

# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Abstract

Accountants and Accounting Educators' Perceptions of Accounting  
Certifications/Accreditations and Communication Divides

by

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MA, Cleveland State University, 2005

BS, University of the Virgin Islands, 2003

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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## Abstract

Global changes to business exchanges of goods, services, capital, technology, and knowledge requires accountants to have more diverse skill sets than in the past.

Practitioners' documented concerns about accounting graduates' inability to function globally. The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was twofold: (a) to explore accounting practitioners' and educators' perceptions of the Certified Public Accountant and other accounting certifications and accreditations, and (b) to explore possible communication divides between accounting academia and professionals that may be creating a gap between what employers expect and what they receive from graduates.

Phone interviews were conducted with 5 practicing accounting educators and 5 practicing accounting professionals. Using NVIVO, a thematic analysis was conducted to examine and analyze the data for patterns and opposing views. Half of the participants believe that the curriculum should be modified; they were not convinced that existing accounting curricula prepare students for the workplace, even if they passed the CPA exam. Despite being aware of other certifications and the relevancy of specific certifications for various job trajectories, educators and practitioners view the CPA certification as most valuable and most recognized. Six participants perceived a communication gap and a need for conversation, due to educators' detachment from accounting profession. This research serves to unify educators and practitioners to foster a learning environment conducive to preparing graduates to communicate and work in a global business because a highly skilled workforce will contribute to trust and sustainable value creation; ultimately improving the economy by building enduring businesses and communities.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to Dr. William Brent. I will always be very appreciative and grateful for all that he has done to help me through my frustration and emotional distress on this journey. I am a very emotional person, and I was already dealing with a lot due to relocating from the Virgin Islands to Ohio. Dr. Brent took on a heavy feat with me. I had no support in my educational endeavors, and Dr. Brent was my support inside and outside of Walden University.

Without Dr. Brent's help, counsel, and friendship, it would have been much more difficult to complete this dissertation. Even after Dr. Brent left the employment of Walden University, I could reach out to him for assistance; he always encouraged me to push ahead. My warm thanks and appreciation to Dr. Brent for persevering with me as my committee chair and friend throughout the time it took me to complete this research and write the dissertation.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The impact of the way companies conduct business globally has expanded the accounting profession and created a demand for specially trained and certified accountants. Yet accounting firms continue to use the certified public accountant (CPA) to market accounting services (Ahadiat & Martin, 2015; Chu & Man, 2012; Lee, 2013; Mucenski-Keck, Hintz, & Fedoryshyn, 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Simms & Enrique, 2012 ), even though the way of doing business in the industry is constantly changing (Corkern, Parks, & Morgan, 2013). The CPA may be the only licensed accounting certification (Boyle, Lawrence, & Mahoney, 2013; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012), but a CPA education does not prepare graduates with specialized knowledge in the new areas of accounting, leaving financial audits more susceptible to errors (Chu & Man, 2012; Lee, 2013; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012). Moreover, little has changed in the accounting curriculum over the past 5 decades (Chu & Man, 2012; Wedemeyer, 2014).

With communication divides between accounting educators and practitioners, students and practitioners may not be knowledgeable about the variety of other accounting certifications available to them, which may be creating a gap between what employers expect and what they get from accounting graduates (Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang, Churyk, & Yu, 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). Therefore, this exploratory qualitative phenomenological study served two purposes. First, I explored accounting practitioners' and educators' perceptions of the CPA and other accounting certifications and accreditations to understand how well-prepared accounting students are to meet the

needs of a changing accounting profession. Second, I used it to explore the communication divides between accounting academia and professionals that may be creating a communication gap between what employers expect and what they received from accounting graduates.

This study is intended to start a conversation to bring about curriculum changes to provide diverse specialized accounting skill sets that would better prepare graduates to work in the capacity of an accountant. By providing students with information about the alternative accounting certifications and accreditations, schools encourage students to study in whatever field of accounting that they choose. In this chapter, I discuss the background of the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, research question, conceptual framework, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of this study for practice and social change.

### **Background of the Study**

About 400,000 CPA members work in different venues of accounting, spread across 145 countries (American Institute of Certified Public Accountants [AICPA], 2015). Certifying public accountants came into practice after the AICPA (2015) dubbed accountancy a profession in 1887. Since then, the impact of globalization has expanded the range of accounting responsibilities. In fact, the impact of globalization has created a demand for specially trained and certified accountants (Ahadiat & Martin, 2015; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Simms & Enrique, 2012; Singer & Wiesner, 2013), including, for example certified divorce financial analyst, certified

forensic accountant, accredited valuation analyst, elder care specialist, and certified information security managers (Gangolly, n.d.). The issue—with the growing demands—is that educators and practitioners may not be knowledgeable about the many accounting certification opportunities available to them (Burke & Gondolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Johnson, 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).

Changes in the accounting field have prompted public accounting firms to provide services out of the norm for accounting firms (Kessler, 2015). However, through all the shifting and mixing of business, the certification of public accounting (CPA) has remained the accounting certification used to market accounting services (Chu & Man, 2012; Lee, 2013; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012). Because for the past 5 decades little has changed in accounting curricula at universities, education for CPAs, accounting and finance executives, and industry accountants has remained the same, even though the way of doing business in the accounting industry has been constantly changing (Chu & Man, 2012; Hargadon & Fuller, 2015; Wedemeyer, 2014).

In the past, accounting certifications and accreditations options were limited; therefore, the CPA quickly became the certification of choice (Boyle et al., 2013). However, CPA education does not provide specialized knowledge in other accounting areas now opening up because of changes brought on by globalization (Boyle et al., 2013; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012). In addition, even though the CPA is the only accounting certification that provides its holder with an accounting license, a broad array of other accounting certifications and accreditations is available, many of which may lead to valuable career paths and opportunities (Boyle et al., 2013; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012).

However, according to Boyle et al. (2013), whether accounting practitioners have a CPA or not, accounting practitioners still need a degree and a certification in their particular field of practice.

Large accounting firms may garner the greatest influence on the accounting profession, but research shows that 79% of the accountants and CPA work for the industry or smaller firms (Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). Many of those who did were uninformed about the other accounting careers available to them or unaware that having a CPA was not necessary to be an accountant (Samuel, 2015). With communication divides between accounting educators and practitioners, students and practitioners may not be knowledgeable about the variety of other accounting certifications available to them (Burke & Gondolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).

The communication between the accounting educators and the accounting industry is broken, creating a gap between what employers expect from their newly hired accounting graduates and what they actually receive (Chang et al., 2015; Cory & Pruske, 2012; Johnson, 2015; Mohamed Faker & Ahmed Atef, 2013; Weaver & Kulesza, 2014). In fact, accounting practitioners have complained about accounting graduates' lack of knowledge and skills and their inability to perform in an accounting capacity (Chang et al., 2015; Cory & Pruske, 2012; Mohamed Faker & Ahmed Atef, 2013; Weaver & Kulesza, 2014; Wedemeyer, 2014). The impact of globalization on the accounting profession has placed new requirements on educators and students (Barthel, 2014; Boyle et al., 2013; Mohamed Faker & Ahmed Atef, 2013; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Sawalqa & Obaidat, 2014; Weaver & Kulesza, 2014). Even

members of the international accounting communities have noted the importance of creating an accounting credential structure with global standards (Albu, 2013; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Sawalqa & Obaidat, 2014; Smith, 2015). For this reason, this research was vital to promoting the development of a highly skilled accounting workforce, which can help contribute to trust and sustainable value creation and ultimately improve the economy by building enduring businesses and communities.

### **Problem Statement**

Mainly because of globalization, accounting work has grown more complex; hence, new niches and certifications will continue to expand (Boyle et al., 2013). A CPA education does not prepare graduates with specialized knowledge in the new areas of accounting (Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012). The communication divides between educators and practitioners may be why graduates are not meeting employers' expectations (Cory & Pruske, 2012; Johnson, 2015; Mohamed Faker & Ahmed Atef, 2013; Weaver & Kulesza, 2014). Even people in the international accounting communities are working on aligning with the new global needs (Albu, 2013; Iulia et al., 2014). However, schools have failed to adjust the accounting curriculum to prepare students for global changes due to the CPA's popularity (Boyle et al., 2013; Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Chu & Man, 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Wedemeyer, 2014).

In this research I address several problems. First, practitioners and educators may be overly focused on the popularity of the CPA, and thus remain unaware of the other accounting certifications and accreditations available, thereby leaving accounting

graduates uninformed about the current status of the Generally Accepted Accounting Principal (GAAP). Second, possible communication divides between educators and practitioners may be creating a gap between what employers expect and what they get from accounting graduates.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This exploratory qualitative phenomenological study served two purposes. The first purpose is to explore accounting practitioners' and educators' perceptions of and experiences with the CPA and other accounting certifications and accreditations. The goal is to understand participants' perceptions on how well-prepared accounting students are to meet the needs of a changing accounting profession. The second purpose is to explore possible interruption of communication or misinformation between accounting academia and professionals that may be creating a communication gap between what employers expect and what they receive from accounting graduates. This could possibly start a conversation to bring about curriculum changes to provide diverse specialized accounting skill sets.

### **Research Questions**

I interviewed five accounting practitioners and five educators to learn about their perceptions of accounting students' preparation to meet the needs of a changing accounting, as well as their perspectives on any communication divide between accounting academia and practitioners. The following central research questions guided the study:

1. What are accounting practitioners' and educators' perceptions of and experiences with the CPA and other accounting certifications and accreditations?
2. What are possible communication divides between accounting academia and professionals that may be creating a communication gap between what employers expect and what they received from accounting graduates?

### **Conceptual Framework**

According to Saunders College of Business at the Rochester Institute of Technology (n.d.), the nature of accounting is to collect, organize, and manage financial data for decision making; hence, accounting is called the language of business, and it is the basis by which businesses' financial stability is measured (Helliari, 2013; Horvat & Korošec, 2015). Therefore, communication is vital to the lifeline of accounting (Johnson, 2015; Siriwardane & Durden, 2014). The interruption of communication or misinformation is hurting the accounting evolution due to the possible lack of communication between accounting academia and practitioners creating a gap in the competency of accounting graduates (Ahadiat & Martin, 2015; Bhasin, 2013; Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Corkern et al., 2013; Cory & Pruske, 2012; Mohamed Faker & Ahmed Atef, 2013; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Sawalqa & Obaidat, 2014; Simms & Enrique, 2012; Siriwardane & Durden, 2014; Smith, 2015; Weaver & Kulesza, 2014; Wedemeyer, 2014). For this reason, there is a difference in accounting employers' expectations and the accounting graduates' job performance (Ahadiat & Martin, 2015; Bhasin, 2013; Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Corkern et al., 2013; Cory &



Pruske, 2012; Madsen, 2015; Mohamed Faker & Ahmed Atef, 2013; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Sawalqa & Obaidat, 2014; Siriwardane & Durden, 2014; Smith, 2015; Weaver & Kulesza, 2014; Wedemeyer, 2014).

Globalization and the continued advancement of technology have magnified the need for college-educated certified accountants (Boyle et al., 2013; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012). To promote accountability and ethical conduct in business, there will likely be continuous amendments to corporate governance (Abbasi, 2013; Hutaibat, 2012; Jiles, 2014; Petkov, 2012) In addition, the impact of globalization has changed the way businesses communicate (Johnson, 2015; Siriwardane & Durden, 2014). However, because of the vague and confusing accounting terminology, accountants are not always effective communicators (Johnson, 2015; Siriwardane & Durden, 2014). Researchers have found that accounting graduates' lack the competency necessary to function in the capacity of an accountant (Ahadiat & Martin, 2015; Chang et al., 2015; Corkern et al., 2013; Cory & Pruske, 2012; Madsen, 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Sawalqa & Obaidat, 2014; Simms & Enrique, 2012; Siriwardane & Durden, 2014; Wedemeyer, 2014).

Researchers have identified a gap in accounting graduates' skill sets and expertise (Ahadiat & Martin, 2015; Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Sawalqa & Obaidat, 2014; Simms & Enrique, 2012). CFOs have asserted that graduates are unable to meet the current accounting needs created by the impact of globalization and regulatory changes (Boyle et al., 2013; Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; as cited in Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). Johnson (2015) and Raghavan and

Thomas (2014) reported that accounting educators have not communicated to the students and practitioners about career opportunities. In addition, a lack of communication exists about the knowledge and accessibility to accounting certifications that should be readily available to prepare accounting students and practitioners to perform even those nontraditional tasks (Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Johnson, 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). Thus, students are uninformed or misinformed about accounting certifications (Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Wedemeyer, 2014).

For the past 5 decades, there have been few changes in accounting curricula. Thus, education for CPAs, accounting and finance executives, and industry accountants has remained substantially unchanged, even though the way of doing business in the accounting profession has been constantly changing (Wedemeyer, 2014). As a result, CPA education does not provide specialized knowledge in other accounting areas that are now opening up because of the influence of globalization (Barthel, 2014; Boyle et al., 2013; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012). Accounting practitioners have expressed dissatisfaction with accounting graduates' inability to function in the capacity of an accountant (Chang et al., 2015; Mohamed Faker & Ahmed Atef, 2013; Weaver & Kulesza, 2014), which may have been created by the gap in communication between accounting academia and industry (Johnson, 2015; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012).

In addition, even though the level of accounting skills set satisfaction varies between accounting interns and graduates, both expressed some level of satisfaction with their accounting skills (Chang et al., 2015). Large accounting firms may garner the

greatest influence on the accounting profession, but researchers have shown that 79% of the accountants and CPA work for the industry or smaller firms (Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). Moreover, according to Burke et al. (2014), Chang et al. (2015), Raghavan and Thomas (2014), and Wedemeyer (2014), the interruption of communication or misinformation between the accounting educators and the accounting industry has created a gap between what employers expect from their newly hired accounting graduates and what they actually receive. The impact of globalization on the accounting profession has placed new requirements on educators and students (Johnson, 2015; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).

This exploratory qualitative phenomenological study served two purposes. First, I explored accounting practitioners' and educators' perceptions of and experiences with the CPA and other accounting certifications and accreditations to understand study participants' perceptions on how prepared accounting students are to meet the needs of a changing accounting profession. Second, I explored the communication divides between accounting academia and professionals that may be creating a communication gap between what employers expect and what they received from accounting graduates. The intent is to begin a conversation to bring about curricular changes to provide diverse specialized accounting skill sets.

Researchers use qualitative phenomenological study to explore and describe perceptions and experiences, thereby creating rich, complex research with depth and meaning to unstudied phenomena (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Davidsen, 2013; Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Rocha Pereira, 2012). Further, the phenomenological approach can

provide an understanding of the essence of the topic (Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Rocha Pereira, 2012). In this phenomenological study I explore accounting practitioners' and educators' perceptions and experiences about a gap between curricula and practice. This research consists of a self-made list of questions employing a mixture of open- and closed-ended questions.

I used public listings of populations to purposefully select study participants (Haney, 2015). I conducted and recorded phone interviews with 5 accounting practitioners and 5 accounting educators in the continental United States. The intention of the phone interviews was to draw on the participants' knowledge and experiences. I selected study participants in the field of accounting because I presumed these participants had experience with and knowledge about accounting education and accounting certifications.

The head of a facility is the best point of contact for access to study participants (Markle, 2015). Therefore, I contacted the point of contact of five accounting firms and five business universities for permission to conduct the interviews. I then contacted the potential participants via email and phone calls to make arrangements.

To provide insight into the research problem, the study participants should have experience in the accounting industry or in an accounting program in academia; hence, I conducted purposeful sampling. From the responses to the open-ended questions, I established themes through convergence of the participants' perspectives and look for rich descriptions of the research topic. I included opposing information to enhance the

validity of the study and document procedural steps to ensure reliability (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are defined as follows in this study:

*Accountant*: An individual with a degree in accounting (Accountant, 2015).

*Communication divides*: A breakdown in communication where the message delivered is incomprehensible to one party or entirely absent between the parties involved.

*Practitioners*: Practicing accountants with or without accounting certifications (Practitioners, 2015).

### **Assumptions**

Several underlying assumptions affect this study. First, I assumed the out-of-date accounting curriculum will continue to be a concern during the process and finalization of this research. This is a reasonable assumption because, for the past 5 decades, the accounting curriculum has remained largely unchanged even though business methods have been constantly shifting (Balachandran et al., 2014; Howard & Warwick, 2013; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Wedemeyer, 2014).

Second, I assumed that participants would be candid in their interview responses. This is a reasonable assumption because, except for improving the accounting profession, the collected information resulted in no negative personal consequence to the participants. All information relating to the anonymous participants was confidential.

Third, I assumed the study participants possessed experience with and knowledge about the CPA and other accounting certifications and accreditations, and the changing needs of accounting because they participated in the accounting curriculum at their schools or work in the accounting industry.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Accounting has expanded due to globalization, which has resulted in niches to address new accounting needs (Boyle et al., 2013). However, the accounting curriculum has changed little in the past 5 decades due to the popularity of the CPA certification (Chu & Man, 2012; Wedemeyer, 2014). In fact, practitioners have stated that accounting graduates are unable to perform accounting duties (Chang et al., 2015; Cory & Pruske, 2012; Mohamed Faker & Ahmed Atef, 2013; Weaver & Kulesza, 2014). In changing the way that people do business, the impact of globalization has also changed the way business communicate, and communication is vital to the lifeline of accounting (Johnson, 2015).

I designed this study to better understand study participants' perceptions on how prepared accounting students are to meet the needs of a changing accounting profession, and to start a conversation that may bring about curriculum changes to provide diverse specialized accounting skill sets. I explored (a) accounting practitioners' and educators' perceptions of and experiences with CPA and other accounting certifications and accreditations, and (b) possible communication divides that may be creating a gap in communication between accounting academia and professionals. This study was delimited to the perspectives of practitioners and educators in the field of accounting.

The research data are based on information collected via phone interview of 10 accounting practitioners and educators in the continental United States.

### **Limitations**

A purposeful sampling design prevents generalization of the results to a larger population of accounting practitioners and educators. However, the results may be transferable, particularly because I asked the accounting educators and professionals open-ended questions, which enabled rich perspectives (Bernard, 2013). I discuss limitations further in Chapter 3. Moreover, I did not conduct a pretest, which would have been valuable in checking the adequacy of the interview questions.

### **Significance of the Study**

From a review of the current professional journals, it is clear certification in public accounting is favored above the other accounting certifications and accreditations available (Boyle et al., 2013). Consequently, an exclusive focus on the certification in public accounting may be undermining other accounting areas of expertise. This overemphasis on the CPA certification makes financial audits more susceptible to errors (Lee, 2013; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012). Students and practitioners have been encouraged to obtain the CPA certification rather than to earn one of the many other accounting certifications and accreditations.

The impact of globalization has created a business environment that has expanded accounting work, which requires accountants to have diverse skill sets in order to perform beyond the customary accounting norms (Boyle et al., 2013). Therefore, it is essential to understand the effect that the exclusive focus on the CPA certification may have on

students' ability to meet the needs of a changing accounting profession, given the impact of globalization. Members of the accounting industry have advised educators to make changes to the accounting curriculum to improve graduates' skills (Ahadiat & Martin, 2015; Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Simms & Enrique, 2012; Weaver & Kulesza, 2014). However, communication divides between the accounting industry and academia continue to produce accounting graduates lacking the knowledge and skills necessary to perform in the capacity of an accountant (Bhasin, 2013; Mohamed Faker & Ahmed Atef, 2013; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).

Students and practitioners must be informed about and given access to available accounting certifications (Wedemeyer, 2014). Gangolly (n.d.) provided a list of other accounting certifications and accreditations (see Appendix A), a list that will continue to grow (Boyle et al., 2013). Although the CPA certification has been in existence for decades, has garnered a high degree of respect, and has become the standard of accounting curriculum, the CPA certification does not cover specialized knowledge found in other accounting certifications and accreditations, thus leaving financial information open to errors (Lee, 2013; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012). In addition, a lack of communication and understanding between accounting practitioners and accounting educators may exacerbate the skills gap exhibited by accounting graduates (Brewer et al., 2014; Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Madsen, 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Weaver & Kulesza, 2014; Wedemeyer, 2014).

Despite changes in the industry, accounting firms still market their business under the CPA certification, which gives no assurance of the competency of the performing



accountant (Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). In fact, the CPA may not be adequate to address the following accounting niches, to name only a few:

1. A certified divorce financial analyst (CDFA) determines the impact of a proposed divorce settlement along with other financial issues, and assists the attorney with financial matters to prove divorce cases (Institute for Divorce Financial Analysts, 2015).
2. A certified forensic accountant (CFA) uses accounting knowledge to investigate accounting litigations (Association of Fraud Examiners, 2015).
3. An accredited valuation analyst (AVA) performs valuation for estates, divorce assets, purchase negotiations, sale or merger of a business, and other related issues (Vineyard Group, LLC, 2013).
4. An elder care specialist (ECS) evaluates the situations of the elderly to identify services or care, provides counseling and support, makes referrals, aids in directing families through the perplexity of elderly service, monitors elder care, and other relating issues (St. Andrew's Senior Solutions, n.d.).
5. A certified information security manager (CISM) manages, develops, and oversees information security systems (TechTarget, 2015).

Typically, accounting and business development has been a cooperative effort of both industry and academia (Bitter, 2014). However, this cooperation seems to have expired: Business and industry are quickly changing while universities' accounting curricula continue to focus on the certification of public accounting (Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Wedemeyer, 2014). A certification in public accounting is not the only career

path available to accounting students. The CPA certification provides the certification holder with a license, but the opportunities for accounting students to differentiate themselves in the accounting industry are numerous (Boyle et al., 2013; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012); ideally, universities should communicate with their students about the available certification options (Boyle et al., 2013).

According to Johnson (2015), communication is vital to the lifeline of accounting. Therefore, it is important to initiate a conversation among educators and practitioners to take action to bring the accounting education up to standard to meet current accounting needs. In this exploratory qualitative phenomenological study, I explored accounting practitioners' and educators' perceptions of and experiences with CPA and other accounting certifications and accreditations to understand study participants' perceptions on how prepared accounting students are to meet the needs of a changing accounting profession.

I also explored the communication divides between accounting academia and professionals that may be creating a communication gap between what employers expect and what they received from accounting graduates. This study may provide the accounting industry with information about changes needed to prepare students and practitioners with the diverse skill set necessary to perform the specialized functions that globalization has prompted. A highly skilled accounting workforce will help contribute to trust and sustainable value creation and ultimately improve the economy by building enduring businesses and communities.

**Significance to Practice**

The impact of globalization has created a business environment that requires accountants to have diverse skill sets in order to perform beyond the customary accounting norms (Boyle et al., 2013). Globalization and the continued advancement of technology have magnified the need for college-educated certified accountants (Boyle et al., 2013). In addition, the effort to promote accountability and ethical conduct in business, there will likely be continuous amendments to corporate governance (Hutaibat, 2012; Jiles, 2014; Petkov, 2012); hence, the need exists for proficient accounting professionals to take on the task. This study has the potential to contribute to changes in the accounting curriculum and industry by starting a conversation that could drive change in accounting academia.

**Significance to Social Change**

This research has implications for positive social change. The findings may start a conversation to bring about curriculum changes to prepare students and practitioners with the diverse skill sets necessary to perform the specialized accounting functions that the impact of globalization has presented. The hope is that accounting professionals will identify and use accounting niches to achieve growth and competitive advantage, generating measurable returns for both the profession and the community. A highly skilled accounting workforce will help contribute to trust and sustainable value creation, and ultimately improve the economy by building enduring businesses and communities.

### Summary and Transition

Practitioners are concerned about the gap in accounting graduates' accounting skills (Ahadiat & Martin, 2015; Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Madsen, 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Sawalqa & Obaidat, 2014; Simms & Enrique, 2012). As a consequence, concerns have emerged about the currency of schools' curriculum, the awareness of and accessibility to all available accounting certifications, and the value of certification in public accounting in comparison to the other available other accounting certifications (Kessler, 2015; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Wedemeyer, 2014). The problem is that practitioners and educators may be overly focused on the CPA certification and thus remain unaware of the other accounting certifications and accreditations available, which may leave students unprepared to meet the needs of the accounting profession.

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative phenomenological study was to explore accounting practitioners' and educators' perceptions of and experiences with CPA and other accounting certifications and accreditations, and a possible communication divides between accounting academia and professionals. Therefore, I explored the essence of the phenomenon, via phone interviews, to understand how well accounting students are prepared to meet the needs of a changing accounting profession. The findings provide insight into how the documented overemphasis on the CPA certification and a lack of communication between accounting practitioners and accounting educators about other accounting certifications may exacerbate the skills gap exhibited by accounting graduates.

In Chapter 2, I address relevant research literature on how the exclusivity of the CPA certification affects a changing accounting profession.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Because of the dynamics of globalization, today's accountants perform a far wider range of accounting than in the past (Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). Many certifications exist to differentiate accounting professionals, broaden their career opportunities (Boyle et al., 2013; Coppage et al., 2012; Gangolly, n.d.), and demonstrate their credibility (Boyle et al., 2013). Only a few certifications are widely recognized; the CPA is the front-runner because of its status as the first certification (Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012).

The communication divides between schools and the accounting industry concerns practitioners because accounting graduates lack the knowledge and skills necessary to perform as accountants (Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). This study was intended to fulfill two purposes:

1. To explore accounting practitioners' and educators' perceptions of and experiences with CPA and other accounting certifications and accreditations in order to understand how well accounting students are prepared to meet the needs of a changing accounting profession.
2. To explore possible communication divides between accounting academia and professionals that may be creating a communication gap between what employers expect and what they received from accounting graduates to possibly start a conversation to bring about curriculum changes to provide diverse specialized accounting skill sets.

In this chapter I discuss the literature search strategy and conceptual framework, and I discuss the literature about following topics: the accounting field and the accountant's job, the impact of globalization on the accounting profession, the changing roles of accountants, value of accounting certifications, the purpose and impact of accounting certification, the extent to which universities are harming students by not preparing them for the present state of the accounting profession, and bringing awareness to accounting curriculum deficiencies.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

Because few studies pertain to how exclusivity of the CPA certification affects a changing accounting profession, the literature search had to be sensitive, specific, and precise to pick up information germane to the study while not filtering out vital information. I also needed to ensure a thorough search for peer-reviewed documents; therefore, I used the ProQuest and EBSCOhost databases and the Google Scholar search engine.

The literature addressed a variety of issues related to this study, including insufficiency of accounting education, practitioners' displeasure in accounting graduates' level of on-the-job knowledge and skills, the expanding accounting industry and the changes the impact of globalization is having on the accounting profession, what accounting certifications are available and supported, adjustments of accounting curriculum, accounting graduates' career choices and perceptions of accounting curriculum, and international concerns and effort to bring accounting standards in line with global needs (Ahadiat & Martin, 2015; Albu, 2013; Boyle et al., 2013; Burke &

Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Hutaibat, 2012; Johnson, 2015; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Sawalqa & Obaidat, 2014; Simms & Enrique, 2012; Smith, 2015; Wedemeyer, 2014). In addition, my findings include a list of accounting certification and noncertifications (Gangolly, n.d.).

Using Boolean operators either broadened the search or rendered nothing, so I used no parameters in my search; using the basic search option was adequate. In cases where the search did not render relevant literature, I revised my search accordingly. When the search rendered relevant literature, I reviewed the references in each document for datedness and relevance. I reviewed the subject terms on the documents' detailed record returned in the databases search to find other relevant search words or terms that I could use. I also reviewed the option "Cited by" in the search engine to find other relevant search words or terms. I applied the following search terms:

1. *American Institute of Certified Public Accountants.*
2. *CPA/certified public accountant.*
3. *Accounting/accountant.*
4. *Accounting/CPA journals.*
5. *Business/management journals.*
6. *Qualitative sample size.*
7. *Phenomenology.*
8. *Research methods.*
9. *Social sciences/research in social sciences.*
10. *International accounting.*



11. *Globalization and accounting.*
12. *Accounting certification.*
13. *Accounting gap.*
14. *Finance.*
15. *Accounting graduates/accounting students.*
16. *Accounting practitioners.*
17. *Accounting history.*
18. *Sample size/saturation.*

### **Conceptual Framework**

According to Saunders College of Business: Rochester Institute of Technology (n.d.), accountants collect, organize, and manage financial data for decision-making; hence, accounting is the language of business, and it is the basis by which businesses' financial stability is measured (Helliard, 2013; Horvat & Korošec, 2015). Therefore, communication is vital to the lifeline of accounting (Johnson, 2015). The interruption of communication or misinformation is hurting the accounting evolution due to the lack of communication between accounting academia and practitioners, creating a gap in the competency of accounting graduates; for this reason, there is a difference in accounting employers expectations and the accounting graduates' job performance (Ahadiat & Martin, 2015; Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Sawalqa & Obaidat, 2014; Simms & Enrique, 2012; Wedemeyer, 2014).

In addition, the impact of globalization has changed how businesses conduct business and communicate (Johnson, 2015). Accountants are not always effective

communicators because of the vague and confusing vast accounting terminology (Johnson, 2015). Several reports have suggested accounting graduates lack the competency necessary to function in the capacity of an accountant (Ahadiat & Martin, 2015; Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Sawalqa & Obaidat, 2014; Simms & Enrique, 2012; Wedemeyer, 2014). Therefore, the construction of the conceptual framework, upon which this research is based, was informed by the following key sources (Ahadiat & Martin, 2015; Burke et al., 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Chu & Man, 2012; Cory & Pruske, 2012; Durocher et al., 2016; Helliard, 2013; James & Lee, 2014; Lee, 2013; Mohammed Faker & Ahmed Atef, 2013; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Sawalqa & Obaidat, 2014; Smith, 2015; Simms & Enrique, 2012; Weaver & Kulesza, 2014; Wedemeyer, 2014; Yoon et al., 2013).

Researchers have identified a gap in accounting graduates' skill sets and expertise (see, e.g., Ahadiat & Martin, 2015; Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015). Graduates are unable to meet the current accounting needs created by the impact of globalization and regulatory changes (Boyle et al., 2013; Burke et al., 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). Indeed, schools are not communicating career opportunities to students and practitioners (Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Johnson, 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). In addition, a lack of communication exists about the knowledge of and accessibility to accounting certifications that should be readily available to prepare accounting students and practitioners to perform even those nontraditional tasks (Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas,

2014); thus, students are uninformed or misinformed about accounting certifications (Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Wedemeyer, 2014; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).

In the past, the accounting certifications and non-certifications options were limited; therefore, the CPA became the certification of choice (Boyle et al., 2013). Accounting certification and non-certifications are a needed byproduct of the evolution of the accounting profession, given the CPA education is not adequate to provide specialized knowledge in the other areas of accounting (Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012). Even though the CPA is the only accounting certification that provides its holder with an accounting license. A broad array of other accounting certifications and accreditations are available, many of which may lead to valuable career paths and opportunities (Boyle et al., 2013).

Gangolly (n.d.) identified many other accounting certifications and accreditations (see Appendix A), thus opening the door to an array of career paths and opportunities (Boyle et al., 2013). The accounting profession may have bestowed more value on the CPA than it may merit (Boyle et al., 2013; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). However, whether accounting practitioners have a CPA or not, accounting practitioners still need a degree and a certification in their particular field of practice (Boyle et al., 2013).

The impact of globalization on the accounting profession has placed new requirements on educators and students (Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). Members of the international accounting communities have noted the importance of creating an accounting credential structure with global standards (Albu,

2013; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Smith, 2015). The accounting profession has a strong influence on the advancement of international business, science, and technology (Boyle et al., 2013; McPeak et al., 2012). For this reason, employers have requested accountants with professional skills and practical expertise, which may require specialized certification (Boyle et al., 2013). Accountants often specialize in specific areas of accounting; they can also obtain certification in those areas of expertise (Boyle et al., 2013).

### **Literature Review**

The lack of information in accounting schools' curriculum about the wide range of accounting certifications (Chang et al., 2015; Johnson, 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014) leaves students and practitioners vulnerable. Schools appear to be focused on preparing students to become certified in public accounting (Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Howard & Warwick, 2013; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014), suggesting the other available certifications and accreditations are insignificant in comparison.

However, researchers have been investigating other accounting certifications, including certifications as management accountant, fraud accounting, IT accounting—along with soft skills—because of the role that researchers feel these certifications play in the realm of global accounting (Bhasin, 2013; Mohamed Faker & Ahmed Atef, 2013; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Weaver & Kulesza, 2014). This new focus on other certifications comes in the wake of practitioners voicing concerns about ill-prepared

graduates and their inability to perform at an expected level of competence in the new global economy (Howard & Warwick, 2013; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012).

The remainder of this chapter focuses on the following topics: accounting field and the accountant's job; impact of globalization on the accounting profession; changing roles of accountants; value of accounting certifications; purpose and impact of accounting certifications; preference for the certification in public accounting; universities may be harming students by not preparing them for the present state of accounting profession, and bringing awareness to accounting curriculum deficiencies.

### **The Accounting Field and the Accountant's Job**

Even though an accounting certification is not necessary to have an accounting career, having a certification has benefits, especially if one's intention is career advancement (Boyle et al., 2013). Many accountants work without an accounting certification; however, accounting certifications afford accountants the opportunity to differentiate themselves in terms of professional credibility (Boyle et al., 2013; Coppage et al., 2012). In addition, accounting certification enhances skills and employment marketability, leading to job retention and a higher salary (Boyle et al., 2013). In fact, employers prefer certified accountants, and certified accountants receive higher salaries than do non-certified accountants (Boyle et al., 2013).

Accounting is the language of business (Helliard, 2013; Horvat & Korošec, 2015), involving collecting, organizing, and manipulating financial data (Saunders College of Business: Rochester Institute of Technology, n.d.). Accounting has been around since people started assigning value to objects (Giroux, n.d.), and it is how business leaders

make decisions about budgets, profit, research and development, and investments (University of South Australia Library, 2013). Accounting is an established profession. In fact, accountants help sustain and grow the economy (McPeak et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014); therefore, the accounting profession will continue to expand and evolve to meet the changing needs of people, businesses, and the economy (Hales & Johnson, 2015).

This type of evolution comes with opportunities requiring creative problem solving and social interaction (Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). Thus, acknowledging and integrating the many available accounting certifications into schools' curriculum is vital. While the accounting profession respects individual's accounting experience, the accounting profession in America views the certification in public accounting as the individual's entry into the profession; however, an individual does not need to have accounting experience to acquire a certification in public accounting (Jiles, 2014; McPeak et al., 2012).

The accounting discipline has evolved in a similar fashion to the medical and law disciplines in terms of the multitude of niches that students and practitioners can fulfill (Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). In this time of global expansion, the monotonous, solitary accounting job no longer exists. Accountants work in every industry, and one can get as many accounting certifications as one likes or needs to meet one's career goals (Boyle et al., 2013; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). An accounting degree provides the foundation to obtain work as an accountant. However, beyond the traditional CPA certification, accounting certifications in other areas of accounting provide options for accountants in

new accounting niches (Boyle et al., 2013; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). For instance, a certified divorce financial analyst determines the impact of a proposed divorce settlement along with other financial issues, and assists the attorney with financial matters to prove divorce cases. In addition, an elder care specialist evaluates the situations of the elderly to identify services or care, provides counseling and support, makes referrals, aids in directing families through the perplexity of elderly services, monitors elder care, and other relating issues.

Accounting schools are responsible for providing and communicating the availability of other certification options to students (Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). However, for some reason, schools are not adapting to accounting industry needs brought on by global changes (Wedemeyer, 2014). Therefore, students and practitioners have expressed concerns that schools are not properly preparing accounting graduates for accounting careers (Howard & Warwick, 2013; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012). In addition, it takes more than an accounting degree to prepare accounting graduates to perform in a global business environment, as demonstrated by employers who prefer to hire certified accounting graduates (Barthel, 2014).

Credibility is important in the accounting profession; certification is one way to validate one's skills (Boyle et al., 2013). Accountants need not have an accounting certification in the United States, but certification does offer the certificate holder many benefits (Boyle et al., 2013). Certification signifies superior expertise in specific fields of accounting. In addition, to receive an accounting certification, one must have more than knowledge to function in the capacity of an accountant (Coppage et al., 2012; Raghavan

& Thomas, 2014). ACPA applicant needs a certain amount of credits to qualify to take the CPA exam (Griffin et al., 2012; Hargadon & Fuller, 2015; Henry & Hicks, 2015; Howard & Warwick, 2013; Jiles, 2014; Petkov, 2012). Most importantly, acquiring accounting knowledge starts in a classroom.

Earning a certification in public accounting seems desirable to many students, practitioners, and firms. Accountants holding a certification in public accounting have the authority to sign off on audits, and only CPAs can prepare and review audited financial statements (Boyle et al., 2013). However, despite the popularity of the CPA, the CPA certification fails to prepare applicants fully in necessary areas (Ahadiat & Martin, 2015; Chang et al., 2015; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Simms & Enrique, 2012). Moreover, even though it is widely accepted and recognized, the CPA certification might not always be pertinent (Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).

Employers have communicated concerns regarding the lack of competently trained accounting graduates (Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Cory & Pruske, 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). In fact, Burke et al. (2014), Chang et al. (2015), Mucenski-Keck et al. (2012), and Raghavan and Thomas (2014) reported the accounting professionals may hold the CPA in high regard; however, the CPA is not an assurance that the accountant has suitable skills and knowledge to perform competently. Therefore, accounting students and practitioners are encouraged to obtain certification in public accounting rather than earn any of the many other certifications and accreditations available; thus, it is essential to understand the effect the exclusive focus on the CPA certification may have on the accounting profession, given the impact of globalization.



Further, barriers could be hindering the lines of communication in the accounting community about the availability of other accounting certifications and accreditations.

Several researchers have indicated concerns about the exclusive focus on the certification in public accounting. However, in terms of recommending co-credentialing, researchers have focused narrowly on a few accounting certifications. The following list encompasses previous researches that pertain to this study:

- The impact of globalization on the accounting profession has created career opportunities that educators may not be communicating to students and practitioners (Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Siriwardane & Durden, 2014).
- The roles of accountants are changing. The impact of globalization has transformed the sedate, mundane responsibilities of the accounting profession into a multifaceted endeavor (Barthel, 2014; Kessler, 2015; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Washburn & Fischer, 2012; Yoon et al., 2013).
- Accounting certifications validate the skills of the certificate holder in specific areas of accounting and are deemed valuable assets in global competition (Boyle et al., 2013; Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012).
- The purpose and impact of other accounting certifications is not well studied, because the universities are CPA oriented (Boyle et al., 2013; Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Hutaibat, 2012; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012).

- Certification in public accounting is preferred; however, the reasons for its popularity and the impact of its existence on the accounting profession and the other accounting certifications are unclear (Boyle et al., 2013; Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Hutaibat, 2012; Mucenski-Keck et al. 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).
- Universities may be harming students as professors fail to communicate the variety of other accounting certifications and accreditations available (Boyle et al., 2013; Chang et al., 2015; Siriwardane & Durden, 2014; Wedemeyer, 2014).
- Awareness of the deficiencies in accounting curriculum should prompt a dialog to initiate change (Ahadiat & Martin, 2015; Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Mucenski-Keck et al. 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Siriwardane & Durden, 2014).

The accounting profession continues to evolve largely because of globalization (Iulia et al., 2014). For this reason, the monotonous, solitary accounting job that accountants once performed has ceased to exist (Burke, et al., 2014; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). The changes in the accounting profession have brought on newer ways of doing business, and these changes in accounting business have created niches in the accounting profession that has greatly expanded accounting needs (Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). However, even though accounting is the language of business, there seems to be a gap in communication due to the complexity of the constantly changing world (Helliard, 2013; Johnson, 2015). With the accounting

curriculum focused on the certification in public accounting (Boyle et al., 2013; Hutaibat, 2012), the impact that globalization is having on the accounting profession may not be getting the warranted attention.

### **Impact of Globalization on the Accounting Profession**

Globalization has affected the accounting industry on a massive scale, leading to a domino effect on schools, graduates, practitioners, and certifications (Griffin et al., 2012; Helliard, 2013; Hutaibat, 2012; Jiles, 2014; Petkov, 2012). Accounting work has permeated into other professions, thereby creating unexpected niches that have left schools with outdated curriculum (Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Mohamed Faker & Ahmed Atef, 2013; Weaver & Kulesza, 2014). This evolution has business leaders concerned about the deficit in the skills and knowledge of the graduates that the schools produce (Mohamed Faker & Ahmed Atef, 2013; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012). What was once a sedate, confined, and repetitive profession has blossomed into an expanding profession (Boyle et al., 2013; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014), thus changing and growing with other professions as the business world develops and diversifies (Mucenski-Keck et al. 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).

In this global competition, all available accounting certifications are valuable, which means it is vital that schools prepare students to enter the accounting field competitively. Gangolly (n.d.) identified many other accounting certifications and accreditations (see Appendix A); yet, to date, schools have only recognized a few of these accounting certifications (Wedemeyer, 2014). The impact of globalization has changed things where having financial knowledge alone is insufficient; accountants need to equip

themselves with knowledge of business and its global connections (Boyle et al., 2013; Jiles, 2014; Petkov, 2012). Researchers have found that the United States has a broken accounting curriculum that requires reform (Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Johnson, 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). Thus, educators neglect to take action to change the accounting education system (Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Johnson, 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).

Given these points, the accounting profession seems to bestow the CPA with unwarranted esteem, as though it is a one-size-fits-all application. In addition, the accounting educational environment may be neglecting other accounting niches as it supports the certification in public accounting. In fact, the impact of globalization may have diminished the prestigious reputation that the CPA has garnered over the years. The accounting discipline has evolved in a similar fashion to the medical and law disciplines in terms of the multitude of niches that students and practitioners can fulfill (Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). Practitioners are thus concerned that an accounting degree may not be sufficient to prepare accounting graduates to take on the responsibilities that today's accountants face in business, especially international business (Chang et al., 2015; Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Smith, 2015; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012). Employers prefer accounting graduates with skills that a 4-year accounting education seems to lack (Weaver & Kulesza, 2014).

The certification in public accounting has always been the measure of the accounting curriculum, which has not changed in decades at most universities (Balachandran et al., 2014; Wedemeyer, 2014), even though the demands have increased

for these special skill sets (Hargadon & Fuller, 2015). This evolution is expected to continue to increase the accounting employment rate throughout 2020 (Corkern et al., 2013).

Employers are looking for accountants who are experts in international business, and they want documentation of proof, namely accounting certifications (Boyle et al., 2013). Unfortunately, academia is not promoting the accounting niches in the accounting profession the way other professions, such as the medical and law fields promote their niches. For this reason, other accounting certifications are overlooked (Boyle et al., 2013). In fact, research has indicated the certification in public accounting is significantly preferred above all other accounting certification (Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).

With the demand for specialty accounting on the rise (Corkern et al., 2013), firms conducting business overseas must adhere to the laws of the communities in which they work. In some cases, business communities abroad do not recognize the U.S. accounting practices, or their accounting practices are not aligned with America's CPA standard (Albu, 2013; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). In fact, some of these countries have their own accounting certification standards in which certification may be mandatory (Howard & Warwick, 2013; Sawalqa & Obaidat, 2014). However, globalization has international accounting communities focused on restructuring their accounting standards to meet the demands that the impact of globalization has created (Albu, 2013; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).

For these reasons, employers have sought accountants who can function beyond the traditional responsibilities of an accountant (Cory & Pruske, 2012; Weaver &

Kulesza, 2014). In fact, this requires accountants to have diverse skill sets (Boyle et al., 2013). Having a standard global accounting profession is beneficial to the accounting education and practice because accounting practitioners everywhere affects the global accounting industry, and it decreases unethical behavior that undermines the accounting profession (Bhasin, 2013; Durocher et al., 2016; McPeak et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).

Boyle et al. (2013) have argued a degree is not enough to prepare accounting graduates to take on the responsibilities that today's accountants face in business, especially international business. The growing need for accountants with international accounting experience did not appear overnight, so this evolution should be no surprise to practitioners (Albu, 2013). Yet this evolution has practitioners concern about the knowledge and skills deficiency that the impact of globalization has created in the accounting community (Mohamed Faker & Ahmed Atef, 2013; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Weaver & Kulesza, 2014). Most importantly, accounting associations should take an active role in addressing the skills gap that employers have identified (Weaver & Kulesza, 2014).

The impact of globalization has bestowed the accounting profession with requirements that is a call to action for the accounting community (Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). American-trained accountants once dominated the accounting profession, but the impact of globalization has changed that (Iulia et al., 2014). Therefore, to succeed in today's accounting profession, accountants should consider obtaining certification in multiple accounting areas to supplement knowledge and skills (Mucenski-Keck et al.,

2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014), especially since the certification in public accounting is may not be sufficient to address specialized areas of accounting that are addressed by other accounting certifications and accreditations (Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).

### **Changing Roles of Accountants**

Accountants are not just functioning in an accounting capacity anymore; they have to be well rounded (Boyle et al., 2013). In fact, the profession is expected to continue to expand and evolve (Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014); however, the demand for specialty accounting skills is expanding to accommodate the need for the specialty skills, and this demand is expected to continue to evolve through 2020 (Corkern et al., 2013). Because the accounting profession is changing globally, accounting practitioners likely will have to receive accounting training and accounting certification in international issues, especially if they plan to advance their careers; therefore, an accounting certification from the country in which one practices accounting adds value to one's skill set (Albu, 2013).

As mentioned earlier, the CPA may be held in high regard, but the certification in public accounting lacks education in the specialized skills and knowledge attainable from some of the other accounting certifications and accreditations (Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Burke & Gandolfi, 2014). Hence, the CPA status as most prevalent and widely recognized may not mean most relevant (Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). According to Boyle et al. (2013), accountants have been turning to areas of accounting expertise,

including “business valuation, forensic accounting, accounting information systems, financial services, internal auditing, and management accounting to name a few” (p. 62).

This type of accounting expertise is increasing in numbers creating a broad range of accounting certification possibilities (Boyle et al., 2013). The accounting communities should communicate the need for different accounting certifications and embrace co-credentialing as a necessity or the needs of communities will go underserved or unserved (Hargadon & Fuller, 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). Because of the focus on the certification of public accounting, there is a misconception about the type of work that accountants perform (Howard & Warwick, 2013; Weaver & Kulesza, 2014). However, in the current reality of the accounting profession, accounting graduates fill many different roles in the accounting industry (Boyle et al., 2013).

The lack of access and misinformation about the accounting profession creates hurdles that may delay or prevent students from seeking a career in the profession (Stivers & Onifade, 2014). The best-case scenario is that educators promote changes in accounting curriculum to maintain the accounting evolution (Siriwardane & Durden, 2014). In essence, diversifying one’s accounting certifications can be a vital component in communicating competencies (Boyle et al., 2013). Accounting competencies, defined by Abbasi (2013), are characteristics of accounting prospects that permit them to perform their accounting responsibilities competently and productively.

However, accounting firms marketing their business as a CPA firm, even though the way that they are doing business has changed, is providing no assurance of the competency of their work (Chang et al., 2015; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Raghavan &



Thomas, 2014). The impact of globalization created niches in the accounting industry that require a certain level of competency (Chang et al., 2015; Weaver & Kulesza, 2014; Yoon et al., 2013). In fact, other disciplines are now incorporating competency-based professional education in response to the global changes (Abbasi, 2013). Nevertheless, some people say that accounting academia has not been able to react to the global changes that are affecting the accounting education (Behn et al., 2012; Black, 2012; Helliard, 2013; Weaver & Kulesza, 2014). Misinformation and lack of communication negatively affects the competency of accounting graduates (Ahadiat & Martin, 2015; Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Sawalqa & Obaidat, 2014; Simms & Enrique, 2012; Wedemeyer, 2014).

In addition, most universities set up their accounting curriculum upon the assumption that accounting graduates will all go into public accounting (Abbasi, 2013; Chu & Man, 2012; Lee, 2013). However, a new generation of technology savvy students is another fast growing niche in the accounting industry (Behn, et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014); hence, the dynamics of globalization have brought new opportunities to the profession (Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Weaver & Kulesza, 2014). Globalization and the continued advancement of technology have magnified the need for college-educated certified accountants to accommodate the niches brought on by these changes (Barthel, 2014). Further, in the effort to promote accountability and ethical conduct in business, as a global interest, there will likely be continuous amendments to corporate governance (Abbasi, 2013; Jiles, 2014; Petkov, 2012). Therefore, the need exists for proficient accounting professionals to take on the task.

## **Value of Accounting Certifications**

In terms of global competition, differentiating accounting certifications creates value for practitioners and students. However, an accounting certification may have different values to the holders, depending on the intended use. Whether one is conducting business in the United States or internationally, accounting professionals must follow many rules and regulations (Wedemeyer, 2014). Possessing multiple certifications creates a fairer level of competition among accountants and allows accountants to select an area or several areas of accounting specialty (Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). Thus, having multiple certifications is not only valuable to the accounting professionals, but also to the economy as a whole, especially with international businesses seeing the necessity of adjusting their accounting system to adapt to global changes (Albu, 2013; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).

What is more, according to Boyle et al. (2013), there was never an assortment of accounting certifications to allow choices. Therefore, many accountants chose to work towards getting a certification in public accounting. However, even though the certification in public accounting is the only accounting certification that provides the holder with a license, there are different accounting certifications that afford accountants multiple career opportunities to individualize them in the market place (Boyle et al., 2013; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012).

Conducting international business supports jobs in the United States, which contributes to the U.S. economy (Albu, 2013). International business also creates a platform for developing opportunity for the economy and for cultures (Durocher et al.,

2016; Helliari, 2013; James & Lee, 2014). In fact, possessing multiple accounting certifications makes it easier for accounting professionals to do business in the global markets (Boyle et al., 2013; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012). Businesses must establish a viable value to keep their customers coming back, but the key to success is for the businesses and professional communities to recognize that each entity has a relative worth that requires them to work together to evolve with the times (Hales & Johnson, 2015; Hagel, 2014).

Another value that accounting certifications bestow on its holder is the benefit of competitive advantage. The dynamics of the global marketplace require accountants to adapt and grow with the changes and seize the opportunities that the changes bring about (Durocher et al., 2016; Helliari, 2013; James & Lee, 2014). One of the opportunities that accounting professionals need to embrace in order to gain a competitive edge is the growing number of certifications, thereby generating greater value for themselves and the economy (Coppage et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Yoon et al., 2013). To sustain this competitive edge, accounting professionals must adopt new methods—for example, accounting certification specializations (Boyle et al., 2013). However, the value of accounting certifications is driven by the value that corporations give them (Giacomino et al., 2013)—that is, what the CPA is worth to the business is what it is worth to the potential employees.

Similarly, what the CPA certification is worth to the schools is what it is worth to the graduates. Accounting graduates depend on the schools to point them in a beneficial direction, specifically, that the certification in public accounting is the accounting

certification that graduates need in order to be successful in their accounting career. As such, one must consider whether the schools are telling the accounting students that they are preparing them to take the certification in public accounting, the only accounting certification for which schools are preparing accounting students (Howard & Warwick, 2013). The clear message to the students is that the CPA is the accounting certification to have if they want to succeed in the accounting industry.

Opportunities exist for introducing other accounting certifications and accreditations. However, when discussing other accounting certifications—aside from the CPA or along with the CPA—researchers seem to stay within the realm of a few particular accounting certifications (Griffin et al., 2012; Jiles, 2014; Petkov, 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Hargadon & Fuller, 2015). This narrow focus suggests researchers may be unaware of the variety of accounting certifications and accreditations available (Wedemeyer, 2014). These researchers may have focused on specific accounting certifications for the same reasons others have developed a preference for the certification in public accounting.

This narrow focus on only a few certifications is detrimental to the accounting profession (Howard & Warwick, 2013; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012). Considering the many available accounting certifications, this preference of researchers to choose some certifications over others, regardless of quality or usage, seems like the for the traditional CPA certification. Either way, the accounting professionals lack knowledge about what is available and how to access what is available (Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Wedemeyer, 2014). The value of the many other accounting certifications and

accreditations may remain unrecognized until educators and practitioners start a conversation about what non-accounting certification is available and how to access the non-accounting certification (Wedemeyer, 2014).

Regardless of the other certifications the profession offers, the CPA certification has developed into a brand with a loyal following (Boyle et al., 2013). If the educators and practitioners do not start a conversation about other accounting certifications, proponents of the CPA will not acknowledge the need for the other accounting certifications and accreditations (Boyle et al., 2013). Thus, continued innovation in the accounting profession, in terms of accounting niches and other accounting certification, is vital to maintaining a competitive advantage (Coppage et al., 2012; Hagel, 2014).

### **Purpose and Impact of Accounting Certifications**

The purpose of accounting certifications is to identify and verify individual accounting knowledge and expertise in specific areas of accounting (Boyle et al., 2013). Certifications demonstrate that the certificate holder received specific training and possesses skill sets required to accomplish specific tasks (Boyle et al., 2013). Financial professionals can select from many certifications, which represent tools to allow them to find opportunities and career paths (Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). Even though accounting certifications are in place to validate the accountants' skill sets, they also provide accountants with a competitive edge in the workplace (Boyle et al., 2013; Coppage et al., 2012). In addition, accounting certifications allow accountants access to professional associations, other practitioners, and networking opportunities (Coppage et al., 2012; Boyle et al., 2013).

One accounting course does not prepare a student for a career in governmental accounting, tax accounting, audit accounting, budget accounting, or any other area of accounting. In fact, almost anyone can apply to take the CPA exam (Griffin et al., 2012; Jiles, 2014; Petkov, 2012). For this reason, the accounting education system is flawed when it promotes the idea that an undergraduate degree coupled with the CPA is sufficient preparation for students going into the accounting profession (Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). Schools encourage accounting students to get certified (Barthel, 2014; Griffin et al., 2012; Jiles, 2014; Petkov, 2012), but may not communicate to students all that the certifications provide (Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Wedemeyer, 2014). Thus, the impact that accounting certifications have on accounting education is limited to the certifications that the schools promote and incorporate into the curriculum (Barthel, 2014; Howard & Warwick, 2013; Griffin et al., 2012; Hargadon & Fuller, 2015; Jiles, 2014; Petkov, 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).

Accounting educators may not be equipped to carry out a complete lesson plan, because most of them went to school to learn how to be an accounting teacher (Buchholz et al., 2014). Therefore, some may not have held an accounting job outside of the classroom (Buchholz et al., 2014). However, accounting students have no preference in whether the accounting professor has a Ph.D. or a CPA because their only concern is that the professor provides proper in class training (Buchholz et al., 2014). Considering that accounting employers have reported students' lack of job skills (Ahadiat & Martin, 2015; Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Sawalqa & Obaidat, 2014; Simms & Enrique, 2012; Wedemeyer, 2014), establishing and

maintaining this type of connection between the classroom and the workplace is vital to keeping up with the changing accounting needs (Braun & Mauldin, 2012; Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Cory & Pruske, 2012; Howard & Warwick, 2013; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).

Accounting educators may not need to have accounting experience to teach an accounting class (Buchholz et al., 2014). Because accounting education does not outrank the certification in public accounting, as far as accounting students are concerned, the students may see the CPA as a resourceful base (Buchholz et al., 2014). For this reason, practitioners are rightfully concerned about the knowledge and skills deficiency that accounting graduates possess (Ahadiat & Martin, 2015; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Yoon et al., 2013). However, accounting students may think the knowledge and experience that they need to function in the capacity of an accountant can be learned in the classroom (Buchholz et al., 2014), which practitioners may beg to differ.

Further, even though most accounting graduates will find employment in this economy, they can enhance their competitive advantage with advanced education and certifications (Coppage et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). For example, international certifications are valuable now that the impact of globalization is creating a virtual business world (Albu, 2013; Durocher et al., 2016; Helliard, 2013; James & Lee, 2014). American certifications are accepted across the world, and having a certification that represents a particular field of expertise adds to one's value in the workplace (Boyle et al., 2013). Considering the growing list of accounting practitioners complaining about inadequately prepared accounting graduates and students complaining about inadequate

accounting curriculum, it is no surprise that researchers have recommended that schools improve their accounting program so that they can produce graduates prepared for the work force (Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Cory & Pruske, 2012; Madsen, 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).

The accounting evolution has created a business environment that requires more than schools are offering, including expertise in other related disciplines (Kessler, 2015). Tradition has created a perception about accounting that permeates the accounting industry and the accounting education (Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). However, the accounting business environment is evolving very quickly, which has created a gap between what schools are offering and what the accounting industry now requires (Johnson, 2015). Some universities have recently modified their accounting courses, as it relates to content and delivery, to accommodate the changes in the accounting industry; yet in the overall scheme of things, the fundamentals of the accounting education have not changed in decades (Howard & Warwick, 2013; Wedemeyer, 2014).

The accounting profession now provides a range of services that go beyond the public accounting practice, a factor of the accounting profession that the accounting curriculum is not considering (Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). Accountants are now dealing with more complex and diverse accounting information and responsibilities (Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014); for which new opportunities to the accounting profession means more specialized accounting certifications (Chang et al., 2015; Hargadon & Fuller, 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).



In response, specialized accounting certifications are increasing to meet the demands of the new opportunities that the dynamics of globalization has brought about (Hargadon & Fuller, 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). Regardless of where students begin their accounting careers, most of them end up working in a corporate setting (Howard & Warwick, 2013; Sawalqa & Obaidat, 2014).

Education may be necessary, but certification and training are key components for an accountant to be successful (Buchholz et al., 2014; Chang et al., 2015), even though it is likely that accounting graduates can be successful without multiple certifications and co-credentialing (Samuel, 2015). Company leaders have expressed a renewed commitment to keep current with regulations and professional standards (Bhasin, 2013; Durocher et al., 2016). In addition, the present economy requires accountants to be multifaceted in order to be marketable (Boyle et al., 2013). Therefore, it makes sense to help educators stay current and provide real work experiences that merge practice with theory to give their students comprehensive education (Braun & Mauldin, 2012; Howard & Warwick, 2013). Thus, educators can expand their teaching to include other certifications in the accounting curriculum.

### **Preference for the Certification in Public Accounting**

As noted, accounting education combined with accounting certifications and training demonstrates credibility (Boyle et al., 2013; Coppage et al., 2012). The accounting education and accounting professionals may not promote non-accounting certification education as widely as the CPA; for this reason, accounting graduates are unaware of the new accounting expectations (Mohamed Faker & Ahmed Atef, 2013;

Weaver & Kulesza, 2014). In addition, the fact that the CPA has been around much longer and has developed acceptability makes it harder for other certifications to establish recognition, especially at that caliber (Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).

This decrease in applicants did not decrease the outlook of the CPA as the principal certification. Aside from the fact that the certification in public accounting was highly recommend in accounting and other professions, one reason for the popularity of the certification was that applicants did not need to have work experience to take the exam (Jiles, 2014; Singer & Wiesner, 2013). Coppage et al. (2012) and Jiles (2014) reported accountants have various ways to use accounting certifications to enhance their human capital. In addition, Hargadon and Fuller (2015) reported that a certification in management accounting and certification in public accounting are the certifications to hold in order to stand out and demonstrate accounting expertise.

Research has suggested that the certification in public accounting is greatly preferred above all the other accounting certifications (Boyle et al., 2013). In addition, most universities use the CPA as the foundation of their accounting curriculum in support of the CPA examination and the public accounting practice; this is the reason for modification to the university's accounting curriculum when the credits to take the CPA exam increased (Singer & Wiesner, 2013). On the other hand, the business world is continuing to evolve and diversify (Chang et al., 2015; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).

Market accounting firms under the certification of public accounting, which does not guarantee competency as it relates to the accountant conducting the work (Boyle et al., 2013; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). Even though the accounting undergraduate curriculum focus on public accounting with the assumption that the accounting graduates will go to work in the public sector (Sawalqa & Obaida, 2014), the demand for specialized accounting skill sets is continuing to expand and will continue this way throughout 2020 (Corkern et al., 2013). The certification in public accounting may be widely recognized and the preferred accounting certification to possess, but it may be given more value than it merits (Boyle et al., 2013; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). The certified public accounting education influences the AICPA and the AICPA influence the university's accounting curriculum, but the AICPA has no control on how the universities set up their accounting curriculum or has the authority to advise the universities on the content of the accounting curriculum (Boyle et al., 2013; McPeak et al., 2012; Sellers et al., 2015). Most importantly, the AICPA supports only five accounting credentials, but the holder of the credentials must also hold a CPA (Boyle et al., 2013).

Many researchers view the CPA as the component that leads to key accounting positions, which likely encourages educators to champion the certificate (Bailey et al., 2013), even though the CPA certification may not be the most relevant (Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). However, students and practitioners may not be knowledgeable about the many accounting certification and accreditation opportunities available to them (Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas,

2014). In fact, the array of accounting certifications is impressive: CPA, CMA, CIA, CFE, CrFA, CISA, CFP, CTP, CGA (Gangolly, n.d.). Yet Bailey et al. (2013) reported that 60% of respondents were CPA holders while the others were 6% CMA, 2% CIA, and 8% other certifications. Nevertheless, accountants who equip themselves with an assortment of certifications are most likely to have a fruitful career (Boyle et al., 2013).

### **Universities May Be Harming Students**

Practitioners have complained about graduates not having the required skills to perform effectively (Boyle et al., 2013). Employers expressed dissatisfaction of the lack of knowledge and skills from their accounting graduates, and for the most part, they need accountants who can function in a broad capacity of accounting (Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Weaver & Kulesza, 2014). Additionally, the frequent regulatory and reporting changes make it necessary for graduates to be well prepared when going into the accounting field (Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014); even though financial accounting knowledge alone is not sufficient, it is essential to participate in the accounting profession (Hargadon & Fuller, 2015).

Globalization has magnified the differences in the American standard of accounting education in comparison to the standard of accounting education in the United Kingdom (Durocher et al., 2016; Helliard, 2013; James & Lee, 2014; McPeak et al., 2012). In the United Kingdom, people do not need an accounting degree or a degree of any sort to become an accountant (McPeak et al., 2012). In fact, research shows that a connection between the accounting schools and profession can be beneficial for both parties in the

form of on the job training (Braun & Mauldin, 2012; Chang et al., 2015), the professional bodies in the United Kingdom—which are equivalent to America’s AICPA—prepare anyone in the United Kingdom who wants to take on the role of an accountant (Albu, 2013).

In addition, during the time that the individual accounting prospects are receiving preparatory training from the professional body, they are also required to intern at an accounting firm to gain actual on the job experience (McPeak et al., 2012). On the other hand, in America the universities prepare the individual accounting prospects to take on the role of an accountant (McPeak et al., 2012; Weaver & Kulesza, 2014). However, American practitioners have complained that accounting graduates lack the knowledge and skills to function at the capacity of an accountant (Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).

The impact of globalization, as well as accounting regulatory changes, has created a business environment that is continuously promoting diversification in the work that accountants do; very much like those of the medical industry and the legal industry (Durocher et al., 2016; Helliard, 2013; James & Lee, 2014). Even though this development has brought on new prospects for the advancement of the accounting profession (Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014), the call for action seems to be ignored (Wedemeyer, 2014). The evolution of the accounting industry has established a need for accounting graduates with specialized training (Ahadiat & Martin, 2015; Simms & Enrique, 2012), yet accounting education is not comprehensive enough to keep up with the constant changes in the accounting industry (Wedemeyer, 2014).

Further, the universities still structure the accounting curriculum to prepare accounting graduates solely for public accounting (Wedemeyer, 2014). However, as the economy and information technology rapidly evolve, competency is required in different areas of the accounting curriculum (Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Singer & Wiesner, 2013). Chang et al. (2015), Hutaibat (2012), and Raghavan and Thomas (2014) expressed similar concerns about the skills of new accountants regarding information accuracy, scarce resources, accountability, transparency, corporate governance, and business ethics.

In the late 1980s to the early 1990s, business firms complained that students lacked comprehension in some areas of tax, budget, and strategic planning and did not know the functions of an accountant in the corporate environment. The curriculum might not have change much over the last 50 years or more (Wedemeyer, 2014). The core courses are set up to prepare students for the CPA, which is not the route that most students take (Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). Thus, it is important to identify possible issues that may prevent schools from equipping students with what they need to be successful in the corporate world (Wedemeyer, 2014). Although employers prefer certified accountants with at least a 4-year degree in accounting or in an associated field (Barthel, 2014), schools should consider the various accounting certifications when developing accounting curriculum, because the schools' purpose is to fulfill the workforce needs of its community and society as a whole (Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).

Most importantly, the learning objectives of the various accounting certifications are developed by industry stakeholders (Chang et al., 2015; McPeak et al., 2012); for that

reason, schools working in concert with practitioners are the best platform to engage change relating to the schools' accounting program (Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012). The interaction between accounting associations and academia may not be what it should be to maintain the flow of information between the two. The changing needs of the accounting profession are not getting the proper response from schools; hence, a disparity exists between the accounting practice and schools' curriculum (Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Wedemeyer, 2014).

### **Bringing Awareness to Accounting Curriculum Deficiencies stop**

Today's accountants perform critical duties prompted by the effects of the impact of globalization on business practices; they must be ready to give advice, make technological decisions, and perform on an international level (Boyle et al., 2013; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). In fact, history demonstrates that the evolution of accounting is consistent with advances in the business industry; for instance, the double-entry bookkeeping was developed during the renaissance of Italian uprising (Salmagundi, n.d). Because the accounting profession has been evolving into a bigger arena with a wide range of specialties (Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Corkern et al., 2013; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014), schools may need to set up learning environments that cater to the need for advanced accounting professionals (Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).

The accountancy curriculum objective is to produce competent graduates who utilize their profession to make continuous positive contributions to the accounting

profession and society in its entirety (Helliari, 2013; McPeak et al., 2012). Helliari (2013) argued accounting education should be uniform across the globe. Many students, educators, and practitioners are ignorant of the many available accounting certifications (Wedemeyer, 2014); thus, the accounting community needs to start communicating this information to bring awareness (Johnson, 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). In addition, the schools have neglected to address real world or real-time accounting events, resulting in stagnant accounting curriculum (Johnson, 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).

One example is the governmental courses. Governmental accounting courses may provide information for an accounting graduate who wants to pursue a financial career in the government, but not for an accounting graduate who wants to pursue a career in the government on the management level; hence, one governmental accounting class or book does not cover enough of the things involved (Freeman et al., 2014). In fact, the government is constantly changing procedures and processes that, when merged with the impact of globalization, makes the accounting profession more complex (Durocher et al., 2016; Helliari, 2013; Hutaibat, 2012; James & Lee, 2014). Moreover, possessing accounting certifications and non-certifications allow student career options and opportunities; however, if the accounting curriculum is not evolving with the times, accounting students may not be getting the opportunities that accounting certification provides (Boyle et al., 2013).

Universities share a commonality in relation to the education that the schools can use to bring the educational standards on the same level, and some contend that accounting accreditation standards has a positive effect on their programs (Bitter, 2014;



McPeak et al., 2012). Experience has shown that the schools' faculty members can help cause and guide this movement (Barthel, 2014). Educators and practitioners have expertise that they can utilize to assist in directing the changes needed to align the accounting education and practice (Helliari, 2013; McPeak et al., 2012). There is an urgent call to action, as it relates to the evolution of the accounting profession, because practitioners and educators can work together on resolving the accounting curriculum deficiencies (Braun & Mauldin, 2012; Brewer et al., 2014). Moreover, a strong economy partly depends on a strong accounting profession (Helliari, 2013; McPeak et al., 2012).

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The CPA is can be inappropriate preparation for each accounting profession (Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). The need for highly skilled accountants who are cognizant of the importance of certification has increased (Corkern et al., 2013). A degree no longer prepares graduates for the real responsibilities of today's accountant (Boyle et al., 2013), and practitioners have been complaining about graduates not having the required skills to perform their duties (Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). Globalization has weakened the CPA's reach by changing the way business is conducted and has created diversified accounting needs (Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). Therefore, the accounting profession is continuing to flourish, and more accountants are needed (Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).

However, learning and preparation begins in the classroom; accounting educators and practitioners can participate and benefit from curriculum changes to produce a skilled accounting workforce (Boyle et al., 2013). Other countries are experiencing the need to

create accounting systems comparable to those in the United States to meet the needs of globalization (Albu, 2013). Accounting certifications' impact on schools is limited to the certifications that schools promote (Weaver & Kulesza, 2014); hence, the most prevalent and widely recognized certification may not be the most relevant (Boyle et al., 2013; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).

Based on the preceding literature review, this explorative qualitative phenomenological study was essential for several reasons. First, a gap exists in the accounting skill sets and expertise: graduates are not meeting the current accounting needs prompted by globalization (Boyle et al., 2013). This situation is troubling because of the significant role that the accounting profession plays in the technological advances and the internationalization of the markets (Iulia et al., 2014).

Therefore, employers have solicited accountants with professional skills and practical expertise, which can only come with specialized accounting certifications (Boyle et al., 2013; Burke & Gandolfi, 2014; Chang et al., 2015; Gangolly, n.d.; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). However, the exclusive focus on the CPA certification has overshadowed the value of other accounting certifications and accreditations. Thus, a lack of communication is exacerbated regarding the availability of these other salient accounting certifications (Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014; Sawalqa & Obaidat, 2014).

The information gathered in this chapter gave rise to the research questions presented in Chapter 1. In Chapter 3 I explain, describe, and discuss how I answered the research questions. The following topics are discussed in Chapter 3: the research design

and rationale; role of the researcher; methodology, which includes participant selection logic, interview questions, procedures for recruitment/participation/ and data collection; data analysis plan; and issues of trustworthiness, which includes credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical procedures.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative phenomenology study was to examine the perspectives of accounting practitioners and educators in the continental United States. The intent was to gain insight into how prepared accounting students may be to perform in the capacity of the contemporary accounting industry. I explored accounting practitioners' and educators' perceptions of and experiences with the CPA and other accounting certifications and accreditation. The study focused on any communication divides between accounting academia and professionals that have created a communication gap between what employers expect and what they received from accounting graduates. Accounting practitioners and educators were ideal study participants because of their experience with and knowledge of accounting. The intent of the study was to contribute to a diversified curriculum that addresses emerging specialized accounting skill sets. I used population listings to conduct purposeful selection (Haney, 2015), and participants' availability determined the sample size (Bernard, 2013).

In this chapter, I discuss the following topics: research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, participant selection logic; instrumentation; procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection; and the data analysis plan. I also address issues of trustworthiness.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

Two research questions guided this study:

1. What are accounting practitioners' and educators' perceptions of and experiences with the CPA and other accounting certifications and accreditations?
2. What are possible communication divides between accounting academia and professionals that may be creating a communication gap between what employers expect and what they received from accounting graduates?

Considering the intent of this study, the qualitative research method fits the needs of this research. Using a qualitative method, a researcher can explore and describe experiences that can potentially create a rich, complex study with depth, insight, and access to relatively unstudied phenomena (Bernard, 2013; Bhattacharjee, 2012). The objective of this research is not to test relationships between variables, as would be the case in a quantitative or mixed-method study (Bernard, 2013).

Researchers usually utilize a phenomenology approach in human sciences to organize, analyze, and synthesize individuals' experiences to expose the basic, real, and invariable nature of the phenomenon (see Abawi, n.d). The phenomenology approach is also associated with nursing, psychology, media, and the arts (Abawi, n.d). The objective of this exploratory qualitative phenomenological study was to describe the study participants' lived experiences (Waters, 2016), and capture the participants' interpretation of their experiences and how they define those experiences (Abawi, n.d). In a phenomenological approach, researchers learn about study participants' unique perspective of their experiences and describe their experiences in their own terms (Bernard, 2013). For this reason, I constructed a description exposing the essence of the

study participants' perceptions of their experiences, providing insight into the phenomenon (Davidsen, 2013; Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Rocha Pereira, 2012).

Besides describing the participants' lived experiences, this type of study involves bracketing, intuiting, and analyzing (Davidsen, 2013; Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Rocha Pereira, 2012). Taking this approach to research does not require a large sample set because it can become unmanageable; therefore, 10 study participants were sufficient (Van Manen, 2015). Through open-ended question participants can describe and elaborate on their experiences (Writing Studio, n.d.). In addition, interviews are one way to accomplish data saturation using the available sample (Bernard, 2013). For these reasons, I conducted an exploratory qualitative phenomenology study.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My perceptions and knowledge about accounting certifications and accreditations stem from my personal experiences as an accounting graduate, a student, and a practicing accountant. I worked in the field of accounting for more than 30 years, covering positions from clerical to payroll and then account tech responsibilities. I have also been a practicing accountant for the past 12 years. To ensure the integrity of the study, I acknowledged my own potential biases:

1. The CPA is promoted by the accounting industry without consideration for other accounting certifications and accreditations.
2. People in the accounting industry are set in their ways and do not want to change to accommodate the needs of a changing accounting profession.

3. Educators do not hold accounting education in as high a regard as they hold medical or law education, and therefore, accounting receives second-rate attention.
4. Accounting educators and practitioners can make the changes necessary to overhaul accounting curriculum to keep pace with the needs of a changing accounting profession if they choose to take action.

### **Methodology**

#### **Participant Selection Logic**

Qualitative methods often require researchers to collect perspectives from a diverse sample set; the need for a diverse sample set influences the desired sample size (Robinson, 2014; Thurling & Harris, 2012). Thus, I selected participants through purposeful sampling (Bernard, 2013). Qualitative research sample size is generally somewhat small, because more data do not imply more information; thus, there is a decline in return after a certain point (Burmeister & Aitken, 2012; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Walker, 2012). The sample size must be large enough to ensure that the targeted perceptions and experiences are revealed. Conversely, the data from a large sample can become repetitive and excessive (Cleary et al., 2014; Walker, 2012).

In addition, sample size cannot be quantified, but interviews are one way to accomplish data saturation using the available sample (Bernard, 2013). Numerous sources suggest the adequate interview sample size can be anywhere from five to 50; the needs of a particular research study determine the size (Bernard, 2013; Dworkin, 2012).

The key is to obtain a sufficient sample size to ensure that most, if not all, of the targeted population's perceptions are captured (Bernard, 2013); therefore, I conducted and recorded phone interviews with five accounting practitioners and five accounting educators. I used public listings of populations to purposefully select study participants in the field of accounting in the continental United States (Haney, 2015), because these potential participants presumably had experience with and were knowledgeable about accounting education, certifications, and the profession (see Recruitment Strategy section, below). Currently 115,039 listed accounting firms exist in the United States (Manta, n.d.), and there are 730 listed universities offering undergraduate accounting degrees in the country (Accounting Coach, 2004-2015; Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business [AACSB], n.d.); hence, these lists may not be complete. I conducted and recorded phone interviews with five accounting practitioners and five accounting educators.

### **Instrumentation**

I developed a mixture of 11 open-ended and closed-ended questions to permit intensive and thorough research necessary to collect pertinent information (see Appendix B). I strived to keep interviews to last from 30 to 60 minutes.

Questions 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 were open-ended. Question 4 was closed-ended, and Questions 3 and 5 were partially open-ended to give participants the opportunity to present their perceptions. The interview questions closed with demographic questions (see Appendix B) asking for (a) participants' age and gender, (b) participants' occupation status, (c) participants' certifications/accreditations, (d) place of



employment if the participant was a referral, (e) college degrees, (f) email address, and (g) phone number.

In conformance with validity procedures (Bernard, 2013), I established themes through convergence of the participants' perspectives, used rich descriptions of the findings, and presented opposing information to ensure validity. During data collection and analysis, I documented my procedural steps to ensure reliability; standardized analytical procedures enhanced the reliability of the data collected (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). This type of documentation produced real thoughts and ideas from a variety of perspectives, giving real meaning and richness to the study.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, Confidentiality and risk and Data Collection**

**Recruitment strategy.** I sampled two populations within the accounting profession: accounting practitioners and educators. I used a purposeful sampling design to locate participants who work at accounting firms and universities, using a point of contact to identify qualified study participants. Purposeful sampling is a common tool used with the qualitative method to select individuals with specific characteristics that pertain to the research topic (Bernard, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2014). In selecting study participants for the research, I checked the accounting universities' syllabi on their websites to determine qualified participants, and I eliminated individuals who the universities did not list as teaching two or more accounting classes or did not list as teaching any class. The point of contact at the firms identified their employed accountants to participate and provide study participants' contact information.

**Participation.** Prospective participants chose to participate by acknowledging an email invitation. Data collection occurred for 2 weeks. Because members of a particular population often group together (Bernard, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2014), snowballing can provide access to reliable information from a sample set with characteristics representative of the target population (Bernard, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2014), which improves credibility and hence validity. In addition, at the end of the interviews, for validity purposes, participants stated their occupation and place of employment. Study participants received a snowballing recruitment letter, along with the cover letter, asking them to refer someone within their work environment and giving them the option of declining the invitation.

**Confidentiality and risk.** This study poses no risk to the participants. All information relating to the participants will remain confidential, and participants will remain anonymous. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, I presented interview information in a group format with no personal identifying data, and all the participants' personal information along with the participants' completed interview responses will continue to be stored in a secured location in a password-protected computer that only I can access. Moreover, I will delete all the participants' personal information and interview responses—written and recorded—5 years after completion of the research. Participation was voluntary; participants were not obligated to take part in this research. Participants also had the right to decline participation, the right to withdraw after signing the consent to research participation form, and the right to stop participating during the engagement.

**Data collection.** I conducted phone interviews with a targeted audience of accounting educators and professionals in the continental United States. Study participants received an email invitation cover letter to participate in the study. The cover letter consisted of the following information:

- Identification of myself as the researcher.
- Identification of the nature of the research.
- The reason for selecting the participant.
- An offer to the participant to accept or decline the invitation.
- A description of what participants can expect.
- My contact information.
- Negotiable interview date and time

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Study participants who accepted the invitation emailed me their contact phone number to schedule the phone interview. I uploaded interviews from a hand-held recorder to a password-protected computer and deleted the data from the hand-held recorder after each interview. NVIVO managed and analyzed the data. I analyzed data from educators and professionals separately then compare the results to see the degree of agreement. I also asked each participant to review and approve a transcription of their interview to ensure that their experiences were properly represented (Fives & Gill, 2015).

Doyle et al. (2015) demonstrated the use of codes to organize and categorize research information. For this reason, I organized the qualitative data into categories

using abbreviated words to code the data and label the categories with descriptive names to identify themes and patterns (Bernard, 2013; Bhattacharjee, 2012; Doyle et al., 2015). For the closed-end data, I used numerical codes to aid in data processing and analysis (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Doyle et al., 2015). Because of the nature of the research, I assigned abbreviated codes of letters next to descriptive themes, after which I organized and categorized the themes. I also added and adjusted the codes as new categories emerged from the data. Finally, I identified consistent or opposing information, connections, and relationships.

The standard coding for data from the interview questions included the following categories: school promoted certification (SPC), certifications and accreditations awareness (CAAW), knowledge of specific certifications and accreditations (KSCA), certification availability communicated (CAC), co-credential encouraged (CCEN), school certification exams reviews (CER), access to the other accounting certification and accreditation (A42), informed of other accounting certification and accreditation (I42), most valued certification (MVC), importance of co-credential (IMCOC), encouraged to get certified (ETGC), school faculty's certifications (SFC), curriculum prepares students (CPS), CPA glorified (CPAG), curriculum modification (CM), CPA adequate for modern accounting (CPAMA), communicate awareness (CA), and increase awareness (IA).

I documented the codes mentioned above, along with other codes that emerged during analysis in NVIVO. The NVIVO software housed the interview data, which comprised the following: (a) codes, (b) questions, (c) study participants' responses to each question, and (d) review notes to study participants' response. I used NVIVO to

filter and display the codes in order to assemble similar phenomena in the same group and then continue further filtering to extract themes and patterns. I drew conclusions as I filtered the data to display themes and patterns, which I verified by revisiting prior phases of the data analysis, including reviewing the raw data. Finally, I revisited the raw data to verify assumptions for significance (Bernard, 2013; Bhattacharjee, 2012). In addition, I kept the research questions and the interview questions visible to keep from deviating from the topic.

I summarized the categories with descriptions of the main points and report the amount of times a specific theme appears, hence, revealing patterns (Bernard, 2013; Bhattacharjee, 2012). I also identified themes that consistently occur together, thus suggesting a relationship. In addition, this research provided insight into (a) whether the certification in public accounting is adequate to address current accounting situations; (b) how to open the lines of communication among practitioners, educators, and students to bring awareness to the need for changes to accounting curriculum; and (c) how to increase awareness of the availability and accessibility of other accounting certifications and accreditations.

I identified the themes, patterns, and connections to explain my findings, using richly detailed descriptions (Bernard, 2013; Bhattacharjee, 2012). I presented the data explaining each situation, development, and experience in detail to illustrate the phenomenon. Then I established themes through convergence of the participants' perspectives and present opposing information to ensure validity. I documented my procedural steps to ensure reliability (Bernard, 2013; Bhattacharjee, 2012). In addition, I

reconciled the participants' actual verbiage to present the participants' perspective (Bernard, 2013; Bhattacharjee, 2012).

I refrained from using words that were general or abstract to avoid obscurity and boredom (Bernard, 2013). I was specific and used concrete language to ensure clear and expressive information (Bernard, 2013). To accomplish this, I provided summaries, examples, descriptions, or quotations of particular situations, developments, and experiences in relation to the research questions to make the readers' experience concrete (Bernard, 2013; Bhattacharjee, 2012).

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

Credibility involves believability of the research results from the study participants' perspective (Bernard, 2013; Bhattacharjee, 2012). Credibility is to qualitative research what internal validity is to quantitative research (Bernard, 2013; Bhattacharjee, 2012). After obtaining all necessary permissions, I collected data from accounting practitioners and educators and analyzed the data to identify converging data sources and establishing themes, patterns, and contradictions (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

As previously mentioned, I used rich descriptions of the findings, present opposing information to ensure validity, and document my procedural steps to ensure reliability (Bernard, 2013; Bhattacharjee, 2012). Multiple data sources provided triangulation, which supports credibility (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). I established research credibility by disclosing my personal biases, offering opposing research

information, and discussing analyst and data source triangulation. In addition, I remained conscious of my biases regarding this research—as mentioned in the Role of Researcher section of this paper—throughout the data collection and data analysis processes to ensure integrity.

### **Transferability**

The degree at which a researcher can utilize a qualitative research in another setting refers to transferability (Bernard, 2013; Bhattacharjee, 2012). Transferability is to qualitative research what external validity is to quantitative research (Bernard, 2013; Bhattacharjee, 2012). Providing rich descriptions of the rationale for the sample set selection and the content of the participants' perceptions and experiences enhance transferability (Bernard, 2013; Seidman, 2013). For this reason, I provided rich descriptions of the open-ended questions answered by accounting practitioners and educators who possessed the related knowledge and experience.

### **Dependability**

Dependability is the consistency in the inquiry processes over time (Bernard, 2013; Bhattacharjee, 2012). Dependability is to qualitative research what reliability is to quantitative research (Bernard, 2013; Bhattacharjee, 2012). I managed, sorted, organized, annotated, coded, and analyzed the data collected using NVIVO (a) codes, (b) questions, (c) study participants' responses to each interview question, and (d) review notes of study participants' response. The process included (a) procedures for contacting study participants and data collection arrangements; (b) explicit rules to protect study participants' confidentiality and anonymity; (c) a detailed list of questions; and (d) a

preliminary outline for the final phenomenology study report. Outlining the phenomenology study procedures ensured dependability of the data collection, analysis, and reporting (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

### **Confirmability**

The extent to which the respondents confirm or corroborate the researcher's findings refers to confirmability (Bernard, 2013; Bhattacharjee, 2012). Confirmability is to qualitative research what objectivity is to quantitative research (Bernard, 2013; Bhattacharjee, 2012). I remained conscious of my biases regarding this research throughout the data collection and analysis processes. I analyzed the participants' responses to the interview questions in an unbiased manner to ensure a holistic representation of perceptions of and experiences with CPA and other accounting certifications and accreditations. I identified possible communication divides between accounting academia and professionals that may be creating a communication gap between what employers expect and what they received from accounting graduates.

### **Ethical Procedures**

I contacted five accounting firms and five business universities for permission to conduct interviews. The point of contact at these facilities identified accounting educators and accounting professionals, initiated contact, and provided me with the individuals' contact information. I emailed the cover letter to the identified research prospects along with a snowballing recruitment letter. I contacted study participants who volunteered to participate in the phone interviews via email to schedule interview arrangements.



Participants' response to the invitation cover letter email was the participants' consent to interview. Their participation in this research study was voluntary; therefore, they were free to refuse participation or stop participating at any time. For maintaining confidentiality, I presented all information provided in a group format with no identifiers. As stated earlier, only I have access to the raw data, which will be deleted in 2022.

### Summary

Although certification in public accounting has been around for many years, it is not always the appropriate answer to every accounting need (Mucenski-Keck et al., 2012; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). For this reason, this research was needed to gain insight into how accounting students who have been encouraged to focus only on the CPA certification may be unprepared to meet the needs of a changing accounting profession.

Qualitative research is inductive, emergent, and based on assumptions of participants' perceptions and experiences (Bernard, 2013). This method and approach were appropriate for providing the essence of experiences about the phenomenon and insight into the following research questions:

1. What are accounting practitioners' and educators' perceptions of and experiences with CPA and other accounting certifications and accreditations?
2. What are possible communication divides between accounting academia and professionals that may be creating a communication gap between what employers expect and what they received from accounting graduates?

In addition, this research provided insight into (a) whether the certification in public accounting is adequate to address current accounting situations; (b) how to open the lines of communication among practitioners, educators, and students to bring awareness to the need for changes to accounting curriculum; and (c) how to increase awareness of the availability and accessibility of other certifications and accreditations.

I selected accounting practitioners and educators from accounting firms and universities because they possessed the specialized knowledge and experience to address the research question. I conducted and record phone interviews with study participants and employed NVIVO to manage, sort, organize, annotate, analyze, and store the collected data collected. In addition, to ensure a robust, valid, and reliable study, I merged the participants' perspectives to establish themes, patterns, and contradictions.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore perceptions of accounting professionals and educators of accounting certifications and accreditations and to identify gaps in communication or perceptions between those who train new accounting professionals and those who employ them. The study had two purposes: (a) to understand perceptions of both educators and employers regarding the preparation of accounting graduates for the contemporary workplace, and (b) to explore whether there is need for better communication between employers and educators. The goal was ultimately to start a conversation about curricular changes that could better prepare graduates for the demands of a changing accounting profession.

To this end, I interviewed U.S. accounting practitioners and educators with experience in the industry. Participants were asked about their perceptions of the CPA, accounting certifications and accreditations, and communication divides that they believe exist between academic and professional communities. They were asked whether they perceived a gap between the training accounting graduates receive and the expectations employers have, and whether they believed more communication was necessary between educators and practitioners.

In this chapter, I report the results of the interviews. First, I outline the logistics of the research, including research setting, sample selection and demographics, and data collection procedure. In the following section, I discuss how NVIVO was used to analyze the data collected during the interviews. Finally, I present the results of the analysis in

relation to the two central research questions and the themes that emerged during analysis.

### **Research Setting**

As described in Chapter 3, 10 participants were selected by locating qualified accounting practitioners and university educators using web resources, contacts, and recommendations from other study participants. Participants were contacted via email and invited to participate with a cover letter that explained the research. After participants accepted the invitation, I contacted them by phone and recorded their responses. Participants decided where and when to be interviewed. This study procedure was minimally invasive and did not influence participants at the time of the study. No issues or traumas emerged during data collection, which went according to the procedure described in Chapter 3.

Because of my experience in accounting, I connected the experiences and perceptions of the participants. While bias always has the potential to influence interpretation, I remained aware of my own biases, outlined in Chapter 3, during the interview and analysis process. No untoward circumstances or trauma disrupted the research process or influence the data and analysis presented in this chapter.

### **Data Collection**

Ten participants, five accounting professionals and five educators (one of whom was also an accounting professional), were interviewed. One self-designed questionnaire with a mixture of open-ended and closed-ended questions (Appendix B) was employed for each interview. Interviews took place over the phone at a time and place of the

participants' choosing. Interviews took 30-60 minutes depending on the extent of participants' reflections. Demographic questions, reported below, were also contained in the interview protocol.

### **Data Analysis**

Interviews were coded using NVIVO data analysis software. The interview protocol guided data analysis for this research study. Interviews were coded in waves. During the first wave of coding, interviewees' responses were first coded according to the individual interview questions of the study. Table 1 shows the themes that emerged during this analysis.

Once the first stage of data analysis was completed, the second wave of coding commenced. The second wave of coding consisted of looking at each interview question individually across the interview participants and coding them for either emergent subthemes or subquestions within the interview question. The subthemes that emerged are listed in Table 1 under the heading Second Level Subthemes. Once the second wave of coding data was completed, the third wave began.

The third wave involved rereading through each of the interviews to refine the coding scheme. This consisted of either modifying the existing coding scheme (merging and combining like themes into larger categories or deleting themes which were not relevant to the focus of the question) or finding subthemes for the larger themes in the participant's responses. The subthemes identified during this stage of analysis are presented in Table 1, under the heading Third Level Subthemes.

The fourth wave of coding consisted of reading through the codes to ensure the theme was an accurate representation of the participants' words. During this wave, the code *Google* under the subtheme Yes, of the theme Q. 3 Knowledge of How to Get Other Accounting Certifications of Accreditations was changed from google to internet searches with google as a subcategory. This coding procedure was preferred because it provided a way of looking at the data from various points of view. No additional changes were made, and no additional subthemes were created.

Table 1.

*Themes and Subthemes Coded During Analysis*

Theme	Second Level Subtheme Codes	Third Level Subtheme Codes
Q1. Awareness of Accounting Certifications/ Accreditations	CPA, CMA, CFE, CIA, CISA, CFA, Enrolled Agent, Certified Global Management A, CPA School, CRMA, CGAP, CIFA, CCFA, ABV, IS, CBS, AIFA, CGM, CGFM, RIS, PFS, CCSA, CGMA and CFM	1-3, 4-6, and 7-8 certifications known
Q2. Accounting Certifications School or Job Supports	School	CPA, CMA, CFE, CGMA, CIA, CISA, CCSA and CFM.
	Job	CPA, CIA, none and unspecified
Q3. Knowledge of How to Get Other Accounting Certifications of Accreditations	Yes	Google, Internet boards, personal research, professional association, accounting resources, AICPA, job, family member, and business news
	No	
Q4. Importance of Multiple Accounting Degrees, Certifications or Accreditations	Extremely important, Very Important, Neutral, Moderately Important and Slightly Important	
Q5. Whether Encouraged to Get Accounting Certifications or Accreditations	Yes	Who encouraged you (professors, dean, employers, family members, department chair, job partners, CPA exam developers and school) which certifications (CPA, CMA, CFP and any)

		What encouraged you (value of certifications, CPA as golden standard and necessary for promotion)
	No	
Q6. Beliefs about Value of CPA	CPA is most valuable	Most recognized, employment, rigorous exam, wide range, perceptions, higher pay, gold standard, and longevity
	CPA is not most valuable	not measure of knowledge and depends on career
	Neutral	
Q7. Beliefs about Modifying Accounting Curriculum	Should not modify	Geared toward exam, experience, companies should modify and certifications most important
	Should modify	Emphasis on exam, include additional certifications, make students aware and real world based
Q8. Beliefs about Adequacy of CPA	CPA is adequate	General knowledge, international accounting standard and stand out
	CPA is not adequate	no soft skills, writing skills limited, constantly changing, limited and hands on training
Q9. Beliefs about Increased Awareness of Other Accounting Certifications	Should be	Depends on career, right to know and competitive advantage
Q10. Beliefs about Lack of Communication Between Educators and Practitioners	Lack of communication	Lack of practical, curriculum exam based, professors are academic researchers, one-sided communication and emphasis on CPA
	No lack of communication	Advisory boards, focus on theory and resources available
Q11. Beliefs about Conversation Between Educators and Practitioners Regarding Making Changes to Accounting Curriculum	Should be a conversation	Educators should be active, educators need to reach out, advisory committee, CPA society, working with textbook publishers and more hands on

Overall, analysis proceeded in multiple steps which served to identify themes while preserving credibility and dependability. The next section provides details on study trustworthiness.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

The credibility of the results from the study participants' perspectives was ensured by collecting rich descriptions and data from open-ended interview questions. The information gathered on participants' perceptions was not constrained by the interview procedure or my own biases. I sought participants of different ages, genders, and backgrounds to support the credibility of data analysis for this research study. By collecting and comparing responses from educators and practitioners and multiple institutions, I obtained data from multiple sources, which increases the credibility of the findings through triangulation of the data. I was especially careful to present data that not only agree with but also disagree with my own biases and knowledge as discussed earlier.

#### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the applicability of qualitative research outside the original setting of the study. I provided participant responses to the questions, direct quotes from practitioners and educators, descriptions of broad patterns observed in interview responses as well descriptions of the data analysis procedure used to obtain those patterns. By reporting on patterns in perception of accreditations and communication based on age, gender, or other factors, in addition to differences in



perception between educators and practitioners, I preserved the richness of the qualitative data and their applicability to broader contexts and questions.

### **Dependability**

The interview process was consistent over time. The interview protocol and length remained consistent across all 10 participants. Interview responses were managed, coded, and analyzed using NVIVO as they related to the study's two broad research questions. This procedure ensured that data were collected, analyzed, and reported dependably.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability was maintained by triangulating different sources of information about the same topic, analyzing the participants' responses according to an established protocol, and remaining conscious of my own biases throughout the study. Internal agreement across responses also provides evidence of confirmability. For instance, as described below, participants were most likely to recognize the CPA, and in a separate question also described the CPA as most recognized. Internal consistency was observed across interview questions and participants.

### **Demographics**

There were 10 interview participants, five active accounting practitioners and five accounting educators (one of whom was also a practitioner). The participants were asked their age, gender, and occupation, as well as about their certifications, degrees, and accreditations. A discussion of the demographic data follows.

## Age and Gender

Participants were asked to identify their ages and genders. Age ranges are shown in Figure 1; gender, in Figure 2.

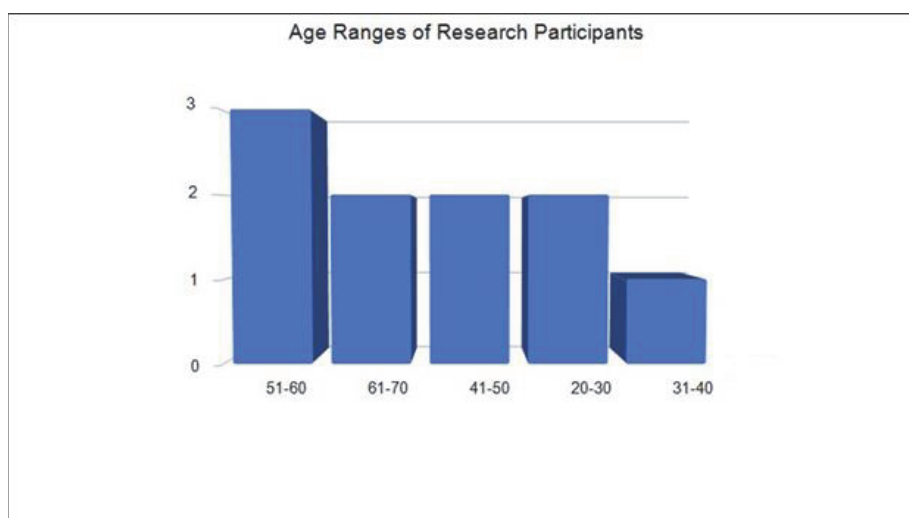


Figure 1. Age ranges of research participants.

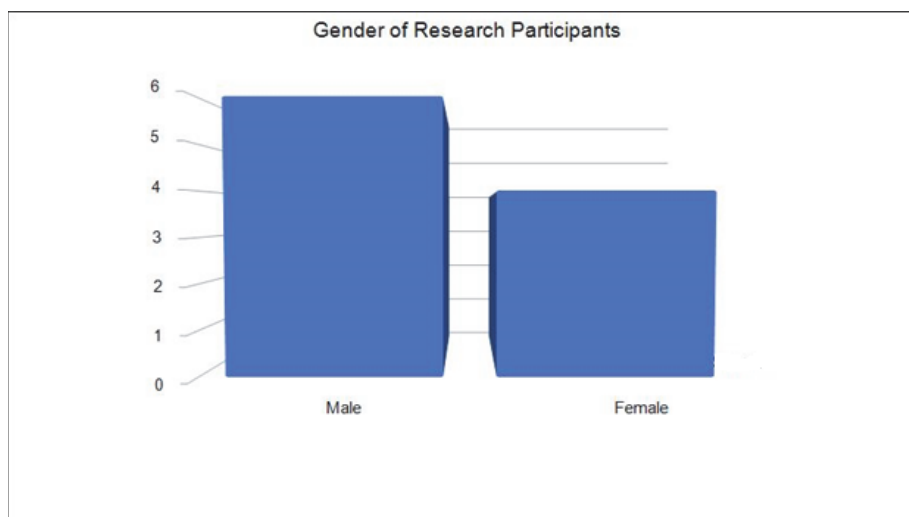


Figure 2. Gender of research participants.

## Occupations

Participants were also asked about their occupations. The results of this question are shown in Figure 3. As the figure shows, five of the participants indicated they are accounting practitioners. In addition, four of the participants indicate they are accounting educators. Only one of the participants indicated he is both an accounting practitioner and educator.

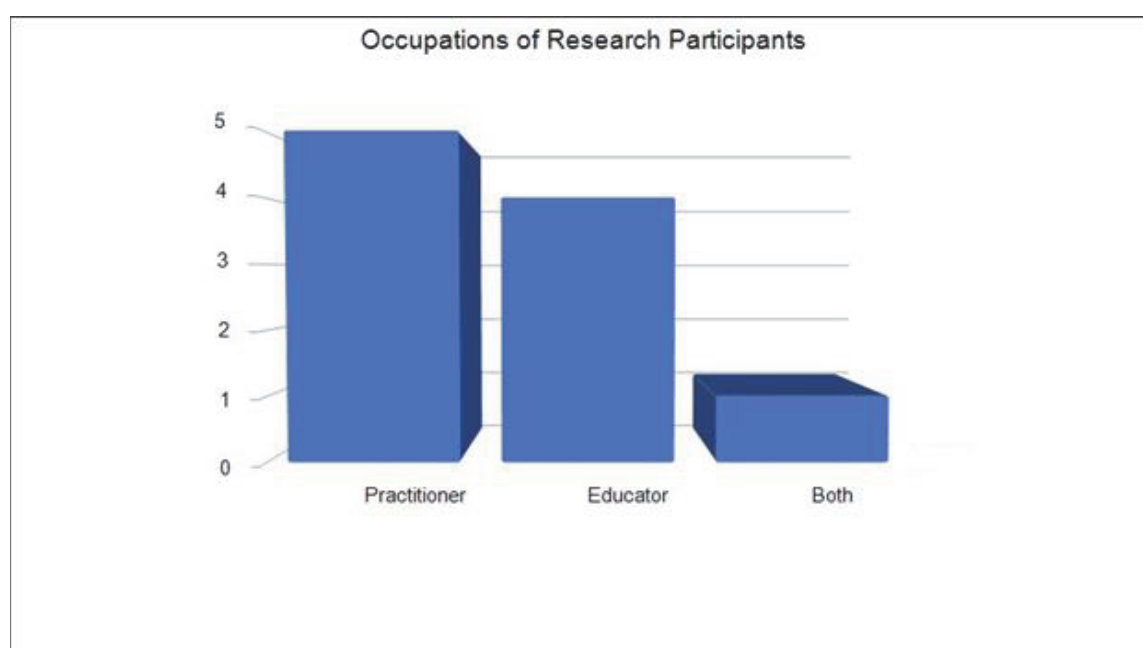


Figure 3. Occupations of research participants.

## Certifications and Accreditations

In addition to being asked their age, gender and occupation, participants were also asked about what certifications they hold. As Figure 4 illustrates below, seven participants indicated they hold a CPA, two participants indicated they do not hold any certifications, two additional participants indicated they hold a CGMA, and one

additional participant each holds a CRMA and a CIA. Out of the 10 participants, none indicated they hold any accreditations.

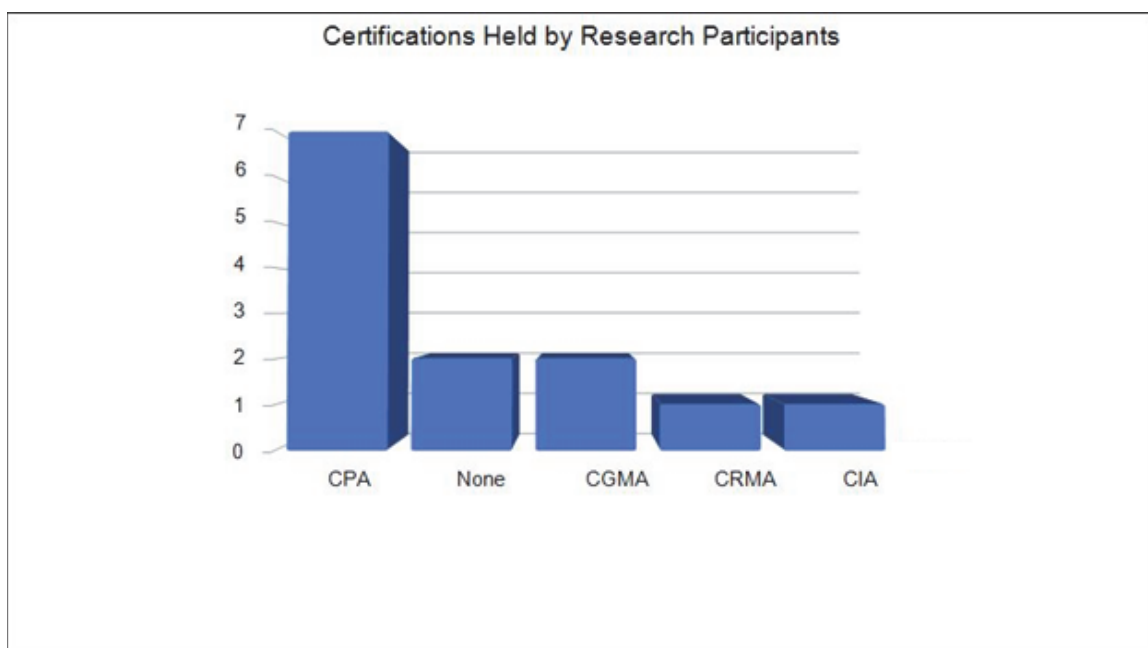


Figure 4. Certifications held by research participants.

### Degrees

In addition to being asked about what certifications they hold, participants were also asked about what degrees they hold. The results of this question are shown in Figure 5. As the figure shows, six of the participants indicated that they hold a BA. Two participants each indicated that they hold an MS, an MBA, a DBA and a BS. A Ph.D., an MSA and a BBA are held by one participant each.

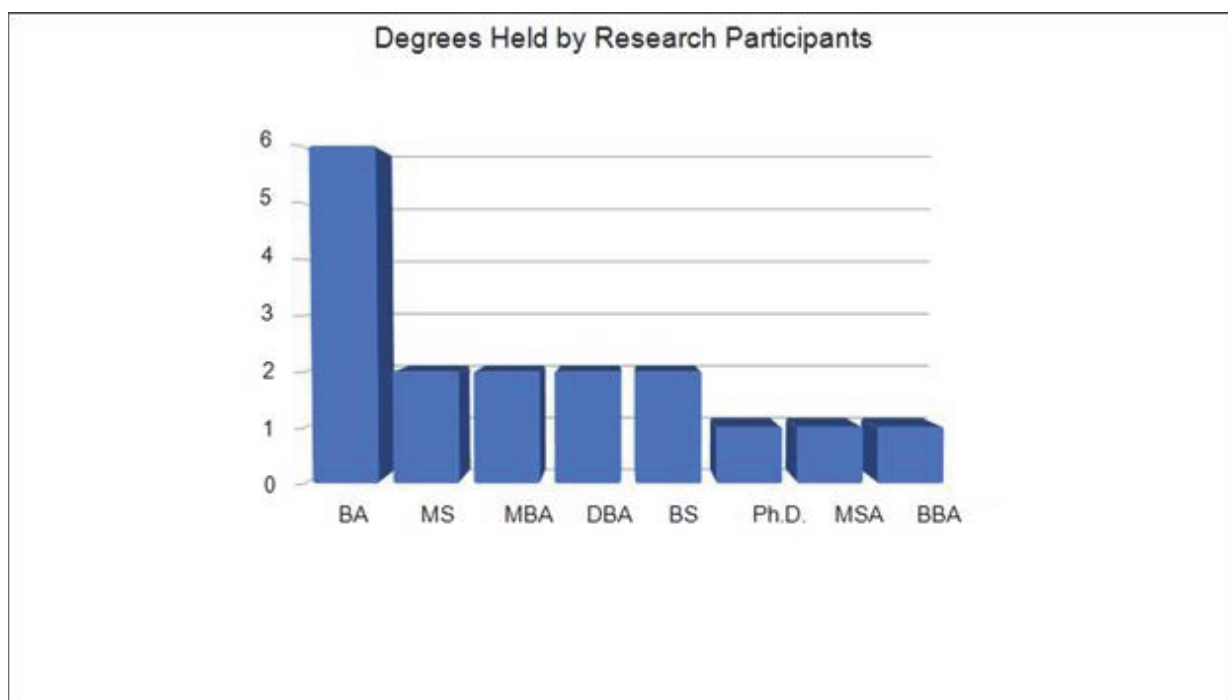


Figure 5. Degrees held by research participants.

### Study Results

In this section, I present results of each interview question individually to ensure a rich description of the data. In some cases, patterns unrelated to the research questions, such as differences in perceptions according to age or gender, emerge from the analysis. By organizing the discussion first according to the interview questions, I preserve transferability and credibility. After discussing each research question in turn, I summarize the data in relation to the two research questions: the perceptions of educators and professionals regarding certifications and accreditations, and the communication gap between educators and professionals regarding the preparation of accounting graduates.

### **Awareness of Accounting Certifications and Accreditations**

The first interview question asked participants how many accounting certifications and accreditations they know about. Participants' responses were first analyzed according to the numbers of accounting certifications and accreditations they are aware of. In addition to looking at the general patterns across the participants, participants' awareness of the numbers of accounting certifications and accreditations participants was compared according to their age, gender, and occupation. Finally, participants' responses were analyzed according to the names or acronyms of the specific accounting certifications and accreditations that they are aware of. The following is a discussion of these results.

**Awareness by number.** Participants were asked how many accounting certifications and accreditations they know about. The results of this question are shown in Figure 6 below. As the figure shows, five of the 10 participants indicated that they are aware of four to six accounting certifications and accreditations. In addition, four out of the 10 participants were aware of seven or eight accounting certifications and accreditations. One participant was aware of between one and three accounting certifications and accreditations.



Figure 6. Awareness of accounting certifications and accreditations by number.

**Awareness by age.** In addition to looking at the general patterns across the participants, the numbers of accounting certifications and accreditations participants identified were compared first according to their age. These results are portrayed in Figure 7. As the figure shows, the awareness of accounting certifications and accreditations of the 20- to 30-year-olds showed the most variation. For example, of the two participants between the ages of 20 to 30 years old, one was aware of only one accounting certification and accreditation, while the other was aware of between seven and eight accounting certifications and accreditations. Surprisingly, the 51- to 60-year-olds showed a somewhat higher awareness of accounting certifications and accreditations than their senior counterparts (61- to 70-year-olds). As the figure shows, while two of the three participants ages 51 to 60 (67%) were aware of between seven to eight accounting

certifications and accreditations, only one out of two (50%) of the 61- to 70-years-olds were aware of between seven to eight accounting certifications and accreditations.

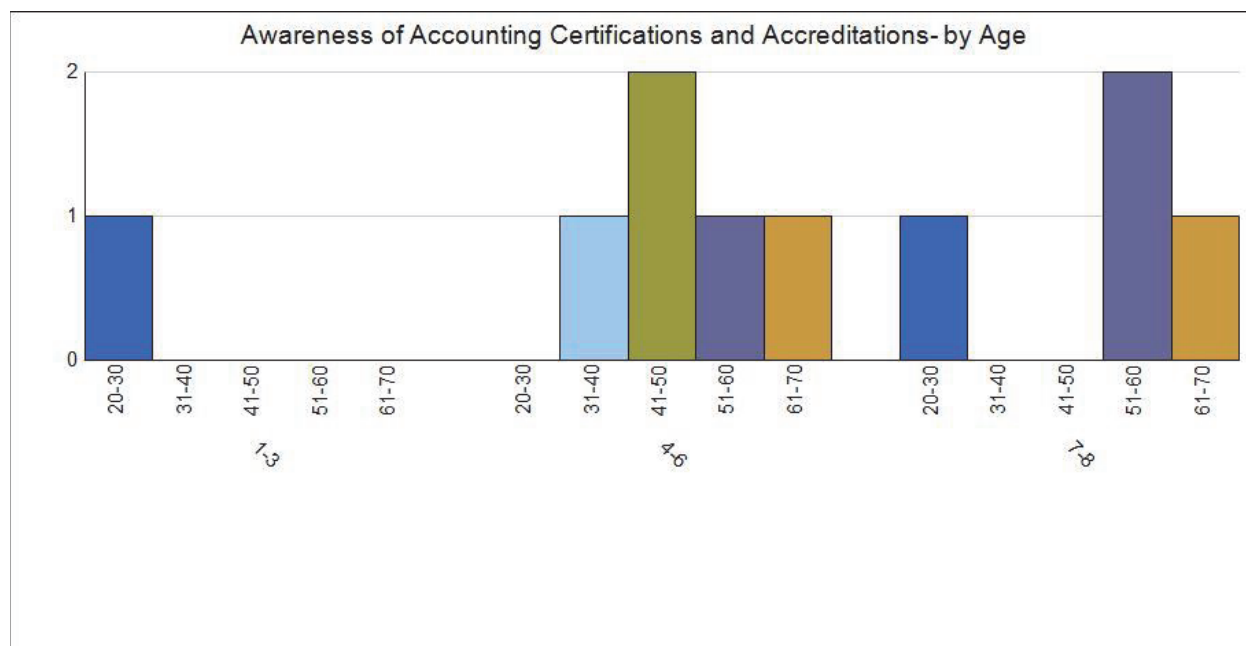


Figure 7. Awareness of accounting certifications and accreditations by age.

**Awareness by gender.** In addition to looking at the numbers of accounting certifications and accreditations participants are aware of in terms of their ages, the numbers of accounting certifications and accreditations participants were aware were analyzed according to their gender as well. As Figure 8 below shows, the range of knowledge of accounting certifications and accreditations is greater among women. Male participants show less variation in their range of knowledge of accounting certifications and accreditations as the majority, four of the six male participants (67%), indicated that they were aware of between four to six accounting certifications and accreditations. Finally, females showed a somewhat higher level of awareness of accounting certifications and accreditations when compared to males.



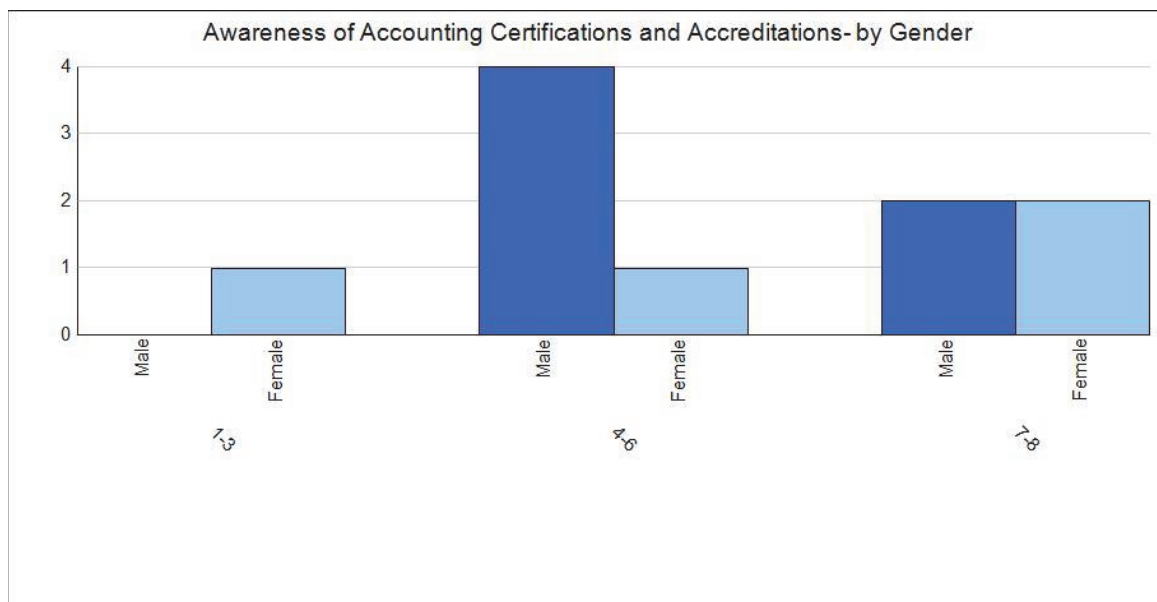


Figure 8. Awareness of accounting certifications and accreditations by gender.

**Awareness by occupation.** The final way in which data regarding the numbers of accounting certifications and accreditations participants were aware of were analyzed was according to their occupations. The results of these findings are presented in Figure 9 below. As the figure shows, educators appear to have only a slightly higher awareness of accounting certifications and accreditations when compared to practitioners. The participant with the least awareness of accounting certifications and accreditations was a practitioner.



*Figure 9.* Awareness of accounting certifications and accreditations according to occupation

**Awareness by acronym.** Participants also indicated the accounting certifications and accreditations they are aware of by their acronym. These results are presented in Figure 10 below. As the figure illustrates, all 10 of the participants indicated awareness of the CPA. An additional eight participants describe knowledge of the CMA, seven participants describe their awareness of the CIA and CFE.

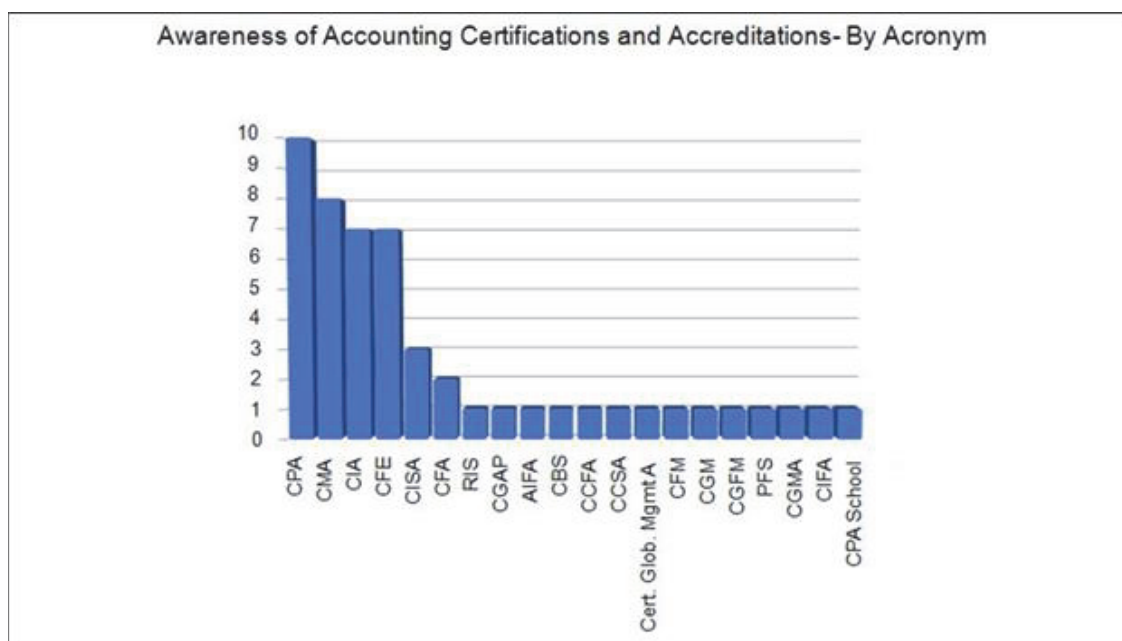


Figure 10. Awareness of accounting certifications and accreditations by acronym.

### Accounting Certifications School or Job Supports

The second interview question asked participants to list the accounting certifications that their school and/or job supports. The CPA was much more commonly identified by both educators and professionals than other certifications. A discussion of participants' responses follows.

**School.** Seven out of the 10 participants indicated the accounting certifications that their school supports (three did not indicate the certifications supported by their school). All seven who reported supported certifications indicated that their school supports the CPA. Six out of the seven participants who indicated certifications said that their school supports the CMA. In addition, three participants indicated that their school supports the CFE. The complete results are depicted in Figure 11.

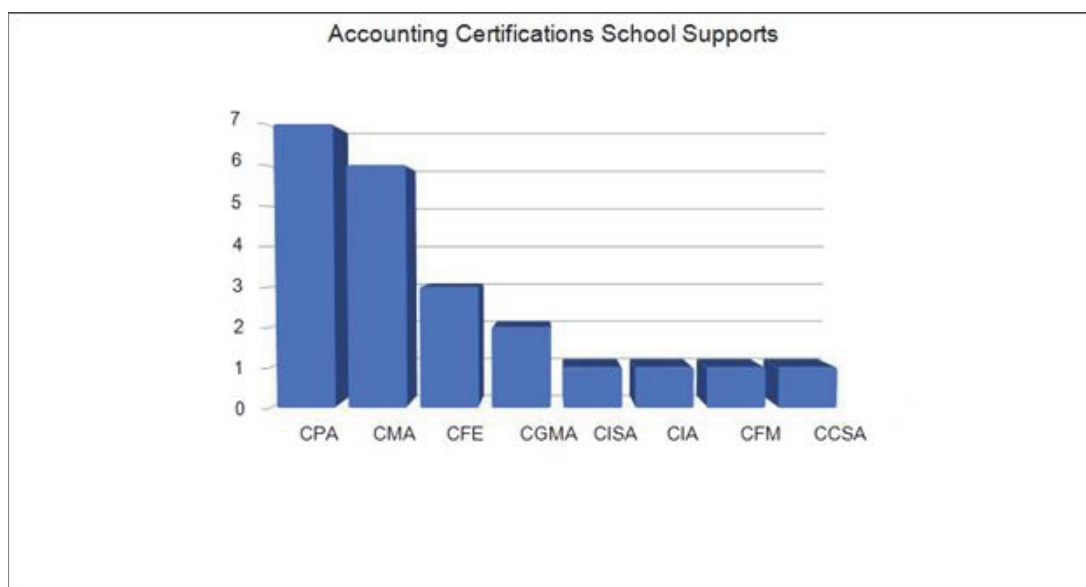


Figure 11. Accounting certifications school supports.

**Job.** Similarly, participants were asked to list the accounting certifications that their job supports (see Figure 12). Two of these five participants indicated that their job supports the CPA, one participant that his job supports a variety of accounting certifications (however, he does not specifically name which ones), one that his job does not support any accounting certifications. One indicated his job supports the CIA.

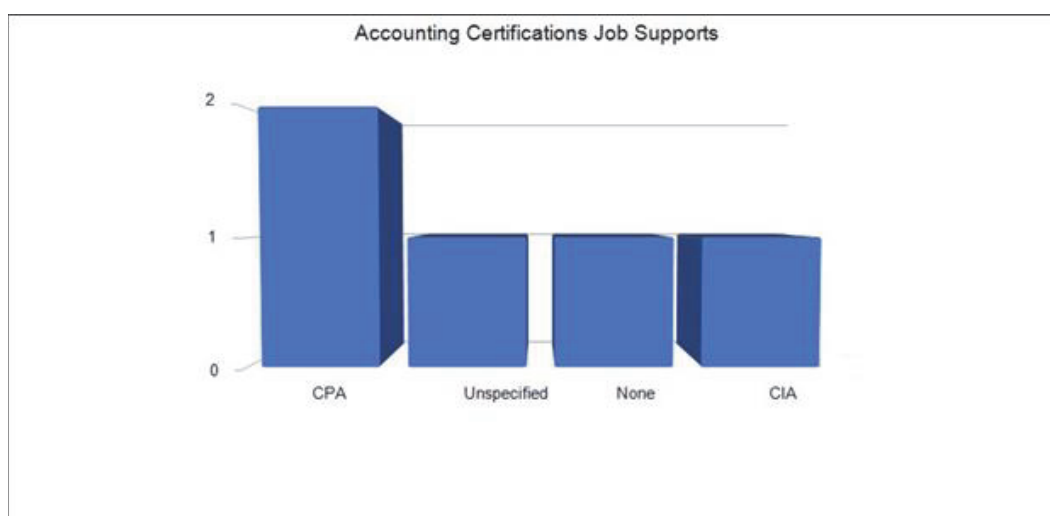


Figure 12. Accounting certifications job supports.

### **Knowledge of how to get other accounting certifications or accreditations.**

The next question asked participants if they know how to get other accounting certifications or accreditations. Those participants who indicated that they do know how to get other accounting certifications or accreditations (nine out of 10) were then asked how they found out about these certifications and accreditations. Only one participant indicated that he did not know how to get other accounting certifications or accreditations. He was asked what he thinks kept him from finding out. A discussion of participants' responses to these questions in their own words follows.

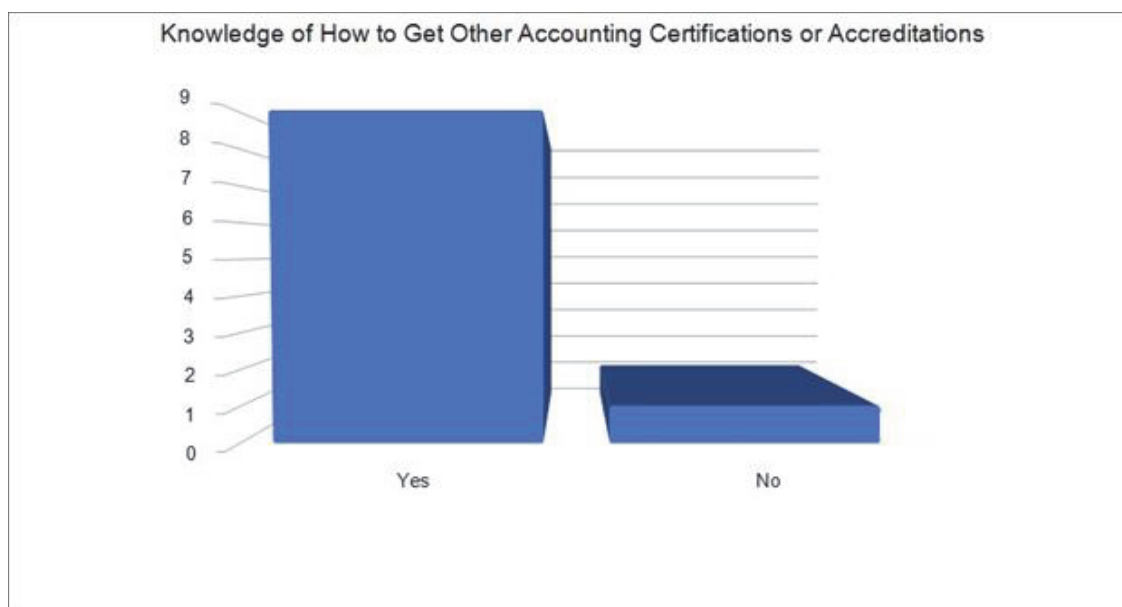


Figure 13. Knowledge of how to get other accounting certifications or accreditations.

### ***How participants get knowledge of other accounting certifications***

***accreditations.*** Nine out of the 10 participants indicated they had knowledge of how to get other accounting certifications or accreditations and how they found out about these

certifications and accreditations. Their responses are illustrated in Figure 12 below. As the figure illustrates, five indicated they found out about these certifications and accreditations through Internet searches. In addition, two each of these nine participants indicated that they found out about these certifications and accreditations through professional associations, personal research and Internet boards. The most popular ways in which participants found out about other accounting certifications and accreditations are explored below.

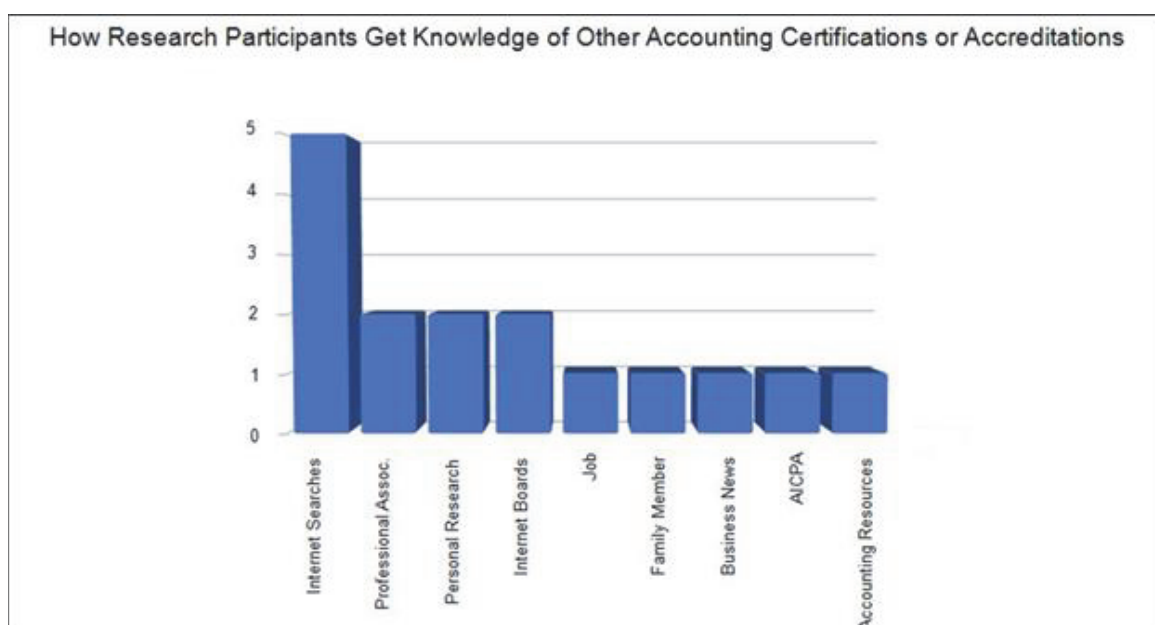


Figure 14. How participants get knowledge or other accounting certifications or accreditations.

**Internet searches.** One of the most popular ways in which participants found out about other accounting certifications and accreditations, as indicated by five participants was through Internet searches. For example, Participant G2-5 uses internet searches to expand her information of accounting certifications and accreditations: “I hear about

certifications through my pursuit of business news, and I've found it easy to learn more through internet search." Similarly, Participant G1-2 explained the specific internet search (Google) she uses to expand her knowledge of other accounting certifications and accreditations: "I would see different types of accounting certifications on people's business cards. I would have Googled for the information, use Virginia Border Certified Accounting resources for the information, or AICPA." These examples from these two participants show the ways in which participants used internet searches, and Google searches in particular, to expand their knowledge of other accounting certifications and accreditations.

***Professional accounting associations.*** In addition to using internet searches, another popular way in which participants found out about other accounting certifications and accreditations, as indicated by two participants was through professional associations. As Participant G2-3 simply explained: "Yes, I know how to acquire other accounting certifications/accreditations. I seek the information about other accounting certifications from the accounting associations." Seeking information through professional accounting associations was therefore an additional way in which participants found out about other accounting certifications and accreditations.

***Personal research.*** In addition to using internet searches, another popular way in which participants found out about other accounting certifications and accreditations, as indicated by two participants, was through professional associations. For example, Participant G1- 5 explained how he uses personal research to find out more information about other accounting certifications and accreditations:

Yes, I know how to acquire other accounting certifications and accreditations. I am involved in recruiting, so I basically research unfamiliar accounting certifications/accreditations that I see on the documents of the recruited documents. Our people pursue various certification in their area of expertise, so they become familiar with what is available and what will help them in develop credibility in their area of practice; a lot of this is an individual endeavor.

Through personal research was another popular way in which participants found out about other accounting certifications and accreditations.

**Internet boards.** A final popular way in which participants found out about other accounting certifications and accreditations, as indicated by two final participants, was through internet boards. Participant G1-3 explained how he uses internet boards in addition to other approaches in order to find information about other accounting certifications and accreditations:

Yes, my job is good at answering question pertaining to what is available. I also utilize the internet to google information or the discussion boards, even though the information may not be 100% accurate, but they provide links to the information.

As this participant's comment shows, the use of internet boards was another popular way in which participants found out about other accounting certifications and accreditations.

**Lack of knowledge of how to get other accounting certifications or accreditations.** While the vast majority of participants, nine out of the 10, indicated that they do have knowledge of how to get other accounting certifications or accreditations,



one of the participants indicated he does not know how to get other accounting certifications or accreditations.

### **Perceived Importance of Multiple Degrees, Certifications, or Accreditations**

Participants were asked to use a defined scale to rate the importance of having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations in order to help one develop accounting knowledge and skills. The scale consists of seven options which allow participants to choose whether the importance of having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations is: 1 unimportant, 2 of little importance, 3 slightly important, 4 neutral, 5 moderately important, 6 very important or 7 extremely important. Participants' responses to the question are depicted in Figure 15 below. It is important to note that one participant (G2-5) did not indicate a choice from among these options.

As can be seen in Figure 15, three participants indicated that having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations is moderately important, two participants indicated that they are neutral on the subject, two additional participants indicated that having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations is extremely important, one participant indicated having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations is very important and one final participant indicated having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations is only slightly important.

In addition to choosing from one of these options from the defined scale, participants also provide an explanation for their choice among the options. In addition to looking at the general patterns across the participants, regarding their thoughts about the

importance of having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations; the patterns in participants' responses were compared according to their age, gender and occupation. A discussion of the most common responses regarding participants' thoughts about the importance of having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations in their own words follows.

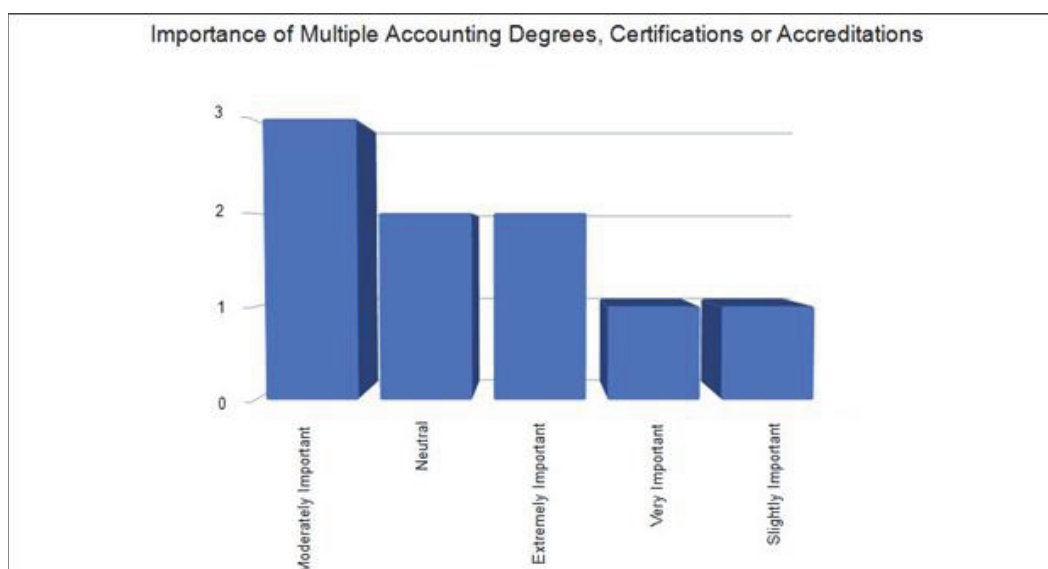


Figure 15. Importance of multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations.

**Having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations as moderately important.** When asked to rate the importance of having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations in order to help one develop accounting knowledge and skills, three participants respond by indicating that having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations is moderately important. For example, Participant G1-4 explained why having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations is only moderately and not of greater importance to him citing the fact that it is not required by his job. As he explained:

I think it is moderately important to have multiple accounting degrees/certifications/accreditations. It is important as far as studying and passing the exam, but I wouldn't say extremely important because my job doesn't require. Similarly, Participant G2-4 explained why he estimates that having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations is only moderately and not of greater importance to him tying the importance to whether one passes the relevant exams:

I think it is moderately important to have multiple accounting degrees/certifications/accreditations in helping develop accounting knowledge and skills. Having all those certifications may force you to take the course work, which may help develop some knowledge of it, but there is no guarantee that you will pass the exam. Therefore, I think it is helpful, but not really important.

As these participants' responses show, some participants felt that having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations is only moderately and not of greater importance due to reasons such as whether they were required for their jobs or as tied to whether one passed the relevant exams or not.

**Having multiple accounting degrees, certifications, or accreditations as neutral.** In addition to indicating that having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations is moderately important, when asked to rate the importance of having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations in order to help one develop accounting knowledge and skills two participants indicated that they are neutral on the topic. For example, Participant G1-5 explained why he takes a neutral position on the

matter, in particular citing how the importance of accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations differs depending on the area of specialization:

I am neutral because if you are just looking at the CPA it is moderately important because you are required to take classes and continually learn. But as you move towards a specialized area like the ABV, it becomes more important depending on the area of specialization. There are different CPE requirements, so you are constantly developing your accounting knowledge in conjunction with that particular degree, and in some cases the CPE is mandatory.

In this way, some participants indicated that they are neutral regarding the issues of the importance of having accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations.

**Having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations as extremely important.** In addition to indicating that having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations is moderately important or being neutral on the subject, when asked to rate the importance of having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations in order to help one develop accounting knowledge and skills two final participants suggest that it is extremely important. Participant G2-1 explained why she feels having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations is extremely important:

It is *extremely important* to have multiple accounting credentials because you need to distinguish yourself in the market place. Students, young professionals, and businesses like the idea of getting certified; however, there is a decreasing value or interest in the CPA credential due to the difficulty of the exam. If you

look at the data, there are fewer people taking the CPA exam compared to the number of people graduating with an accounting degree. A lot of people are unwilling to put in the time for the CPA, so they are going for the easier certifications.

As this participant explained, having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations is extremely important in order for one to distinguish themselves from other accountants.

**Importance by age.** In addition to looking at the general patterns across the participants regarding their thoughts on the importance of having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations in order to help one develop accounting knowledge and skills, participants' evaluations were compared first according to their age. These results are portrayed in Figure 16 below.

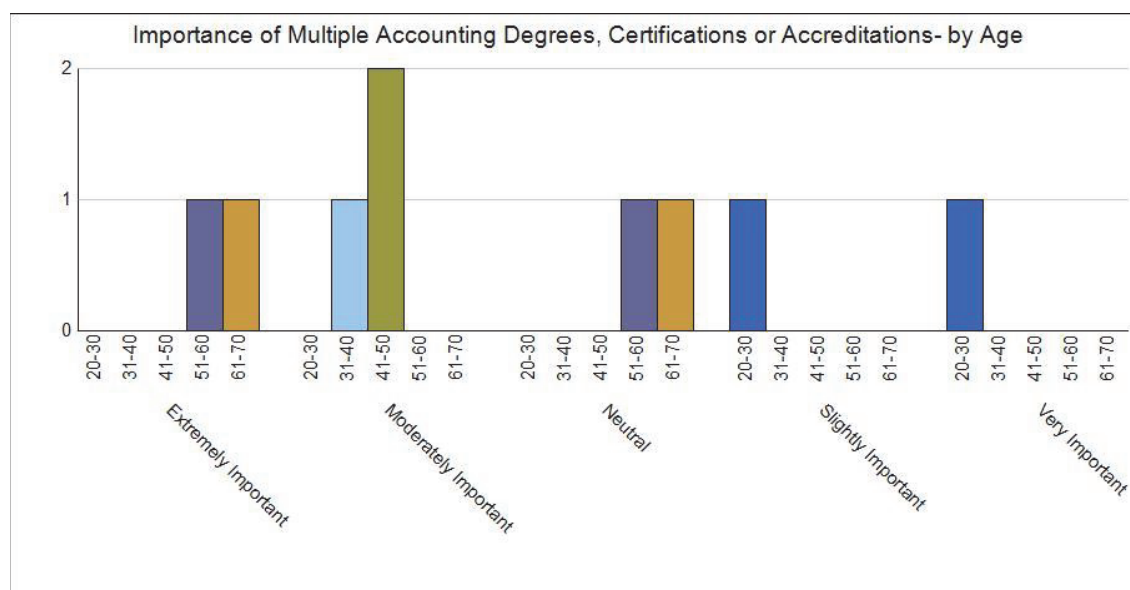


Figure 16. Importance of multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations by age.

**Importance by gender.** In addition to looking at participants' thoughts regarding the importance of having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations in terms of their ages, their selections were analyzed according to their gender as well. As Figure 17 below shows, female participants attach greater importance to having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations when compared to their male counterparts. Two of the three female participants (67%) indicated that having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations is extremely important. An additional female participant (another 34%) indicated having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations is very important. In contrast, three of the male participants (50%) indicated that having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations is only moderately important. Two additional male participants (33%) indicated they are neutral regarding the topic and one final male participant (17%) estimates that having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations is only slightly important.

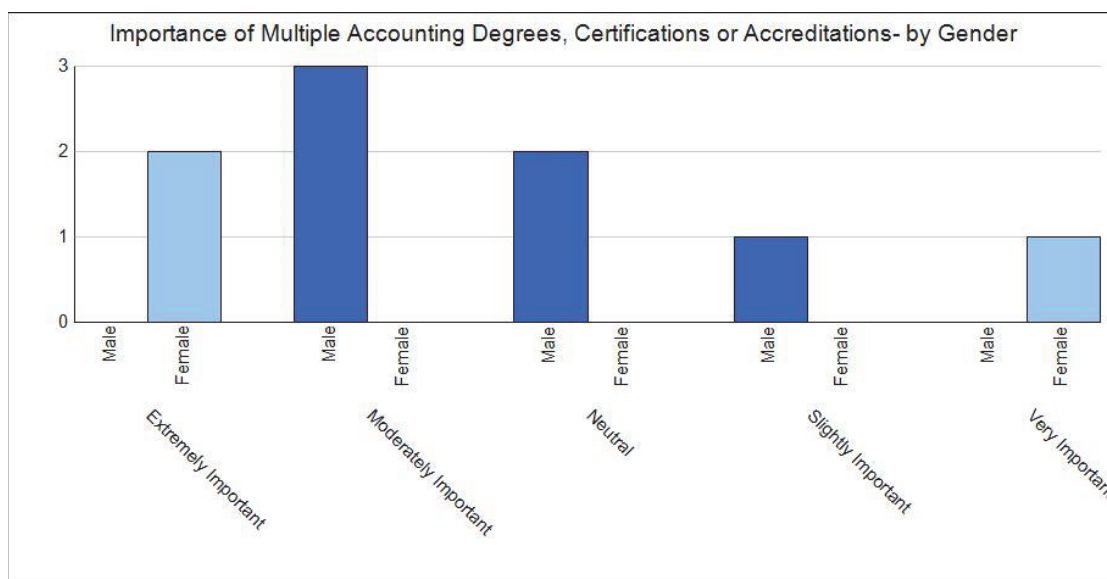


Figure 17. Importance of multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations by gender.

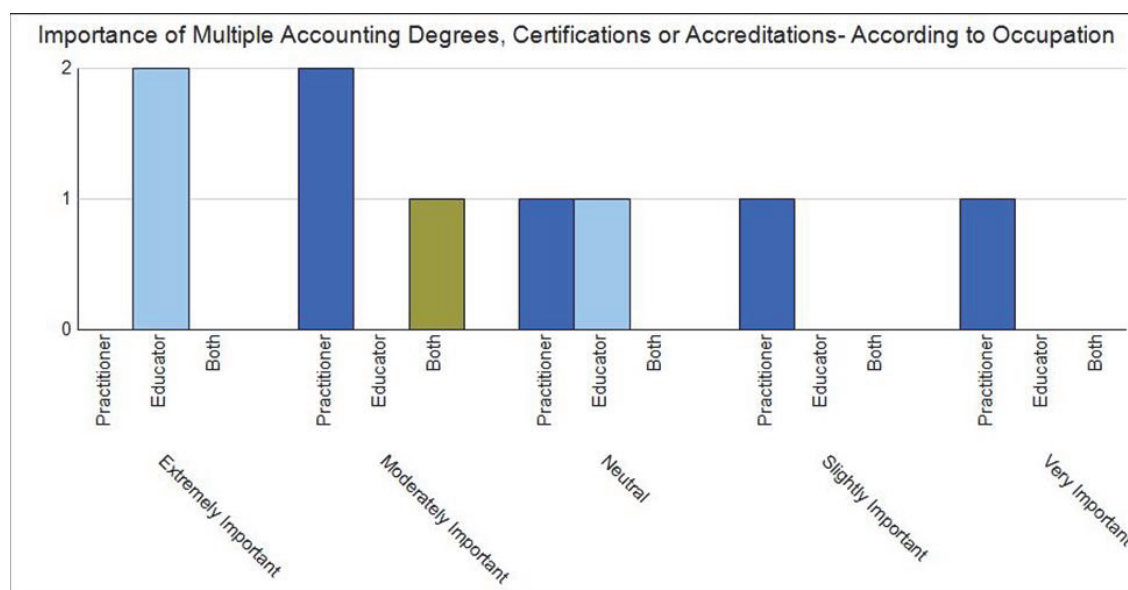
**Importance by occupation.** A final way in which participants' thoughts regarding the importance of having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations were analyzed was according to their occupations. Their responses are illustrated in Figure 18 below. The figure shows variation among both educators as well as practitioners. For example, while two of the educators (67%) indicate that having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations is extremely important, one other educator (33%) indicated he is neutral on the topic. Similarly, while two of the practitioners (40%) describe having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations as being moderately important, one each of the practitioners (20%) describes having multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations as being

very important or of being only slightly important. A final practitioner indicated he is neutral on the topic.

### **Whether encouraged to get accounting certifications or accreditations.**

Participants were asked whether they were encouraged to get an accounting certification or accreditation. As Figure 19 below shows, nine out of the 10 participants were encouraged to get an accounting certification or accreditation, while only one of the participants was not encouraged to get any accounting certification or accreditation.

Those participants who indicated they were encouraged to get an accounting certification or accreditation were asked which certifications they were encouraged to take as well as who or what encouraged them. A presentation of their responses follows.



*Figure 18.* Importance of multiple accounting degrees, certifications or accreditations- according to occupation.





Figure 19. Whether encouraged to get accounting certifications or accreditations.

**Which certifications.** Among those participants who were encouraged to get an accounting certification or accreditation, eight out of the nine participants indicate which certifications they were encouraged to take. These certifications are depicted in Figure 20 below. As the figure illustrates, almost all the participants who responded, seven out of eight, indicated they were encouraged to take the CPA. In addition, two participants indicated they were encouraged to take the CMA, one participant indicated he was encouraged to take the CFP and one final participant indicated she was encouraged to take any certifications.

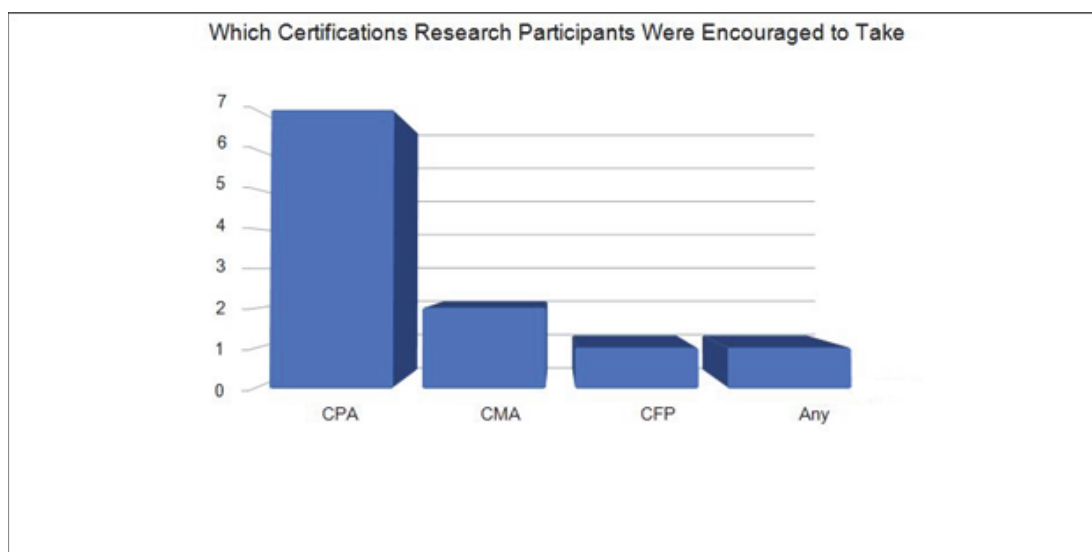
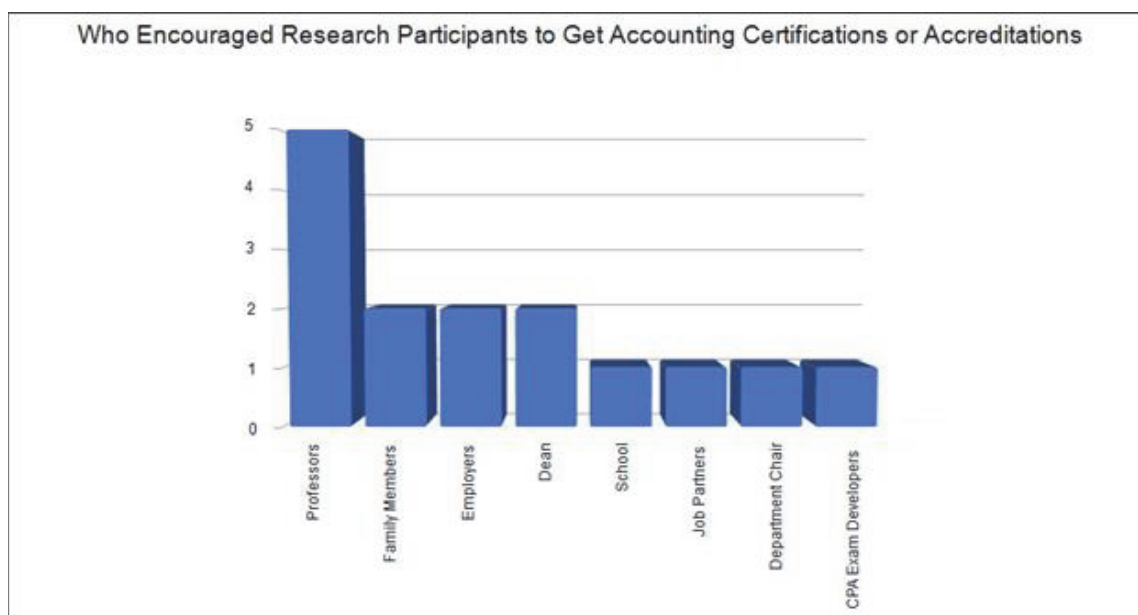


Figure 20. Which certifications participants were encouraged to take.

**Who encouraged certifications or accreditations.** In addition to indicating which certifications they were encouraged to take, participants who were encouraged to get an accounting certification or accreditation were also asked who encouraged them. Eight out of the nine participants indicate who encouraged them to get an accounting certification or accreditation. Their responses are illustrated in Figure 21. As the figure shows, the majority of the participants (five out of eight) indicated they were encouraged to get an accounting certification by their professors. Other common sources of encouragement as indicated by two each of the eight participants are family members, employers and deans.



*Figure 21.* Who encouraged participants to get accounting certifications or accreditations.

**What encouraged participants to seek certificates.** In addition to indicating who encouraged them to get an accounting certification or accreditation, three of the nine participants indicate what encouraged them to get an accounting certification or accreditation. These findings are shown in Figure 22 below. As the figure shows, two of the participants suggest the value of certifications encouraged them. One additional participant indicated what encouraged him to get an accounting certification or accreditation was that they are necessary for promotions. One final participant indicated what encouraged him to get an accounting certification or accreditation was that the CPA is the golden standard.



*Figure 22.* What encouraged participants to get accounting certifications or accreditations.

### **Beliefs About Value of CPA**

Participants were also asked whether they believed that the CPA is the most valuable of all the certifications and accreditations. Participants' responses to the question are depicted in Figure 23 below. As can be seen in the figure, seven out of the 10 participants believed that the CPA is the most valuable of all the certifications and accreditations. Whether the CPA is the most valuable of all the certifications and accreditations is shown by age, gender, and occupation. Finally, participants indicated if the CPA is the most valuable of all the certifications and accreditations. A discussion of these trends in participants' own words follows.

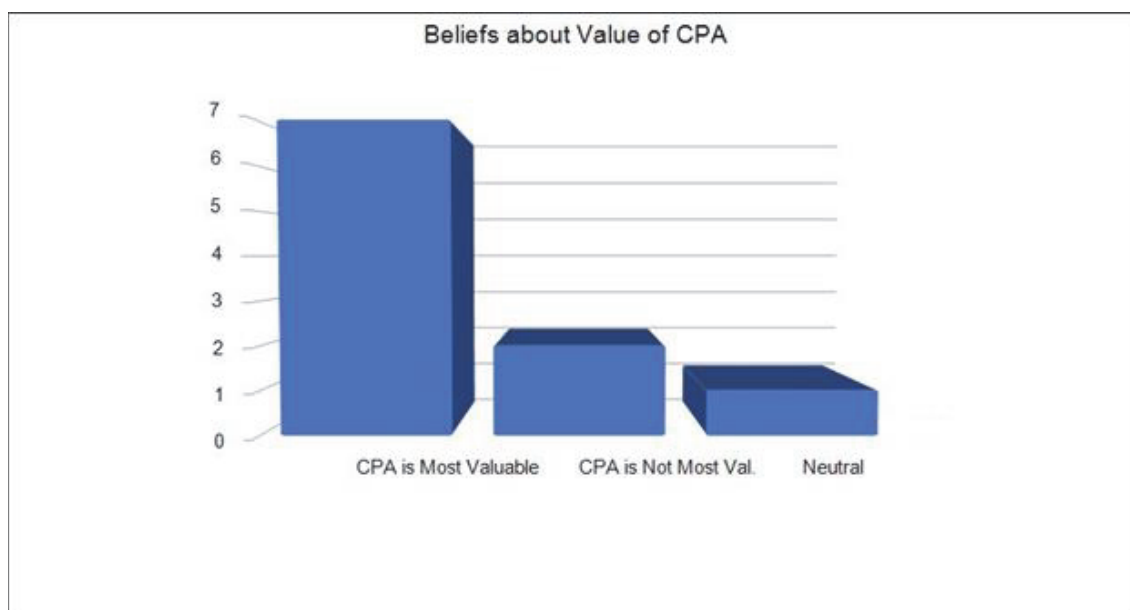


Figure 23. Beliefs about value of CPA.

**Beliefs by age.** In addition to looking at the general patterns across the participants regarding their thoughts on whether the CPA is the most valuable of all the certifications and accreditations, participants' evaluations were compared first according to their age. These results are portrayed in Figure 24.

**Beliefs by gender.** In addition to analyzing participants' thoughts on whether or not the CPA is the most valuable of all the certifications and accreditations according to their age, the results were also analyzed according to the gender of participants (see Figure 25). Female participants were only slightly more likely to believe that the CPA is the most valuable of all the certifications and accreditations. While three out of four of the female participants (75%) agreed that the CPA is the most valuable of all the certifications and accreditations, only four out of the six male participants (67%) agree.

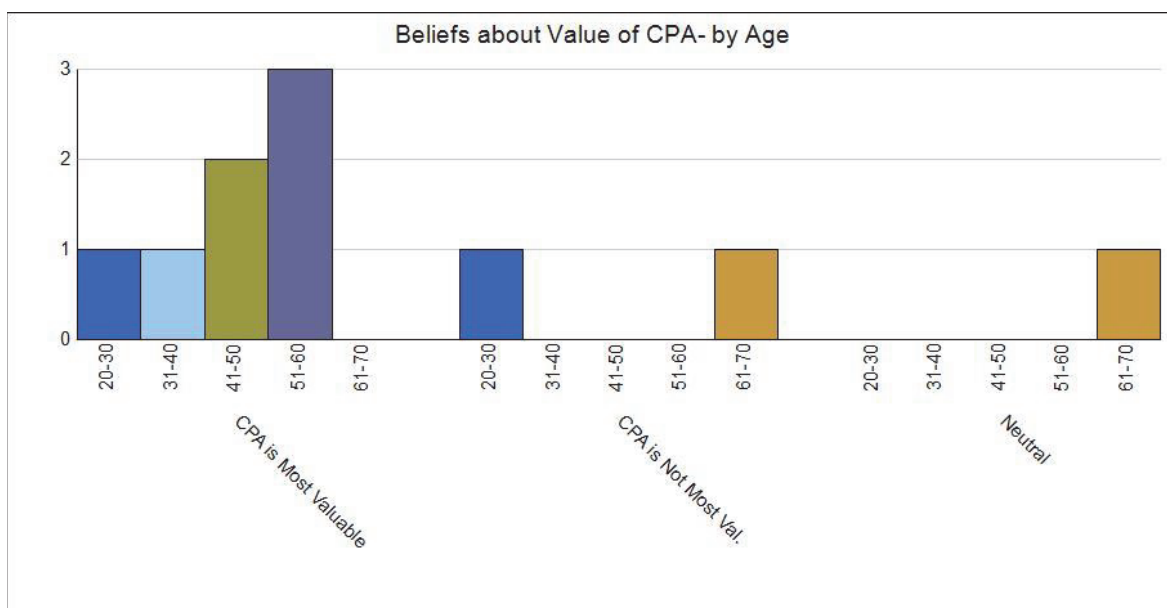


Figure 24. Beliefs about value of CPA by age.

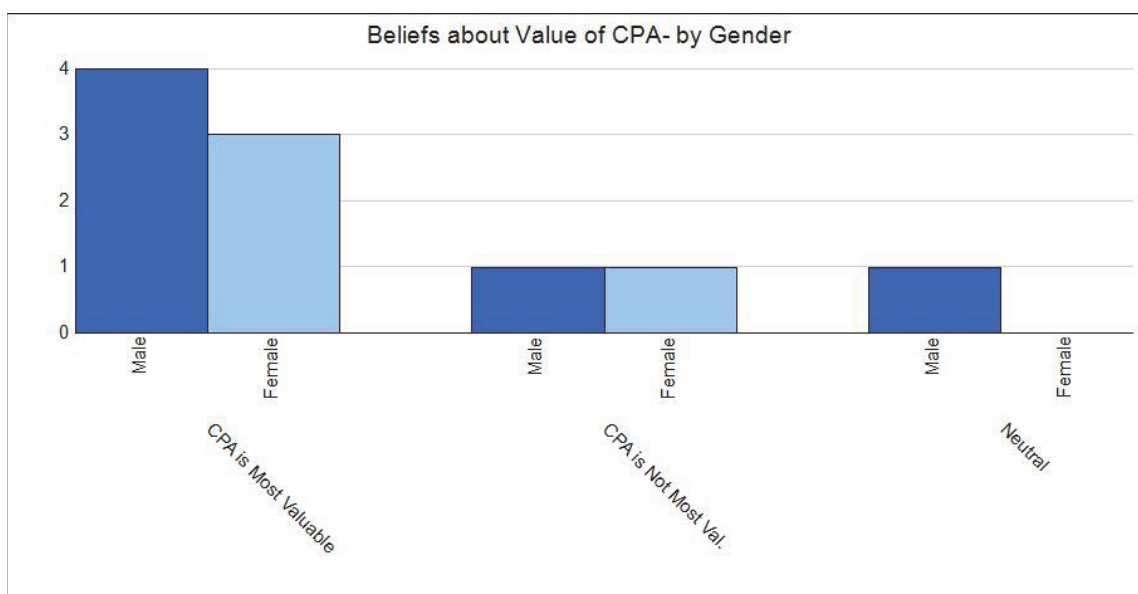


Figure 25. Beliefs about value of CPA by gender.

**Beliefs by occupation.** A final way in which participants’ thoughts on the relative value of the CPA were analyzed was according to participants’ occupations. The results of this analysis are presented in Figure 26 below. As the figure shows, educators were

only slightly more likely to believe that the CPA is the most valuable of all the certifications and accreditations.

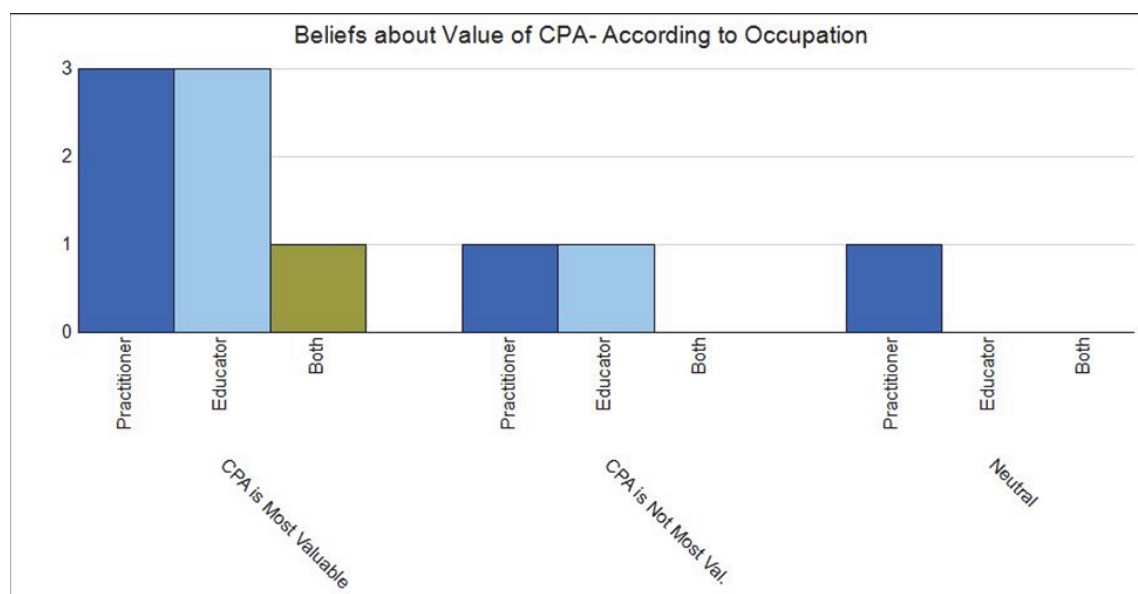


Figure 26. Beliefs about value of CPA by occupation.

**Reasons the CPA is the most valuable certification.** Participants who indicated they believed that the CPA is the most valuable of all the certifications and accreditations provide explanations supporting their beliefs. These explanations are depicted in Figure 27 below. A discussion of the most common reasons participants gave for believing that the CPA is the most valuable of all the certifications and accreditations follows.

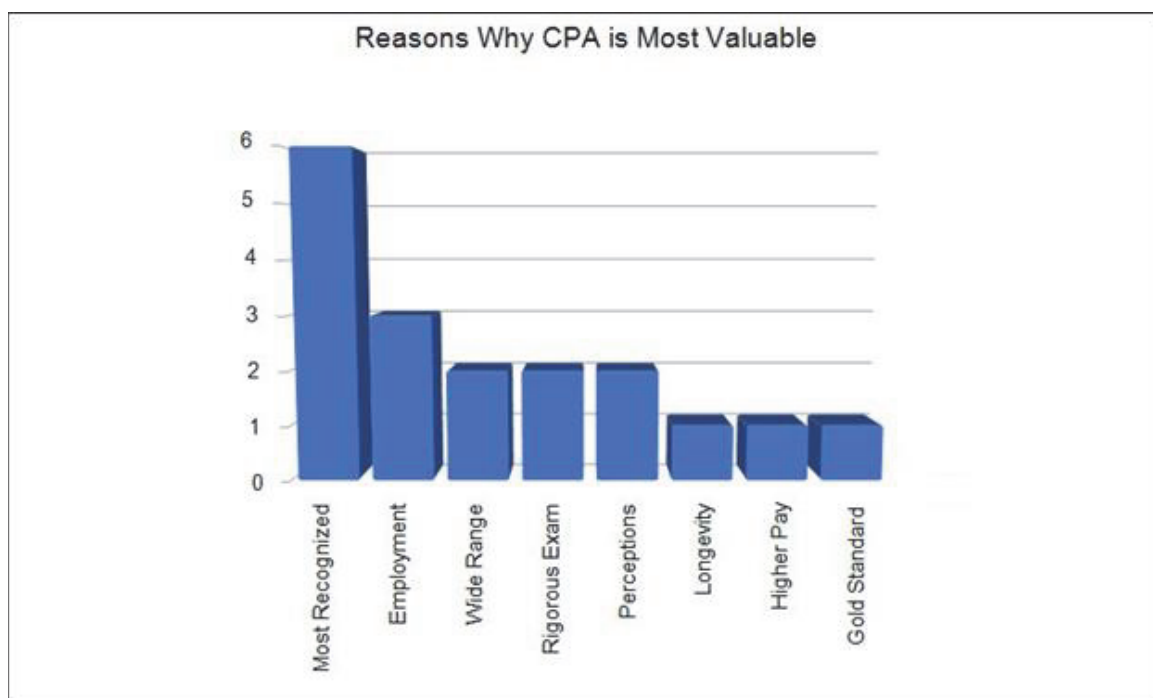


Figure 27. Reasons CPA most valuable.

**Most recognized.** Among those participants who indicated they do believe that the CPA is the most valuable of all the certifications and accreditations, six provide the CPA as being the most recognized certifications as an explanation supporting their belief. For example, as Participant G1-2, a practitioner, explained:

I believe the CPA is the most valuable accounting certification because it is the most recognized by people in the field of accounting and the public. Even though the public may not know what CPA stands for, to them it has a connotation of trust in the accounting field. The public has the perception that the CPA is the umbrella for with the other accounting certifications exist, and that the holder of a CPA is an expert in tax, audit, and everything accounting.



As this example illustrates, many participants believed the CPA is the most valuable of all the certifications and accreditations as they feel that it is the most recognized in the field of accounting as well as among the public.

**Employment.** Another common explanation participants provide in support of their belief that the CPA is the most valuable of all the certifications and accreditations, relates to employment. In fact, three participants indicate employment in relation to their belief that the CPA is the most valuable of all the certifications and accreditations. For example, as Participant G2-4 explained:

I believe that the CPA is the most critical certification because even though it is just a test, it is considered the gold standard. The CPA has been around longer than the other accounting certifications and accreditations. Even if the CPA doesn't help you on the job or your certification is inactive, it's a good look because it's preferred by employers. You can be brilliant, but if you didn't take the exam, you are view as a step below someone who has the CPA. An accountant without the CPA is viewed as a second-class citizen because employers pick CPA over everything else, especially if they don't know you. Just the fact that you studied for and past the exam puts you a step above accountants without the CPA, especially in a higher end job. If you don't have that CPA designation you are a step behind.

**Reasons the CPA is not the most valuable certification.** While the majority of the participants believed that the CPA is the most valuable of all the certifications and accreditations, two of the participants did not agree. In particular, these participants

suggested that the CPA is not a measurement of knowledge of accounting practices as well as the fact that the value of the CPA depends on one's career path in order to explain their beliefs that the CPA is not the most valuable of all the certifications and accreditations. These results are illustrated in Figure 28 below. A discussion of participants' explanations for why they do not believe that the CPA is the most valuable of all the certifications and accreditations in their own words follows.

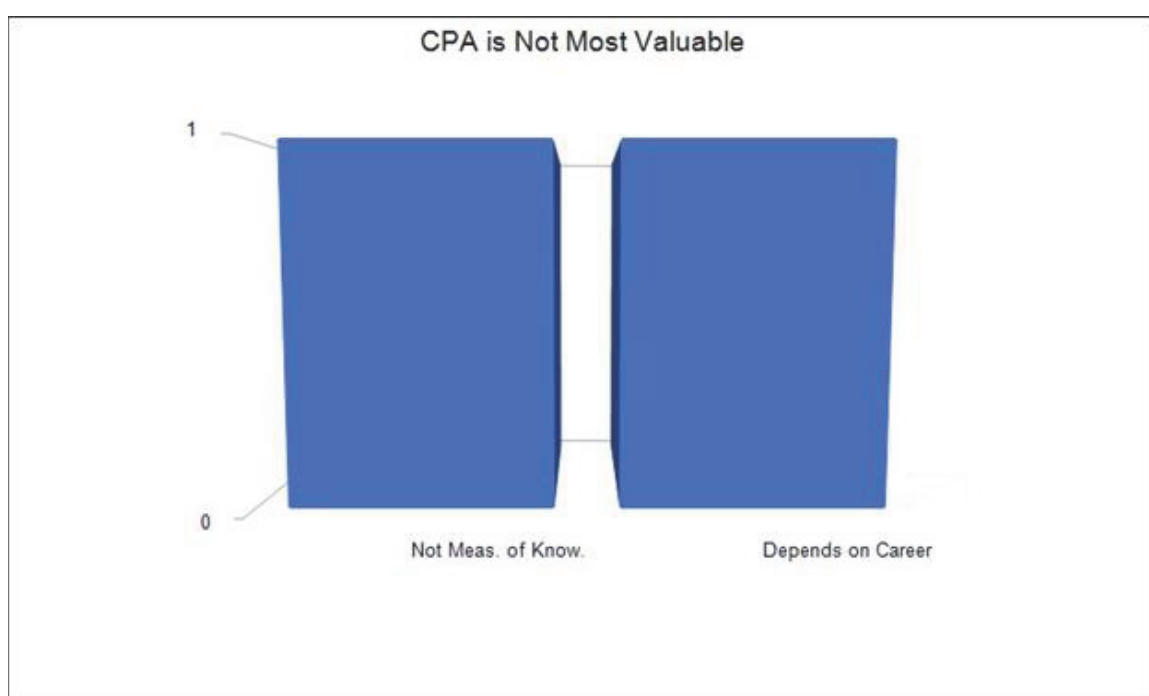


Figure 28. CPA is not most valuable.

***Not measurement of knowledge.*** The first reason that participants give for explaining their beliefs that the CPA is not the most valuable of all the certifications and accreditations is that it is not a measurement of knowledge. Participant G1-3 explained this view:

I do not believe it's the most valuable accounting certification because it is not a measurement of an Accountant's accounting knowledge. I know a lot of CPAs that are horrible at accounting and I know a lot of non-CPA Accountants that are very good at accounting. I don't believe that the CPA is an accurate measurement of an Accountant's accounting knowledge. We have CPAs that seek accounting guidance from me, and I am a CIA. The CPA exam is like a marathon; you cram the information in your head, let it out in the exam, and then forget it. Six months after the exam if you asked people who took the exam a question they will give you a freaked-out expression and say that they don't remember; this has been my experience.

As this participant explained, the fact that the CPA is not a measurement of knowledge is one reason participants give to explain their belief why the CPA is not the most valuable of all certifications and accreditation.

***Depends on career.*** In addition to asserting that the CPA is not the most valuable of all certifications and accreditations by citing the fact that it is not a measurement of knowledge, one additional participant explained her beliefs that the CPA is not the most valuable citing that the value of the CPA depends on the career. For example, as Participant G2-3 explained:

I do not believe that the CPA is the most valuable certification or accreditation because your selection of these credentials depends on what you plan to do with your career. The CPA is valuable if you intend to spend at least five years in auditing, tax, or something in that particular field. However, the CMA is more

valuable if you are going into the industry. The specialty certifications like CIA or CISA should complement the CPA or CMA.

In this way, the way in which the value of the CPA varies depending on the career is another reason participants give in support of their belief that the CPA is not the most valuable of all certifications and accreditations.

**Beliefs about modifying accounting curriculum.** Participants were also asked to explain why schools should or should not modify the accounting curriculum.

Participants' responses to the question are depicted in Figure 29 below. As the figure shows, half of the participants (five out of 10) believed schools should modify the accounting curriculum, while the other half believed they should not modify the curriculum.

Patterns in participants' responses were compared according to their age, gender and occupation. As Figure 30 shows, older participants (between the ages of 51 to 70) were more likely to believe that the accounting curriculum should not be modified. Men were substantially more likely than women to believe that the accounting curriculum should be modified. Finally, practitioners were substantially more likely than educators to believe that the accounting curriculum should be modified.

In addition to stating their general beliefs on whether schools should or should not modify the accounting curriculum, participants stated the reasons they believed schools should or should not modify the accounting curriculum. A discussion of the reasons schools should or should not modify the accounting curriculum in participants' own words follows.

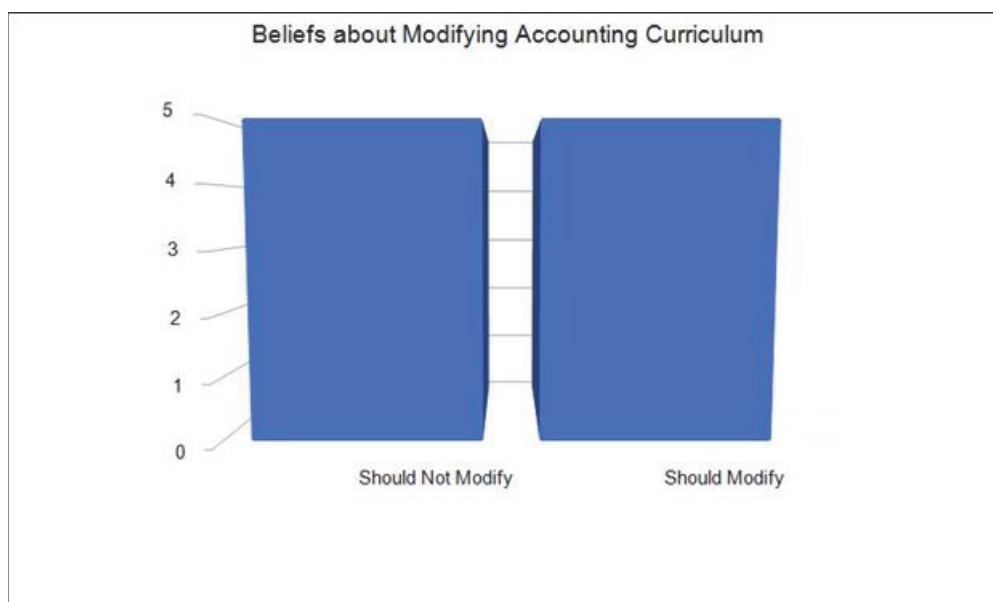


Figure 29. Beliefs about modifying accounting curriculum.

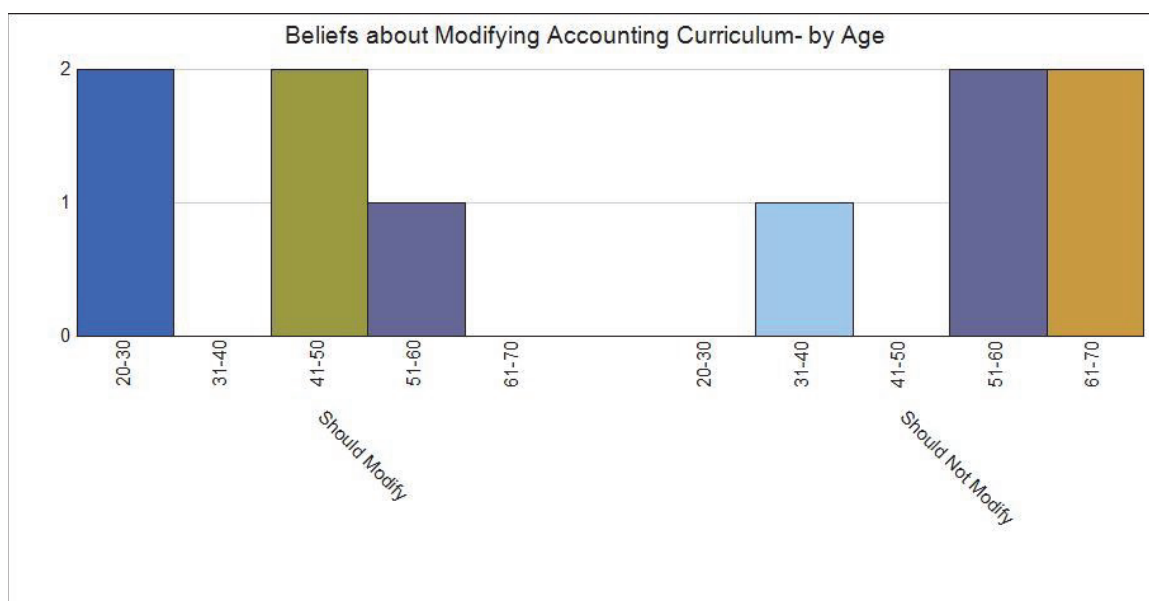


Figure 30. Beliefs about modifying accounting curriculum by age.

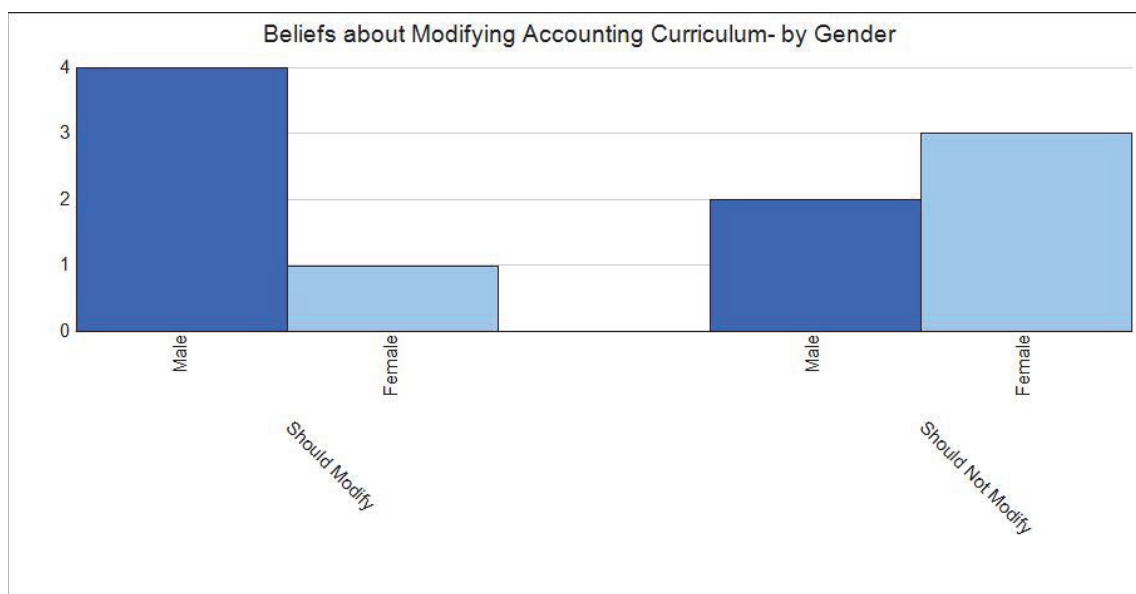


Figure 31. Beliefs about modifying accounting curriculum by gender.

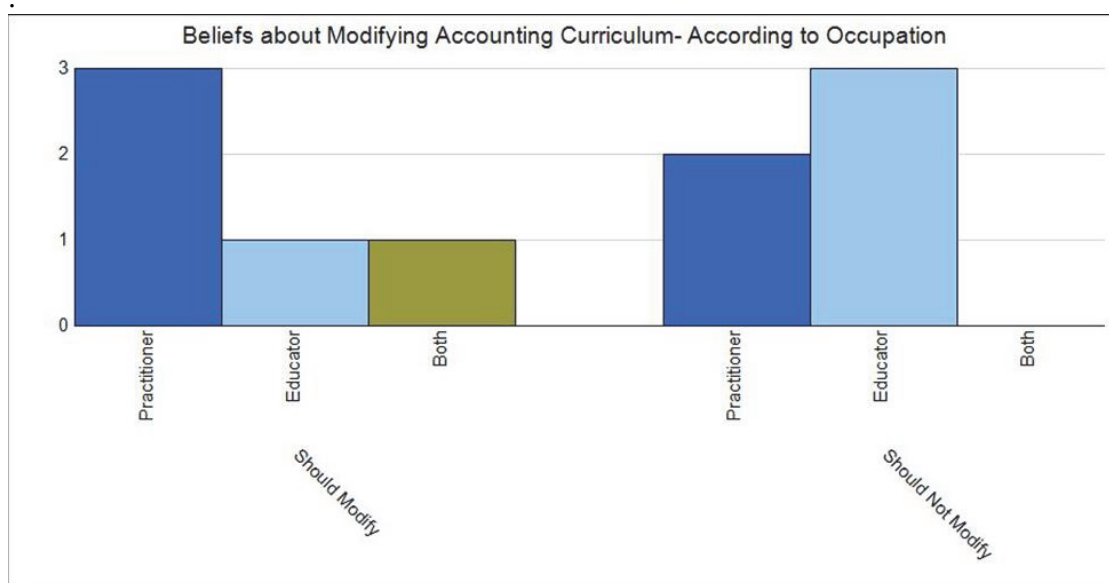


Figure 32. Beliefs about modifying accounting curriculum according to occupation.

**Why schools should not modify the accounting curriculum.** When asked to explain why schools should or should not modify the accounting curriculum, half of the

participants provided reasons schools should not modify the accounting curriculum. Participants' responses to the question are depicted in Figure 33 below. As the figure shows, the most common reason participants give for asserting why schools should not modify the accounting curriculum is because it is geared towards the CPA exam.

Participant G2-1 explained this line of reasoning:

Schools should not modify the accounting curriculum. The program should stress the basic knowledge and provide selective courses in specialty areas because this would allow the students to choose specific certifications in the area of their interest, but it shouldn't be required. The core coursework should be in support of what is needed to sit for the CPA in most states.

In this way, as the accounting curriculum is currently geared towards the CPA exam, some participants feel that schools should not modify it. Other reasons participants gave for asserting why schools should not modify the accounting curriculum is because "the value of the specialty certifications and accreditations comes from gained experience (Participant G1-5)," the belief that companies should modify it as well as due to the importance of certifications to the field.

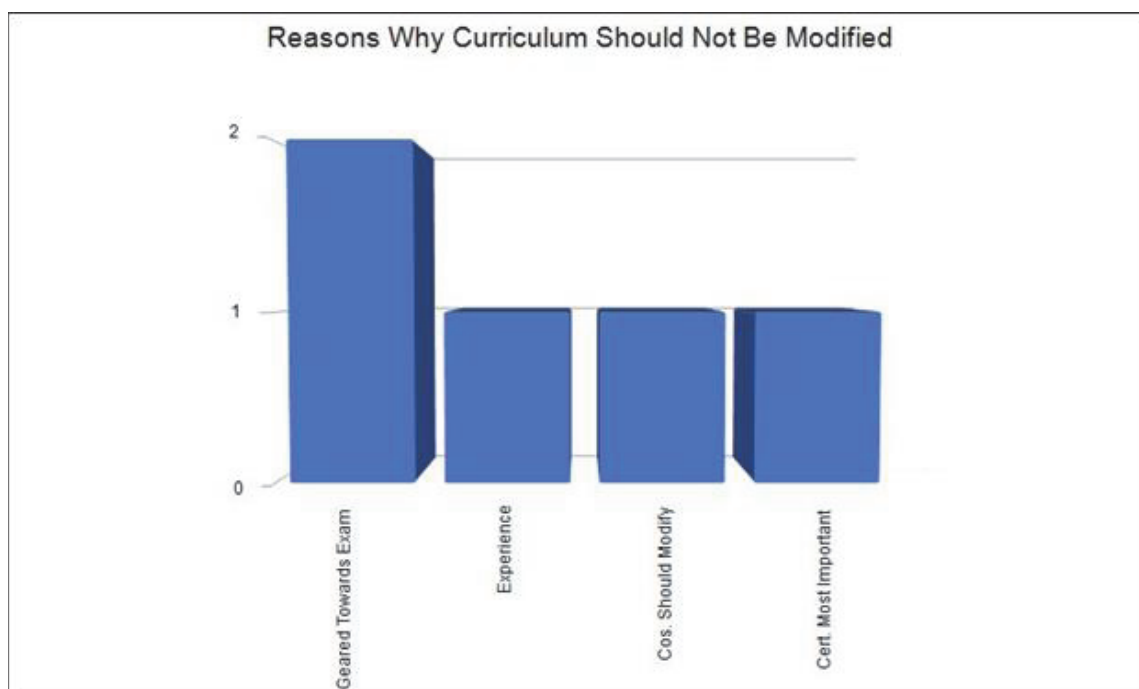


Figure 33. Reasons curriculum should not be modified.

**Why schools should modify the accounting curriculum.** In addition to explaining why schools should not modify the accounting curriculum, half of the participants (5 out of 10) provide reasons schools should modify the accounting curriculum. These reasons are illustrated in Figure 34 below. Participant G1-4 explained this view: “Schools should, considering the accounting curriculum is tailored towards the CPA exam and some students may want to go into another field of accounting.”

Similarly, Participant G2-2 explained,

Schools should modify the accounting curriculum because too much of the upper level curriculum is geared towards passing the CPA. I have had conversations with chairmen of accounting departments who told me that if we change the CPA exam and what it focuses on, they will change their accounting curriculum.



As these participants' comments illustrate, as the accounting curriculum is overly focused on passing the CPA exam, some participants feel that schools should modify it. Other reasons participants give for asserting why schools should modify the accounting curriculum is because they should make the curriculum more real world based, they should make students aware of other certifications available to them, as well as they should include additional certifications in the curriculum.

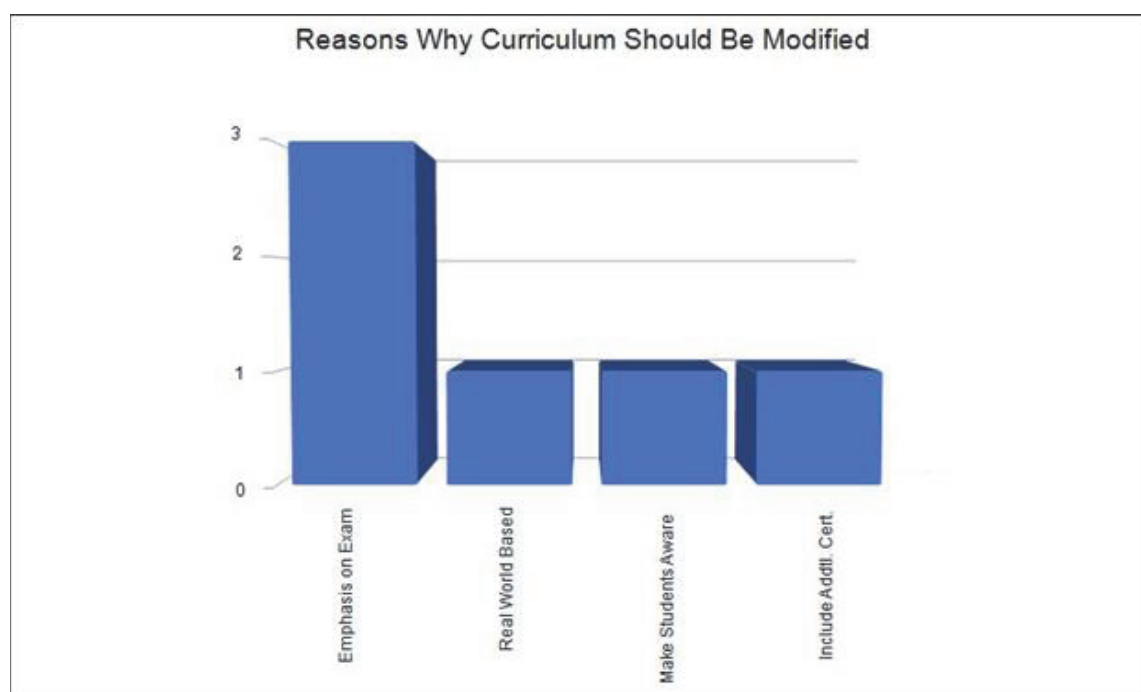


Figure 34. Reasons curriculum should be modified.

**Beliefs about adequacy of CPA education to address current accounting situations.** Participants were asked why they believed or did not believe a CPA education is adequate to address current accounting situations. Participants' responses to the

question are depicted in Figure 35 below. As the figure illustrates, six believed a CPA education is adequate to address current accounting situations.

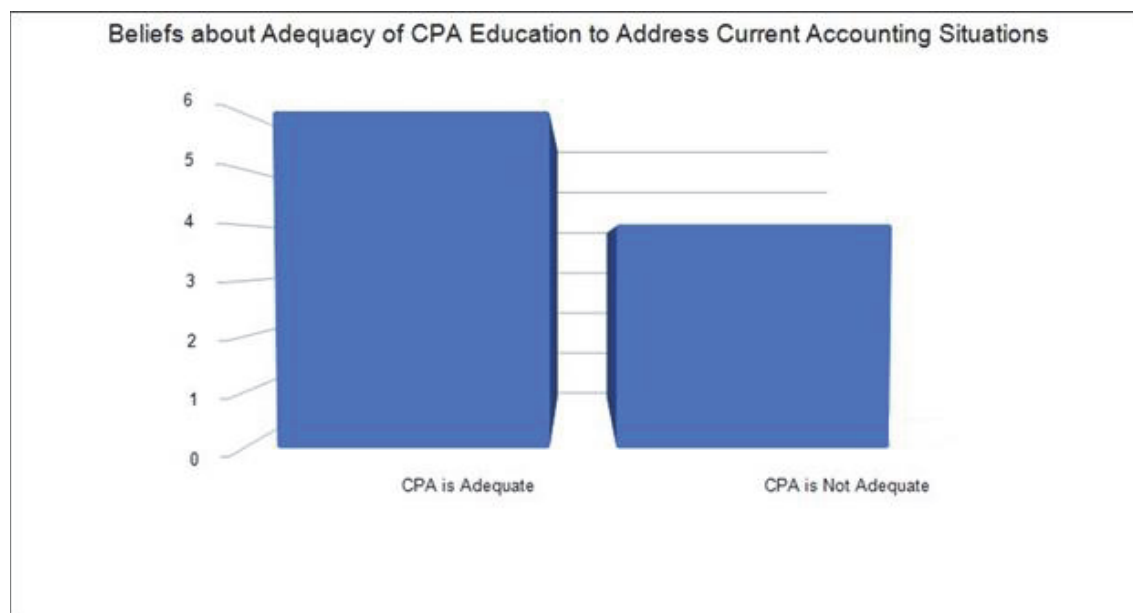


Figure 35. Beliefs about adequacy of CPA education to address current accounting situations.

In addition to looking at the general patterns across the participants, regarding whether a CPA education is adequate to address current accounting situations; the patterns in participants' responses were compared according to their age, gender and occupation. As Figure 36 shows, participants of all age ranges were divided regarding the issue of whether a CPA education is adequate to address current accounting situations. In addition, as Figure 37 shows, male were only somewhat more likely than female participants to believe that a CPA education is not adequate to address current accounting situations. While three out of the six male participants (50%) believed that a CPA education is not adequate to address current accounting situations, only one out of four

(25%) of the female participants believed so. Finally, practitioners were substantially more likely than educators to believe that a CPA education is not adequate to address current accounting situations.

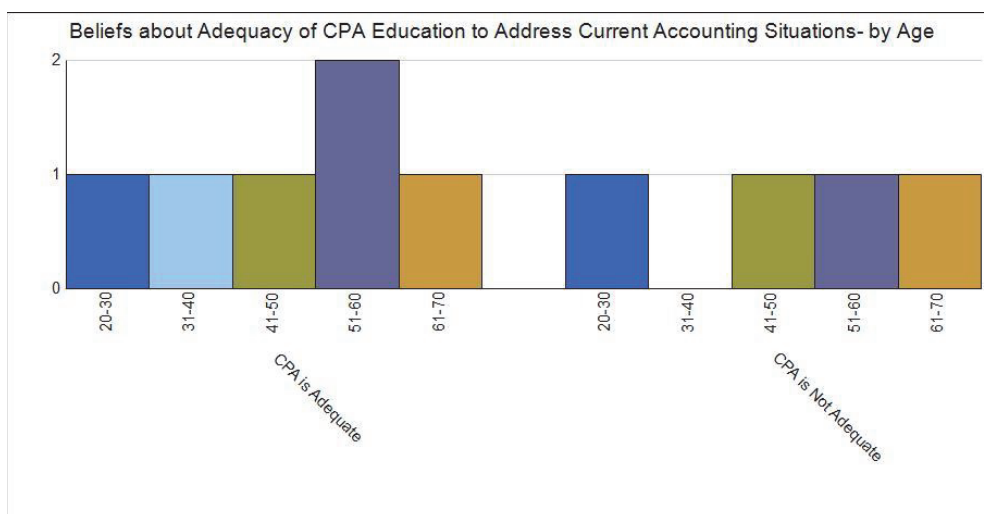


Figure 36. Beliefs about adequacy of CPA education to address current accounting situations by age.

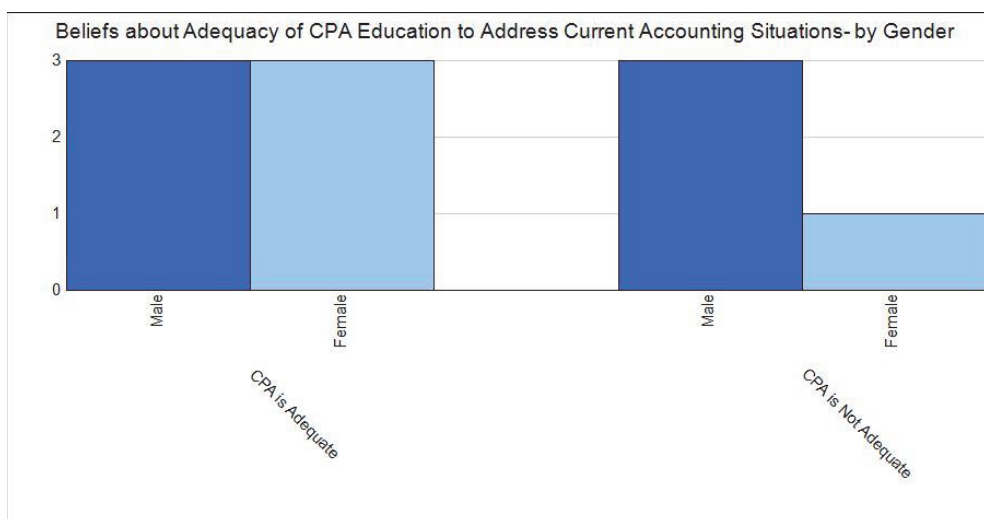
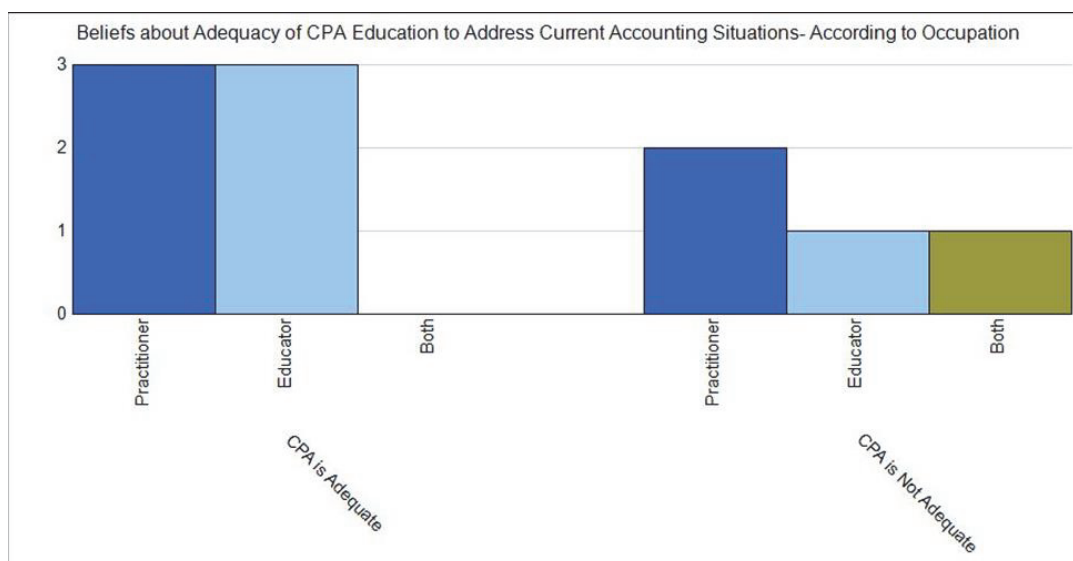


Figure 37. Beliefs about adequacy of CPA education to address current accounting situations by gender.



*Figure 38.* Beliefs about adequacy of CPA education to address current accounting situations by occupation.

In addition to stating their general beliefs on whether a CPA education is adequate to address current accounting situations, participants stated the reasons they believed or did not believe a CPA education is adequate to address current accounting situations. A discussion of the reasons a CPA education is or is not adequate to address current accounting situations in participants' own words follows.

**Why CPA education is adequate to address current accounting situations.** Of the six participants who indicate that a CPA education is adequate to address current accounting situations, five believed so because the CPA provides a general knowledge. These reasons are depicted in Figure 39 below. For example, Participant G1-1 explained this view: "I believe the CPA education provides a general knowledge adequate for students going into the work force because the actual learning takes place on the job."

Additional reasons participants give is because the CPA is because it incorporates the international accounting standard as well as because having a CPA helps students to stand out from other accountants.

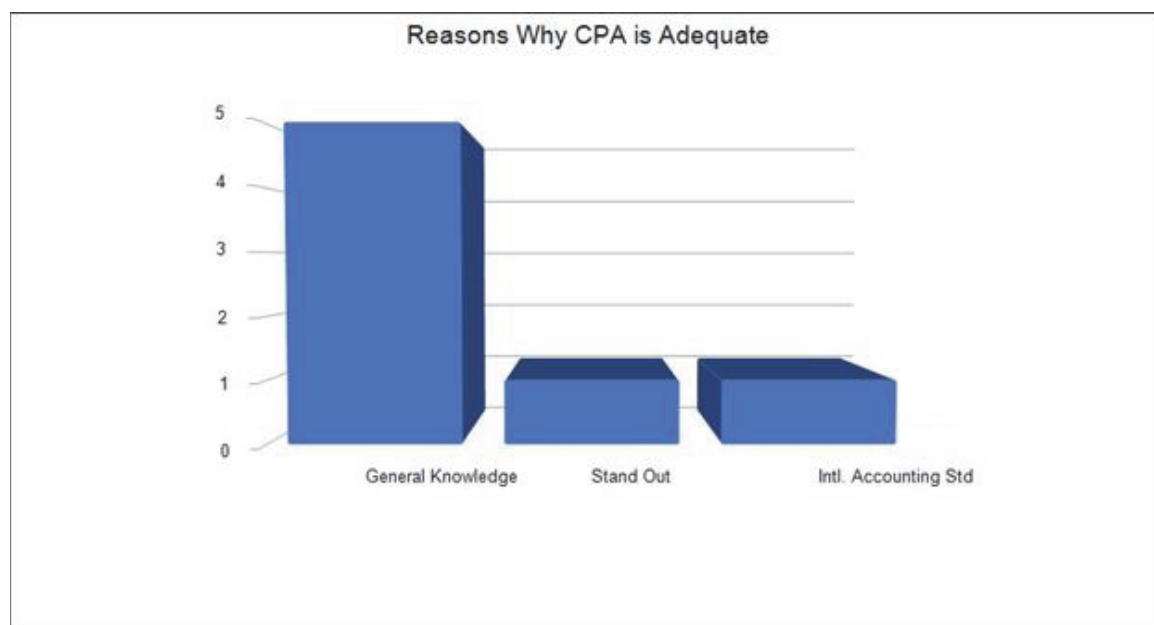


Figure 39. Reasons CPA is adequate.

#### **Why CPA education is not adequate to address current accounting**

**situations.** In addition to indicating the reasons a CPA education is adequate to address current accounting situations, four out of the 10 participants provide reasons a CPA education is not adequate to address current accounting situations. These reasons are depicted in Figure 40. Among the main reasons participants give for why a CPA education is not adequate to address current accounting situations is because it does not address soft skills. In fact, two out of the four participants provide this reason. For example, as participant G1-3 explained:

I do not believe a CPA education is adequate to address current accounting situations. I went through the CPA exam, so I know what it entails; it doesn't address soft skills and writing skills are limited. Even the high-level thinking skills section is not adequate because you still have to select answers from a box. For instance, a journal entry on the exam was not representative of those used in accounting.

Additional reasons participants provide for why a CPA education is not adequate to address current accounting situations is because writing skills are limited, the field is constantly changing, the CPA is limited to addressing all possible situations as well as because a CPA does not provide a hands-on training.

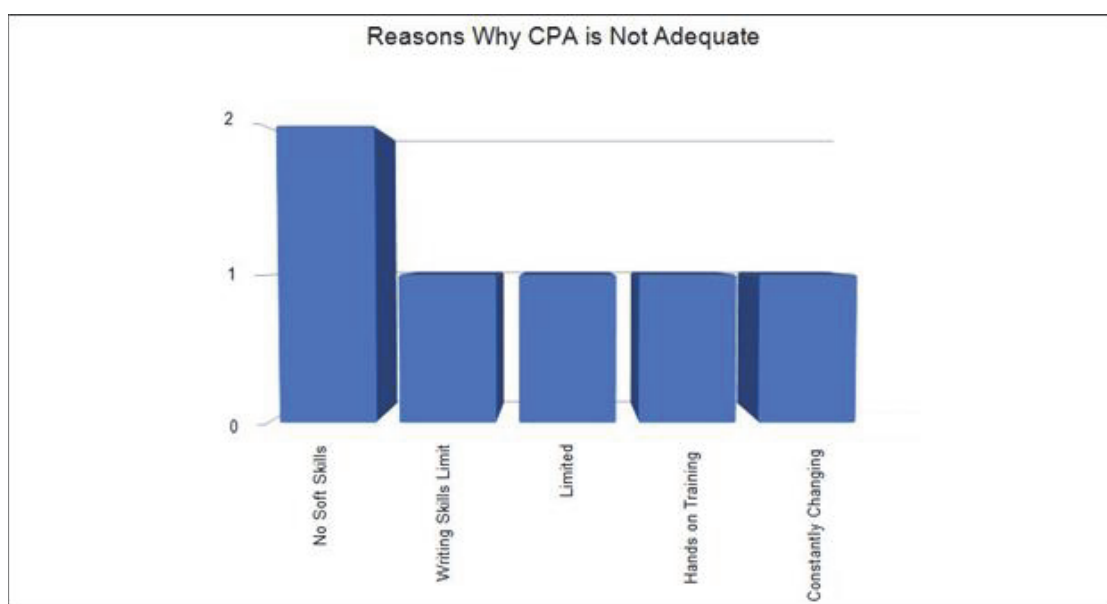


Figure 40. Reasons CPA is inadequate.

**Beliefs about increased awareness of other accounting certifications and accreditations.** Participants were asked why there should be or should not be increased

awareness about the availability and accessibility of other accounting certifications and accreditations. All 10 of the participants agreed that there should be increased awareness about the availability and accessibility of other accounting certifications and accreditations. In addition to asserting this belief, participants also provide explanations for their beliefs regarding why there should be increased awareness about the availability and accessibility of other accounting certifications and accreditations. These reasons are shown in Figure 41 below. As the figure shows, the majority of participants (7 out of 10) believed there should be increased awareness about the availability and accessibility of other accounting certifications and accreditations as the certifications and accreditations they will need depends on their career goals. For example, as Participant G1-2 explained:

There should be increased awareness about the availability and accessibility of other accounting certifications and accreditations because not everyone is pursuing public accounting, and there are other options and other fields that professional may not be aware of until later in their career.

In addition, three participants stated there should be increased awareness about the availability and accessibility of other accounting certifications and accreditations citing students' right to know. As Participant G2-3 asserted: "I think there should be increased awareness about the availability and accessibility of other accounting certifications and accreditations; if it's available, the students have the right to know." A final reason that participants give for suggesting that there should be increased awareness about the availability and accessibility of other accounting certifications and accreditations is that it will give students a competitive advantage. As Participant G2-2 stated:

There should be increased awareness about the availability and accessibility of other accounting certifications and accreditations to give students a competitive advantage. I believe this to be true because of the declining opportunities due to automation through technology advance software.

As these participants' comments illustrate, all the participants believed there should be increased awareness about the availability and accessibility of other accounting certifications and accreditations as the certifications and accreditations they will need depends on their career goals, students have the right to know as well as this knowledge will give them a competitive advantage.



*Figure 41.* Beliefs about increased awareness of other accounting certifications and accreditations.

**Beliefs about lack of communication between educators and practitioners about what is taught in the classroom.** As Figure 42 shows, six participants thought



there is a lack of communication between accounting educators and practitioners about what is taught in the classroom and what accountants actually do.

In addition to looking at the general patterns across the participants, regarding their beliefs about communication between accounting educators and practitioners; the patterns in participants' responses were compared according to their age, gender and occupation. As Figure 43 shows, the youngest participants (between the ages of 20 to 30) were the most likely to believe that there is a lack of communication between accounting educators and practitioners. As Figure 44 shows, female participants were slightly more likely than male participants to believe that there is a lack of communication between accounting educators and practitioners. Finally, educators were somewhat more likely than practitioners to believe that there is a lack of communication between these two groups (see Figure 45). While only three out of five of practitioners (60%) believed that there is a lack of communication between the two groups, three out of four (75%) of the educators believed so.

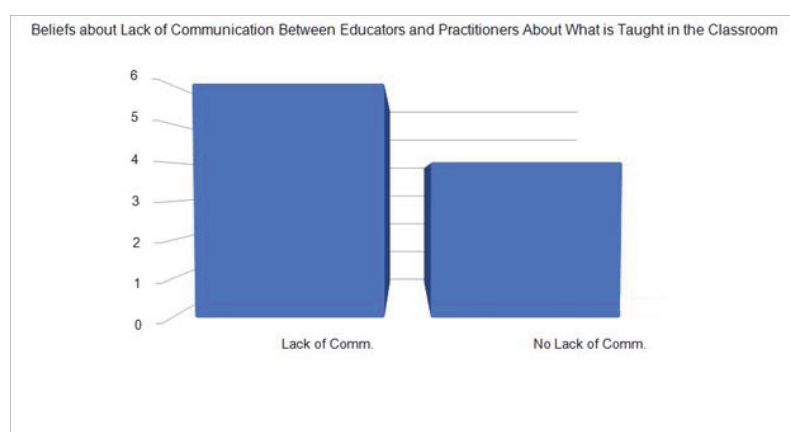
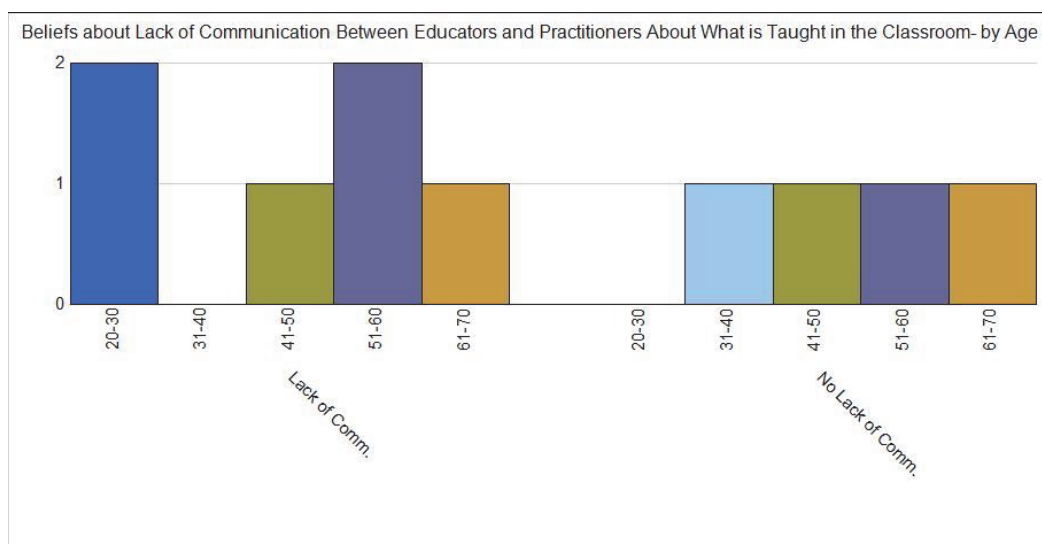
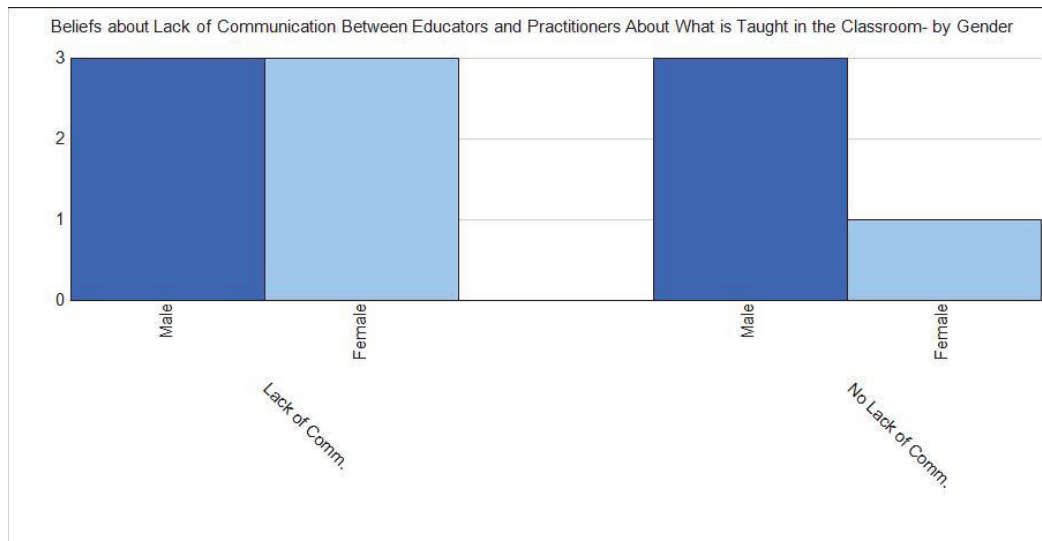


Figure 42. Beliefs about lack of communication between educators and practitioners about what is taught in the classroom.



*Figure 43.* Beliefs about lack of communication between educators and practitioners about what is taught in the classroom by age.



*Figure 44.* Beliefs about lack of communication between educators and practitioners about what is taught in the classroom by gender

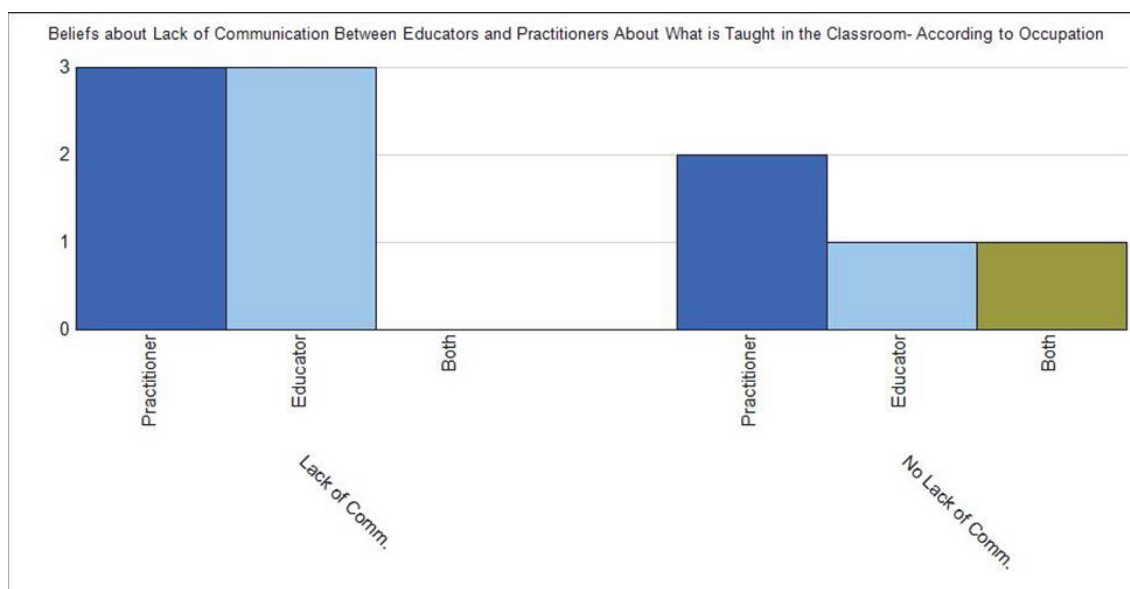


Figure 45. Beliefs about lack of communication between educators and practitioners about what is taught in the classroom- according to occupation.

In addition to stating their general beliefs on whether there is a lack of communication between accounting educators and practitioners about what is taught in the classroom and what accountants actually do, participants stated the reasons they believed there is or there is not a lack of communication. A discussion of these reasons in participants' own words follows.

#### **Lack of communication between accounting educators and practitioners.**

When asked to explain why they believed there is or there is not a lack of communication between accounting educators and practitioners about what is taught in the classroom and what accountants actually do, six participants indicated they believed there is a lack of communication. Their beliefs are illustrated in Figure 46 below. As the figure shows, among the most common reason participants provide for their belief that there is a lack of

communication between educators and practitioners, is that there is a lack of the practical side of accounting in current educational practice. For example, Participant G2-2 explained this view:

There is a lack of communication between accounting educators and practitioners about what is taught in the classroom and what accountants actually do because too many educators are focused on the theory of accounting and are detached from the practical side of accounting.

Another issue one participant provides for explaining why there is a lack of communication between educators and practitioners is because professors are academic researchers and many have never practiced accounting. Another participant points to the one-sided nature of communication between accounting educators and practitioners, in that it is primarily focused on educators making contact with practitioners, who lose contact with educators once they graduate. An additional participant notes that there is a lack of communication between accounting educators and practitioners as educators place their sole emphasis on the CPA and fail to communicate other options. A final reason one participant provides for asserting that there is a lack of communication between accounting educators and practitioners is that the curriculum is exam based rather than being based on what goes on in the work place.

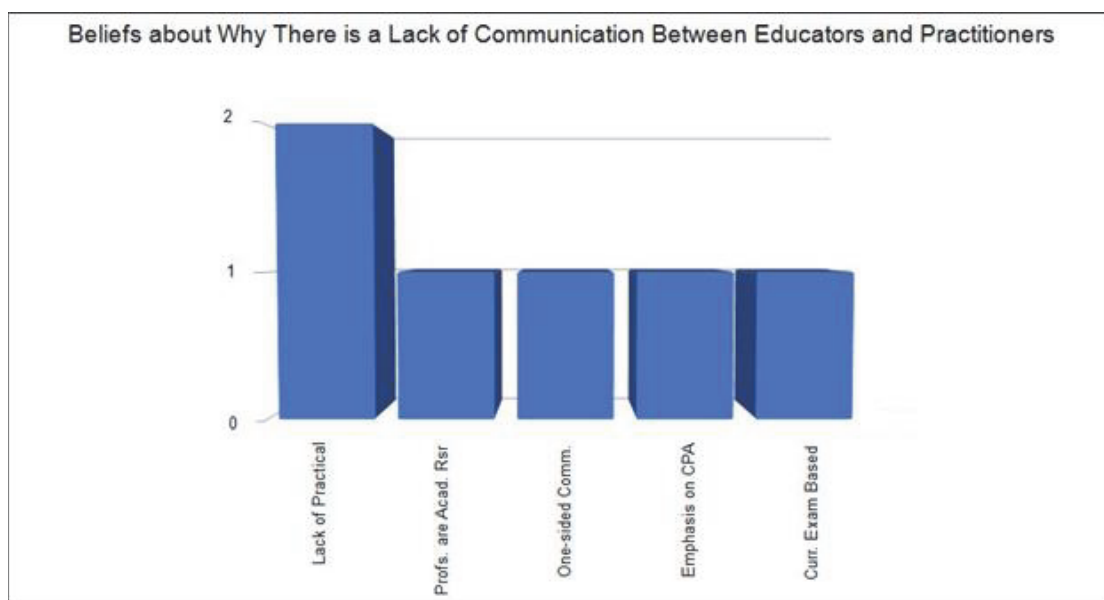


Figure 46. Beliefs about why there is a lack of communication between educators and practitioners.

#### **No lack of communication between accounting educators and practitioners.**

When asked to explain why they believed there is or there is not a lack of communication between accounting educators and practitioners about what is taught in the classroom and what accountants actually do, four participants indicated they do not believe there is a lack of communication. Participants' beliefs are illustrated in Figure 47 below. As the figure shows, among the most common reason participants provide for their belief that there is not a lack of communication between educators and practitioners, is due to the presence of advisory boards. Participant G1-5 explained this view:

There is not a lack of communication between accounting educators and practitioners about what is taught in the classroom and what accountants actually do. I think communication takes place to some degree. We have employees who

participate in advisory boards at their alum; they talk about what the schools can do better as far as training the students to be able to transition to the work force easier and what type of skills practitioners are looking for that they need to focus on in the curriculum. We try to keep the schools up on what we see lacking and what is trending so that they can better prepare the students. How much of our feedback that gets filtered into the curriculum depends on the school.

A further reason one participant provides for her belief why there is not a lack of communication between accounting educators and providers is by citing the various resources educators have available, including practitioners as well as online resources. A final participant explained the issue as rather than an issue with lack of communication as an issue with an exclusive focus on theory in the classroom and suggests students gain real world experience through participation in internships.

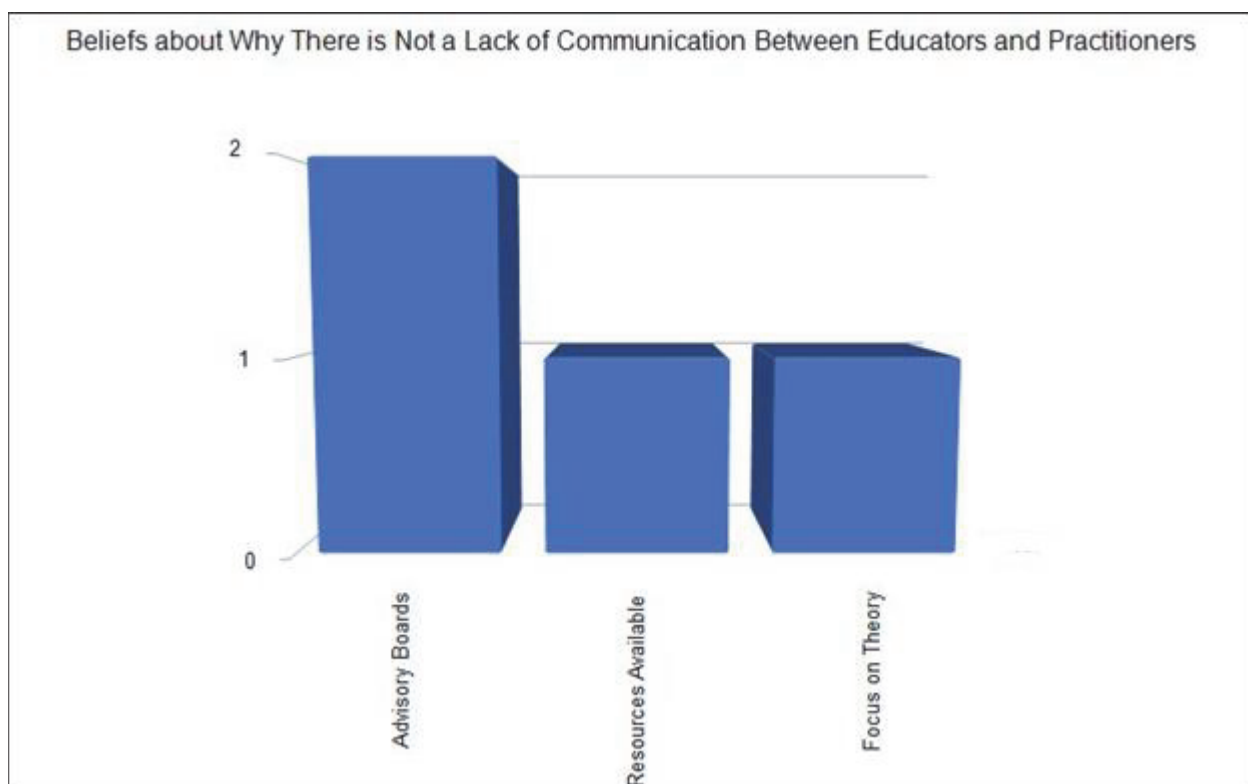


Figure 47. Beliefs about why there is not a lack of communication between educators and practitioners.

**Beliefs about conversation between educators and practitioners regarding making changes to accounting curriculum.** Finally, participants were asked to explain why there should or should not be a conversation between practitioners and educators about making changes to the accounting curriculum. It is important to note, all 10 of the participants believed there should be a conversation. In addition, participants were asked to list the ways in which they think a conversation can be started. Their suggestions are depicted in Figure 48 below.

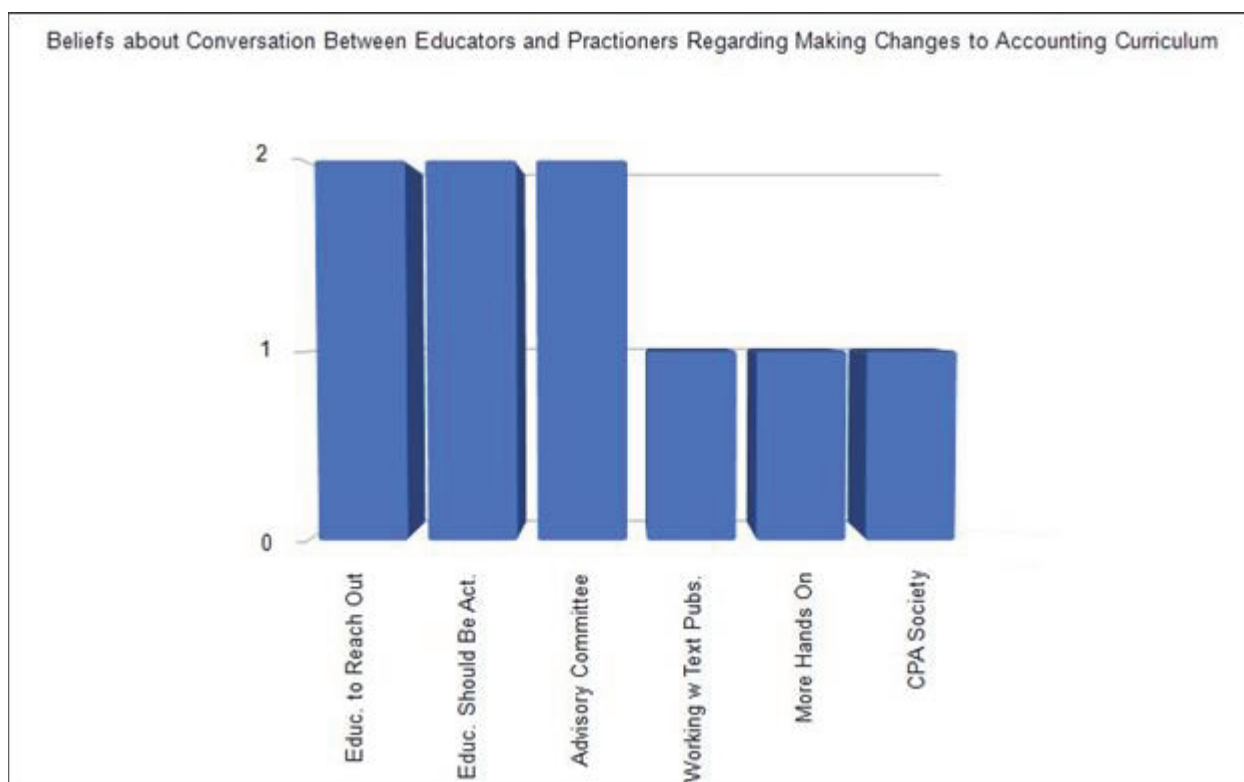


Figure 48. Beliefs about conversation between educators and practitioners regarding making changes to accounting curriculum.

Among the most common suggestions participants provide (by two out of 10 participants) is that educators should reach out. Participant G1-4 explained this suggestion: “There should be a conversation between practitioners and educators about making changes to the accounting curriculum. Starting a conversation is the hard part. There should be a conversation about real world skills and the other options available to accountants. Educators need to reach out to practitioners to make sure what they are teaching is what the students will be using when they go out in the work force.” Another common suggestion made by two additional participants is that educators should be



active in accounting communities. For example, Participant G1-2 explained this suggestion:

To start a conversation to keep a connection between the school and the practice, the practicing educators should be more active in the accounting communities, and attend the AICPA and the local chapters. In doing this they can ask practitioners what is lacking; when practitioners hire level entry accountants they can see where the accountants are lacking.

A final common suggestion among two other participants regards starting a conversation through advisory committees. Participant G2-4 explained this position:

There should be a conversation between practitioners and educators about making changes to the accounting curriculum. We can start a conversation by having an advisory committee in the schools, working with text book publishers, and giving students more hands on in the class or having hands on courses rather than regurgitating the information in the text.

Other suggestions participants make regarding starting a conversation between accounting educators and practitioners is through working with textbook publishers, offering students more hands-on class as well as through communication at the CPA society.

### **Research Question 1: Perceptions**

Data analysis identified some gaps in perception of accreditations between educators and professionals, and some shared views. The CPA was the most widely recognized accreditation among all participants, even though most participants were

aware of a number of other certifications and accreditations and how to obtain them, and even held non-CPA certifications. Awareness generally increased by age and was not strongly differentiated by occupation. The CPA was much more commonly supported by participants' home institutions than were other certifications. Most participants were also aware of the CMA, which was supported by a majority of schools but not mentioned as supported by any employers. This finding suggests that jobs tend to focus more attention exclusively on the CPA, even though professionals are aware of other certifications and accreditations.

Participants in both groups reported similar perceptions on holding accreditations and certifications. Participants viewed holding multiple degrees, certifications, or accreditations to be moderately important on average, though some perceived this as extremely important and others as neutral. No participant saw this as unimportant. This variability was observed among practitioners as well as educators; both groups were split on whether holding multiple accreditations and degrees is very important. A similar finding was that most participants, academics and professionals alike, were encouraged by their professors or others to get an accounting certification or accreditation, most often the CPA.

If participants were split on their perceptions of the value of holding multiple certifications, they agreed that the CPA is the most valuable certification. Older participants were the most likely to doubt the value of a CPA, perhaps indicating a generational shift or the role of experience in gauging the value of the CPA. Again, there was general agreement between educators and practitioners regarding the value of the

CPA. Although most participants groups agreed that the CPA is the most valuable certification, the proportion was slightly higher among educators. Participants generally agreed that the CPA's value comes from its broad recognition and the preference of employers for the CPA. At the same time, participants agreed that students should be made aware of other accreditations and certifications beyond the CPA. Participants who doubted the value of the CPA mentioned that other accreditations and certifications may be more relevant depending on career.

The strongest disagreement between practitioners and educators related to training and curriculum. Accounting professionals were more likely to believe that accounting curricula should be modified, but only a quarter of educators agreed. Older participants were also less likely to believe that the curriculum should be modified. The accounting curriculum was linked to preparing students for the CPA exam, even if there was not consensus that this is desirable. Those who wanted to preserve the existing curriculum pointed to its alignment with the CPA exam. They viewed the role of accounting coursework as supporting the CPA exam. Those who would prefer to modify the curriculum suggested that it is too tied to the CPA exam, as opposed to other accreditations or soft skills like writing and problem solving. Interestingly, however, older participants were more likely to disagree with modifying accounting curricula, but also more likely to disagree that the CPA is valuable. This could indicate a generational shift in understanding of the role of the accounting curriculum.

Participants were asked how well graduates are prepared for the workplace. A slight majority viewed graduates as adequately prepared. Practitioners were much more

likely to view preparation as inadequate (60% of practitioners vs. 25% of educators). Interview responses regarding education reveal the biggest gaps between practitioners and educators. Educators were more likely to view the current curriculum as adequately preparing students for the CPA exam and the career of accounting, and less likely to want to modify it, while practitioners were more likely to view graduates as underprepared, especially in terms of soft skills, and were also more likely to want to modify the curriculum.

### **Research Question 2: Communication**

The disagreements in perception discussed above could stem from a communication gap between educators and practitioners. Six of the 10 respondents perceived a lack of communication between educators and professionals regarding the nature of accounting education. Younger participants were more likely to identify a lack of communication, perhaps because they had more recently made the transition from education to the workplace. Educators were also more likely to perceive a lack of communication. Many responses to the question of communication gaps focused on the divide between theory taught in the classroom and hands-on practice, whether this is because theory is traditionally taught in the classroom and later applied in the workplace, or because educators may not have much personal experience putting theory into practice.

All participants believed that educators and professionals should engage in conversation about the accounting curriculum and the preparation students are receiving for the workplace. Many respondents placed the onus for starting this conversation on

educators, believing they should reach out to practitioners and become more active in accounting associations and communities. Others believed that the professional community can reach out to form advisory committees or let educators know where recent graduates are lacking.

### **Summary**

This project addressed two key questions regarding perception and communication about certifications, degrees, and training between accounting educators and professionals:

1. What are accounting practitioners' and educators' perceptions of and experiences with the CPA and other accounting certifications and accreditations?
2. What are possible communication divides between accounting academia and professionals that may be creating a communication gap between what employers expect and what they received from accounting graduates?

Perspectives on these two questions were gathered by interviewing five educators (one of whom was also a professional) and five professionals. Analysis revealed that educators and professionals alike tended to view the CPA as the most important and most valuable certification, largely because of its recognition and acceptance by employers rather than because it consistently indicates level of skill and knowledge. They were all encouraged by professors and others to obtain certifications and accreditations, most often the CPA. Despite this view, educators and practitioners were aware of other accreditations and certifications, and thought students should be aware of others

especially as they relate to intended career paths. However, educators were more likely to perceive graduates as well prepared by a curriculum tailored to the CPA exam, while practitioners were more likely to view graduates as underprepared, especially in soft skills such as writing, and more likely to want to modify the curriculum.

Although educators were more likely to perceive a gap in communication between the university and the workplace, all participants believed it is necessary to promote conversations among educators and professionals for educators to be aware of the needs of the workplace. In Chapter 5, I place these results in the context of previous research, discuss the implications of these findings, and provide further directions for future research.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In this qualitative, phenomenological study, I explored the perceptions of academics and professional accountants regarding the preparation of accounting graduates, the value of accounting certifications, and the nature of communication between accounting programs and employers regarding the preparation of graduates. I conducted interviews with five accounting educators and five professional accountants to answer two research questions: (a) What are accounting practitioners' and educators' perceptions of and experiences with the CPA and other accounting certifications and accreditations? and (b) What are possible communication divides between accounting academia and professionals that may be creating a communication gap between what employers expect and what they receive from accounting graduates?

Interview responses revealed agreement between educators and practitioners that, despite the many accreditations and certifications valuable to graduates, the CPA is the most valuable and most recognized. Participants reported that the CPA's value lies largely in its wide recognition and use by most employers rather than its correlation with strong job preparation, especially soft skills like writing and problem solving.

Educators and practitioners did not agree on whether the standard accounting curriculum adequately prepares graduates or whether it should be modified. Educators saw the curriculum as successfully preparing graduates to pass the CPA exam and land a job, while practitioners believed that curricula should focus less on the test and more on soft skills. The two groups agreed that there is a communication gap between educators and employers, and that there should be more communication. However, their

perspectives differed on how greater communication might be achieved. In this chapter, I discuss these findings in light of the previous literature and offer recommendations for further study and future practice.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The goal of academic accounting programs is to prepare future accounting professionals for the workplace. Previous research has questioned whether this preparation is adequate to the expectations of employers, especially in the context of recent changes to an increasingly globalized field. The lack of communication between academics and practitioners in the field of accounting has created a gap between how accounting programs prepare graduates and the expectations of accounting employers. Researchers have also pointed out that accounting graduates are not adequately prepared to communicate and carry out their work in a globalized, quickly changing business environment, where regulations, modes of communication, and career paths are constantly in flux. New accountants need not only be prepared for the current workplace; they need the skills to adapt as conditions change. Yet the standard accounting curriculum focuses on preparing students to pass the CPA exam, which research suggests does not test the full set of skills relevant to the globalized workplace. The present study, which investigated perceptions of the CPA and the accounting curriculum, generally supports this previous research.

#### **Research Question 1: Perception**

Research Question 1 addressed perceptions of educators and practitioners regarding the value of various accounting certifications and the preparation of accounting



graduates to perform in the workplace. The CPA is the most common accounting certification, and the only one that provides an accounting license. Previous research, and the findings of the present study, suggest that it is the most recognizable and is regarded by educators, students, and practitioners as necessary for a career in accounting. Results show that practitioners and educators alike are aware of many certifications beyond the CPA and generally know how to obtain them. They tend to believe that students should be better informed about alternate certifications. However, study participants overwhelmingly viewed the CPA as most valuable, were themselves encouraged to obtain a CPA by professors and others, and tended to believe that it is only moderately important to obtain multiple degrees and certifications reflect the dominance of the CPA in the field. This could indicate that knowledge of alternate certification is not the limiting factor but rather perceptions of the universal acceptance and recognition of the CPA certification.

Previous research has suggested that the accounting profession is not in agreement that the CPA education is adequate to prepare accounting graduates (Boyle et al., 2013; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). In the present study, a slight majority (60%) of participants considered the CPA to be adequate, largely because it supplies graduates with general knowledge and the certification necessary to work in the field. Practitioners were much less likely to view the CPA as more adequate than educators (60% compared with 25%). This difference could be attributed to the observations of practitioners in the workplace, compared to the experience of educators which ends when students graduate. This finding concurs with previous research showing that a CPA education does not

necessarily prepare graduates to be strong communicators and creative problem solvers (Boyle et al., 2013; Weaver & Kulesza, 2014). One participant in the present study articulated strong agreement with this point, citing soft skills and real-world experience as especially lacking in graduates prepared for the CPA. According to the present study, accounting professionals do not universally regard passing the CPA exam as necessarily equivalent to being a good accountant. One participant stated that on-the-job training is a necessary supplement to the accounting curriculum, suggesting that a classroom-based curriculum is not sufficient training alone.

The findings concur with previous research indicating that, as accounting becomes more international and diverse, other certifications may be more relevant than the CPA for particular job trajectories (Hargadon & Fuller, 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). One practitioner interviewed in this study specifically mentioned that in industries other than public accounting, other certifications are more valid and more valuable. Yet, despite this view, participants still tended to report that the CPA was the most recognized and recognizable.

Boyle et al. (2013), Burke et al. (2014), Chang et al. (2015), and Raghavan and Thomas (2014) reported that graduates are unable to meet the current needs of employers, and the present study provides supporting data for this assessment. The accounting practitioners interviewed were not convinced that existing accounting curricula prepare students for the workplace; 60% of this group agreed that the accounting curriculum should be modified. This view was also more common among younger study participants, which may reflect their firsthand experience of the changing

accounting workplace. One practitioner specifically noted that the accounting field is constantly changing, and students are not necessarily prepared to enter the workplace even if they pass the CPA exam, which echoes previous findings (e.g. Chang et al., 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014).

Like Buchholz et al. (2014), the educators interviewed were much less likely to perceive a need to modify the current accounting curriculum. Results also echo Howard and Warwick (2013) and Wedemeyer (2014), who documented a lack of change in the fundamentals of accounting education across decades. Those participants who believed that the curriculum should not be modified were most likely to state that the current curriculum prepares students to sit for the CPA exam because that is its goal. This finding thus relates to perceptions of the value of the CPA certification as the gold standard of the accounting profession.

Despite existing research questioning the value of the CPA and the preparation of accounting graduates, the results of this study show a lack of consensus among educators and practitioners, and within the overall sample of accounting professionals. While much of the literature on accounting education reviewed in Chapter 2 focused on the rapidly changing workplace and the need to better prepare students for the demands of the profession, the sample of practitioners and educators interviewed here was split on questions of whether the accounting curriculum should be modified and whether a CPA-focused education is adequate to prepare graduates for the profession. This study revealed that about half of accountants are not dissatisfied with the current system, but also documented a gap in perception and communication.

## Research Question 2: Communication

According to the present study, both educators and practitioners perceived a gap in communication between academia and professional accounting, though educators were more likely to have this perception. Johnson (2015) and Raghavan and Thomas (2014) have pointed out that the accounting community needs to communicate more effectively their needs and the deficiencies they perceive to educators. One of the largest gaps in communication signaled by researchers and study participants alike was the value of alternate certifications (Johnson, 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). Participants believed that students have a right to be made aware of alternate certifications, especially if they are interested in pursuing careers other than public accounting. Yet educational programs remain focused on teaching to the CPA exam.

Helliar (2013) and McPeak et al. (2012) have suggested that accounting education and practice can be aligned only with the combined expertise of professionals and educators. Participants who perceived a lack of communication cited a detachment on the part of educators from the daily realities and demands of the profession, and a one-sided communication pattern where educators are the ones to reach out. These conflicting views (i.e., educators are detached, and educators are the only ones reaching out) signal a real gap in communication and ideas about how this communication should take place.

All educators and practitioners who participated in this study indicated that there should be more conversation between academia and professional contexts. Previous research has shown that a connection between accounting schools and professionals benefits both parties (Braun & Mauldin, 2012; Chang et al., 2015). Educators in the

present study viewed their programs and curriculum as preparing students for the CPA exam, a view that echoes the findings of Wedemeyer (2014) that universities structure their curriculum toward public accounting. One participant believed that if the CPA exam changed, then the curriculum would follow. This perception places the onus on the CPA exam itself and professional organizations to alter the exam, which would in turn change accounting degrees and produce better-prepared graduates.

Other participants viewed the gap as the result of academia's focus on theory to the exclusion of hands-on practice. Participant G2-2 said that because professors are researchers rather than practicing accountants, they are "detached from the practical side of accounting." Research has found that university curricula have stagnated in part because they have failed to keep pace with real world accounting events (Johnson, 2015; Raghavan & Thomas, 2014). In this view, professional organizations and employers need to be more active in fostering communication and hands-on opportunities, like internships. Thus, while study participants concurred that more conversation would be beneficial, they differed in their vision for how this conversation might take place.

In sum, the results of this qualitative research study show general agreement with previous research, which has suggested that too much focus is placed on the CPA exam in comparison to other certifications and to training in soft skills such as communication that are transferable in a globalized, changing business landscape. While study participants had varying perceptions of the way that accountants are trained and the level of communication between educators and participants, they concurred that the CPA was

important largely because of its wide acceptance rather than because it adequately prepares new accountants for diverse careers.

These results extend previous findings by generating rich qualitative data in the form of interview responses, from which diverse perspectives are allowed to emerge in the context of the two central research questions. In the following section, I discuss some limitations of the study before summarizing implications for future research and professional practice.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Although this study has several limitations to generalizing the results, it provides important data regarding perceptions of accounting certifications and training. The sample of practitioners was selected using a purposeful, snowball sampling design. While the sample exceeds the minimum size, it was too small to be able to draw meaningful conclusions for each group. Because only four women participated, for instance, it was difficult to determine whether the perceptions of female educators resembled those of female practitioners or male educators. A larger sample size, selected randomly, might have yielded more broadly generalizable results. However, the phenomenological approach and rich responses to open-ended questions provided necessary depth and nuance to the study that could not be achieved with a larger sample.

Another limitation is the bias of the researcher. I outlined potential sources of bias stemming from my own experience and perceptions as an accounting professional in Chapter 3. While I recognize and maintain awareness of this bias, it may have shaped the interview questions or the conversations that took place through the process of the open-

ended interview conversation in a way that limits the potential generalizations drawn from this study. However, because I provided answers to open-ended questions from the participants' own perspectives, the reader can attend to alternative perspectives and opposing answers.

### **Recommendations**

This study has provided qualitative, exploratory data grounded in a phenomenological approach in relation to two research questions that addressed perceptions of CPA training and qualifications, and communication gaps between educators and practitioners. The findings are indicative of some disagreement both between educators and practitioners, and within the field as a whole, regarding the value of the CPA and the level of preparation of accounting graduates when they enter the market. They also indicate points of agreement regarding communication gaps and the need for a more sustained conversation about the goals of accounting education. This study, as an exploratory, qualitative project, identifies several points of departure for further research.

Further research could address gaps in perception and experience not only between educators and practitioners, but across generations. For several interview questions, clear disagreement was seen between the perceptions of the youngest and oldest participants. For instance, older participants were more likely to disagree with modifying accounting curricula but more likely to disagree that the CPA is valuable. On the other hand, younger participants were more likely to perceive a gap in communication between educators and practitioners. Previous research indicated accounting has changed

rapidly as globalization made international business a priority. Given the disagreement between younger and older study participants, perceptions may be shifting along with the changing field. This suggestion could motivate further research into how perceptions align with generation in the field of accounting.

Likewise, because of the study's small sample, it was difficult to identify clear differences in perceptions of accounting education and certification by gender. Further research with a larger sample size might generate additional insights into the question of whether views of accounting certifications and communication are influenced by gender.

Previous research has highlighted the role of globalization in diversifying the roles of accountants beyond the traditional public accountant role, and in placing new demands on accountants, such as communication and creative problem solving in the face of regulatory and market changes. The career trajectories and level of experience of accounting professionals likely affects perception of preparation, certifications, and communication gaps. Experience appeared to play a role in shaping perceptions, as discussed above. Further research might explicitly compare accounting professionals from different industries or with different career trajectories to understand variation across the field in accounting professional perceptions.

This study collected rich, qualitative interview data from a small group of participants. As an exploratory study, it has highlighted several areas that could be further studied using surveys and quantitative data methods. For instance, accounting practitioners were more likely than educators to believe that a CPA education does not adequately prepare graduates and that the CPA curriculum should be modified. Interview



responses listed a few ways in which graduates were well-prepared (e.g., general knowledge) and underprepared (e.g., soft skills, communication, hands-on application). These responses could be used to generate a survey to be given to a larger sample of accounting professionals and employers to generate more robust conclusions about the specific gaps in accounting education as perceived by those who employ recent graduates.

Perceptions indicated a CPA is not a good measure of an accountant's skill, and that alternative certifications or accreditations should be more widely valued. A quantitative study could explore these perceptions further by developing performance measures for accountants in the workplace (for example, performance reviews or questionnaires). These instruments could be applied to CPA and non-CPA accountants with similar levels of experience to identify any gaps in knowledge or performance between the two groups. Similarly, CPA exam scores could be compared to performance measures to see if accountants who scored higher on the CPA exam were more successful or performed better than accountants with lower scores. If the CPA exam does not predict successful performance in the workplace, as expressed by study participants, then little correlation should be seen between the CPA and career success.

These recommendations identify productive areas for further research based on the exploratory, qualitative data reported here. These data also have implications for changes to social practice in the fields of accounting education and practice, discussed in the next section.

## Implications

The findings of this study on perceptions of certifications, the preparation of accounting graduates, and communication between accounting educators and practitioners have implications for the field of accounting and the design of accounting degree programs. The theoretical and practical implications are most relevant to two issues: the preparation of new accounting professionals, and the role of the CPA certification. In this section, I discuss each of these implications in turn.

The goal of accounting degree programs is to train a new generation of accounting professionals. Previous research has shown a lack of consensus in the field as to whether accounting degree programs are meeting this goal, and this lack of consensus was apparent in interview responses in the present study. Differences in perception were apparent across generational and professional divides. One implication of these results is that a conversation needs to take place between accounting educators and practitioners regarding the skills and knowledge that are needed in the workplace. All participants in the present study agreed that such a conversation was necessary, but there was lack of agreement regarding who needs to initiate and sustain the conversation, and whether information might best be transmitted through professional societies, universities, or other partnerships.

One implication arising out of this research is that conversations must be formalized to close the gap between educators and industry. Waiting for others to initiate contact, or doing so on an ad hoc basis, will not lead to sustained conversation or substantial change. Professional organizations might collect data on the needs of

employers in various parts of the industry, which universities could use to evaluate their curriculum and develop relevant student learning goals. Interview responses in this study implied that one of the major deficiencies in accounting graduates might lie in soft skills such as communication, problem-solving, and real-world application of material, rather than in specific knowledge. If this finding is supported by future research, then universities could find places in the curriculum to institute high impact practices that have been shown to improve critical thinking and creative problem solving. They could also explore internships and other ways to give students hands-on experience in the workplace prior to graduation, as is the case in the British model. As indicated by interview responses, professional organizations might be a good place to formalize partnerships and lines of communication and feedback between educators and practitioners. If a conversation is to take place, and the findings of the present research suggest support for such a conversation among educators and practitioners, it needs to be formalized and sustained.

The other area where this study has the potential to impact the accounting profession is by contributing to discussions of the CPA certification. Previous research and study participants signal the dominance of the CPA compared to other certifications and accreditations in structuring accounting degree programs and hiring accounting graduates, even though public accounting is not the only relevant career track students may pursue. In fact, different areas of industry require different knowledge and skill sets, and alternative certifications could be quite valuable, according to interview responses presented here. This study did not find a lack of awareness on the part of educators and

practitioners regarding alternative certifications, but rather a sense that the CPA is most valuable because it is most recognized by employers. This view was supported by the fact that the CPA was most recognized by the workplace of the practitioners interviewed.

If alternate certifications are more relevant to different areas of the industry, especially as the role of accountants shift in a globalized workplace, then formalized advising may need to take place earlier in accounting degree programs, so that students choose a certification that fits their ultimate career goals. Participants generally agreed that students should be informed of alternate certifications. Alternately, students could be advised to complete several certifications to increase career flexibility. Employers should make sure that the certifications they emphasize in hiring reflect the demands of the jobs they are hiring for, rather than treating the CPA exam as a “one-size-fits-all” credential.

If the industry needs more broadly trained accountants with better communication skills, then the results of this study suggest that the predominance of the CPA exam could be used to affect the preparation of accounting graduates. Since several educators indicated that the curriculum of accounting degree programs reflects the CPA exam, and since participants generally agreed that the CPA was most valuable and most recognized, there is significant pressure for accounting programs to adjust to any changes to the CPA exam. If the CPA exam were reconceptualized to address a broader or more relevant set of skills, then accounting degree programs would likely follow. One participant suggested that the curriculum would adjust to changes in the CPA exam. It may be that the curriculum will continue to remain stagnant, as suggested by the literature, unless the CPA exam shifts to better reflect the skills employers need in their accountants. A similar

shift took place recently in medicine, as the MCAT exam for admission to medical school shifted to include more content related to the social context of medicine. Pre-med programs shifted in response to recommend that students take sociology or anthropology courses to prepare for this section of the MCAT. Addressing the content of the CPA exam could foster an industry-wide shift in the way accounting graduates are prepared for the workplace.

The results suggest several ways in which the conversation around accounting education might shift, given the needs of a globalized business environment. Along with previous research, this study echoes the need for increased focus on how new accountants should be trained, and calls into question the centrality of the CPA in the accounting curriculum. It also identifies key points of connection between educators and practitioners that can form a base for future conversations.

### **Conclusions**

Accounting employers and professionals have identified a gap in the skills of accounting graduates, especially in a rapidly changing, globalized business environment. Accounting programs may not be providing sufficient training or guidance to students regarding the variety of certification and training they need to prepare for their career. Especially concerning is a possible overreliance on the certification in public accounting, or CPA, when other certifications may better prepare graduates for the needs of the accounting profession more broadly.

This exploratory qualitative phenomenological study investigated the perceptions of accounting practitioners and educators regarding the CPA, other certifications, and the

accounting curriculum. It also aimed to better understand how a communication divide between educators and employers might contribute to the skills gap in accounting graduates. Five accounting practitioners and five accounting educators (one of whom was also a practitioner) were interviewed by phone, and their responses analyzed using NVIVO to identify important themes in relation to the research question.

Results showed that educators and practitioners alike viewed the CPA certification as most valuable and most recognized, despite being aware of other certifications, recognizing acronyms, knowing how to obtain different certifications, and perceiving moderate or high value to having multiple certifications, accreditations, and degrees. While it was overwhelmingly identified as valuable, the CPA was not universally viewed as reflecting preparedness for the demands of the modern workplace, especially by practitioners. Practitioners were more likely than educators to believe that the accounting curriculum, which is aimed at preparing students for the CPA exam, needed to be modified to adequately prepare students for the profession. Just over half of the participants perceived a communication gap between academia and industry, and all participants agreed there should be a conversation between educators and practitioners regarding the preparation of accounting graduates.

The results echoed previous research by showing a focus on the CPA, and a gap in perceptions regarding the accounting curriculum and the need for greater communication between educators and professionals. This study joined others in raising concerns about the kind of training accounting students need to contribute to a globalized business environment. It added to previous research by showing that awareness of

alternate certifications is not lacking, but the focus remains on the CPA, even though it is not universally viewed as valuable. Results suggested that the CPA exam itself may need to be modified to broaden the focus and preparation of accounting graduates, given its place as what participants regarded as the gold standard of the accounting field. Finally, both practitioners and educators desire more conversation, and more formalized venues for conversation and feedback should be implemented.

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## Appendix A: Accounting Certifications and Accreditations

**Table A2. Accounting Certifications and Accreditations**

1. Certification in Control Self-Assessment (CCSA)	2. Certified Management Accountant (CMA)
3. Certified Bank Auditor (CBA)	4. Certified Payroll Professional (CPP)
5. Certified Bookkeeper (CB)	6. Certified Professional Environmental Auditor (CPEA)
7. Certified Business Manager (CBM)	8. Certified Public Finance Officer (CPFO)
9. Certified Cash Manager (CCM)	10. Certified Quality Auditor (CQA)
11. Certified Divorce Financial Analyst (CDFA)	12. Certified Risk Professional (CRP)
13. Certified Financial Examiner (CFE)	14. Certified Valuation Analyst (CVA)
15. Certified Financial Services Auditor (CFSA)	16. Forensic Certified Public Accountant (FCPA)
17. Certified in Financial Management (CFM)	18. Accredited Business Accountant (ABA)
19. Certified Financial Planner (CFP)	20. Accredited in Business Valuation (ABV)
21. Certified Forensic Accountant (Cr.FA)	22. Accredited Financial Examiner (AFE)
23. Certified Forensic Consultant (CFC)	24. Accredited Tax Advisor (ATA)
25. Certified Forensic Financial Analyst (CFFA)	26. Accredited Tax Preparer (ATP)
27. Certified Fraud Deterrence Analyst (CFD)	28. Accredited Valuation Analyst (AVA)
29. Certified Fraud Examiner (CFE)	30. Automated Examination Specialist (AES)
31. Certified Fraud Specialist (CFS)	32. Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA)
33. Certified Government Auditing Professional (CGAP)	34. Elder Care Specialist (ECS)
35. Certified Government Financial Manager (CGFM)	36. Enrolled Agent (EA)
37. Certified Healthcare Financial Professional (CHFP)	38. Personal Financial Specialist (PFS)
39. Certified Information Systems Auditor (CISA)	40. Certified Retirement Financial Advisor (CrFA)
41. Certified Information Security Manager (CISM)	42. Certified Information Technology Professional (CITP)
43. Certified Treasury Professional (CTP)	44. Certified Internal Auditor (CIA)
45. Certified General Accountant (CGA)	

*Note:* Gangolly, J. (n.d.)

## Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. How many accounting certifications and accreditations do you know about?  
Please list them.
2. List the accounting certifications that your school/job supports.
3. Do you know how to get other accounting certifications/accreditations?  
Yes-How did you find out?  
No-What do you think kept you from finding out?
4. Use the scale below to rate the importance of having multiple accounting degrees/certifications/accreditations in helping you develop accounting knowledge and skills.
  - 1 Unimportant
  - 2 Of little importance
  - 3 Slightly important
  - 4 Neutral
  - 5 Moderately important
  - 6 Very important
  - 7 Extremely important
5. Were you encouraged to get an accounting certification/accreditation?  
Yes  
No  
  
Which certifications/accreditations were you encouraged to take?  
Who or what encouraged you?
6. Explain why you believe or do not believe that the CPA is the most valuable of all the certifications and accreditations.
7. Explain why schools should or should not modify the accounting curriculum.
8. Explain why you believe or do not believe a CPA education is adequate to address current accounting situations.
9. Explain why there should be or should not be increased awareness about the availability and accessibility of other accounting certifications and accreditations.
10. Explain why you believe THERE IS or THERE IS NOT a lack of communication between accounting educators and practitioners about what is taught in the classroom and what accountants actually do?

11. Explain why there should be or should not be a conversation between practitioners and educators about making changes to the accounting curriculum.

List ways in which you think we can start a conversation.

#### Participant's Information

AGE:

GENDER:

OCCUPATION (educator, practitioner, or both):

CERTIFICATION(S):

DEGREES:

ACCREDITATIONS:

PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT (only referrals):

EMAIL ADDRESS:

PHONE#: