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Public vs. Private Institutions: A Comparative Analysis of Accounting Education

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Abstract
Accounting education plays a vital role in preparing graduates for professional practice, public accountability, and economic development. Public and private higher education institutions contribute significantly to accounting education, yet they differ in governance structures, funding mechanisms, pedagogical approaches, and stakeholder expectations. This paper presents a comprehensive comparative analysis of accounting education in public and private institutions. Drawing upon institutional theory, human capital theory, and accounting education literature, the study examines differences in curriculum design, teaching quality, resource availability, industry engagement, student outcomes, and equity considerations. A conceptual framework is proposed to explain how institutional characteristics shape accounting education quality and graduate employability. The paper highlights strengths and limitations of both public and private institutions and offers policy and pedagogical recommendations to enhance accounting education across sectors

KeyWords: Accounting Education, Public Institutions, Private Institutions, Curriculum Design, Higher Education Comparison

Introduction

Higher education systems across the world are characterized by the coexistence of public and private institutions, each playing a distinct role in delivering professional education. Accounting education, in particular, is influenced by institutional missions, funding models, regulatory oversight, and market pressures. While public institutions are traditionally associated with accessibility, social equity, and state regulation, private institutions are often linked to flexibility, innovation, and market responsiveness.

The rapid expansion of private higher education over the past few decades has intensified debates regarding quality, affordability, and outcomes. In accounting education, stakeholders increasingly question whether public or private institutions are better positioned to develop competent, ethical, and employable accounting graduates. This paper seeks to address this question through a systematic comparison of accounting education across public and private institutions.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Background

Institutional theory provides a useful lens for understanding differences between public and private

institutions. According to this theory, organizational behavior is shaped by regulatory, normative, and cultural-cognitive pressures. Public institutions are primarily influenced by government policies, public accountability, and social missions, whereas private institutions respond more strongly to market competition and student demand.

Human capital theory further explains how investment in education contributes to skill development and labor market outcomes. From this perspective, variations in accounting education quality across institution types can lead to differential employability and career trajectories for graduates.

3. Evolution of Public and Private Accounting Education

Historically, public institutions dominated accounting education, particularly in developing economies, where governments viewed education as a public good. These institutions emphasized standardized curricula, affordability, and broad access. Over time, fiscal constraints and rising demand for higher education led to the growth of private institutions offering accounting programs.

Private institutions often positioned themselves as alternatives to resource-constrained public universities by emphasizing smaller class sizes, industry-aligned curricula, and professional certifications. This dual system has created a diverse accounting education landscape with varying strengths and challenges.

4. Curriculum Design and Academic Rigor

Curriculum design is a key area of differentiation between public and private institutions. Public institutions typically follow nationally prescribed curricula aligned with regulatory frameworks and professional standards. While this ensures consistency and academic rigor, it may limit curricular flexibility and responsiveness to emerging industry trends.

Private institutions, in contrast, often enjoy greater autonomy in curriculum design. This flexibility enables them to incorporate contemporary topics such as data analytics, fintech, and international accounting more rapidly. However, excessive market orientation may sometimes compromise academic depth in favor of employability-focused content.

Exhibit 3
Comparison of In-Demand Skills Advanced by Selected Influencers

Influencer	Domain	In-Demand Skills
CPA Exam Evolution Initiative	CPA Exam	■ Digital technology expertise ■ Critical thinking ■ Professional judgment/skepticism ■ Problem solving ■ Understanding of business ■ Systems, controls, risk ■ Data management and analysis ■ SOC engagements
AICPA ASB	Auditing Standards	■ Digital Technology
AACSB	Business School and Accounting Program Accreditation	■ Ethics ■ Business acumen ■ Data analytics ■ Digital technologies ■ Information management, privacy, security ■ Technology agility
ACCA	Accounting Profession	■ Technology innovation ■ Need for continuously upskilling ■ Growing regulatory pressure ■ Changing organizational structures and functions ■ Data opportunities for business
IFAC	Accounting Profession	■ Business acumen ■ Behavioral competencies ■ Digital acumen ■ Data interrogation ■ Communications
World Economic Forum: Top 10 Skills for 2020	All Professions	■ Complex problem solving ■ Critical thinking ■ Creativity ■ People management ■ Coordinating with others ■ Emotional intelligence ■ Judgment and decision making ■ Service orientation ■ Negotiation ■ Cognitive flexibility

AACSB=Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business
ACCA=Association of Chartered Certified Accountants
IFAC=International federation of Accountants
SOC=System and Organization Controls

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PSU Accounting Certificate Program (ACP) Sample Schedule

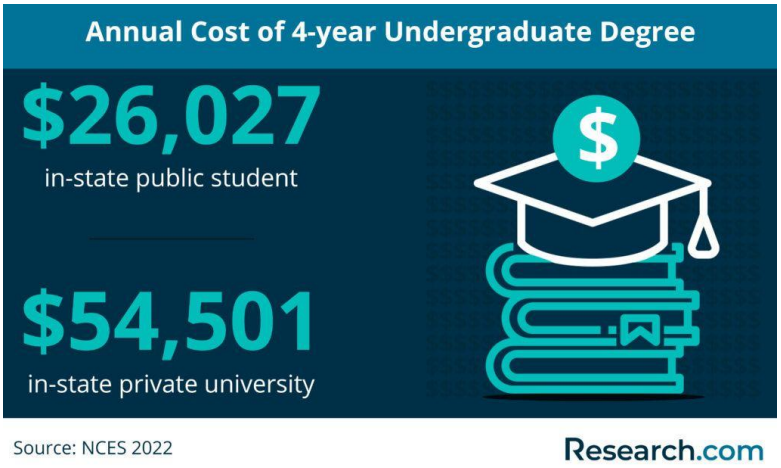
Schedules are tentative and subject to change.

Quarter	Courses	Units	Offering
1	AC1101A: Accounting Principles I AC1201A: Intermediate Accounting I AC1365: Computer Applications in Accounting	4 4 4	Evening or weekends
2	AC1102A: Accounting Principles II AC1202A: Intermediate Accounting II AC1425: Accounting Ethics	4 4 4	Evening or weekends
3	AC1203A: Intermediate Accounting III AC1420: Auditing I Elective (select from the ACP elective listing)	4 4 4	Evening or weekends
4	AC1421: Auditing II AC1300: Managerial Accounting Elective (select from the ACP elective listing)	4 4 4	Evening or weekends
5	AC1430: Federal Income Tax Accounting I AC1480: Government and Nonprofit Accounting Elective (select from the ACP elective listing)	4 4 4	Evening or weekends
6	AC1431: Corporate Tax Accounting AC1405: Advanced Accounting Theory Elective (select from the ACP elective listing)	4 4 4	Evening or weekends

ACP Elective list:

BL1001	Commercial Law
BL1002	Corporate Law
BU1250	Small Business Management
BU1445	Government Relations in Business
BU1420	Financial Management
CS1310	Microprocessor Software
EC1202	Macroeconomics
IS1000	Introduction to Computer Information Systems

Or any other business courses approved by the business department chair



5. Teaching Quality and Learning Environment

Teaching quality in accounting education is influenced by faculty qualifications, pedagogical practices, and institutional support. Public institutions often employ highly qualified faculty with strong research backgrounds, contributing to theoretical depth and academic credibility. However, large class sizes and administrative constraints may limit personalized instruction.

Private institutions frequently emphasize teaching effectiveness and student satisfaction. Smaller cohorts and performance-based incentives can encourage innovative pedagogy and closer faculty–student interaction. Nevertheless, reliance on part-time or industry-based instructors may affect research integration and academic continuity.

6. Resources, Infrastructure, and Technology

Resource availability represents a significant point of divergence between public and private institutions. Public universities often face funding limitations that restrict investment in technology, accounting laboratories, and software tools. This can hinder the development of digital and analytical skills increasingly demanded by the accounting profession.

Private institutions, supported by tuition revenue and private investment, may offer superior infrastructure, modern classrooms, and access to accounting software. While these resources enhance learning experiences, high tuition costs can limit access and raise concerns about equity and inclusiveness.

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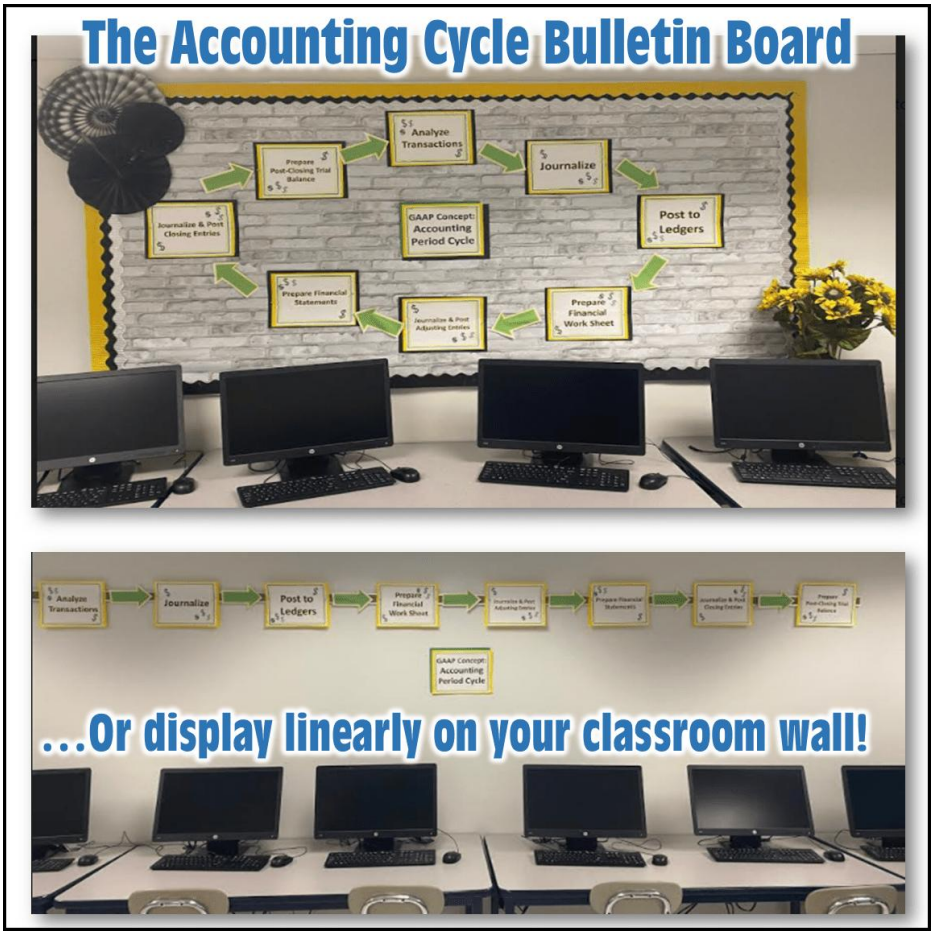

7. Industry Engagement and Employability Outcomes

Industry engagement is a critical determinant of accounting graduate employability. Public institutions often maintain formal but limited partnerships with industry due to bureaucratic processes. Internship opportunities and placement support may therefore be uneven.

Private institutions typically prioritize industry linkages as a competitive advantage. Guest lectures, live projects, and mandatory internships are commonly integrated into accounting programs. These initiatives enhance practical exposure and employability but may prioritize short-term skills over foundational knowledge.

8. Access, Equity, and Social Responsibility

Public institutions play a crucial role in promoting social equity by offering affordable accounting education to diverse populations. Subsidized tuition and reservation policies increase access for underrepresented groups. However, resource constraints can affect student support services and learning outcomes.

Private institutions, while expanding capacity, often cater to students from higher socio-economic backgrounds due to higher fees. Scholarships and financial aid programs can mitigate this challenge, but disparities in access remain a critical concern in accounting education systems.

9. Challenges and Policy Implications

Both public and private institutions face distinct challenges in delivering high-quality accounting education. Public institutions must address funding shortages, infrastructure gaps, and curriculum

rigidity. Private institutions, on the other hand, must ensure academic integrity, regulatory compliance, and long-term educational value beyond market demands.

Policymakers should promote collaboration between public and private sectors through shared resources, joint research initiatives, and common quality benchmarks. Accreditation frameworks should balance flexibility with accountability to ensure consistent standards across institution types.

10. Conclusion

The comparison of accounting education in public and private institutions reveals complementary strengths and limitations. Public institutions excel in accessibility, academic rigor, and social responsibility, while private institutions demonstrate agility, resource availability, and strong industry engagement.

Rather than viewing the two sectors as competitors, this paper argues for a synergistic approach that leverages the strengths of both. By fostering collaboration, policy alignment, and pedagogical innovation, accounting education can better serve students, employers, and society. Future research should empirically examine student outcomes across institution types and explore cross-national variations in public–private dynamics.

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