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TEACHING ACCOUNTING AND TAXATION IN GREECE

The paper describes how accounting and taxation are being taught in Greek business schools. The structure of educational system for economics and teaching methodologies are analyzed. The syllabi for accounting and taxation classes at the Department of Accounting and Finance (A&F) in University of Macedonia are described and a taxonomic model on these subjects is formed.

ACCOUNTING; TEACHING METHODOLOGY; TAXATION; COGNITIVE MODEL; BEHAVIORAL MODEL; ACCOUNTING PRACTICE; SKILLS; TEAM WORKING

Structure of economic education in Greece

Generally, the science of economics in Greece is taught in several stages, the first of which during first and third (final) years of high school. The first class is mandatory whilst the second one is semi-obligatory, since during the third year students can choose it, from a variety of other courses. The selection (Table 1) helps to gather a better score in order to get accepted (through the system of national exams) into a business school. Subjects that are discussed in those two classes include introduction to basic economic thinking and schools of thoughts, basic terminology, concepts of microeconomics and macroeconomics. Furthermore, during a final year, there is another course about business administration, which is, in fact, a preamble of academic freshman year in business administration. During that course, students come to face basic terminology and scope of the BA field. This course is also optional, but selecting it means that the student tends to have more possibilities to be accepted in business schools.

Table 1. Economics in high school in Greece

Course	Year	Obligatory
Economics	1 st	Yes
Principles of Economic Theory	3 rd	No
Principles of Business Administration	3 rd	No

The other stages follow the Bologna (European) classification of education, as well. However, the naming of the stages in this paper begins with number 1 for high school, so as to depict better areas of education where economics is involved. So, the second stage includes departments or schools of several fields of economics in public universities and technical schools, which are of the same stage but they offer courses to a more practical (rather than strict academic) direction. For this reason, accounting (as a more practical field itself) can be frequently seen as a core course in economics-related technical schools. Finally, it is important to be

mentioned that each bachelor degree program in economics in Greece is lasts four-years, in contrast to other European programs which last mostly three years. Nevertheless, the ECTs a student finally obtains are almost equal in both cases.

The last two stages contain the master and doctoral degrees. Master degrees can be found in plethora at every department and school of economics (in universities or technical schools). In fact, some departments may offer several different master degree programs, offering the chance to students to be efficiently diversified to correspond better to the needs of the market, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Structure of economic education in Greece

Stage	Institution	Program
1	High school	3 courses
2	Public (and private) universities, technical schools	Bachelor degree
3	Public (and private) universities, technical schools	Master degree
4	Public (and private) universities, technical schools	Doctoral degree

All the above combinations form the spinal cord of economic education in Greece. Although, education cannot be restrained to these subjects but it is spread taking several forms, mainly through independent institutions and educational structures who organize seminars, workshops even fieldtrips as side-programs to support lifelong learning for practitioners, to educate people that are not economists but need standard knowledge about matters on business administration (there are, for example, special master degree programs for employers and employees), even to enhance students who need to specialize more on their subject.

Teaching economics in the academia

In the academia in Greece, all of the most important schools of thoughts of education of economics are present. According to Whitehead & Bousiou [1] the most prominent ones are the cognitive and behavioral, as well as the information processing theory of learning.

The first one suggests that the learning process consists of certain attributes such as:

- Perception of knowledge lies upon not only listening to the lecturer but also other senses should participate (it is better to present also a visual course). Even listening takes a different meaning when special features of it are added (tone of speaking, pitches etc).
- People can relate and correlate things that hear now to things that they may have heard or seen in the past, and thus, they form perceptions of the reality and ideas. People, also, develop certain procedures by themselves to help them organize information from the outer environment (cognitive structures). These structures, though, are not constant and develop and change.

A most known author of this school of thought, as the two authors suggest, is Bruner. Bruner’s cognitive learning theory lies upon four fundamental principles: motives, structure of the field that is to be taught, sequence of presentation and enhancement. The basic scope of learning, according to his theory, should be the thorough understanding of the structure of the field,

expressed by general notions, solid but general correlations between them and creation of cognitive structures, as a result.

The second one (behavioral) considers learning to be a procedure of change in behavior, as a result of incentives and acts that come from the outer environment. Most prominent, according to this approach, are the principles of contiguity, classic regulation, active regulation and social learning. Contiguity happens when two incentives correlate iteratively Classic regulation refers to the connection of a certain automatic reaction to a certain incentive. Active regulation refers to rewarding certain behaviors, instead of only automatic reactions, giving the teacher a more active role to forming behaviors. Finally, with the term “social learning” we imply the role of mimicry in forming new behavior patterns.

The information processing learning theory considers the human brain as a computer and tries to model learning processes such as algorithms and mathematical equations. Atkinson & Shiffrin [2] suggest the three stages of learning (Fig.1), using computer science terminology: an external stimulus comes into the brain through receptors, where it is “translated” into neural information in the Sensory Memory. Afterwards, information stays in Short-term Memory only for a while, as the name indicates. After elaboration and further coding, information can stay in Long-term Memory, processes that can be practiced (here – but not exclusively – enters the teaching process) in order to be developed. This stay in Long-term Memory indicates knowledge, which can be retrieved anytime to Short-term Memory so as the student can respond to incentives.

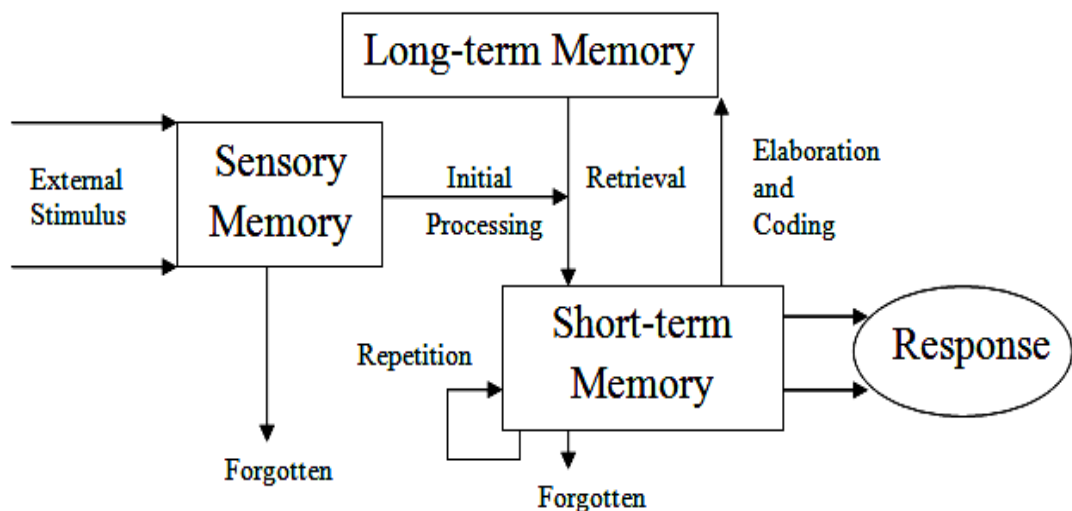


Fig. 1: The 3-stage theory of learning by Atkinson & Shiffrin [2]
 (source: <http://www.edpsycinteractive.org/topics/cognition/infoproc.html>)

Issues in accounting teaching

The main objective of teaching accounting to students in economics trains them for accounting practice. Zraa et. al. [3] indicates that during the last decades accounting has been transformed from a more technical job into a more managerial one. Thus, educational needs in accounting have changed, too. The authors have found that a cooperative learning teaching model is more appropriate for

universities to offer the necessary competencies to their students in their worklife. The term “cooperative learning” refers to student grouping and team working, but is enhanced with certain qualities such as positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, appropriate use of social skills and group processing.

For non-accounting majors, even students that attend MBA programs and have nothing to do with the science of economics from their previous studies, teaching accounting may be extremely harsh for them and the teacher, since the objective here is different: students in this case prefer to obtain basic accounting knowledge among others, so professors have to explain basic terminology and framework in a different, more practical way. Lloyd & Abbey [4] propose six active learning strategies for this purpose: “1) help non-accounting majors to learn to process accounting concepts by offering them the opportunity to use practical thinking skills, 2) assist students’ evaluation of evidence, 3) offer non-accounting majors the otherwise unavailable opportunities to devise applications of accounting principles, 4) enhance or develop eagerness to learn more about accounting, (5) aid in the articulation of what the students learned, and 6) provide immediate feedback regarding student comprehension or confusion.”

Academic program structure in A&F department in University of Macedonia

In Greece, most bachelor degrees are four-year long and each academic year consists of two separate semesters. Especially at the Department of A&F in University of Macedonia, during the first two years (four semesters) students are being taught ground courses, which are necessary for deep understanding of what is coming in the next two years. During them students have to choose between two distinct academic directions, either finance or accounting. Of course, there still are a few courses of general interest that intercept, but the general paradigm is specialization. Furthermore, students of each direction may choose among a variety of optional courses, while in the meantime they have to attend the mandatory ones. In table 3 below, an analysis of each course is presented, while an effort takes place to group them into sets.

Table 3. Accounting/Taxation courses structure

Course title	Semester	Mandatory	Set
Financial accounting 1	2	Yes	Financial accounting
Financial accounting 2	3	Yes	Financial accounting
IFRS 1	3	Yes	Financial accounting
Computerized accounting 1	4	Yes	Financial accounting
Corporate accounting	5	Yes	Corporate accounting
Managerial accounting 1	5	Yes	Managerial accounting
IFRS 2	6	Yes	Financial accounting
Managerial accounting 2	6	Yes	Managerial accounting
Tax accounting 1	6	Yes	Taxation
Tax accounting 2	7	Yes	Taxation
Accounting for business	7	No	Financial managerial accounting

Elements of accounting law	7	No	Taxation
Managerial accounting 2	7	No	Managerial accounting
Advanced financial accounting	8	Yes	Financial accounting
Costing and cost accounting	8	Yes	Managerial accounting
Special issues in financial accounting	8	Yes	Financial accounting

As it is clear now, the courses cover most of the branches of the academic fields of accounting and taxation. Taxonomy of sets is accomplished according to The Accounting Theory [5], though there has been aggregation of the subfields of Computerized Accounting, Accounting Information Systems and IFRS into the subfield of Financial Accounting and aggregation of Cost Accounting into the main body of Managerial Accounting [6]. The next table 4 explains the contents of each set, as it is taught in the courses mentioned above.

Table 4

Matching field sets with contents and methodology

Set	Contents	Teaching methodology
Financial accounting	General accounting terminology, terms under the Greek accounting scheme, accounting principles, accounting issues (depreciation, inventory valuation, accounting errors), end-of-year adjustments and preparation of financial statements, legal requirements regarding accounting entries, IFR standards and differences with the Greek accounting and legal scheme, accounting information systems and rationale of their function	Lecturing, examples and practical applications, case studies, individual or group tasks, lab practice (accounting information systems)
Corporate accounting	Accounting of unlimited general partnerships, accounting of limited partnerships, accounting of dormant partnership, accounting of civil corporations, accounting of joint ventures, accounting of private capital companies, accounting of limited liability companies, accounting of public limited companies, accounting of debt loans and special purpose entities.	Lecturing, examples and practical applications, case studies
Managerial accounting	Cost classification schemes, terminology, linkage to management theory, costing models.	Lecturing, examples and practical applications, case studies, individual or group tasks, lab practice (managerial accounting information systems)
Taxation	Tax classification and description, taxation and financial accounting, vat - general issues, vat - special issues (pro rata, EU transactions etc), income taxes, corporate decisions regarding taxes, legal issues (Greek tax law)	Lecturing, examples and practical applications, case studies

Main material – objectives

Most of the material is organized into presentations, scientific papers and books. The main (but not exclusive) books used for financial accounting are written by professors who adapt accounting theory to the Greek accounting practice and legislation, which usually varies year after year. Thus, new editions become the main material in order to catch up with changes in law. A clear example would be the new accounting law (L. 4308 of 2014) which imposes all sorts of firms to use a nearly IFRS framework and methodology on various issues.

In financial accounting courses the main scope is gaining ground knowledge about accounting issues and also skills in practice, as a result of the demands of the accounting market in Greece. For this reason, practice via case studies and exercises is of grave importance for success in teaching. Books like “Bank Accounting” [7], written by G. Kontos – a practitioner – tend to be preferred, since they combine a high academic level with accounting practice (particularly this one offers a huge variety of accounting treatment of modern financial tools for corporations – and banks – such as the issue of corporate bonds, leasing and leaseback, RePos, factoring etc). The same principle applies upon taxation courses and corporate accounting, and, moreover, forming tax consciousness comes as a “soft” objective along with other “hard” skills. On the other hand, managerial accounting aims more at academic knowledge and less at skills. The content of the M.A. courses is more stable, as a result of the minimized impact of laws upon it.

Conclusion

This paper was a first effort on taxonomy of accounting and taxation courses in business schools in Greece. After presenting the theoretical background, I used the method of a representative example to depict the course and syllabus structure of such departments (the example being the Department of A&F of University of Macedonia in Thessaloniki). This attempt may be useful for further research, perhaps in comparative analysis to other departments of Greece’s business schools, or other countries’, as well.

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ПРЕПОДАВАНИЕ БУХГАЛТЕРСКОГО УЧЕТА И НАЛОГООБЛОЖЕНИЯ В ГРЕЦИИ

Статья посвящена преподаванию бухгалтерского учета и налогообложения в бизнес-школах Греции. Проанализированы структура системы экономического образования и методы преподавания. Описаны учебные программы по бухгалтерскому учету и налогообложению, реализуемые на факультете бухгалтерского учета и финансов Университета Македонии и предложена таксономическая модель, отражающая порядок формирования знаний и навыков.

**БУХГАЛТЕРСКИЙ УЧЕТ; МЕТОДИКА ПРЕПОДАВАНИЯ;
НАЛОГООБЛОЖЕНИЕ; КОГНИТИВНАЯ МОДЕЛЬ; ПОВЕДЕНЧЕСКАЯ МОДЕЛЬ;
ПРАКТИКА БУХГАЛТЕРСКОГО УЧЕТА; НАВЫКИ; РАБОТА В КОМАНДЕ**

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