



IMPACT OF TALENT GAP AND CHANGING SKILLSET ON ACCOUNTING PROFESSIONALS IN NIGERIA: A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Abubakar Mohammed¹, Bashir Alhaji Bello²

¹*Department of Accountancy, Federal Polytechnic, Daura, Katsina State*

²*Department of Accountancy, Federal Polytechnic Daura, Katsina State*

Corresponding Author(s) Email/Mobile: abubakarmohd01211@gmail.com/

+23408136965662¹, alhajibashir13@gmail.com/+2347037929520²

Abstract

This paper examines the impact of talent gap and changing skillset on accounting professionals in Nigeria. Drawing on Neo-Correspondence Theory, the study synthesizes empirical and theoretical literature to identify and categorize critical skills including technical, digital, soft, and emotional intelligence required for modern accountants. The study employs a conceptual research design suitable for theory development, conceptual clarification, and framework construction. This designed is aimed at synthesizing and critically analyzing existing literature rather than relying on empirical data collection. In addition, the study conducted a thematic analysis of the literature in order to identify the patterns, contradictions, and knowledge gaps across various contexts and disciplines. Findings reveal the necessary skills required by accountants in Nigeria to include technical (IFRS, audit), digital (ERP, AI), soft (communication, teamwork), and Emotional Intelligence (empathy, self-regulation). The study also found the existence of skills gap arising from none or poor application of digital/technical knowledge in the practice of Nigerian accounting profession. The study found s further, the growing need for advisory and technical roles in the accounting profession rather than mere accounting and reporting. In line with the findings, the stud recommends that a comprehensive modernization of the curriculum should be done to incorporate modules on data analytics, Enterprise Resource Planning systems, artificial intelligence, and cyber security into accounting programs; and the existing University-Industry Collaboration should be enhanced through the establishment of industry advisory boards to co-develop curriculum content.

Keywords: accounting profession, digital competencies, performance gap, skillset, talent gap

1. Introduction

In order to shape economic activity and guarantee the success of firms and organizations, the accounting profession and skilled accountants are essential. Through various positions in the public and private sectors, the profession has over the years made a substantial contribution to Nigeria's economic development. As globalization, demographic changes, and technological advancements modify the nature of professional capabilities, the accounting profession is going through a significant revolution. More than

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ever, accountants must exhibit a dynamic blend of digital, analytical, advising, and interpersonal skills in addition to technical expertise.

In Nigeria, local issues like an increasing youth population, underfunded educational systems, and gaps in curriculum relevance have exacerbated this worldwide shift, leading to a growing talent gap and shifting skill sets in the accounting industry. An increasing amount of empirical research supports the crucial importance of the subject matter. According to Yamamura and Westerman (2007), there is a persistent global scarcity of accounting experts. They stress that efforts to recruit and retain employees are hampered by a discrepancy between workplace expectations and actual skill sets.

Despite improvements in digital competency, Kabir (2024) notes that students and accountants in Nigeria lack critical soft skills like emotional intelligence, problem-solving, and cognitive ability, all of which are critical in the industry. The flexibility and long-term viability of the accounting workforce are at risk due to this deficiency. The requirement for advanced competencies has increased globally as regular, transactional accounting duties have given way to advising and intelligence-driven positions (Hancock et al., 2009; Fetzer et al., 2023).

The value of accountants depends on their capacity to provide insight, use discretion, and participate in strategic decision-making as duties like bookkeeping, payroll processing, and basic auditing become more automated. However, research indicates that accounting education is not keeping up with these developments, particularly in emerging nations like Nigeria. According to Getahun and Mersha (2020), employers in Ethiopia believe that graduates lack professional competence and communication skills, which is similar to the situation in Nigeria.

There has been much discussion in the literature on the expectation performance gap, which is defined as the difference between the abilities graduates possess and the skills employers expect (Ghani et al., 2024; Elo et al., 2025). Curriculum mismatch and a lack of emphasis on experiential learning in Nigeria make the issue even worse. According to Barac et al. (2021), in order to produce accountants who are genuinely prepared for the workforce, it is necessary to incorporate both attributes-based and activity-based perspectives of skill development.

According to Mbonigaba (2024), accountants in sub-Saharan Africa are still at an amateur level when it comes to AI preparation, which puts them at risk of falling behind global norms. The quality of financial reporting, tax compliance, auditing standards, and the moral behavior of Nigerian professionals are all directly impacted by this skills shortage. According to Aring (2012), in areas where youth unemployment is prevalent and educational output does not convert into employability, skill gaps impede productivity and economic mobility. Therefore, it is both a professional necessity and a national economic problem to rectify the mismatch between supply and demand in Nigeria's accounting labor market.

In the light of these dynamics, this study aims to evaluate the effects of the current talent gap and changing skill needs on Nigerian accounting professionals. It will assess the type, magnitude, and causes of these gaps and investigate professional and institutional approaches to bridging them. In order to improve the competitiveness and resilience of Nigeria's accounting workforce, the findings are intended to guide curriculum design, corporate training frameworks, and policy formulation.

Like its global counterpart, the accounting profession in Nigeria is at a pivotal juncture. Stakeholder expectations, changing business models, and technological disruptions have reshaped what it means to be a skilled accountant in the twenty-first century. The Nigerian accounting industry is still struggling with a growing talent gap, or a mismatch between the skill sets that professionals and graduates possess and those that employers require in the workplace, even though these developments are well acknowledged (Jackson et al., 2022; Joshi, 2023).

Technical expertise is still necessary, but it is no longer enough, as empirical evidence repeatedly shows. Digital savvy, emotional intelligence, critical thinking, communication, and flexibility are becoming more and more valued by employers (Low et al., 2016; Micallef et al., 2023). However, Nigeria's professional training and accounting education institutions fall short in developing these competencies (Kabir, 2024; Elo et al., 2025). For example, Hancock et al. (2009) discovered that although technical skills can be learned on the job, graduate employability and long-term career advancement are severely hampered by deficiencies in soft and strategic skills including self-management, leadership, and analytical thinking.

Similar to this, Mbonigaba (2024) and Fetzer et al. (2023) stressed that Nigerian and Sub-Saharan African accountants are notably unprepared for the needs of data analytics, blockchain, and artificial intelligence (AI), which are now essential to the field and not optional. Additionally, there are still unanswered questions about the scope, character, and consequences of this skill shortage, particularly in the Nigerian setting. Nigeria lacks a comprehensive assessment that charts the evolution of skillsets against education and workplace realities, despite studies in other jurisdictions (e.g., Jackson et al., 2022; Cohen et al., 2025) exploring employer perspectives on skill requirements in light of automation and demographic transitions. This has led to a divide in research practices: companies report consistent underperformance, particularly in non-technical and digital areas, while universities assert that their graduates are prepared for the workforce (Joshia, 2023; Singh Dubey et al., 2021).

Furthermore, a conceptual framework used to analyze this mismatch is not sufficiently applied in the research currently in publication. Without being based on organized conceptual models that connect education, talent pipelines, and job performance, the majority of publications have used descriptive surveys or theoretical justifications. This gap is particularly obvious in studies from emerging nations, where soft skills are generally disregarded in curriculum planning (Dubey, et al., 2021). This study tackles these issues via the lens of neo-correspondence theory, which holds that in order to generate professionals and graduates who are prepared for the workforce, higher education must closely match business expectations.

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate how the talent gap and shifting skill needs affect the accounting industry in Nigeria. Its specific objectives are to:

- i. Identify and categorize the critical skills (technical, digital, soft, and emotional intelligence skills) required for accountants to thrive in Nigeria's evolving professional landscape.
- ii. Examine the nature and extent of the talent gap between the competencies possessed by accounting professionals and the expectations of employers in Nigeria.

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- iii. Assess the impact of changing skillset demands driven by technology, globalization, and regulatory shifts on the roles and performance of professional accountants in Nigeria.
- iv. Evaluate the alignment between accounting education curricula and industry expectations, particularly with respect to non-technical and digital competencies.
- v. Develop a conceptual framework, based on neo-correspondence theory, to bridge the gap between educational outcomes and workplace requirements in the Nigerian accounting profession.
- vi. Propose strategic interventions for professional bodies, educators, and employers to collaboratively mitigate the identified talent gaps and enhance the future readiness of Nigerian accountants.

2. Literature Review

This section is designed to provide extensive explanation of relevant concepts and theories. The section also includes an extensive and syntheses review of relevant empirical studies in order to align concepts, theories and practice. From the conceptual points of view, various concept like the concept of talent gap, changing skillset, skillset classification as well as accounting profession were extensively discussed.

Conceptual Review

Talent Gap

The term "talent gap" describes the discrepancy between the abilities and competencies that employers seek and those that workers or recent graduates truly possess. Because of the accounting profession's rapid technological change, changing business models, and rising demands for professional and non-technical skills, this gap has widened recently (Jackson et al., 2022; Micallef et al., 2023). From a definitional perspective, the talent gap can be divided into two categories: quantitative (the lack of qualified employees) and qualitative (the insufficiency of necessary skills among available talent).

According to Dubey et al. (2021) and Kabir (2024), the problem in emerging economies such as Nigeria is mainly qualitative, with a talent pool that may be adequate in quantity but lacking in workplace-relevant competencies. In the changing role of professional accountants, these include deficiencies in digital literacy, emotional intelligence, analytical thinking, and communication skills.

Traditional tasks like bookkeeping and financial reporting are no longer the only focus of the accounting profession. Industry 4.0 technologies that automate routine tasks, like robotic process automation (RPA), big data analytics, and artificial intelligence (AI), are changing the profession (Fetzer et al., 2023; Kotb et al., 2019). Consequently, a wider range of cognitive and interpersonal skills are needed as accountants are expected to take on more strategic and advisory roles.

According to Barac et al. (2021) and Elo et al. (2025), the majority of Nigerian accounting graduates are still receiving training that prioritizes memorization of technical knowledge over the development of soft skills or real-world applications. The discrepancy between employer expectations and graduate outputs has been extensively documented through empirical research. For example, Low et al. (2016) found that a large number of accounting graduates worldwide are deficient in the essential communication, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence skills.

In a study involving warrant holders and graduates in Malta, Micallef et al. (2023) also found that although technical skills like financial reporting and auditing were sufficiently taught, soft skills like analytical reasoning, oral communication, and self-confidence were not sufficiently developed during university training. According to Kabir (2024), this finding is in line with the reality in Nigeria, where curricula are frequently out-of-date and out of step with international professional standards.

An expectation performance gap, which is the difference between the competencies that employers look for in entry-level workers and those that graduates demonstrate when they are hired, is another way that the talent gap shows up (Low et al., 2016; Bui & Porter, 2010). This gap is not just academic in Nigeria's accounting labor market; it has real ramifications for audit quality, regulatory compliance, and the profession's ability to compete globally. Accounting education is still primarily attribute-based, emphasizing knowledge acquisition over activity-based learning that fosters competence development, according to Barac et al. (2021).

The talent gap must be filled through a variety of strategies. Jackson et al. (2022) emphasize the necessity of interdisciplinary approaches that involve professional associations, industry, and academia. These include offering technology-focused training, rethinking curricula, integrating experiential learning, and encouraging communication and emotional intelligence. Regulatory organizations like Association of National Accountants of Nigeria (ANAN) and Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) in Nigeria must also be proactive in incorporating international best practices into professional certification programs.

Changing Skillset

The dynamic evolution of the information, abilities, and qualities that accountants must have in order to be relevant in a business and technological world that is changing quickly is referred to as a shifting skillset in the accounting profession. Accounting has always been seen as a profession based on transaction records, regulation compliance, and technical accuracy. Globalization, the emergence of digital technology, and the growing focus on strategic business contribution, however, have caused a significant shift in this paradigm (Jackson et al., 2022; Micallef et al., 2023).

The accounting industry is changing due to a number of worldwide developments. These consist of: Routine accounting processes including data input, audit sampling, and compliance reporting have been revolutionized by technological disruption related to automation, artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, and big data analytics. According to Fetzer et al. (2023) and Kotb et al. (2019), accountants are increasingly expected to assess data, produce insights, and participate in decision-making.

Accountants must be globally literate and have adaptable skills due to globalization and regulatory complexity, which includes the growth of international trade and regulatory frameworks like IFRS and anti-money laundering regulations (Mbonigaba, 2024). Workforce and demographic changes are linked to shifting work ideals, stressing technology proficiency and adaptability, but they also frequently lack fundamental interpersonal skills, necessitating specialized skill development (Cohen et al., 2025).

Similar to this, modern accountants now need a far wider range of abilities than only technical knowledge of tax, audit, and financial reporting. Technical, professional, and digital competencies are increasingly encouraged by the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) and other regulatory bodies. Digital and data skills, which include

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understanding corporate systems (like SAP and Oracle), data visualization, and analytics tools (like Power BI and Tableau), are becoming more and more important (Jackson et al., 2022).

Complex decision-making contexts require cognitive skills focused on integrative reasoning, problem-solving, and critical thinking (Micallef et al., 2023). These days, soft skills like teamwork, communication, and emotional intelligence are seen as essential to employability rather than just supplemental (Low et al., 2016; Dubey, Paul, & Tewari, 2021). Leadership and Business Acumen As accountants move into advising positions, their ability to plan strategically, be innovative, and interact with clients becomes increasingly important (Cohen et al., 2025).

Skills Classification Framework

The Skills Classification Framework refers to the systematic categorization of competencies required for effective professional performance. In the context of the accounting profession, this framework helps to delineate the broadening range of skills now deemed essential due to digital transformation, evolving stakeholder expectations, and globalization. Such a framework provides a foundation for aligning education, training, and recruitment practices with current and future workplace realities (Micallef et al., 2023; Jackson et al., 2022).

Historically, skills in accounting were largely viewed through a binary lens. Technical skills which are concern with core domain expertise in areas such as auditing, taxation, financial reporting, and accounting standards and non-technical skills often referred to as “soft skills,” including communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and leadership (Low et al., 2016; Micallef et al., 2023). However, this distinction has become increasingly inadequate in capturing the complexity of modern accounting roles. The emergence of hybrid roles where accountants must combine analytical insight with advisory capabilities necessitates a more complex framework.

Modern literature (e.g., Cohen et al., 2025; Dubey et al., 2021) identifies a broader multi-dimensional classification of skills relevant to today’s accountants, including: Technical Skills which remain foundational and include knowledge of accounting principles (e.g., IFRS, GAAP), financial analysis, taxation and audit procedures and use of accounting software (e.g., QuickBooks, Sage).

On the other hand, digital and technological Skills is becoming central to finance functions, its key competencies include data analysis and visualization (e.g., Excel, Power BI, Tableau), ERP systems (e.g., SAP, Oracle), blockchain literacy and understanding of AI and robotic process automation (RPA) (Fetzer et al., 2023; Jackson et al., 2022). These include problem-solving, critical thinking, and the ability to make data-driven decisions. Micallef et al. (2023) emphasize the need for “integrative thinking” to manage complex, cross-functional problems effectively.

Emotional intelligence is now widely recognized as central to professional success. Key EI competencies include self-awareness and self-regulation, empathy and interpersonal effectiveness and teamwork and adaptability (Micallef et al., 2023; Goleman, 1998). Effective oral and written communication is crucial for accountants who must explain technical findings to non-financial stakeholders (Low et al., 2016; Cohen et al., 2025). Presentation skills are especially vital for roles involving client interaction, board meetings, and investor reporting. As accountants’ transition into managerial and partner-

level roles, they need strategic thinking, change management and decision-making under uncertainty skills (Cohen et al., 2025)

Accounting Professionals in Nigeria and Talent Gap and Changing Skillset

The accounting profession in Nigeria serves as a fundamental component of the nation's financial infrastructure, essential for financial reporting, public accountability, tax compliance, and economic governance. Two primary professional bodies govern the field: The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) and the Association of National Accountants of Nigeria (ANAN). These organizations regulate accounting practice standards, professional education, and ethical conduct.

Despite the strong regulatory framework, the Nigerian accounting profession encounters considerable challenges in talent development and skills alignment, particularly due to technological advancements and evolving global market expectations (Kabir, 2024; Mbonigaba, 2024). In the last twenty years, the function of the accountant has evolved from a transactional record-keeper to a strategic business advisor.

Technological disruptions, including automation, artificial intelligence (AI), data analytics, and blockchain, have expedited this change by automating numerous routine accounting tasks (Jackson et al., 2022; Fetzer et al., 2023). Nigerian accountants are now required to exhibit a combination of technical skills and soft skills, including digital literacy, emotional intelligence, and strategic thinking. This paradigm shift necessitates a transformation in accounting education, training, and certification.

Empirical studies and professional assessments indicate a notable talent gap within the Nigerian accounting profession. This gap indicates a quantitative shortfall in the number of certified accountants and a qualitative deficiency, as current professionals and graduates do not possess the competencies required by employers and the global business environment (Elo et al., 2025; Dubey et al., 2021). Kabir (2024) found that many Nigerian accounting graduates possess theoretical knowledge but often lack essential soft skills, including communication, adaptability, and teamwork, which are increasingly necessary for addressing modern workplace challenges.

The evolving skillset demanded in the profession has surpassed the pace of curriculum reforms in the majority of Nigerian tertiary institutions and professional training programs. Research conducted by Micallef et al. (2023) and Low et al. (2016) indicates that traditional accounting subjects, such as financial accounting, auditing, and taxation, receive adequate coverage; however, there is a notable lack of focus on digital competencies and emotional intelligence skills.

Graduates face challenges in fulfilling employer expectations regarding data visualization, enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, and client advisory services (Jackson et al., 2022). The expectation-performance gap in Nigeria has significant implications for professional service delivery, regulatory compliance, and investor confidence. Barac et al. (2021) contend that without immediate reform, the profession may be viewed as antiquated and unresponsive to the demands of business. Furthermore, as Nigeria seeks to draw foreign investment and engage with the global economy, the international competitiveness of its accounting professionals is crucial.

Theoretical Review

The dynamics of talent gaps and evolving skill requirements among accounting professionals in Nigeria can be effectively analyzed through two theoretical frameworks: Neo Correspondence Theory and Human Capital Theory. Both theories provide effective

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frameworks for analyzing the discrepancies between educational outcomes and workplace expectations. The Neo-Correspondence Theory, developed by Saunders and Machell (2000), extends traditional correspondence theory within the field of education. It highlights the necessity for congruence between the outcomes of higher education institutions and the demands of the labor market.

The theory emphasizes that educational institutions must not function in isolation; rather, they should align with industry demands. Employers' expectations should guide curriculum design, teaching methods, and assessment systems. Misalignment results in non-employability, skill mismatches, and talent deficits. This theory holds significant relevance in the Nigerian context, as accounting graduates frequently do not fulfill employers' expectations in digital literacy, analytical reasoning, and emotional intelligence (Kabir, 2024; Micallef et al., 2023).

This theory establishes a robust basis for analyzing the expectation-performance gap, which is pivotal to this research. It additionally endorses recommendations for curriculum reform and collaboration between industry and academia, which are crucial for addressing the talent gap. Neo-correspondence theory has been empirically applied in studies evaluating accounting graduate employability in Australia (Pan & Perera, 2012), Romania (Nicolescu & Cristian, 2009), and Malta (Micallef et al., 2023), indicating its adaptability to the Nigerian context.

Conversely, Human Capital Theory, as developed by Becker (1964), asserts that education and training serve as investments in human capabilities, thereby improving individual productivity and national economic performance. The theory posits that individuals acquire knowledge, skills, and competencies that enhance their economic value, while organizations gain from investing in employee development, as a well-trained workforce fosters innovation, productivity, and competitiveness.

This theory elucidates that bridging the talent gap via education and upskilling serves as both an individual advantage and a national economic necessity. In Nigeria, skill mismatches diminish employability and impair institutional performance. Human Capital Theory underscores the necessity for ongoing professional development and investment in skills (Dubey et al, 2021; Elo et al., 2025). This framework has been utilized to support reforms in technical and vocational education, workforce development, and professional training in diverse sectors, such as accounting and finance (Barac et al., 2021; Fetzer et al., 2023).

Both theories hold value; however, Neo-Correspondence Theory is the most appropriate for this study. The primary focus is the misalignment between educational institutions and professional expectations, a core aspect addressed by this theory. This facilitates a thorough analysis of the expectation-performance gap, curriculum relevance, and industry readiness of accounting graduates, while also offering a practical framework for reform through the emphasis on continuous dialogue among universities, professional organizations, and employers. This framework facilitates an analysis of how the accounting profession in Nigeria can effectively address talent shortages and adapt to changing skill requirements through institutional realignment with market realities.

Empirical Review

Empirical evidence indicates a consistent disparity between the skills of Nigerian accounting graduates and the competencies anticipated by employers. Adegbite and Adeosun (2021) identified that the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4th IR) has transformed

job profiles in accounting, necessitating advanced cognitive skills such as critical reasoning, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence. Many graduates exhibited deficiencies in these areas, particularly in soft and digital skills.

Similarly, Kabir (2024) observed that despite theoretical training, Nigerian graduates lack practical technological skills and workplace adaptability necessary to remain competitive in the digital economy. Ofoegbu et al. (2018) emphasized that Nigerian universities have insufficiently updated their curricula to align with labor market demands, leading to inadequately prepared graduates. Obsolete infrastructure, unmotivated lecturers, and insufficient industry collaboration were identified as primary factors contributing to the employability gap.

Other empirical studies in various contexts have confirmed the presence of a significant expectation-performance gap in the accounting profession. Low et al. (2016) conducted a survey of accounting employers in New Zealand, revealing that although technical skills were expected, the actual shortfall was in non-technical or generic skills, including communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. Jackling & De Lange (2009) identified comparable deficiencies in South Africa and Australia, observing that only a small proportion of graduates were "work ready" at the time of employment. This gap extends beyond theoretical considerations. A survey conducted by Elo et al. (2025) among accounting practitioners and employers revealed significant gaps between existing skill levels and anticipated future skill requirements. Key areas of underperformance encompassed IT proficiency, analytical reasoning, and interpersonal communication, indicating a discrepancy between educational outcomes and practical requirements.

Many studies indicate that the accounting profession is experiencing a structural transformation due to the influence of digital technologies. Kruskopf et al. (2020) and Fetzer et al. (2023) highlighted the increasing significance of data analytics, cloud computing, and block chain in routine accounting functions. Essential skills often identified include adaptability, decision-making, creativity, and data interpretation, which are insufficiently addressed in the majority of accounting programs in Nigeria.

Barac et al. (2021) noted that future-ready accountants should integrate domain knowledge with strategic and technological skills; however, many educational systems, including those in Nigeria, still emphasize rote learning and outdated audit and tax practices.

Jummai (2021) and Adepoju (2022) observed that digital literacy among accounting students in Nigeria is significantly deficient. Evidence from interviews indicated that early-career accountants faced challenges with fundamental software tools, ERP systems, and data interpretation. Concurrently, soft skills including time management, leadership, and teamwork were recognized as significant areas of concern. The findings were supported by a focus group discussion (FGD) in Northern Nigeria, where students and professionals highlighted the importance of digital skills and analytical capabilities as essential tools for success in the contemporary accounting environment.

Numerous studies highlighted the disparity between academic curricula and professional practice. Pitan (2017) and Ezeagba & Abiahu (2018) cautioned that the presence of outdated content and the restricted application of case-based or experiential learning methods result in graduates who are technically proficient yet practically deficient. Fetzer et al. (2023) suggested that regulatory bodies such as ICAN and ANAN should update syllabi and certification frameworks to meet the requirements of Industry 4.0.

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There's also a call for interdisciplinary education—merging accounting with IT, communication, and project management training to enhance future relevance.

3. Methodology

This study employs a conceptual research design suitable for theory development, conceptual clarification, and framework construction. Conceptual research synthesizes and critically analyzes existing literature rather than relying on empirical data collection, aiming to generate new theoretical insights or models (Jaakkola, 2020). This study examines the implications of the talent gap and changing skillset requirements for accounting professionals in Nigeria. The phenomena are shaped by various intersecting factors, such as technological disruption, curriculum misalignment, and regulatory inertia, necessitating a multi-dimensional, theory-driven investigation.

A conceptual approach facilitates a thorough examination of these factors via critical literature synthesis, providing a comprehensive and integrated perspective. A conceptual methodology is warranted because the empirical literature is fragmented, with existing studies on skills gaps in accounting often being isolated or geographically limited, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (Micallef et al., 2023; Kabir, 2024). An integrative conceptual approach facilitates the interpretation of these findings.

The development of theory and models aims to establish a conceptual framework based on Neo-Correspondence Theory and bolstered by Human Capital Theory, elucidating how educational and professional systems can adjust to changing skill requirements (Saunders & Machell, 2000; Becker, 1964). Conceptual papers effectively generate insights that can guide policy, curriculum reforms, and workforce strategies, especially in low-resource, high-demand contexts such as Nigeria (Jaakkola, 2020). A thorough review was performed utilizing peer-reviewed journal articles, professional reports, and institutional publications. A thematic analysis of the literature was performed concerning the talent gap and employability, evolving skillsets in Industry 4.0, the expectation-performance gap, and challenges related to curriculum and institutions. This analysis identified patterns, contradictions, and knowledge gaps across various contexts and disciplines.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the conceptual study, organized according to the six research objectives. The findings are derived from an integrative review of scholarly literature, professional reports, and policy documents, underpinned by Neo-Correspondence Theory. Below are the detailed analyses:

Objective 1: Identify and classify essential skills necessary for accountants in Nigeria.

The review classifies essential skills into four dimensions: technical, digital, soft, and emotional intelligence (EI). Technical competencies encompass financial reporting (e.g., IFRS), auditing, taxation, and management accounting. These principles are fundamental to the profession and continue to be effectively taught in Nigerian institutions (Low et al., 2016). Digital skills have become essential in the context of automation, encompassing data analytics, enterprise resource planning (ERP), spreadsheet modeling, and artificial intelligence (Fetzer et al., 2023). Employers consider soft skills, including communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and adaptability, essential for client-facing and managerial positions (Micallef et al., 2023). Emotional intelligence skills such as self-

awareness, empathy, and interpersonal management are essential in leadership, client advisory, and audit contexts (Dubey et al., 2021). The competencies indicate a transition of accounting from a compliance role to a value-adding advisory profession (Jackson et al., 2022).

Objective 2: Analyze the Characteristics and Scope of the Talent Gap

A significant performance gap exists between the competencies of accounting graduates and the expectations of employers. The gap was identified among various categories of skills that accounting professionals are expected to have. Technical knowledge may appear adequate in theory but is frequently ineffectively implemented in practical situations (Kabir, 2024). There is a deficiency in soft and digital skills attributed to a curriculum that prioritizes theoretical knowledge over practical application (Elo et al., 2025; Low et al., 2016). Employers frequently indicate deficiencies in analytical thinking, communication, and business acumen, resulting in extended onboarding durations (Mbonigaba, 2024). The talent gap is qualitative rather than merely quantitative, exacerbated by inadequate infrastructure and limited access to experiential learning in Nigeria.

Objective 3: Evaluate the Effects of Evolving Skillset Requirements on Accounting Positions

Technological advancements such as artificial intelligence and blockchain, along with globalization and regulatory changes, are reshaping the roles within the accounting profession. Accountants increasingly engage in data interpretation, strategic advising, and system oversight, necessitating advanced skills (Fetzer et al., 2023). Automated systems are increasingly handling repetitive tasks, including bookkeeping and basic tax preparation (Jackson et al., 2022). Regulatory changes necessitate real-time reporting, compliance analytics, and capabilities for fraud detection. Professionals who do not adapt to these skillsets face the risk of obsolescence, while organizations encounter capacity gaps in analytics and digital tools.

Objective 4: Assess the Alignment of Curriculum with Industry Standards

Research indicates a discrepancy between university curricula and labor market requirements. Curricula continue to emphasize theoretical knowledge and examination performance, offering minimal engagement with modern accounting software or business simulations (Barac et al., 2021). Many Nigerian institutions lack the integration of soft skill development, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence training. Feedback mechanisms from industry regarding curriculum updates are inadequate or absent, resulting in an increased expectation-performance gap (Elo et al., 2025). The insufficient alignment negatively impacts the employability and professional preparedness of recent graduates.

Objective 5: Formulate a Conceptual Framework Utilizing Neo-Correspondence Theory

A conceptual framework based on Neo-Correspondence Theory (Saunders & Machell, 2000) was created to demonstrate the feedback loop between employer expectations and educational delivery. Emphasize curriculum redesign, skills benchmarking, and collaboration with industry education as key strategies for alignment, while underscoring the importance of continuous monitoring and reform to ensure ongoing relevance amid change. This framework provides a systematic approach to addressing the supply-demand imbalance in Nigeria's accounting workforce.

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Objective 6: Propose Strategic Interventions

The study identifies policy and practical interventions, including curriculum reforms that integrate soft skills, analytics, and ERP systems into accounting programs (Kabir, 2024). Mandate internships for accounting students through collaborations with ICAN, ANAN, and private accounting firms to enhance experiential learning. Reform of certification processes to align professional examinations with competencies in digital and emotional intelligence. Mandatory digital up-skilling for practice and license renewal is essential for continuing professional development. Public-private establishing a National Accounting Skills Council to assess industry trends and shape educational policies through collaboration.

Table 1

Summary of Key Findings, and Implications

Objective	Key Findings	Practical and Policy Implications
Identify and categorize critical skills	Skills required: technical (IFRS, audit), digital (ERP, AI), soft (communication, teamwork), EI (empathy, self-regulation)	Curriculum must reflect multi-skill models; soft and digital skills need equal emphasis
Examine the talent gap	Skills gap exists in digital and non-technical domains; technical knowledge poorly applied	Internships, simulation-based learning, and employer feedback loops are essential
Assess skillset impact	Automation and globalization change job descriptions; advisory and tech roles growing	Re-skill workforce through CPD; redefine job roles to match market trends
Evaluate education-industry alignment	Theory-based curriculum disconnected from market realities	Accreditation standards must mandate industry inclusion in course reviews
Develop framework (Neo-Correspondence Theory)	Model links supply (education) and demand (employers) through collaboration and reform	Policy makers can use framework for national curriculum audits and reform tracking
Propose strategic interventions	Multi-stakeholder solutions needed: reforms, CPD, internships, certification updates	Institutions and regulators must align with global competency frameworks

Source: Researcher's Compilation, (2025)

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study's findings indicate that Nigeria's accounting profession is at a pivotal point. The exclusive emphasis on technical proficiency is inadequate in today's dynamic, technology-driven global economy. Nigerian accounting graduates lack adequate preparation to fulfill the changing demands of employers, especially regarding digital fluency, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence. The discrepancy between educational

outcomes and labor market requirements has resulted in a sustained talent gap, jeopardizing both graduate employability and professional competitiveness.

The implementation of a conceptual framework based on Neo-Correspondence Theory establishes a strong basis for systemic reform. The framework highlights the importance of ongoing feedback between industry and academia, the need for curriculum reform, and the implementation of competency-based education. This highlights the significance of experiential learning and regulatory involvement to maintain the adaptability of accounting education to evolving circumstances.

The study recommends the following based on its findings and conclusions:

- i. A comprehensive modernization of the curriculum is necessary to incorporate modules on data analytics, ERP systems, artificial intelligence, and cyber security into accounting programs. This includes integrating soft skills and emotional intelligence training into the accounting curriculum through case studies, role plays, and project-based learning. This can be accomplished by transitioning from lecture-based teaching methods to participatory, experiential models.
- ii. The University Industry Collaboration should be enhanced through the establishment of industry advisory boards to co-develop curriculum content. This can be accomplished by facilitating regular employer feedback sessions to evaluate graduate performance and the relevance of the course. Promoting academic staff internships in industry can effectively bridge the gaps between theory and practice.
- iii. Regulatory authorities and professional bodies should collaborate to institutionalize structured internship and mentorship programs, making internships a mandatory graduation requirement in accounting programs. National internship standards can be established through collaboration with ICAN, ANAN, and other professional organizations.
- iv. Professional certification pathways should be revised by updating the syllabi of ICAN and ANAN to reflect evolving global competencies. Digital skill proficiency should be established as a criterion for certification, alongside the inclusion of ethical reasoning and emotional intelligence as assessable components in examinations.
- v. It is essential to align national policy and framework by establishing a National Accounting Skills Development Council that includes the NUC, NBTE, ICAN, ANAN, and employers. This aids in the development of a National Accounting Competency Framework aligned with global standards (e.g., IFAC, ACCA). Institutions that implement skills-based reforms should receive policy incentives, such as grants and accreditation benefits.

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