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**The assessment of soft skills in South African
Accounting Education: guidelines to produce
comparable accounting graduates**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the assessment of soft skills in South African accounting education and develop some guidelines that can be used to produce comparable accounting graduates.

A qualitative exploratory research design was used. In-depth interviews were used to gather information. 16 employees from four SAICA-accredited South African universities that offer chartered accountancy courses participated. A convenience sampling strategy was used to choose Accountancy Heads of Departments and Accountancy Academic Staff members on a voluntary basis. The interviews were taped and transcribed thereafter. Participants were then given a second chance to review and approve the transcripts. The data was analysed repeatedly using thematic analysis.

The findings demonstrated a disparity in how academic staff choose which soft skills to focus on. A lack of a single framework utilised by universities to create comparable graduates was blamed for the lack of consistency and commonality. Soft skills were also addressed in a variety of ways in accounting programmes provided at South African institutions of higher learning. Individual differences and a lack of resources were cited as reasons for the discrepancy. The findings reveal that instructors are guided by Bloom taxonomy when addressing soft skills in accounting programmes. This approach tended to produce graduates that are not comparable and disconnected from practice.

Some guidelines that are based on local understandings are proposed. These guidelines are informed by the findings. Further, these guidelines can help to achieve consistency and uniformity in the places where soft skills are covered in accounting education, as well as in how academic staff select which soft skills to address. Finally, this aids in the production of comparable accounting graduates in South Africa.

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The study contributes to the debate about the teaching of soft skills in accounting education by proposing some ideas based on research-based teaching, authentic assessments, active learning, and encouraging students and instructors to think like entrepreneurs. This contributes to the rethinking of existing theoretical understandings of assessments in accounting education, with the intention of producing accounting graduates relevant to the needs of the South African environment.

Keywords: Soft skills, Assessment, accounting graduates; Teaching; South Africa