

# Reflection on the Teaching Reform of Accounting Major under the Background of Constructing Application Oriented Universities

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**Abstract:** In October 2019, the Ministry of Education issued Opinions on Guiding the Application-Oriented Transformation of Ordinary Local Undergraduate Colleges and Universities, which clearly proposed to implement the classified reform of higher education, promote the transformation of local undergraduate colleges into application-oriented universities, cultivate applied technical talents and serve the regional economic and social development. Local colleges and universities should seize the opportunity to promote the construction of high-level and application-oriented universities, deepen the teaching reform of accounting specialty, cultivate compound and applied talents needed by the society, and improve the competitiveness of the school.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the information technology revolution represented by Internet plus occurs. Information, technology, capital and talents which can flow across countries become the leader in the innovation driven development. As far as accounting is concerned, new concepts and technologies such as electronic invoices, paperless reimbursement, electronic orders, big data and cloud computing, financial sharing, as well as financial outsourcing are emerging constantly. Management accounting has become the latest trend of accounting development in the Internet plus era. The state also encourages and supports local undergraduate schools to build application-oriented colleges and universities. In this context, local undergraduate colleges, as the main force which cultivates accounting talents in China, should seize the opportunity to carry out the reform of accounting major from aspects of deepening the curriculum system reform, building double qualified teachers' team, improving students' practical operation levels and professional abilities, and deepening cooperation between the school and enterprises, so as to cultivate compound and applied accounting talents needed by the society. Based on relevant working experience, the author analyzes problems existing in accounting education in local undergraduate colleges and puts forward corresponding ideas and suggestions.

## 2. General Situation of the Accounting Major

Due to the characteristics of large scale of enrolment, relatively small investment and relatively good employment prospects, the accounting major is provided in most of domestic colleges and universities. According to data released by the Sunshine Platform of College Entrance Examination Information of the Ministry of Education, in 2019, 620 undergraduate colleges and universities set up accounting majors (including financial management, the same below), with the about 200000 people enrolled. According to data published by the National Bureau of Statistics, as of 2014, there are 1202 colleges and universities at all levels in China, including 110 ministerial undergraduate colleges and 672 local undergraduate colleges, which means that at least 75% of local undergraduate colleges have opened the accounting major. A large number of graduates go to the society every year. Take Zaozhuang University of Shandong where I work as an example, in 2002, our school opened the accounting computerization major, and more than 90 students were enrolled in that year. In May 2020, the number of undergraduate and junior college students majoring in accounting has reached 1446, and the enrollment scale has increased by 15 times in more than ten years.

With the good source and increasing number of students, there are also many problems in the accounting major of local universities. Compared with universities affiliated to the ministry and provincial colleges and universities of finance and economics, local undergraduate colleges have obvious differences in geographical location, school popularity, as well as teaching and research levels; compared with higher vocational colleges, local undergraduate colleges have deficiencies in the cultivation of students' practical operation ability. The result is that accounting graduates of local colleges and universities cannot fully meet the requirements of employers in terms of theoretical knowledge, social practice and practical ability, and lack market competitiveness.

### **3. Problems of Accounting Major in Local Universities**

#### **3.1 The Curriculum System Lacks Characteristics**

According to above data, local undergraduate colleges and universities account for 56% of the number of colleges and universities in China, with the large scale of enrolment of the accounting major. As far as I know, most local undergraduate colleges did not fully consider conditions like their own characteristics, the location of the city and the level of economic development, as well as the orientation of students' training and employment. Almost all colleges provide the same curriculum system. Most courses are basic compulsory courses (basic accounting, management, western economics), professional compulsory courses (intermediate financial accounting, national tax, financial management, cost accounting), and professional elective courses (advanced financial accounting, financial accounting, tax planning). The curriculum system is relatively static and closed; some courses are entirely different with large time span, so it cannot be organically combined into a systematic and complete knowledge system. For example, financial accounting and tax declaration are the main work of financial personnel in enterprises, and all schools open the two courses of financial accounting and taxation. Students learn to prepare vouchers and statements in accounting class, and learn to calculate the amount of tax payable and tax declaration in tax class, but the two courses are not integrated. In the actual financial work of enterprises, accounting and taxation are closely combined. The result is, though student have learned relevant theory, they still do not know how to deal with actual problems.

#### **3.2 Overemphasizing Theoretical Knowledge and Neglecting the Cultivation of Students' Practical Ability**

Local colleges and universities often emphasize the imparting of theoretical knowledge, but ignore the cultivation of students' practical operation abilities, professional judgment abilities and self-learning abilities. Teachers are in the dominant position, and students become the supporting role of passive acceptance. The common situation is, in the theory class, the teacher firstly explains basic principles and knowledge points, and then provides exercises. Students are busy in taking notes, doing exercises and answering questions. In practice class, the teacher only explains the operation process, and students mechanically imitate without understanding principles and ideas. In the case of a large number of students and heavy workload of teachers, this "cramming" method can help students quickly master basic principles, but it is not conducive to improving students' ability of independent thinking. Students are satisfied with memorizing standard answers given by the teacher, but cannot analyze and solve problems. They lack the ability to cope with complex problems and adapt to the changeable working environment after employment. For example, intermediate financial accounting is the core course for accounting majors, covering 12-15 accounting standards, including contents like long-term equity investment, financial leasing, debt restructuring, events after the balance sheet date, and so on. These standards are needed in listed companies, but rarely used in general small and medium-sized enterprises. At present, most graduates of local colleges and universities are hired by small and medium-sized enterprises; few of them enter large-scale enterprises and listed companies. On one hand, teachers spend a lot of time to explain the content and students study hard, but it is rarely used in practical work; on the other hand, for skills required by accounting personnel in small and medium-sized enterprises, such as original

voucher audit, financial analysis, budget and final account preparation and financial system design, the teaching is insufficient; students only understand some superficial contents. These students cannot meet the needs of employers after graduation.

### **3.3 Unreasonable Training Courses in School**

At present, the main problems are as follows. Firstly, the number of training hours is too small, and there is no close relationship between training and related theoretical courses. At present, the main form of training courses in local undergraduate is school internship, which is generally carried out in a semester of grade two or grade three after the courses of basic accounting, intermediate financial accounting, tax practice and cost accounting. The school does not carry out training at the same time with above courses. Disadvantages of this arrangement include, students can not engage in simulation training after learning the accounting theory; they do not have perceptual understanding on knowledge they have learned. When the training course begins, they forget a lot of theoretical knowledge which needs to be re-explained by the training teacher; the training effect is not good. Secondly, materials needed for school training are outsourcing teaching materials or books edited by teachers themselves. However, according to the author's experience for many years, the training materials obtained through these methods are often selected artificially. They only emphasize the matching with theoretical knowledge, but paying no attention to the reality. Moreover, selected enterprises are mainly industrial enterprises; companies of other industries are rarely involved. Thirdly, in actual work, the first thing that financial personnel needs to do is to audit original invoices; but original vouchers provided by the teacher are correctly filled in. Students can prepare the bookkeeping voucher, but they do not know how to audit the original invoice. Finally, school training mainly focuses on the preparation of vouchers, registration books and statements, and lacks the practice of tax declaration, tax planning, financial analysis, as well as budget and final accounts preparation, but these abilities are what compound and practical talents must possess.

### **3.4 Insufficient Cooperation between Schools and Enterprises**

There is still a certain gap between simulation training and actual work. Only by contacting real business can students deepen their understanding of the accounting profession. In order to solve this problem, many local undergraduate colleges and universities have cooperated with enterprises through signing cooperation agreements and establishing practice bases. But these activities often become a mere formality without substantial progress. The main reasons are as follows. Different from mechanical, electrical, chemical, biological and even marketing majors, accounting posts in companies only have limited capacity. Enterprises are unable to accept a large number of students for internship. Meanwhile, accounting involves business secrets of enterprises, and requires high technical levels. Therefore, even if a small number of students are allowed to practice, they cannot contact the main business.

## **4. Reform Suggestions to Solve Corresponding Problems**

### **4.1 Optimize the System of Professional Curriculum**

First of all, local colleges and universities should focus on training applied and compound accounting talents for small and medium-sized enterprises, appropriately reduce the number of pure theoretical classes and increase the number of practical training sessions. Secondly, on the premise of retaining compulsory courses like basic accounting, intermediate financial accounting, cost accounting, and financial management, professional courses which are not closely related to the financial work of small and medium-sized enterprises, such as advanced financial accounting, financial accounting and budget accounting, should be changed to optional courses. The number of class hours for these courses should be reduced, and the class hours for courses which are closely related to the financial work of enterprises, such as financial analysis as well as budget and final account preparation, should be increased. Thirdly, at present, accounting courses in local

universities are mainly based on industrial enterprises. However, with the rapid development of the tertiary industry in China, the demand for accounting personnel is growing in trade, construction, real estate, transportation (including logistics) and life service industries. It is suggested to increase contents of above industries. In order to avoid content repetition, above industries can be merged into one accounting course which focuses on contents different from industrial enterprises (such as inventory handling of commercial enterprises, as well as cost accounting of construction and real estate enterprises). Finally, we should change the current assessment method based on the results of theoretical exams. Students' scores should be composed of three parts: classroom practice, final examination and practical examination, so as to change students' concepts from rote learning to improving their professional abilities in an all-round way.

#### **4.2 Reform the Teaching Mode and Strengthen the Cultivation of Students' Professional Ability**

First of all, we should change the traditional teaching mode of “teachers giving lectures and students taking notes”, and give full play to students' dominant position in teaching. We need to stimulate students' interest in learning through various teaching methods such as specific case study, group discussion and debate, social practice and survey, as well as shooting sitcom. These activities can guide students to actively explore and gain theoretical knowledge, and improve their teamwork consciousness. Secondly, instead of simply telling students what the standard answers are, teachers can provide specific business scenarios including wrong contents, so that students can analyze, think and identify them according to their knowledge, and improve their judgment ability. Thirdly, on the basis of mastering skills of basic accounting, we should strive to improve students' professional ability in tax declaration, annual business inspection, formulation and revision of internal control system, as well as the preparation of budget, final accounts and financial plan.

#### **4.3 Improve the School Training Mode**

First of all, we should increase the number of training hours. The training course is divided into two groups: course training and comprehensive training. The course training must be completed in classroom after explaining the theory, and the comprehensive training can be carried out in a centralized way. Through the organic combination of the two kinds of training, students can learn in doing. They firstly move from theory to practice, and then from practice to theory. The school needs to ensure that there are practical training courses every semester, so that students can practice repeatedly, and understand both theoretical knowledge and hands-on operation. Secondly, the school should cooperate with accounting firms and other institutions to compile training materials related to industry, commerce, real estate, construction, service industry and other industries based on the real business of enterprises. Students will process the training materials according to completely authentic vouchers, account books, statements, financial software and tax declaration software. In order to increase the difficulty of training, teachers can provide some non-compliance bills for students. Thirdly, we should appropriately increase the training of budget and final accounts preparation, internal control, financial analysis, cost and expense control, tax planning, asset management and other aspects, so as to broaden students' horizons and improve their professional analysis and judgment ability.

#### **4.4 Adopt the School-Enterprise Cooperation Mode Suitable for the Actual Situation of the University**

Many local colleges and universities have studied problems in the school-enterprise cooperation. There are two reasonable solutions. Firstly, taking the Wenzhou Business College as an example, [1] the school cooperates with well-known financial management companies to establish a student oriented training base in the school. The training courses and teaching materials are developed by the company, covering accounting, tax law, auditing, internal control and other contents, and involving different industries and enterprises. These courses are taught by full-time staff of the enterprise; the school gives appropriate subsidies. Secondly, taking Shandong Foreign Trade Vocational College as the representative, accounting teachers of the school have registered to

establish a financial consulting company, providing services such as industrial and commercial tax registration, opening bank accounts, bookkeeping agent and tax declaration. [2] Students can get in touch with the accounting business of various industries, know how to declare multiple taxes, and be familiar with many accounting positions such as cashier, tax declaration, bookkeeping, cost and statement. By comparison, the second scheme has better training effect, but the workload is large. The first scheme is easier to operate, but needs the support of the school in funds and policies. The author believes that, due to the different economic development levels and policies of local undergraduate colleges, there is no definite rule for the construction of training bases outside the school. Therefore, each school should explore the suitable cooperation mode in accordance with its own characteristics and the actual situation of the university.

#### **4.5 Speed Up the Training of Double Qualified Teachers**

In order to build application-oriented universities and cultivate compound and applied accounting talents, it is urgent to build a team of double qualified teachers with both theoretical knowledge and rich practical experience. Considering the current recruitment and management system in colleges and universities, local schools cannot introduce a large number of teachers with rich practical experience but low education levels in a short period of time. The author suggests that this problem can be solved by “going out” and “inviting in”. [3] The “going out” strategy means, school teachers can take the initiative to visit enterprises, take the position temporarily, and cooperate with enterprises to apply for scientific research projects. They can help enterprises to solve practical problems, pass various qualification examinations to understand the accounting process, master the details of accounting, and grasp latest policies in accounting and taxation, so as to improve the level of practical teaching. Secondly, the school can hire senior accountants and tax experts working in accounting firms, tax agent firms, the National Taxation Bureau, and large enterprises as part-time teachers. They can regularly come to the school, discuss with young teachers on working problems, and guide students to carry out practical training inside the school. These experts are familiar with the process and details of financial work; training materials they provide are authentic, detailed and grounded, so that teachers and students can better understand the real accounting work. Thirdly, the school should provide certain financial support and tenure assessment reward to teachers who participate in social practice, school-enterprise cooperation, qualification certificate examination and other activities, so as to guide and encourage teachers to actively participate in the construction of the team of double qualified teachers.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The transformation from local undergraduate colleges and universities into application-oriented schools is a systematic project with heavy responsibilities and a long way to go. As one of the largest departments in local undergraduate colleges, accounting major still has many difficulties and problems in the process of transformation and development. In the future, we should deepen the reform from the aspects of curriculum system reform, training of double qualified teachers, training base construction as well as cooperation between the school and enterprises, so as to cultivate compound and applied accounting talents meeting the needs of society.

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