieve data saturation. This researcher purposively selected 10 respondents whose knowledge and responsibilities fitted the outlined criteria for this research study. The criteria were: alignment with the problem statement and the aim of the study, and familiarity with the topics addressed by the research questions. The chosen respondents received invitation letters to participate in the study and consent forms, to be signed and returned with their confirmation of intention to participate.

Table 3.1: Population and sampling

#	Group of respondents	Population	Sample	Reason for inclusion
1	Heads of Departments (The faculty has 5 academic departments)	5	5	A minimum of 5 respondents was deemed sufficient to provide an understanding of the value of advisory boards in accounting education and the curriculum renewal processes. (This was also the minimum number deemed necessary to get data saturation.)
2	Academic managers	2	1	A minimum of 1 respondent was deemed sufficient. These members are responsible for the inputs into accountancy and curriculum renewal agendas.

				These managers both have knowledge of the type of learning content that should be included in the curriculum.
3	Advisory board members	10	2	A minimum of 2 respondent was deemed sufficient. These members are responsible for the board's inputs into the accountancy curriculum revision process.
4	Alumni/graduates	5	2	A minimum of 1 respondent was deemed sufficient to provide input as to the value of advisory boards in accounting education.
	Total number of population and sample size	41	10	

3.6 Data collection technique

The qualitative data collection methods that researchers choose depend on the specific needs of their qualitative inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Data collection is simply the process of gathering information from all relevant sources prior to finding a solution to the research problem (Gill et al., 2008) and addressing a specific subject. The data collection component of research is common to all fields of study, including physical and social sciences (Mayer, 2015), humanities (Flick, 2018), and business (Adams et al., 2014). According to Guest et al., (2013), data collection methods are simply the techniques and procedures used to gather information for research purposes. Data can be qualitative (meaning contextual in nature), or quantitative (meaning numeric in nature) (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Barrett & Twycross, 2018). An interview is an important qualitative data collection method used for extracting more detailed information about, or to achieve a deep understanding (Rowley, 2012) of the research topic. This study used interviews as the only method to collect data. While recognizing that semi-structured (or unstructured) interviews and/or focus groups are two of the most popular qualitative methods, and that they are usually conducted in face-to-face settings, the face-to-face aspect was not possible as the participants were geographically widely spread and there was insufficient time to visit each participant in person.

3.6.1 *e-Interviews*

According to Fritz and Vandermause (2018), in-depth e-interviews are meaningful and useful use when respondents are geographically dispersed. Due to the nature of their work and their busy work schedules, using email seemed the most appropriate way to approach respondents if the research was to achieve the desired deeper understanding of faculty perceptions on the value of advisory boards in accounting education curriculum development. Thus, qualitative e-interview was the preferred method to collect primary data for this research.

In qualitative methodology the e-interview is usually seen as being flexible (Bampton et al., 2013; Bauman, 2015). Online interviewing is another qualitative research method (Olivero & Lunt, 2004), “using a wide range of synchronous and asynchronous technologies for interviews” (Janghorban et al., 2014). Busher and James (2009) see electronic interviews as a form of data collection which continues to gain trust with interviewees, and is thus as an important data collection option. Cotton (2015) states that, if it is not possible to do interviews in person, it is strongly recommended to do e-interviews to collect data. The use of email to conduct interviews is thought to be an effective way to collect qualitative data (Fritz & Vandermause, 2018), and it is also recognized as an effective cost saving method (Hawkins, 2018). Given that interviews can be conducted in a variety of different forms (for example, by telephone or online methods), it was the researcher’s choice to conduct interviews via email, as opposed to conducting face-to-face interviews.

There are different approaches to qualitative interviews – they can be unstructured, semi-structured and formally structured in design. With the unstructured interview, the researcher might start the conversation with a question, while the semi-structured interview allows the researcher to follow a checklist of topics and questions that need to be covered, and guide the conversation accordingly. The aim of this study is to explore perceptions on the value of advisory boards to the faculties involved in accounting education curriculum development. Thus, this research benefits from the use of a qualitative study approach using semi-structured interviews, as this allowed flexibility in responses and data collection. This method provided the researcher with the opportunity to ask respondents (HoDs, subject coordinators, advisory committee members, and alumni/graduates) about the topic, and to pose certain probing questions related to the topic, for amplification of their responses. The semi-structured interviews also allowed the researcher to

manage the order of the questions (when additional clarification was required) and to ask the probing questions. The semi-structured interviews were guided by the following key questions.

3.6.2 Primary research questions

The research questions were organized to explore three main areas:

Role of advisory boards

- RQ1: How do participants perceive the role of advisory boards in the accounting curriculum development?

Composition of advisory boards

- RQ2: What is the composition of advisory boards in the faculty?

Challenges of the curriculum in the faculty

- RQ3: What are the challenges of the curriculum development in the faculty?

For detailed interview procedures see Annexure 1, which contains the interview questions used for the data collection. The interview questions were emailed to all 10 of the intended respondents, and their responses were received within eight (8) days. A 100% response rate was achieved.

3.7 Data analysis technique

The main purpose of data analysis is to draw conclusions from specific data (Wickham & Wickham, 2016; Lemon & Hayes, 2020), and to interpret these conclusions/results (Adu, 2019; Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Qualitative data analysis involves labor-intensive, in-depth processes (Adu, 2019; Lester et al., 2020; Lemon & Hayes, 2020). It deals with data from interview transcripts, notes, and text documents (Wickham & Wickham, 2016; Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Qualitative data analysis requires data preparation and arrangement (Adu, 2019), review and exploration of data (Lester et al., 2020), and creation of codes that are subsequently linked to specific themes (Linneberg and Korsgaard, 2019), and finally, the presentation of the themes in a cohesive narrative manner (Lochmiller, 2021). Qualitative data analysis is inductive, and focuses on meaning (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2021). Hwang (2008) states that utilizing qualitative data analysis software (such as Atlas.ti) is important and useful, but is not a prerequisite for

undertaking qualitative analysis. There is a range of programs available that assist the qualitative researcher in analyzing qualitative data, including Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS) and NVivo, in addition to Atlas.ti. This type of software supports the coding of data and the identification of themes and patterns. Bazeley (2009) mentions that the identification of significant themes and patterns requires skill if qualitative data analysis is to be successfully used. One way of analyzing data is to sort it (Ruona, 2005). Thereafter, theme identification is one of the most fundamental tasks in qualitative research (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

3.7.1 Data Coding

According to Elliott (2018), coding is a way of indexing or mapping data to provide an overview of different categories/classes of data: this then allows the researcher to make sense of the data in relation to the research questions. Basit (2003) adds that coding is one of the significant steps to organize and make sense of textual data, and it can be done manually or electronically. Manual coding requires researchers to read through all the data and to develop and manually assign codes and themes to ideas and phrases (Wicks, 2017; Saldaña, 2021). The researcher used manual coding in this research, analyzing the response text line-by-line, inserting comments as appropriate. This process allowed the researcher to identify the important/significant lines and to make notes regarding the text data he would likely be quoting in this report. Saldaña (2021) is of the view that data coding can be guided by the research questions, by the literature review, and the responses of the participants.

3.7.2 Coding and analysis

It is noteworthy to remark that the categories need to be determined beforehand in order to perform the data analysis and coding. Table 4.2 identifies and explains the categories, as an initial step. After reading the participants' comments, the researcher marked any that initially appeared to be pertinent. The themes were developed by quoting the statements and associated participant responses, and listing them in order of similarity. Certain statements were taken verbatim, while others were summarized. The statements were examined and analyzed, after the coding of each participant's responses (see Chapter 4 of the study).

3.8 Trustworthiness

There are four concepts used in qualitative research to measure the trustworthiness of the study results. According to Korstjens and Moser (2018), these concepts include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, and are explained below:

- *Credibility* – The credibility of qualitative data can be assured through multiple reviews throughout data collection process to ensure data is appropriate. The credibility in this study can be established by checking preliminary findings and interpretations against the raw data. Further, validation and checking of participants' responses can be done through Table 3.1 of the population.
- *Transferability* – Transferability is similar to generalizability in quantitative research methodology; however, it is not generalizability. In this study, the transferability can be measured through the description of the findings, for anyone who would like to transfer the findings can do so.
- *Dependability* – Dependability can be ensured through creation of a clear audit trail indicating the rigorous data collection techniques and procedures used, and ensuring the analysis is coherent and well documented. Typically, an inquiry audit using an outside reviewer assures dependability. This study realized dependability through reliance on ethical issues such as the researcher's responsibility, and trust.
- *Confirmability* – Confirmability of qualitative data is assured when data are checked and rechecked throughout the data collection and analysis processes, to ensure findings would likely be repeatable by subsequent researchers. Therefore, confirmability can be achieved and reassured through use of verbatim statements from participants, which thus avoids the potential of bias and manipulation.

3.9 Ethical consideration

Ethical considerations are integral to research and need to remain at the forefront of every study (Khan, 2014). According to Sieber and Tolich (2012), responsible researchers need to think about ethics when preparing their research proposals and throughout the subsequent research projects.

Ethics in research guides the protection of participants' rights and their well-being (Arifin, 2018). Compliance with accepted research ethics ensures that findings are valid and reliable (Campbell & Cowton, 2015). This is not simply a tick-box compliance issue. It is a crucial consideration that can make all the difference to the outcome of a research project. Implementing ethical guidelines is essential (Kosinski et al., 2015; Kent et al., 2002). The Haaga Helia University of Applied Sciences and the University of Technology require every researcher to adhere to the fundamental research ethics principles of low risk of harm, obtaining informed consent, and protecting the anonymity and confidentiality of participants and others. This study has been conducted in rigorous compliance with the HEDS-RICH-REC and Research and Ethics Committee requirements, as best practices designed to protect participants' rights and well-being. The research proposal, methodology and research questions were all thoroughly reviewed to ensure there were no potential risks or unmerited benefits. This was done before the start of the data collection and completion phases of the study. In terms of the validity of the research and research design, the Research and Ethics Committee requested clarity on how specific research questions were to be used. This was given and satisfactorily received. Thus, the ethics committee ensured that the methods used related specifically to obtaining responses to the research questions.

3.10 Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter the research methodology used in this study was discussed. The use of a qualitative research method for data collection and analysis was explained and justified. The research paradigm, case study, population, ethical procedures, and measures followed during the data collection were also discussed, and the information about the sample was provided.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

The findings of this study are reported next, as part of the process to explore faculty perceptions of the value of advisory boards in accounting education curriculum development. Findings are then analysed in respect of each of the research questions. Thus: How do participants perceive the role of advisory boards in accounting curriculum development? What is the composition of faculty advisory boards? What are the challenges faced by curriculum development in the faculty? These categories were used to develop the themes.

4.2 Section A: Profile of the Participants

The questions used to guide the interviews were specially created with this study in mind. To gain an understanding of the participants' backgrounds, **Table 4.1** presents the demographic characteristics of the participants. Specific questions were included in the emailed questionnaire to gather data regarding the participants' profiles (see Annexure 1). (The research questions were developed following the reading and discussion of the pertinent literature.) However, due to ethical concerns, some participant information was reported under pseudonyms. A total of ten (10) respondents (academic managers, graduates, and heads of department) participated in the study. These participants are informed individuals, fully aware of the importance of advisory boards in accounting education, and have extensive prior experience with them. They have all participated in the university's academic advisory committee system.

Table 4.1 displays the demographic information for each of the 10 participants in the study: current employment position; number of years in the present position and in their previous positions, and highest academic qualification attained. Studies conducted by Zimmerman et al., (2000); Baker et al., (2007); Norman and Bagranoff (2019), and Xu et al., (2023) have shown that demographic information such as administrative/academic position of the participant, duration in the position, previous position held, and highest academic qualification is important to understanding the responses of the participants.

Table 4.1: Demographic information of the participants

Participants number	Position of the participant	Number of years in the position	The previous position held	Highest academic qualifications
1	HoD	3 years	9 years	Master's degree
2	HoD	6 years	8 years	Master's degree
3	HoD	14 years	22 years	Doctoral degree
4	HoD	1 year	7 years	Master's degree
5	HoD	4 years	10 years	Master's degree
6	Academic manager	10 years	12 years	Master's degree
7	Academic manager	2 years	5 years	Honour's degree
8	Alumni/graduates	3 years	2 years	Honour's degree
9	Alumni/graduates	6 years	4 years	BTech degree
10	Alumni/graduates	12 years	8 years	BTech degree

The data collection guidelines were used so as to obtain standardized information from the participants. **Table 4.1** reports the demographic information of participants in the study that explored faculty perceptions of the value of advisory boards in developing the accounting education curriculum.

4.3 Thematic Analysis

As part of the qualitative investigation, ten participants were sent interview questions in a single email. Every response to the interview questions underwent human coding, categorization, and analysis (i.e., no software was used to process the raw data). All interviews and analyses were completed in the month of September 2023. Codes and categories were used to build themes. Out of the ten interview questions, eight themes were identified. These were derived from the participants' responses.

Table 4.2: Themes and categories corresponding to interview questions

Interview question	How do participants perceive the role of advisory boards in accounting curriculum development?
Categories - Role of advisory boards	
Theme 1	Theme 2
Support	Curriculum

Interview question	What is the composition of advisory boards in the faculty?	
Categories - Composition of advisory boards		
Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
Membership	Graduates	Industry Experts

Interview question	What are the challenges curriculum development faces in the faculty?	
Categories - Challenges of the curriculum in the faculty		
Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
Up-to-date curriculum	Professional bodies	International recognition

RQ1 – How do participants perceive the role of advisory boards in the accounting curriculum?

Participants' responses to the question on how they perceive the role of advisory boards in accounting curriculum development are discussed next.

4.3.1 Category – Role of advisory boards

As a point of departure, Tapis and Delaney (2017) state that using accounting advisory boards is a way to promote collaboration between faculty and practitioners. The role of the academic advisory boards is thus to provide guidance and advice to academics on how to develop, continuously improve, and maintain the relevance of an accounting curriculum.

Seven of the 10 study participants (participants #1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7) stated that they were generally satisfied with the role of advisory boards in their departments. Three of the participants

(#8, 9, and 10) additionally agreed that the advisory committees were able to assist in generating career opportunities for graduates or for academics wanting to move into commerce/industry.

The participants were articulate/knowledgeable on the role of advisory boards in the faculty, and on their importance to the faculty and the university. A composite summary of participant responses follows:

“The role of the Academic Advisory Committee (AAC) is to advise academic departments on matters of the curriculum (participants #1 and 3); career opportunities that exist for student (participant #2) and [to maintain...] the quality of the academic offering (participants #4 and 6). Since the AAC is composed of industry experts and alumni, the faculty and by extension, the university [the faculty] gains a good reputation among industry players, resulting in employers having confidence that the faculty produces competent graduates”. (participants # 5 and 7).

To understand how participants perceived the role of advisory boards in the accounting curriculum development process, participants' responses were unanimous, showing the level of their perceptions about the role of advisory boards in the faculty. A composite summary of 3 participants responses:

“From my understanding, the formulation of the advisory board best supports the faculty or the department to succeed in its qualification(s) offering, and professional development pathways (participant #4). They are mentoring the faculty academic staff to adapt to transitional values, ethics and code of conduct (participant #5). They also assist the faculty in exploring new opportunities and stimulating high-quality conversation, and of course, they provide expert recommendations”. (participant #1).

Specific issues that advisory boards in the faculty should address/are addressing were identified. All participants (participants #1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7, and #8, 9 and 10) made use of the opportunity to identify tasks the academic advisory boards could perform to benefit the departments are indicated below in a representative quote:

“Stimulate critical thinking, analysis, and heighten decision-makers' awareness (participant #1). Provide expert recommendation (participant #2). Help with value-driven insights on qualification(s) to evolve with the relevant new trends (participant #3). Benchmarking of the qualification(s) with national and international standards (participant #4). Evaluation of effectiveness and best practices (participant #5). Mentoring the faculty/department academic staff to adapt to transitional values, ethics and code of conduct

(participant #6). *Help with value-driven insights on qualification(s) to evolve with the relevant new trends* (participant #7). *Explore new opportunities and stimulate high-quality conversation* (participant #8). *Stimulate critical thinking, and analysis, and heighten decision-makers' awareness* (participant #9). *Stipulate expert recommendation”* (participant #10).

Theme 1 – Support

Xu et al., (2023) report on the effectiveness of advisory boards in accounting programs, and conclude that the most effective activities undertaken by accounting advisory boards are in the area of student career development. The academic advisory committee in accounting thus is seen as serving as a bridge between the faculty and the business community, including government institutions. The support from advisory boards (the advice and guidance they offer (Hepperlen et al., 2022), and the collaboration they facilitate, enhances the quality of the mission of the faculty (Guimón, 2013).

Participants were also interested in expressing their views about the importance of the role of advisory boards:

“The support is certainly helpful and certainly implementable. For instance, there are regulations that prescribe how preferential procurement in Government should be dealt with. When the Constitution declared parts of the regulations as unconstitutional, it created a challenge for us because we teach these regulations. So, members of the AAC assisted us with documents of procedures that they followed until the new procurement bill was implemented (participant #1). In my opinion, the responsibility lies with the department to ensure that they create conditions for AAC to effectively exercise their role (participant #2). The faculty plays a supporting role and will support what the department proposes” – (participant #8).

This illustrates effective collaboration between the faculty and the business community and the support that should ensure that accounting graduates have good professional opportunities available upon graduation.

Theme 2 – Curriculum

The curriculum is explained as a prearranged course of learning set for students (Suskie, 2018). It tells what, why, and how students should learn. It is meant to help students develop the skills,

knowledge, values, and attitudes they need to be successful both inside and outside of the university.

The accounting curriculum is a selected specialization within the accountancy programme. There are specialized emphasis areas like financial accounting, internal auditing, public sector finance, finance and investment, and economics under the broad umbrella of “accounting”. The coverage of the curriculum’s core courses often includes a set of basic business subjects, such as business management, communication for academic purposes, business research, taxation, financial accounting, auditing, finance, and economics.

There is a general notion that advisory boards are useful in the accounting curriculum and most of the respondents tend to support the idea that ... *“the advisory boards' role is to guide the curriculum and provide review of the current program offerings”* (participant #1). *Furthermore, it is through the advisory boards that the institution will offer relevant qualifications needed by industry and the upliftment of the society”* – (participant #4). Participants have also confirmed that *“the advisory board meetings are held two times per academic year* (participant #5). *Each academic department has its advisory board related to the academic qualifications offered in the department”* – (participant # 7).

Curriculum development is regarded as catch-all phrase for a continuing process in which structure and systematic planning processes are initiated, developed, adopted, and evaluated (Bengio et al., 2009). In the context of an accounting curriculum, it should give students an understanding of basic business and accounting practices, and it can also prepare students to move forward into professional careers as accountants, accounting technicians, and business entrepreneurs. Thus, the guidance from the advisory boards assists the academic departments in preparing their students for careers in entrepreneurship, or to take positions in government, industry, corporate enterprises and accounting practices. For this, though, they need appropriate skills. These observations from recent research resonate with the findings of the study by Maali and Al-Attar (2020) who examined the accounting curricula in universities in Jordanian universities and the employment market needs. Their study identified the skills and competencies that businesses require from accounting graduates. The study also found that quality assurance bodies are strangling universities’ freedom to develop curriculums that meet the market’s needs: statutory oversight bodies are preventing curriculum development that would align courses with what potential employers need. On the other hand, Snead et al., (2019) also point out that the use of advisory boards’ input for revising the accountancy curriculum continues to be important

to ensure the topics covered in the course programme are those that commerce and industry need.

Summary – What should be the role of advisory board?

The academic advisory committee's function in accounting education should be that of a resource for information and provide support for developing currently relevant curricula. The advisory committee should support the faculty's active involvement in academic research, facilitate interactions with the professions, and assist in other areas that are essential to maintaining and growing a vibrant accounting program. Additionally, by fostering a favorable perception of the accounting program among professionals, business leaders, and the public, the committee should thus serve as a conduit for communication between the faculty and the professional accountancy community.

RQ2 – What is the composition of advisory boards in the faculty?

The participants were asked about the composition of the advisory boards in the faculty: the themes the participants' responses supported are summarized next:

4.3.2 Category – Composition of advisory boards

Theme 1 – Membership of advisory boards

"... our members are from industry, government, academia, and professional bodies (I am referring to the external people, by the way ...)." (participant #1). "Additional people are lecturers in the department" – (participant #3).

The participants recognised that academic advisory boards bring external perceptions to the faculty, since they include various external (non-academic) members from industry, government, and professional bodies.

Drawing from the responses it can be concluded that committee members' inputs bring the following benefits to the departments:

- knowledge resources;

- information about new developments in the marketplace;
- curriculum discussions in current business/economic contexts;
- an ability to create jobs and placement opportunities for students;
- the facilitation of industry partnerships, and signing of memorandums of understanding between industry leaders and the departments; and
- creating opportunities to present guest lectures by industry leaders and external committee members.

Thus, as the views of participant #2 strongly recommends, advisory board members can “... increase their involvement in the programme through, for instance, using them as guest lecturers. This will ensure that they interact continuously with the department or faculty”.

Theme 2 – Graduates

The success of graduates/alumni connects the Faculty of Economics and Finance with industry and government. According to Jackson et al., (2022), this is an important means to attract accounting and finance graduates to advisory boards.

Participants (participants #1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10) identified the involvement of UoT graduates on the advisory boards as something that is needed: “Yes, we do have one, a former student who works at the National Treasury as a Local Government Analyst (participant #1). In my opinion, we should have at least three alumni from different sectors, who will then be able to advocate for the quality of our programs in their organizations” (participant #2).

Some participants indicated that “... we have a departmental alumni network which keeps us (participant #3) “... in the loop with old students ...” (participant #4). Also, try to understand what they are doing in life (participant #5) “... we sometimes even try to communicate and keep in touch with them” (participant #6). “Although they are busy, we also invite them to participate or just to attend departmental events and to share their experiences with students – very important” (participants #7 and 8). “I would of course, like graduates to raise bursary ...” (participant #9) “... and scholarship opportunities for students...” (participant #10).

Theme 3 – Industry Experts

The academic advisory boards in the accounting departments provide the insight and direction that helps the Faculty of Economics and Finance to stay familiar with current professional developments and aware of industry needs (Ho, 2023). The industry experts in the advisory committees ensure that the faculty programme meets the needs of the accounting profession (Edeigba, 2022; Mousavi et al., 2022). Most of the participants (participants #2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, and 10) confirmed that the composition of advisory boards in the faculty comprises an “*External Independent Chairperson* (participant #2); *External members attached to the Community of Best Practice* (participant #3); *external members from Professional Bodies* (participant #4); and *internal members of the academic staff*” (participant #6). On the recruitment of the advisory committee, all the participants who took part in the data collection session indicated that: “*the composition of the Academic Advisory Committee is in line with the policy on Academic Advisory Committees which requires a mixture of industry experts, alumni, a final year student and internal staff members who are in the service of the relevant academic department* (participant #7). “*Members who have an influential standing in their field are recruited to the ACC, as this assists the department in ensuring that advice received represents up-to-date industry practices*” (participant #9) “*... again, staff, students, and the Institution benefit from this ...*” (participant #10).

Summary – Who should be on the advisory board committees?

People with expertise in the subject of accountancy should make up the academic advisory board for the accounting department. To facilitate the sharing of information across curricula, such membership should include those who are currently employed by other universities in addition to those who are actively practicing as professional accountants. The group of people who comprise the advisory committee membership also includes industry experts and alumni/graduates who oversee professional accountants. These individuals may play a big role in advising academic departments about emerging trends and career advancement opportunities.

RQ 3 – What are the challenges of the curriculum development in the faculty?

When the participants were asked about what the challenges the curriculum faced in the faculty representative participant responses included the following:

4.3.3 Category – Challenges of the curriculum development in the faculty

Theme 1 – Up-to-date curriculum

Academic advisory boards play a significant role in accounting and finance curricula (Senaratne et al., 2022) to ensure that the accounting curriculum is up-to-date and relevant, and meets the market's needs (Twyford & Dean, 2023). An up-to-date curriculum offers the opportunity to teach relevant content that addresses modern business and industry needs (Griffin, 2022), thereby equipping students with the skills and experience sought by employers (Jackson, 2023; Heng & Sol, 2023). This is confirmed by the following participants' comment: (participants #2 and #3) *“that an up-to-date curriculum should be measured on the amendment of [texts to teach] relevant new trends within the field of accounting (participant #2) “.... and be implemented in the workbooks, classroom, and assessments” (participant #3).*

According to Samanthi and Gooneratne (2023), an up-to-date curriculum empowers students to gain appropriate expertise in areas including financial and management accounting, corporate finance, accounting and finance issues, and business technology. Ali et al., (2022) advocate transforming assessment in accounting education to align with online learning approaches.

Theme 2 – Professional bodies

The professional bodies assist the faculty by accrediting their courses and certifying that they meet the high standards of the professional accountancy bodies such as the South African Institute of Professional Accountants (SAIPA), the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA), the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA), the South African Institute of Taxation (SAIT), the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA), the Chartered Institute of Government Finance Audit and Risk Officers (CIGFARO), and the Southern African Institute for Business Accountants (SAIBA).

On the question of whether there are challenges to the curriculum in the faculty - the results of the findings are interesting. Participant #6 expressed the following views:

“... achieving some of the simulated work integrated learning outcomes [is difficult] due to availability of buildings... Attracting industry specialists for seminars [is also difficult] due to the perceptions some have regarding the student unrests and the limited academic period [that has been] interrupted by students strikes”.

Thus, it is believed that programme accreditation by the professional bodies will fill curriculum gaps (and increase students' learning with exposure to real-world experiences). Students who have completed an accredited degree are in high demand by employers. Thus, the role of academic advisory boards can be extended to benefit students and the faculty by advocating for accreditation with professional bodies, and by promoting students as desirable employees because the courses they have completed are relevant now. Thus, the academic advisory committee should actively support and encourage professional bodies to create opportunities to improve graduates' employability (Trung, 2016), and to encourage undergraduates and graduates to look for work in accountancy practices to gain relevant skills and experience.

Theme 3 – International Recognition

The international recognition of academic qualification is achieved through affiliation to international professional bodies, and by adhering to current international accounting standards. Assisting teaching staff to achieve similar affiliations to and membership of international bodies, and having their academic and research credentials recognised improves the status of the courses they teach and recognises they are in good standing with the professions. The following comment articulates the participants' view that *“we can support the faculty to build an effective and efficient international status through our networks”* – (participant #7).

Although the faculty may have provided the international community with graduates who possess a global outlook, and with conceptual and applied knowledge in the fields of accounting and finance that will enable them to make a positive impact on society, as participant #7 observed: there are challenges and gaps that still need to be addressed in the accounting curriculum. These involve the *“evolution of technology, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and automation in accounting...”*

The modules therefore need to be broad and to cover key topics that address current information technology perspectives. Some participants (#7 and #8) feel that the faculty is still experiencing challenges in this area, and observed:

“International collaboration and partnership with other Universities outside South Africa [is not being actively promoted]; (participant #7) And [I] also feel that [the] university is not ‘contributing meaningfully at the international forums” (participant #8).

Another challenge recognised by a respondent is that the faculty is not fully utilizing the expertise of individual members of their advisory boards, by not using their guest lecturing potential. There are other areas that are equally challenging and relevant to advisory boards. Thus: *“We should, as faculties, work hard to show members the important role they play in the faculty, especially given the fact that they do this voluntarily. At each meeting, demonstrate to them how their advice was implemented, and utilize them as guest Lecturers to share their industry experience” (Participant #7)*

Participants' presentations of their views about advisory boards embodied the study's . Thus, the HoD expression of the role of advisory boards in the accounting curriculum provides an account of the expectations.

Summary – What is the challenge?

One of the difficulties faced by educators is finding advisory board members who can open doors for our graduates to find full-time jobs. In comparison with other traditional training colleges and universities, the UoT's Faculty finds it difficult to attract suitably qualified applicants with significant industry influence to fill open positions on their departmental advisory boards. Consequently, the faculty is finding that it only attracts recent graduates and alumni, who have not yet gained much accounting experience. Additional difficulties are research-related, and associated issues including curriculum development and embracing technological advances, issues that are likely to guarantee the growth and continuation of an engaging accounting curriculum.

4.4 Summary of the chapter

This chapter presented the results that emerged from the perceptions of the value of advisory boards to the accounting education curriculum and shared by the 10 responders to the in-depth interviews of HoDs, academic managers, advisory board members, and graduates. Through

thematic analysis, themes were identified and linked to the research questions. These themes included support; curriculum development; membership of professional associations and bodies; graduates; industry experts; and international recognition of degrees and research efforts.

In the fifth and final chapter a conclusion and recommendations are provided, an overview of the entire study is outlined, limitations of the study are recognised and recommendations for future research are presented.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter contains the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the data, and recommendations arising from the research study results. The study aimed to explore faculty perceptions of the value of advisory boards in the development of the accounting education curriculum. The study does so by means of semi-structured e-interviews conducted with 10 respondents in which their views were invited regarding the role of advisory boards in accounting curriculum development; the composition of advisory boards; and key barriers to curriculum developers and advisory boards.

The chapter begins with an overview/summary of this research study, and this is followed by the main conclusions drawn from the results and data analysis presented in Chapter 4. The chapter then provides a discussion of the limitations of the study, and outlines the research contributions and implications of the study. A future research direction in the value of advisory boards in the accounting education curriculum is also discussed. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary, final conclusion and recommendations.

5.2 Overview of the study

This chapter presents a coherent summary of the role of advisory boards in accounting curriculum development as seen by the 10 respondents; discusses the composition of advisory boards; and identifies key barriers experienced by curriculum developers and advisory boards.

A recurring theme in all the preceding chapters is that there are many different schools of thought on this process of curriculum development. In summary, therefore, Chapter 1 presented the definition of the research problem, and outlined the research objectives driving the research that underpins this mini thesis. Thus, Chapter 1 provided detailed information on the motivation for the study. The study focused on the following objectives:

- to determine the role of advisory boards in accounting curriculum development - (*Study objective 1*)
- to establish the composition of advisory boards - (*Study objective 2*)
- to identify key barriers of curriculum developers and advisory boards - (*Study objective 3*)

To achieve these three research objectives, the researcher first reviewed the literature (see Chapter 2) on the role of advisory boards in accounting curriculum development; the composition of advisory boards; and key barriers to curriculum developers and advisory boards. The chapter further identified, discussed, and justified the role played by the advisory boards in accounting curriculum development within the University of Technology. Thus, the study's three research objectives were defined, researched and addressed by analysis of the responses to the e-interviews (see Chapters 2 and 4).

5.3 Conclusions drawn from the data analysis

The research methodology and processes adopted to achieve the study's research aim are described in Chapter 3. The views quoted from the literature review (presented in Chapter 2) were largely supported by the empirical results. This chapter also identified that the target population for this study were heads of departments, academic managers, advisory board, and graduates of the faculty. Data was collected via an e-interview in which questions were emailed directly to all participants. Completed responses were returned through the same channels. Data collection and processing methodology was discussed in detail in Chapter 3, and Chapter 4 presented the findings obtained from the previously coded and analysed data.

This qualitative study, employing a case study methodology, provided answers to the research questions. The findings in response to RQ1 suggest that advisory board committees do have the role to play in curriculum support (including efforts to remain abreast of latest industry developments), while participants responses to RQ2 suggest that the evaluation of membership criteria for advisory boards should be reconsidered so as to include more graduates and industry experts. Furthermore, the findings in response to RQ3 also suggest that obtaining accreditation of the curriculum from professional bodies remains a challenge to the advisory board: professional bodies are still reluctant to fully accredit the academic departments' programs. The following

section provides an overview of the empirical results emerging from analyzing the responses to the research questions.

RQ #1: How do participants perceive the role of advisory boards in accounting curriculum development?

Curriculum and Support

Based on an analysis of the data gathered, the advisory board/committee should assess textbooks and other instructional materials to ensure the content is current (curriculum and support). Advisory boards should also assist academic departments to find funding so their teachers may attend conferences and professional gatherings. Educational establishments are aware of the issues and aim to enhance their advisory boards in order to provide more effective curriculum support (McPeak, 2012; Gabbin et al., 2020). According to Kilcrease (2011), advisory boards/committees should also assist with research, teaching and learning, and promote community involvement by motivating for new curricula (to address related academic needs), and promote program enhancements.

RQ #2: What is the composition of advisory boards in the faculty?

Membership

The study concludes that the membership of advisory committees should be opened to anyone who is willing to participate. The recruitment should be done (when seats are available) through announcements in local media and on professional platforms, and the university's website. The study further suggests that the curriculum advisor should be a member of the advisory board/committee. The study also suggests that the advisory boards should include experts in financial accounting, auditing, management reporting, information systems, cost accounting, and taxation. This spread of skills and specialisations will help infuse the course with new ideas, and enable effective review of brainstorming sessions on matters concerning the curriculum. On the other hand, the view was also provided that the composition of the academic advisory boards should be carefully curated. In other words, the study suggests that membership must be balanced, to ensure a high level of expertise and experience (Hunt et al., 2017), and to ensure

appropriate balances between members in public and private practice, and between alumni and non-alumni.

Graduates

The advisory board/committee members should be graduates, to ensure a high academic standard. Jackson et al., (2022) state that the graduates' role on the committee should be to make recommendations on curriculum improvement that will promote students' employability. Additionally, the participation of graduates on the advisory board will increase the visibility of the faculty's programs amongst their employers and professional associates, thereby promoting the program to leaders in business and government. However, the use of the institution's alumni of should not be a prerequisite for participating on an advisory board. The key issue is that it is important to have a variety of skills and experiences from various institutions as this is likely to expand the number and variety of ideas and viewpoints presented at advisory board meetings.

Industry experts

It is vital for the advisory board members to work closely with industry experts in delivering on its mandate of assisting to improve teaching and learning. Having industry experts on the advisory board is also crucial as they provide connections between the university and industry (Edeigba, 2022; Mousavi et al., 2022). Thus, the accounting advisory council brings expertise to the academic department, the university and to the classroom. In particular, here at UoT, the advisory boards work with HoDs by advising and sharing curriculum and career information. Having the industry experts advising the faculty on the latest trends in the accounting profession keeps the faculty and the university on target to ensure the students' skills are aligned with market needs. Having industry experts on the advisory boards is therefore integral to the faculty's connection to the business community and the employment market for their graduates.

RQ #3: What are the challenges of the curriculum development in the faculty?

Professional bodies' recognition

The faculty works with professional bodies like the South African Institute of Professional Accountants (SAIPA), the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA), the Chartered

Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA), the South African Institute of Taxation (SAIT), the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA), the Chartered Institute of Government Finance Audit and Risk Officers (CIGFARO), and the Southern African Institute for Business Accountants (SAIBA) to ensure that qualifications are fit for purpose and meet industry standards. These professional bodies accept/endorse the university's qualifications in a number of ways, such as by recognizing them as a route to employment, and also by providing exemptions for professional membership. Thus, the study recommends that professional bodies be invited to send representatives to participate in the advisory boards as this would cultivate important relationships likely to ensure that accounting students can be confident that they are being taught the practical skills needed to be work-ready upon graduation, and that there will be support for them with career progression and professional recognition.

According to Trung (2016), professional bodies are able to 'brand' (endorse) academic programmes so that they are recognized by professional groups. In line with this, the study participants also recommend that members of professional associations in the business world also be invited to become advisory board members. In other words, by establishing working relationships with professional and business associations, the university departments and faculty can be more effectively guided when updating and revising the curriculum and associated teaching methods.

5.4 Implication of the study

That the research problem was effectively addressed is confirmed by the analysis of the qualitative data. It was demonstrated that advisory boards/committees can directly support curriculum development, help graduates find work, and advise academic departments on how to create curricula that match worldwide standards and are accepted by professional associations. The study's findings should therefore have an impact on advisory boards' involvement in accounting curriculum development. The study's conclusions suggest that there are two things that the accounting field's academic program and the research community should be aware of: Firstly, there may be a chance to investigate what is presumably a new area for academic advisory committees. Even if academic advisory committees are nominally part of UoT, their function should be limited to enhancing/maintaining current relevance of the curriculum, focusing on different aspects of technology as applicable to the department's efforts to teach relevant skills, and fostering strong connections between the academic, business, and professional groups. According to the study, the academic advisory board is crucial in helping to build links and ties

between the UoT, academic departments within the faculty, and between the students and their likely employers. Therefore, it follows that their duties would include making sure that the academic credentials on offer match the requirements of professional bodies, and serving as a helpful source of knowledge about ongoing developments in the accounting industry.

The qualifications that graduates attain should be robust enough to gain international recognition in the twenty-first century, as proof that advisory boards have contributed positively to curriculum development and support. The research's usefulness lies in the identification of advisory committees' perceived ability to identify specific content shortcomings in the curriculum, and to address the misalignment of certain skills currently being taught, and those already being demanded by industry. In other words, this research will help the advisory board to identify industry trends, and to offer advice on the academic initiatives' strategic direction.

5.5 Limitations of the study

This study explored predominantly faculty perceptions of the value of advisory boards in the development of the accounting education curriculum. The study used qualitative research methods to collect data from a small sample comprising heads of academic departments, academic managers, and graduates of the faculty. Every study has limitations, and because the methodology used was exclusively qualitative, and made use of emailed e-interviews with probing questions (but without the option of subsequent interrogation of unclear responses) it was not possible to fully quantify the results. Furthermore, the findings of the study are not automatically applicable to all university faculties at UoT. These limitations were considered when the findings were discussed.

5.6 Recommendations and future research

As this thesis focused on the exploration of perceptions of the value of advisory boards in the accounting education curriculum, the academic research and literature context presented in this study might have been overly narrow in its focus. Future research might benefit from being conducted in a wider, even global context. Nevertheless, this research, in attempting to address these study objectives (to determine the role of advisory boards in accounting curriculum development - (Study objective 1): to establish the composition of advisory boards - (Study objective 2): to identify key barriers of curriculum developers and advisory boards - (Study

objective 3) does provide a solid foundation for future local research endeavours. Thus, the following recommendations for future studies are offered:

- More research still needs to be conducted on the relevance of the accounting curriculum in higher education.
- The alignment of the accounting curriculum with the International Standards needs to be investigated, with the research being directed towards new developments and new Standards.
- Given that the curriculum is ever-changing particularly in respect of using and accommodating technological and IT developments, there is a need to do research into efforts to keep up with these technological trends.

5.7 Final conclusion of the study

The main function of advisory boards should be to provide advice to the faculty on professional, teaching, learning, research, and community engagement issues. While noting the contributions and limitations of this study, it is worthwhile, in conclusion, to again highlight that this study has confirmed that the involvement of graduates/alumni on the advisory boards is important.

Lastly, the study concluded with an overview of this thesis and a presentation of a formal conclusion arising from a discussion of the research presented.

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ANNEXURE 1



Thesis title

EXPLORING FACULTY PERCEPTIONS ON THE VALUE OF ADVISORY BOARDS IN ACCOUNTING EDUCATION CURRICULUM

KGOBALALE NEBBEL MOTUBATSE

Master of Business Administration (MBA)

Education Management

Master's thesis

2024



**EXPLORING FACULTY PERCEPTIONS ON THE VALUE OF ADVISORY BOARDS IN
ACCOUNTING EDUCATION CURRICULUM**

by

NEBBEL MOTUBATSE

The interviews are consisting of questions, uniquely developed for the sole purpose of the study.

Interview Guide

The interviews consist of questions, uniquely developed for the sole purpose of the study.

Section A

1) Demographic information

Position of the participant	
How long in the position	
Position previously held	
How long was the previous position held?	

2) Descriptive information

Please indicate your highest level of academic qualification:

Grade12/matric	
Tertiary certificate/Diploma	
Degree	
Postgraduate degree	

Section B

Primary research questions

The research questions will be organized to explore three main areas:

Role of advisory boards

- How do participants perceive the role of advisory boards in the accounting curriculum?

Composition of advisory boards

- What is the composition of advisory boards in the faculty?

Challenges of the curriculum in the faculty

- What are the challenges of the curriculum in the faculty?

There are seven supporting questions:

1. Describe your views of the role of advisory boards in the accounting curriculum.

Probing question:

- What does this mean for the faculty? And to the university?

2. How is the composition of advisory boards in the faculty?

Probing question:

- How do you recruit the advisory boards?
- What qualities are you looking out for?

3. Do you have alumni/graduates on your current advisory board?

- Do you think this could be improved?
- How do you think you could improve this?

4. Have you ever felt that the advisory boards are helping you in improving the qualification programme and curriculum offering? What supports are they providing to improve curriculum offerings?

Probing question:

- Do you find these supports are ...?
 - Helpful?
 - Implementable?
 - Effective?
- Do you think faculty conditions allow advisory boards to exercise their role?
- How else do you think you could improve the current conditions?

5. Do you think advisory boards support our students enough to get industry exposure and employment?

6. What challenges do you think prevent advisory boards from supporting the faculty programme?

Probing question:

- How could such challenges be reduced or overcome?

7. Are there any other areas that are relevant to this topic that you have not shared and would like to address now?

Thank you for your participation!

NB: These questions are developed for the exclusive purposes of the study.