



Integrated Reporting Education: A Global Analysis of Curriculum Adoption, Pedagogies, and Readiness for Future Accountants

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Abstract

Integrated Reporting (IR) has emerged globally as a strategic reporting approach that combines financial and non-financial information to communicate how an organization creates value over time. As regulators, investors, and stakeholders increasingly demand holistic disclosures related to strategy, governance, risk, sustainability, and future prospects, accountants are expected to be proficient in integrated thinking and integrated reporting practices. This study provides a global analysis of integrated reporting education, examining the extent of curriculum adoption, pedagogical methods, institutional readiness, and barriers to implementation across developed and developing economies. Using an integrative literature review methodology, the paper synthesizes peer-reviewed research, professional body guidance, and higher education initiatives spanning 2009–2024. Findings indicate that while awareness of IR is increasing, formal integration into accounting curricula remains uneven. Common challenges include limited faculty expertise, curriculum overcrowding, lack of teaching resources, and inconsistent employer signals. The paper proposes a competency-based framework for education aligned with value creation, the six capitals, stakeholder connectivity, and assurance considerations. The study concludes with recommendations for educators, professional bodies, and policymakers to strengthen global readiness and reduce curriculum gaps.

Key word: Integrated Reporting, Integrated Thinking, Accounting Education, Sustainability Reporting, Value Creation, ESG Curriculum

Introduction

The global reporting landscape is undergoing a structural shift. Organizations are increasingly expected to disclose not only historical financial performance but also how they create value over time through strategy, governance, business models, and sustainability-related drivers. Integrated Reporting (IR) responds to this demand by encouraging the connectivity of financial



and non-financial information, supporting decision-useful communication for investors and broader stakeholders.

The evolution of integrated reporting is strongly linked to rising expectations surrounding environmental, social, and governance (ESG) accountability, long-term resilience, and enterprise value creation. As a result, accounting professionals must be equipped to understand and apply integrated thinking, materiality assessment, stakeholder relationships, and multiple-capital value considerations. This creates a pressing need for higher education institutions to embed integrated reporting into accounting curricula.

Despite the growing importance of , the extent to which universities worldwide have integrated content remains inconsistent. Some institutions treat integrated reporting as a specialized topic in sustainability reporting courses, while others integrate it across financial reporting, auditing, corporate governance, and management accounting modules. In many regions, however, remains underrepresented due to curriculum constraints, limited faculty expertise, or inadequate institutional support.

This paper provides a global analysis of integrated reporting education. It examines curriculum adoption patterns, pedagogical approaches, readiness challenges, and proposes a competency-based framework for strengthening teaching globally.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Integrated Reporting and Value Creation

Integrated Reporting was originally advanced by the International Integrated Reporting Council (IIRC), which introduced the Framework to support concise communication of how organizations create value in the short, medium, and long term (IIRC, 2013). The framework emphasizes connectivity of information, strategic focus, future orientation, stakeholder relationships, and the six capitals: financial, manufactured, intellectual, human, social and relationship, and natural capital.

Academic literature suggests that integrated reporting encourages “integrated thinking,” a managerial mindset that considers interdependencies across resources, business functions, and stakeholder expectations (Adams, 2015). Consequently, accounting graduates must understand not only reporting outputs but also internal decision processes that shape value creation narratives.

2.2 Integrated Reporting Education in Universities

Studies indicate that integrated reporting education is still in a developmental phase. While sustainability accounting and ESG topics have gained traction, often lacks structured coverage. Many programs introduce it as a conceptual topic without sufficient practical application (Stubbs & Higgins, 2018). This creates a competency gap between what employers increasingly expect—particularly in listed companies and global firms—and what graduates can deliver.

2.3 Drivers of Curriculum Adoption

Key drivers of curriculum adoption include professional body guidance, employer demand, national reporting practices, and faculty champions. In regions where integrated reporting is promoted by regulators or stock exchanges, universities tend to adopt it faster. Conversely, in regions where reporting remains predominantly financial, adoption is slower.

2.4 Barriers to Implementation

Barriers include curriculum overcrowding, scarcity of teaching cases, limited staff expertise, and lack of standardized learning outcomes. Some educators also perceive as “too broad” or “too narrative,” making assessment difficult within traditional accounting evaluation models.

3. Research Objectives

This study aims to:

1. Analyze global trends in integrated reporting education within accounting and business programs.
2. Identify pedagogical approaches used to teach effectively.
3. Evaluate institutional and regional readiness for curriculum integration.
4. Propose a competency-based educational framework for integrated reporting.

4. Methodology

An integrative literature review was used to develop a comprehensive synthesis of integrated reporting education research. Sources were collected from peer-reviewed journals in accounting education, sustainability accounting, corporate reporting, and management, as well as professional publications and global reporting frameworks.

The review covered 2009–2024 to reflect the rise of integrated reporting initiatives since the early global adoption phase. Thematic analysis was applied to classify literature into curriculum adoption, pedagogies, competencies, assessment practices, and barriers. The synthesis approach supports generalization of insights across regions while acknowledging contextual differences.

5. Global Adoption of Integrated Reporting Education

5.1 Developed Economies

In developed economies (e.g., parts of Europe, Australia, South Africa, and some North American institutions), integrated reporting education has expanded through sustainability reporting modules and corporate governance courses. Universities often incorporate content in postgraduate programs, executive education, and professional accounting pathways. However, the level of practical training varies significantly.

5.2 Developing and Emerging Economies

In developing economies, education adoption is uneven. Institutions in emerging markets face greater constraints due to limited resources, fewer faculty trained in sustainability reporting, and a focus on foundational accounting skills. Nonetheless, as ESG disclosure requirements expand globally, demand for -related competencies is growing rapidly in these regions.

5.3 Professional Body Influence

Professional bodies play a crucial role in curriculum change. Where professional examinations and competency frameworks include integrated thinking, universities align learning outcomes accordingly. Without these signals, may remain optional or absent.

6. Pedagogical Approaches for Teaching Integrated Reporting

6.1 Case-Based Learning

Case-based instruction enables students to evaluate integrated reports, analyze value creation narratives, and assess materiality decisions. It improves understanding of stakeholder connectivity and strategic disclosures.

6.2 Experiential Projects and Report Critiques

Student projects involving review and benchmarking of corporate integrated reports enhance practical skill development. Learners gain exposure to real-world reporting structures, KPIs, and narrative sections such as business model, risks, and outlook.

6.3 Interdisciplinary Teaching

Integrated reporting requires intersectional understanding of accounting, sustainability, strategy, and governance. Collaborative teaching across departments broadens student perspectives and encourages systems thinking.

6.4 Simulation and Role-Play

Role-play exercises such as “integrated report committee meetings” foster integrated thinking by assigning students roles (finance, sustainability, HR, investor relations, operations). This approach strengthens teamwork and demonstrates the internal processes behind integrated reports.

7. Proposed Framework and Competencies

Figure 1: Integrated Reporting Education Competency Model

(Insert Figure/Image – Conceptual Model)

Description: A circular model linking (1) Integrated Thinking, (2) Value Creation & Business Model, (3) Six Capitals, (4) Materiality & Stakeholder Engagement, (5) Connectivity of Information, and (6) Assurance & Credibility. These feed into graduate readiness and professional capability.

8. Assessment Strategies in Integrated Reporting Education

Assessment remains a key challenge because combines quantitative and narrative reporting. Effective assessment methods include:

- Integrated report critique papers using structured rubrics
 - Group projects producing mock integrated reports for a case company
 - Materiality mapping exercises and stakeholder analysis
 - Presentations on value creation strategies and KPI connectivity
 - Reflective journals documenting “integrated thinking” development
- Such assessments align with higher-order learning outcomes and help students build professional communication skills.

9. Challenges and Constraints

Globally, accounting programs face constraints including:

1. **Curriculum overcrowding:** Adding may require replacing existing topics.
2. **Faculty capability:** Many educators lack industry exposure to .

3. **Resource limitations:** Teaching requires cases, sample reports, and updated standards.
 4. **Institutional incentives:** Universities may prioritize examinable topics over emerging competencies.
 5. **Regional relevance concerns:** In markets with limited integrated reporting practice, educators may view as low priority.
- These challenges highlight the need for systemic support and professional collaboration.

10. Implications

10.1 For Universities and Educators

Universities should embed across courses rather than confining it to electives. Faculty development programs, practitioner guest lectures, and partnerships with industry can enhance teaching effectiveness.

10.2 For Professional Accounting Bodies

Professional bodies should strengthen and integrated thinking learning outcomes within competency frameworks and certification exams to encourage curriculum adoption.

10.3 For Policymakers and Regulators

Regulators can influence educational integration by standardizing sustainability disclosure expectations and supporting training initiatives that build educator capacity.

11. Conclusion

Integrated reporting is increasingly central to modern corporate reporting and decision-making. Yet, integrated reporting education remains uneven across regions, creating a preparedness gap among accounting graduates. This paper demonstrates that global readiness can be improved through competency-based curriculum redesign, interdisciplinary instruction, experiential learning, and stronger professional body guidance. As integrated reporting continues to evolve alongside sustainability disclosure standards, accounting education must shift toward integrated thinking, connectivity, and long-term value creation competencies to meet global demands.

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