

**THE VIEWS OF 'KNOWLEDGE GATEKEEPERS' ABOUT THE USE AND
CONTENT OF ACCOUNTING TEXTBOOKS**

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Abstract

This study examines financial accounting lecturers’ views about, and use of, recommended course textbooks. In particular, this research explores the factors that influence the selection of a recommended text, the role it plays on the course, and lecturers’ perceptions of the worldview that underpins their chosen text. Drawing on the results of a questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews with introductory financial accounting lecturers, this study draws attention to ideological issues concerning accounting textbooks. In particular, findings from this research suggest that a number of lecturers feel that their recommended textbooks should discuss the information needs of a broad range of stakeholders and supplement their text with materials that provide alternative perspectives or which draw attention to current issues in accounting. Moreover, a number of the participants indicated that their textbook had ideological characteristics in so far as they had an overly technical focus which “obscured” the values that underpinned them.

KEY WORDS: textbooks, ideology, stakeholders, maximisation of shareholder wealth

1. Introduction

Critics of accounting education have observed that, “instructors have used textbooks as a crutch, with the more inexperienced teachers simply becoming textbook facilitators” (Herring, 2003, p.90). This over-reliance on textbooks in accounting education was noted over twenty years ago, when the American Accounting Association (AAA) commissioned a report (*The Bedford Report*) out of a growing concern that accounting education was failing to develop “active, independent learners and problem solvers” and was instead encouraging the passive reception of information in students (AAA, 1986, p.187). Included among the many issues addressed in the *Bedford Report*, was the role of the textbook:

“Textbooks are a key aid to instruction... nevertheless, excessive reliance on textbooks reduces the instructor's incentive to determine constantly what each student should learn. If the teaching process centres on repeating textbook material in the classroom... then the learning process risks becoming uninspiring to capable future accountants” (AAA, 1986, p.177).

The motivations behind this paper emerged out of a growing concern regarding the over-reliance on textbooks in accounting education, and out of another issue which has been gaining prominence in the accounting literature; namely, that accounting education serves an ideological role, inculcating students with the “rationalisations of neo-classical economics and especially the pursuit of self interest” (Gray, Bebbington & McPhail, 1994, p.62; see also, Chua, 1986; Collison, 2003; Collison, Ferguson & Stevenson, 2007; Collison & Frankfurter, 2000; Kelly & Pratt, 1994; Puxty, Sikka & Willmott, 1994). In particular, it has been noted that accounting education reproduces and sustains the values and assumptions of Anglo-American capitalism¹ - i.e. that

society's welfare is optimised as a result of individuals acting in their own economic self-interest, and that shareholders are the only participants in the wealth creating process that should have their interests maximised (Collison, 2003; Collison & Frankfurter, 2000; Ferguson, Collison, Power & Stevenson, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008). In this respect, accounting students are not encouraged to consider the power asymmetries or vested interests behind the prevalent worldview they encounter, or to consider alternative ways in which society may be organised. Given the pivotal role played by the textbook in accounting education, a small number of studies have started to consider the values which underpin those textbooks used on accounting degree curricula; for example, Ferguson et al. (2005) note that introductory accounting textbooks tend to prioritise the needs of shareholders above all other stakeholder groups, while Sikka et al. (2007, p.15) note that shareholder wealth assumptions are either "lurking in the background...[or] form the heart" of most accounting textbooks.

In light of these criticisms, and given the prevalent use of textbooks as a pedagogical device in accounting education, this study aims to address a gap in the literature – by explicitly focusing on lecturers' views regarding the use and content of recommended accounting textbooks. By building on previous research which has examined the content of accounting textbooks (Cuganesan, Gibson & Petty, 1997; Ferguson et al., 2005; 2008; Kelly & Pratt; 1994; Sikka et al., 2007), and their use (Ferguson et al., 2007), this study explores whether, or the extent to which, accounting educators make explicit or challenge the worldview that underpins their recommended textbooks. In addressing this aim, two research methods were used: a questionnaire

survey of lecturers and a series of interviews with university accounting lecturers and with trainers of professional students.

The paper is structured as follows: the next section provides an overview of the extant literature concerned with the ideological characteristics of accounting textbooks; this is followed by a discussion of the methodological issues relevant to the current study. The findings from this research are then reported: results from the questionnaire survey are firstly delineated, and the interview findings are then discussed. The final section provides a summary of the findings and concludes.

2. Literature Review

As noted above, a number of studies have examined the *content* of accounting textbooks, with the aim of exploring the ideological characteristics of these texts. Early studies into the content of management accounting textbooks have highlighted how these texts tend to prioritise the goals of the owner/shareholder and fail to acknowledge the worldview that underpins them (Cuganesan et al., 1997; Kelly & Pratt, 1994; Scapens, Otley & Lister, 1984). For example, in their analysis of Horngren et al. (1994), Cuganesan et al. (1997, p.439-440) point out that management accounting is presented as a “functional” activity with little consideration to its “normative presuppositions and actual effects” and that “the single goal of utility maximisation is assumed for individuals and firms”.

In a more recent study Ferguson et al. (2005) undertook a content analysis of a range of conventional accounting textbooks, including financial accounting, financial management and management accounting texts. A pronounced shareholder emphasis was found within the analysed texts; in this respect, Ferguson et al. (2005) suggest that

students' ethical and moral judgment may be restricted to the view that an accounting decision or action is only appropriate if it maximises shareholder wealth (see also, Gray et al., 1994; McPhail, 1999). Moreover, they argue that a shareholder emphasis:

“[T]ogether with a lack of critical discussion, helps to reinforce an uncritical approach to learning, with the possible implication that accounting graduates who enter practice may be unaware of the ethical, economic and political assumptions underpinning their work” (Ferguson et al., 2005, p.41).

While the content of accounting textbooks have been studied, to a small extent, within the extant literature, there is a paucity of research which considers the views of those who *produce* or *use* accounting textbooks, especially with regard to the values which underpin these texts. Two exceptions to this statement are Ferguson et al.'s (2006) recent study into the production of financial accounting textbooks, and Ferguson et al.'s (2007) analysis of lecturers' perceptions of the emphasis given to different stakeholders in introductory accounting textbooks. In terms of production, Ferguson et al. (2006) note that most authors viewed their textbook as passively reflecting the *status quo*; thus, while these authors recognised that the discipline of accounting was based on a particular ideology, which prioritised the interests of shareholders, the textbooks did not make this explicit or question the worldview portrayed.² A number of participants in Ferguson et al. (2006) did question why certain stakeholders should be privileged in their texts, however, they admitted that there was very little scope for introducing wider/alternative perspectives.

According to the sociologist of education, Michael Apple, there are a number of reasons why authors may have limited scope to introduce some of the material they wish

to include in a text. For example, Apple (2001) explains that publishers often create their own books, through extensive market research. In this respect, the contents of a textbook may be decided almost before an author is commissioned. The reason for this, according to Apple (2001) and Thompson (2005) is that the field of higher education publishing is characterized by large media conglomerates with strong financial/profit motives. Competition in this field is intense and textbook authors are constrained by market pressures and their publisher's desire to secure as many adoptions as possible. As Apple and Christian-Smith (1991, p. 5) point out, textbooks "are economic commodities... even though texts may be vehicles of ideas, they still have to be 'peddled on the market'... decisions about the 'bottom-line' determine what books are published and for how long". In the context of accounting textbooks, one of the publishers from Ferguson et al.'s (2006, p.252) study, highlighted how trade-offs are always made between content, costs and sales. He stated:

"We are not here to disseminate information or whatever, this is just how we choose to make money. If we thought that adding another 30 pages, which means adding 30 pages worth of paper to every unit we produce . . . will bring a greater return, then we will do it."

In this respect, Ferguson et al. (2006) highlight how accounting textbook publishers are keen to minimise costs, and only include additional content if it might increase sales (see also, Thompson, 2005). For example, several respondents in their study suggested that if an introductory financial accounting textbook included material about the wider context of the discipline then mainstream material would have to be cut. Since the mainstream material is required for professional accreditation requirements, both publishers and authors suggested that such a strategy would reduce sales; in other words, they agreed

that fewer lecturers would recommend such a textbook because it did not reflect what was in the professional syllabuses (Ferguson et al., 2006).

Focusing on the use of introductory accounting textbooks, Ferguson et al. (2007) suggested that lecturers were aware of an ideology pervading their recommended textbook; in particular, a number of interviewees noted that the values represented in their recommended text were consistent with those of the Anglo-American model of capitalism, whereby the interests of shareholders were treated as paramount (Ferguson et al., 2007). Consequently, all but one of the interviewees held the view that students should be presented with “alternative perspectives” which emphasised the user needs of other stakeholder groups. Participants in Ferguson et al.’s (2007) research indicated that such perspectives may be introduced during the lectures and tutorials, or by recommending supplementary reading material. In a number of respects, Ferguson et al.’s (2007) study provides some support for the claim that the primary ethical perspective conveyed by accounting textbooks is that of financial utilitarianism. However, and perhaps of most importance to the present study, their work draws attention to the contested nature of accounting knowledge, highlighting how accounting lecturers may resist the values expounded in accounting textbooks by supplementing the text in various ways.

The present study will expand and build upon Ferguson et al.’s (2007) analysis, drawing attention to issues which were not considered in their research. In particular, in addition to exploring lecturers’ perceptions regarding the representation of stakeholders in accounting textbooks, the present study will also consider how lecturers decide upon their recommended text, how it is used, issues of course accreditation, and their views on

whether they perceive accounting textbooks to be ideological in character. As will be outlined in the following section, there are important methodological grounds for focusing on the “reception” of accounting textbooks, especially given that the present study is situated within the context of a body of research concerned with the ideological character of accounting education in general, and accounting textbooks in particular. Other contributions of the current paper include the use of a questionnaire survey as well as follow-up interviews to gain the views of a larger sample of lecturers over a more recent time frame. Thus, the current paper builds upon previous work in this area.

3. Methodological issues

In his important work concerning ideology and mass communication, Thompson (1990) outlines a framework for the analysis of ideology – which he refers to as the depth-hermeneutical approach (see also Ferguson, 2007 for an explication of this methodological approach)³. According to Thompson (1990), one must attend to three analytically separable elements when approaching the analysis of mass media (for example, an accounting textbook) – namely, their production, content and reception. One reason, according to Thompson (1990), for extending the analysis beyond the text, is that mass media “institutes a fundamental *break* between the producers and receivers” (Thompson, 1990, p.220, *emphasis* in original); i.e. mass media messages are produced for recipients who are absent from the site of production, and therefore have a limited capacity to contribute to the communicative process. Obviously, this structured break is a feature of accounting textbooks, whereby textbooks are produced in the absence of lecturers and students. Thompson (1990) argues that too much attention is placed on the

internal structure of 'text' in mass-media analysis, and that inferences are often made regarding the consequences of text from examining the text itself, without paying sufficient attention to the individuals who receive media messages (referred to by Thompson as the "fallacy of internalism" – see also Ferguson, 2007). In this sense, Thompson (1990) acknowledges that mass media messages may be received and appropriated in various ways and, therefore, analysis should consider the extent to which individuals accept or reject media messages⁴.

In addition, Thompson (1990) notes that reception and appropriation are "situated practices"; i.e., activities which take place in particular social contexts. In this respect, he suggests that analysis may consider: the "spatial and temporal" features of reception (where the activity takes place and for how long); the relations of power (who controls the media message or has the technical means of reception); the rules and conventions which govern reception; and, the social institutions within which receptive activity takes place. For example, the reception of accounting textbooks on undergraduate courses is determined by an "institutionalised" aspect of the higher education field: namely, the adoption system (Thompson, 2005). In this sense, the use of a recommended accounting textbook by students will most likely depend on whether the text has been recommended for a course by the lecturer. It is for this reason that Thompson (2005, p.200) acknowledges the extremely important "gatekeeper" role that lecturers play in the production and distribution of textbooks. In other words, there are distinct relations of power which will determine the particular accounting textbook used by students. Furthermore, the textbook may be used by the course lecturer to structure lectures and

tutorial activity, and this may therefore have direct implications for where and how the textbook is used.

In order to address these methodological concerns, this study employs two methods: an online questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews with a sample of respondents to the survey. The survey was employed as an *initial* means of assessing lecturers' perceptions regarding their recommended textbook. As Sarantakos (1993) points out, questionnaires allow for wider coverage, meaning that the views of a greater number of lecturers could be explored. In order to probe the issues that arose from the questionnaire survey in more depth, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with a sample of respondents to the survey. It was felt that semi-structured interviews would allow enough flexibility to pursue topics in more detail, depending on the interviewee's response, but would also ensure that predetermined issues were discussed. In particular, a predetermined interview schedule could be drawn up based on the extant literature; however, the semi-structured approach would be adaptable enough to allow the interviewer to pursue a line of enquiry that had not previously been considered. As Horton, Macve & Struyven (2004, p.340) suggest, semi-structured interviews allow researchers to "explore some of the underlying motives more directly" and to "bring out and resolve apparent contradictions"⁵.

The specific details relating to the data collection for each of these methods is outlined in the following two sections, where the results of both the survey and the semi-structured interviews are respectively discussed.

4. The lecturers' survey

In June 2005, an online survey was conducted which sought the views of introductory financial accounting lecturers regarding their recommended course materials and, in particular, their recommended course text. Suitable participants for the survey were targeted by identifying individuals within the *British Accounting Association Research Register* (Helliar, Gray & Monk, 2004) with a teaching specialism in the area of financial accounting. A total of 280 lecturers were e-mailed with details of the study and a web-link to the survey: 36 useable surveys were returned, representing a response rate of 13.33%.

The survey instrument was split into a number of parts. First, respondents were asked about the textbook that they used when teaching introductory financial accounting. Second, the questionnaire ascertained respondents' perceptions about whether or not the recommended textbook was supplemented by additional reading. Details about the sources of any additional reading, the reasons for recommending additional material and the proportion of the course not covered by the recommended text were ascertained. In the third section of the questionnaire, respondents' views were sought on the extent to which their recommended text discussed the information needs of different stakeholders: a list of nine stakeholders was supplied, developed from the Corporate Report (ASC, 1975), and respondents were asked to rate the coverage in the text of their information needs using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (quite a lot). A follow-up question sought respondents' views about the extent to which the information needs of these stakeholders *should* be discussed in an introductory financial textbook. By ascertaining lecturers' perceptions regarding the extent to which their recommended text discussed, or should discuss, the information needs of different stakeholders, this section

of the questionnaire addressed one of the major issues identified in the extant literature – i.e. that the values underpinning accounting textbooks are consistent with an Anglo-American model of capitalism, whereby the interests of shareholders are treated as paramount.

The fourth section of the questionnaire sought respondents' views about the content of an ideal introductory financial accounting course. Specifically, respondents were asked whether such a course should discuss the wider social context of financial accounting, consider the historical context of the subject, introduce students to business ethics, compare the rules- and principles-based approaches to financial accounting and develop students' critical thinking skills⁶. In addition, respondents were asked about whether or not these issues should be introduced during the early stages of a course on financial accounting. Again, this section of the questionnaire sought to address some of the issues identified in the extant literature; in particular, that accounting education in general, and accounting textbooks in particular, fail to provide students with alternative perspectives and encourage the passive receipt of information. The final section of the questionnaire ascertained background details from the respondents in order to check whether the sample was typical of lecturers in the area.

An analysis of the background information in Table 1 indicates that about $\frac{1}{3}$ of respondents were male, while nearly $\frac{2}{3}$ were female, and the modal age was between 41 and 50 years⁷. Most respondents were experienced lecturers with over 72% having more than 10 years in teaching while over 75% had taught financial accounting for at least 10 years. Finally, an inspection of Table 1 reveals that just over 40% of respondents taught students who were specialising in accounting while a sizeable number taught either non-

specialists or a mix of students. What the background information highlights is that although the response rate is relatively low and the sample size fairly small, the on-line survey has ascertained the views of experienced individuals who have taught financial accounting to students over a large number of years; their views should therefore be of interest.

Insert table 1 about here

Findings from this survey suggest that Frank Wood's *Business Accounting I* is the most frequently recommended financial accounting text on accounting and business degree courses within UK universities (see Figure 1 below).

Insert Figure 1 about here

Nine of the respondents (25.7%) recommended Wood & Sangster (2005) *Business Accounting I* for their course, whilst Atrill & McLaney (2004) *Accounting for non-specialists* was recommended at four institutions (11.4%) and Thomas (2005) *Introduction to Financial Accounting* at three (8.6%); all other textbooks were recommended at either one or two institutions. It is perhaps worth noting that the lecturers who recommended Frank Wood taught predominantly on courses which were attended by students specialising in accounting, whereas Atrill & McLaney (2004) was recommended mainly on non-specialist accounting courses (see Table 2).

Insert table 2 about here

In addition to a recommended textbook, respondents were asked to specify whether any other reading material was recommended on the course. Whilst a range of materials tended to be recommended, including professional and academic journal articles⁸, it is worth noting that 16 respondents stated that they recommended another textbook (see Table 3). In the absence of a single textbook playing a central role and structuring the course itself, courses are being developed by the lecturers using a variety of sources.

Insert table 3 about here

Reasons identified by responding lecturers for recommending other material included: providing an alternative perspective (24 respondents); encouraging independent learning (19 respondents); increasing awareness of current issues (22 respondents); and encouraging critical thinking (19 respondents). Although not as prevalent an issue, almost half of the respondents indicated that they recommend other material because their recommended textbook did not cover everything on the course (17 respondents). Respondents were asked to indicate how much of the course they felt their textbook covered. The majority (nine respondents) felt their recommended text covered 71-80% of the course, whilst eight respondents indicated that their text covered 81-90% of their course, and eight respondents 91-100%.

It would appear that lecturers are providing additional course materials in order to provide students with alternative perspectives and to encourage critical thinking⁹. This would suggest that perhaps accounting educators are not the “textbook facilitators” that Herring (2003, p.90) suggests. However, for the vast majority of lecturers, the textbook appears to make a significant contribution to the content of their course – i.e. at least 2/3

of respondents stated that their textbook covered 70% of their course or more. In this respect, while it would seem that students are encountering wider perspectives/issues, the extent to which this occurs is arguably limited.

Table 4 summarises respondents' views about the actual and desired coverage of information needs for different stakeholders in their recommended financial accounting text. A 5-point Likert scale was employed which ranged from 1 (not at all) to 5 (quite a lot). The table describes the number of responses to each stakeholder group, the mean score awarded by those surveyed and the standard deviation of the replies around this average score. The second-last column reports a t-test of the null hypothesis that the mean score is equal to 1 while the final column documents the p-value for this t-test.

Insert table 4 about here

A visual inspection of panel A of Table 4 indicates that the information needs of shareholders were perceived to be discussed more fully than those of other stakeholders. The mean score of 3.53 was the highest recorded and significantly greater than those documented for analysts/advisers in second place (mean = 2.85), managers in third place (mean = 2.78) and trade creditors in fourth place (mean = 2.59). The information needs of NGOs were rated last achieving an average score of only 1.80. Although shareholders had the highest mean score, there was some variability in the responses of the different lecturers surveyed; the standard deviation for this category was the largest documented, indicating that while some lecturers believed that their textbook discussed the information needs of shareholders to a significant extent, others held a different view. Such a finding is not surprising given the mix of different textbooks used by the lecturers responding to this on-line questionnaire.

Despite the range of mean scores awarded to the different stakeholder categories, one clear finding from panel A of Table 4 is that the information needs of all stakeholder groups are covered to some extent in the financial accounting texts used by the lecturers. A t-test of the null hypothesis that the mean score awarded to each group by the respondents is equal to 1 (not at all) is rejected in every instance. All the t-statistics are greater than their critical value of 2.00, and the p-values are all significant, being lower than 0.05. Thus, the lecturers seem to think that the information needs of all the stakeholder groups listed are discussed to some extent in their recommended financial accounting texts although the level of coverage varies from one group to another.

Panel B of Table 4 reports the result of a follow-up question about the extent to which financial accounting textbooks *should* discuss the information needs of the different stakeholder groups mentioned. The main result to emerge from an analysis of this panel of the table is that all of the mean scores were considerably higher than their counterparts reported in panel A of this table: respondents were strongly of the opinion that financial accounting textbooks should discuss the information needs of a range of stakeholders. One might infer from the comparison between panels A and B of the table that respondents believed that coverage of the information needs of stakeholders should be increased – those of employees, customers and NGOs were some of the largest changes in mean score documented. However, caution must be exercised when making such inferences as the standard deviations of responses in panel B of the table were higher than their counterparts in panel A for six of the nine stakeholder groups; this implies that there was a wider spread of opinions for the questions in panel B. It is also important to note that that, despite the increase in mean score for each of the stakeholder

groups in general, respondents more strongly agreed that the information needs of shareholders should be discussed above all other stakeholder groups.

Results from this section of the survey lend some support to the findings in the extant literature, which highlight the priority ascribed to shareholders in accounting textbooks and the prevalence of an Anglo-American worldview. In addition, findings from this section would suggest that lecturers believe that the information needs of a broader range of stakeholders should be discussed more extensively in accounting textbooks. However, it would also appear that lecturers would still wish to ascribe priority to shareholders in the context of such a discussion.

The final section of this lecturers' questionnaire sought views about the content of financial accounting courses and in particular about whether issues other than technical material – such as the social and historical context of accounting as well as business ethics – should be included. This section builds upon the findings in Table 4 since awareness of such broader material is likely to develop students' understanding of the debates between different stakeholders regarding the provision of information about organisations. A five-point Likert scale was again used but in this instance the possible responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) with 3 representing the neutral response (neither agree nor disagree). The mean scores and their standard deviations are displayed in Table 5 together with the results for a test of the null hypothesis that this mean score is not different from the neutral response of 3. The final column documents the p-value for this t-test; a p-value of less than 0.05 allows the rejection of the null in favour of the alternative hypothesis that the mean score is statistically different from the neutral response.

Insert table 5 about here

An analysis of the findings in Table 5 highlights that the lecturers who completed this on-line survey agreed with the statement that a financial accounting course should develop students' critical thinking skills (mean = 4.30). They also agreed that an introductory financial accounting course should discuss the wider social context of the subject (mean = 4.12) as well as compare the rules- and principles-based approaches to the subject (mean = 4.12). The statement which attracted the lowest average score was the one which suggested that a financial accounting course should discuss the historical context of the subject: even here, however, the mean score of 3.77 was higher than the neutral score of 3.00. This impression is confirmed by the t-test statistics which are all above their critical values of 2.00; this allows in each case the rejection of the null hypothesis that the respondents disagreed with the statements included in the question.

According to panel B of Table 5, respondents were less certain about whether broader issues should be covered during the early stages of a course on financial accounting. A comparison of the mean responses in panel B with their counterparts in panel A indicates that in each instance, the average score is lower. The rankings produced by these average scores are similar, with the development of critical thinking skills coming top in each instance although the inclusion of business ethics drops from a ranking of fourth in panel A to fifth in panel B. Respondents seemed to agree less strongly with the statement that the topic of business ethics should be covered during the early stages of a financial accounting course (mean of 3.56 in panel B vs mean of 3.97 in

panel A). The other feature of panel B in Table 5 is that the standard deviation values are higher than their counterparts in panel A – especially for the statement about the development of critical thinking skills (1.09 vs 0.77). Thus, the mean scores in panel B mask a wider spread of opinion among the respondents about whether the less technical aspects of financial accounting should be covered near the beginning of a financial accounting course. Not surprisingly, these higher standard deviation values result in lower t-test statistics; nevertheless, the p-values for the t-tests are still less than the critical value of 0.05 allowing in each case the rejection of the null hypothesis that the respondents were neutral about the statements included in the question.

The following section builds upon the results of the questionnaire survey, and reports the findings from a set of semi-structured interviews with respondents to the survey.

5. Interviews with lecturers

Eleven semi-structured interviews with university lecturers were conducted between November 2005 and August 2006. Interviews with lecturers were arranged from a list of those responding to the online survey described in the previous section who indicated that they would be willing to be interviewed. To explore the use of accounting textbooks, it was felt that the views of lecturers were important in a number of respects. First, by virtue of the adoption system, lecturers play an important gatekeeper role in terms of deciding which textbook to recommend to students (Ferguson et al., 2008). Second, lecturers have the capacity to ignore or emphasise certain content within the textbook

during their teaching sessions. Third, lecturers may choose to supplement the text to provide alternative perspectives.

A summary of each lecturer's profile can be viewed in Table 6. An inspection of this table shows that six of the lecturers interviewed were female while five were male. Three lecturers were aged between 31-40, six between 41-50 and two were over 50 years of age. All of the lecturers interviewed were relatively well experienced, two having taught between 6-10 years, five between 11-15 years while four had taught for over 15 years. All but two of the interviewees held a professional accounting qualification.

Each interview lasted between 30 minutes and one hour, and all interviews were recorded and transcribed. Before the start of each interview a statement of the objectives of the project and a list of possible discussion points and questions was given to each interviewee; however, there was a conscious effort not to influence the respondents' views with the perspective of the interviewer(s). Nevertheless, the possibility that the wording of the questions may have influenced the responses received cannot be ruled out and remains a limitation of the current paper. Interviewees were not restricted to these topics and were encouraged to expand on other issues that they felt to be important. Interviews were conducted on a strictly non-attributable basis. The views of the lecturers and professional tutors are summarised and discussed under the following six headings: the choice of text; how the text is used on the course; stakeholders; ideology; supplementing the text; and accreditation.

Insert table 6 about here

5.1 The choice of text

The reasons for selecting the recommended textbook varied considerably among the lecturers. Four of the interviewees commented on how they were influenced by the structure of the text and how it presented material to students.¹⁰ For example, Lecturer D stated that she liked the way that her selected text presented material in “bite-size chunks” with small chapters where there were “quite a lot of examples at the end of each chapter”. Similarly, Lecturer G noted that “the good thing” about his recommended text was that “the chapters are small and self-contained and you can rearrange them as you like”.

Course coverage also emerged as an important factor in the selection of a recommended financial accounting text, which, to an extent, supports the findings from the questionnaire survey. For example, Lecturer E pointed out that there was a close alignment between the structure and content of his course with that of the recommended textbook. Similarly, Lecturer A noted that her text was developed specifically for her course, which encompassed a strong element of open learning - therefore a close alignment between course and recommended text was paramount.

A number of interviewees suggested that they were influenced by the perspective that their recommended textbook took. For example, Lecturer I noted that his recommended textbook took a user perspective, as opposed to a preparer perspective, which was more closely aligned with his approach to teaching and the content of his course. Lecturer J explained that his recommended textbook was “plainly written...[and] much clearer in terms of double-entry”. He added that, “it gives students a context and explains that the purpose of accounting is to aid decision making”. For Lecturer C, the textbook did not play such an important role in her students’ learning since EQL training

software products underpinned much of what was taught on the course. Therefore, Lecturer C wanted a recommended text which, “complemented what we do with EQL [and] provide[d] some grounding in the conceptual framework - which most texts don’t do”.

Finally, the inclusion of online materials associated with the textbook was a determining factor for both Lecturers B and F. In particular, Lecturer B stated:

“I basically chose that because it had the computer packages with it, which had all the different examples to go with the answers... [students] can just access the website, and can generate profit and loss and balance sheets, with different numbers”.

While Lecturer F indicated that the most important factor for her was course coverage, she also noted that her decision was influenced by the fact that the text was packaged with “internet access [and] online material, for which you don’t have to have a special password”.

5.2 How the text is used on the course

As noted in Section 3, Thompson (1990) discusses how the reception of mass media (such as accounting textbooks) are “situated practices” – taking place in particular social contexts. In this respect, it was deemed important to consider how lecturers used their recommended textbooks on their courses, since this would have implications for how they were used and received by students. Lecturers’ comments suggest that textbooks were used in a number of different ways on their courses; in particular, while some lecturers fully integrated their text with the course, whereby students would use the text in both lectures and tutorials, others used their own notes and lecture material, and the recommended text served as an additional source of reference for students. For example,

given the open learning approach at Lecturer A's institution, it was important that the text and course material were closely aligned. Similarly, Lecturer I noted that "we basically underpin the course with the textbook... it's a hundred per cent textbook driven". A number of interviewees indicated that while they used their own material in lectures, students were required to undertake questions from the textbook as part of tutorial exercises. For example, Lecturer D explained:

"The way I use it, is we ask them to look at some of the answered examples [in the textbook], and then practice some of the examples for which there are no answers at the back of the text. During the tutorial situation, we can then give them feedback on these examples that they haven't got an answer for and they can raise any issues there, and then we give them an unseen question during the tutorial ...one of our own. So we use it to prepare for tutorials, although we don't use it directly in tutorials".

Similarly, Lecturer F noted that she encouraged her students to attempt questions in the textbook for which the answer is already provided. She stated:

"I set my own tutorial questions. I always have... as I've accumulated [a bank of such questions] over the years. So, no they're not [taken directly from the textbook]. I advise... what I tend to do is that I give them sets of questions to do. They only have fortnightly tutorials, not weekly tutorials. So I set them questions to do for the fortnightly session and I usually put as one extra question... a question that they can do from the textbook but where the answer is in the back. You know, just for more practice. So I'm sort of showing them that their book is another resource for test questions really. And that of course is also the beauty of online material now. Because you can say, well, okay, you can do these for tutorials, you can ask your tutor about them. But, you know, most students say that what they really want is more and more practice questions. And so that's why... I make sure that they make use of the ones where the answers are in the back."

For Lecturer B, the textbook was simply "just supplementary reading", implying that the textbook was not used in the teaching of the course, but could be used by students as a source of reference. Similarly, Lecturer J noted that his recommended textbook was used as a "back-up" for the student who "doesn't attend class". Lecturer J explained that, given

that the approach he took to teaching financial accounting was similar to that of the textbook, if a student failed to attend the class, they at least had some support material.

In describing how lecturers use their textbooks, this section provides insights into the reception of accounting textbooks as “situated practices”. More specifically, how a textbook is used on a course is going to have implications for how it is used and received by students. If we were to assume that accounting textbooks exhibit the ideological characteristics described by Cuganesan et al. (1997), Ferguson et al. (2005; 2008) and Sikka et al. (2007), then one would also assume that students on a course which was heavily structured by a recommended text would be less exposed to wider perspectives or alternative worldviews. In many respects, participants’ comments in this section support the findings from the questionnaire survey. In particular, while a few of the interviewees suggest that the recommended textbook plays a fairly minor role on the course, for the majority, the textbook is an integral part of the course, structuring lectures and/or tutorials.

5.3 Stakeholders

Building upon Ferguson et al. (2005; 2007), interviewees were asked to contemplate the extent to which different stakeholders were reflected in their recommended textbook. Again, this issue was deemed to be of relevance to the present investigation given that one of the predominant criticisms of accounting education in the literature is that it tends to emphasise the interests of shareholders over all other stakeholder groups.

Both Lecturers B and D felt that there was a fairly limited discussion of any stakeholders in their recommended textbook. Their comments, in many ways, suggest

that their recommended textbooks accord with one of Thompson's (1990) characteristics of ideology. In particular, one might infer from their comments that their recommended textbooks represent the user needs served by accounting information in a manner "which deflects attention from, or glosses over existing relations or processes" (Thompson, 1990, p.62). For example, Lecturer D stated:

"There is no discussion as to who this information's needed for, why they need it, what they do with it. [My recommended textbook] is set up mainly from the context of, this is business information, it needs to be prepared and here's how you do it."

Although Lecturer B acknowledged that her recommended textbook contained a discussion of the different users of accounting information, this discussion was very limited. However, she felt that the textbook was not "biased" to any stakeholder group in particular. According to Lecturer F, there was one user group which tended to be emphasised. She stated:

"I would suggest that... the shareholders are paramount in most textbooks. Owners or shareholders, however you express it... I don't think [recommended textbook] really pushes things like employee reporting for example. It doesn't really push society if you were to express that in terms of say social responsibility. There are other books that do that better... but there's still many where it is in the first chapter but it's not really referred to much after that".

Similarly, Lecturer E explained that his recommended textbook "clearly has a shareholder perspective", while Lecturer H noted that his text "the focus on shareholders is taken for granted in the text... there is not much thought given to other stakeholder groups".

A number of lecturers explained that, while their textbook took a predominantly shareholder approach, this did not necessarily reflect the course as a whole. For example, Lecturer C stated that, in her teaching of the subject, she tried to

give students a “broader view of who the users are”. Lecturer I also noted that he attempted to “counterbalance” the shareholder orientation of his recommended textbook by “bringing in the importance of customers, employees and the environment”.

To an extent, these findings support the results of the questionnaire survey, where respondents indicated that textbooks should discuss the user needs of a broad range of stakeholders. Similarly, as the questionnaire survey findings suggested, some lecturers would appear to prefer a more balanced approach, and therefore highlight the importance of other stakeholders in their teaching. Finally, it was also noted by a number of interviewees that there was little discussion accorded to any stakeholder group. That such discussion may be absent from some accounting textbooks raises the question of whether such texts are pedagogically sound. Further, the absence of such discussion raises questions of an ideological nature, since it could be inferred that these texts passively expound taken for granted assumptions in a manner which, according to Thompson (1990) may “help sustain relations of domination through concealment or obscurement”. This point will be further developed in the following section which focuses more specifically on the issue of ideology.

5.4 Ideology

Following Cameron, Ireland, Lussier, New & Robbins (2003, p.712) each lecturer was asked whether they “see [their recommended] textbook as propaganda or ideology?” The question was asked to ascertain the extent to which lecturers believed that their textbook reflected the interests of a particular constituency. In this sense, the question is closely linked to the issue of stakeholder representation in accounting textbooks. As with previous responses regarding their perceptions about the discussion of different

stakeholders in their recommended textbooks, neither Lecturers B nor D considered that their text promoted the interests of any particular user group. For example, Lecturer D explained that she didn't see her recommended textbook as "selling a message" but rather that it was a "technical textbook, which it does very well". Similarly, Lecturer K noted that introductory accounting textbooks were mostly technical, implying that issues of an ideological nature were not apparent. In contrast, Lecturers G and H acknowledged that accounting textbooks could be considered ideological in the sense that the technical focus of many texts "masked" the underlying assumptions which underpin them. For example, Lecturer H stated that his recommended textbook is "ideological in the sense that it is constructed to suggest that it is a purely technical text". In many respect, these comments accord with McPhail and Gray's (1996, p.27, *emphasis added*) assertion that accounting education could be viewed as a "form of indoctrination" and as "hegemonic in the way it imbues students with the values and attributes of a world within *a guise of an innocuous technical rationality*".

Drawing on Thompson's (1990) criteria for the typical modes of operation of ideology, one could argue that by emphasising technique acquisition, the assumptions and values which underpin the techniques presented in the textbook are somewhat obscured. Indeed, when both Lecturers D and K were asked whether they felt the techniques presented in their recommended text could be conceived as serving particular interests, Lecturer D replied, "I think that could be [said of] accounting as a convention as opposed to being specific to [the text]". Lecturer K acknowledged that the interests of shareholders underpinned many of the accounting techniques taught on her course. She stated:

“Well, I suppose in financial accounting textbooks, investors are often the overriding user. [For example] the Statement of Principles states that if you can meet the needs of the investor then you can meet the needs of all the other users. I think most textbooks would state that somewhere [in the text] but then they just apply the mechanics as you go through them”.

Lecturer E acknowledged that his recommended textbook was ideological in the sense that it was “clearly written from a particular standpoint, centred in a capitalist economy and it assumes that profits are a reasonable allocator of resources”. Lecturer A stated that her text was “based on an ideology” because it “took so much for granted [and was] based on a capitalist model”. Similarly, Lecturer J explained that his recommended textbook was both ideology and propaganda, stating that accounting textbooks tended to present a “sanitised view of the world”; in particular, that accounting information was produced for shareholders to assist in decision making. In keeping with her previous response, Lecturer F noted that the interests of shareholders were often paramount in accounting textbooks. However, she also alluded to the difficulty in raising such issues with students. She stated:

“If you’d asked me this when I’d first started I’d probably have said no, of course not. I mean I wouldn’t have really understood what it meant. I think it’s only by...seeing some of the critical perspectives on accounting material that I can understand that there is an element of that. But I don’t feel that... I really wouldn’t know how to do it in a different way. I mean, that sounds really unimaginative... I used to be of the opinion that you could immediately teach students what was wrong with accounting. That you can tell them [that] it’s upholding the capitalist system, it’s designed to enhance shareholder wealth, ignore exploitation, etcetera. It is great to do that and to get on your kind of political soap box... but you are telling it to students who have no idea what you’re talking about. They don’t know... that you can actually present a balance sheet in different ways. They don’t really understand it even when you say, “Not everything is actually in there”. I think that... propaganda is too strong a word. I think in terms of ideology, then yes, I would say it was supporting and upholding a certain ideology. And maybe what is deficient is that it doesn’t allow much questioning of that ideology”.

Despite the fact that she viewed her textbook as upholding an ideology consistent with the values of Anglo-American capitalism, Lecturer F noted that exposing students to the existing criticisms of this economic structure, and the role of accounting in upholding it, would not necessarily engender more enlightened students. In particular, she explained that students “buy into the individualistic values which underpin this particular form of capitalism”, adding:

“We get a lot of management students who clearly want to go and work for large multi-nationals. I think that they have got a view that they want to be a part of this... We have got a new personal development plan initiative. When students first arrive they have got to say what they think they are bringing with them, what skills they would like to develop... and what they aspire to do. And some of them will just say they want to make a lot of money”.

In addition to the issue of students’ own worldviews, Lecturer J explained that first year accounting students might not yet have developed intellectually to the extent that they could fully appreciate the contestable values implicit in accounting. He stated that a number of accounting textbooks were “very pious” by attempting to introduce wider contextual issues. While he acknowledged that many of these authors were “well intentioned”, he felt that “a lot of it simply won’t make sense to a 17 year old”. As Sikka et al. (2007) argue, the idea that first year students do not have the intellectual capacity to critique ideas and question assumptions is somewhat limited to accounting education. They suggest that other social-science disciplines, such as sociology, philosophy and political science, tend to encourage an awareness and critique of theoretical issues at the earlier stages in their degree programmes.

5.5 Supplementing the text

Each lecturer was asked if they supplemented their recommended textbook: it was felt that this issue would, in part, address the extent to which lecturers felt that students should be exposed to alternative perspectives or other accounting issues which were not presented in the recommended textbook. Despite Lecturer D's view that her recommended textbook did not adopt any particular ideological position, she felt it was important to introduce students to wider contextual accounting issues which she perceived were generally absent in her recommended textbook. She stated:

“We supplement the “why” to give them context and the wider accountability issues within society, and then allow [our recommended text] to take over in the “how”, because [it is] very technical... The “how” is obviously very important too, but it's getting them to understand that accounting does fit into society somewhere. It matters because it affects the... way we pay for goods, or how the economy's run - we go through all that. And all these decisions are based on numbers and hopefully, by the end of the course, [students can see] that not everything you see is black and white or completely objective. It's all based on different assumptions, and therefore you've got all these important decisions that have been made based on different assumptions, and you might have made different decisions... had these assumptions been different. So it's getting them to understand the “how” alongside the “why” and the importance of it”.

Lecturer D explained that wider contextual issues were predominantly brought in through the lecture notes and alternative readings. However, despite the introduction of wider contextual issues on the course, Lecturer D expressed reservations in doing so. She stated:

“I don't think Frank Wood gives enough of the big picture. But I'm not sure if they're ready for that at first year. Sometimes they just want black and white answers and they want something that's right or wrong, and maybe challenging too much of that at an early stage isn't always a good thing”.

Similarly, Lecturer B was doubtful about whether introductory accounting students could cope adequately with wider contextual issues, stating that she did not supplement the

textbook “at that level”. However, while Lecturer B noted that the contextual material in her recommended textbook was “very limited”, reflecting the course as a whole, she did note that there was “a new conceptual module...in first year, which looks at all the conceptual issues”.

Lecturer E explained that he supplemented his chosen text with newspaper articles and professional journal articles in order to expose students to wider issues. In particular, he stated that:

“Business articles in regional newspapers very often have an ethical perspective... in terms of asking whether the morality of a particular issue is appropriate, or getting students to think about morality to some extent”.

Lecturer C supplemented her text with the abstracts of some accounting academic journal articles. In particular, she noted that Mouck (2004, p.525), was useful in terms of highlighting to students that some financial accounting representations “only come into existence in accordance with a set of rules... and have no objective basis in either physical or institutional reality”. In this respect, Mouck (2004, p.525) highlights how, for example, the financial accounting rules for aggregating the monetary amount of total assets “are more akin to the rules for a game such as football”. Lecturer C indicated that she would like to see this point made at the beginning of her introductory accounting textbooks, so that students learn to appreciate, early on in their studies, that accounting knowledge has not “just been cast down in a tablet of stone”. Lecturer K also noted that she recommended journal articles because she felt it was important that students begin to “think outside of the mechanics” of accounting.

In addition to using EQL's book-keeping tutorial computer package, Lecturer F recommended that students read broadsheet newspapers as well as professional accounting periodicals. She encouraged students to pick out accounting-related articles of interest to them, which may then be discussed in tutorials. In this way, Lecturer F attempted to encourage students to think more broadly about issues relating to accounting. However, she also noted the limitations of introducing supplementary material to level one students. She stated:

"I don't really recommend any particular academic journals. Because of the nature of the first module, which is very practical. I don't think that much of it would seem relevant. That is maybe a sad thing to say".

5.6 Accreditation

One of the contextual aspects of accounting education discussed by Ferguson et al. (2006, 2007, 2008), namely, the accreditation of accounting degrees, was alluded to by a number of the lecturers interviewed. For example, Lecturer F stated:

"I mean, accreditation's a very good marketing tool if you're trying to attract students to do your degree. And clearly a lot of students are looking for an accredited degree".

When asked whether accreditation influenced her choice of textbook or the content of her course, Lecturer F responded:

"Slightly, yes... I mean, it's not that accreditation drives everything we do by any means. But there is like a minimum requirement for accreditation. And some of them are met by what they study in the first year. So I mean, for example, control accounts. A lot of people would say, why on earth are you doing control accounts? Particularly when a lot of the students are non-accountants. Well, that's to meet accreditation. You've got to tick a box that says that we do actually teach control accounts. They never do them again. They don't do them in the second year as far as I'm aware, still don't do them in the third year. So, I would say that the

recommended text actually does meet what you would expect a first year to do. I mean, our accreditation... we were meeting accreditation not just with what we did at first year level. I mean, there are obviously other things at levels two and even three. We made sure that...without completely pandering to accreditation requirements, there were elements of accreditation items or techniques in these core modules”.

Despite noting the role of accreditation on her degree programme, Lecture F argued that the influence of the accounting profession on university accounting courses should be resisted to some extent. She explained:

“I think that if you go along the lines of everything should be geared towards accreditation then you’re letting the profession decide what a degree should be. And I think the whole point of our students studying a degree is they should be doing something different to professional training. So I don’t think we should be a preliminary sort of professional training for get[ting] a professional qualification. I think it should be that they do a degree. And they study [the subject] in an academic way”.

Lecturer C pointed out that it was sometimes difficult to bring wider contextual issues into her teaching because she had ‘the accreditation issue to deal with’. In particular, she noted that:

“We have a lot of students doing ACCA and therefore we’ve got to make sure we cover enough technical stuff for ACCA accreditation... it is a real tension because then we expect them to do a sort of scholarly dissertation in the third year”.

Similarly, Lecturer K explained that she had to cover certain financial accounting material to satisfy “Institute exemption requirements”, which meant that there was “a core content that you’re trying to cover all the time”.

6. Summary and conclusions

The questionnaire survey of lecturers has highlighted that, amongst respondents, Wood and Sangster (2005) *Business Accounting I* was the most frequently recommended text for introductory financial accounting courses in UK universities; however a significant number of lecturers also recommended professional and academic journal articles as well as at least one other text in order to provide alternative perspectives and to increase awareness of current issues in accounting and finance. In addition, responding lecturers appeared to believe that the information needs of all stakeholder groups identified in the *Corporate Report* were addressed to at least some extent in their primary recommended text. Survey respondents generally supported a range of objectives for a university financial accounting course, including the development of students' critical thinking skills and of an awareness of the wider social context of accounting; however there was less support for the suggestion that development of these skills and awareness of wider issues were suitable objectives for the early stages of an introductory financial accounting course.

When these survey issues were probed in more depth via interview, lecturers' comments regarding their recommended introductory financial accounting course text highlighted a number of pertinent issues. In terms of stakeholder representation in their recommended texts, a number of the lecturers acknowledged that discussion of different stakeholders was extremely limited. In this respect, lecturers' perceptions of their textbooks accord with what Ferguson et al. (2008) refer to as the "selective tradition"; that is, what is selected and omitted from texts was important in terms of framing financial accounting within a narrow and specific context. Again, it would appear from interviewees' remarks that by neglecting to acknowledge broader stakeholder groups,

financial accounting textbooks could be construed as obscuring relations of power (Thompson, 1990) by presenting accounting as an innocuous technical process (Gray et al., 1994). While some lecturers attempted to address this perceived shortfall in their course textbook by recommending supplementary material, it was acknowledged by these lecturers that such material was limited, as it was felt that students may find it difficult to cope with.

Each of the interviewees were asked whether they thought their recommended accounting textbook was ideological. In addressing this issue, interviews pointed to various characteristics of their recommended text which could be considered ideological. More specifically, these were that (i) the assumptions underpinning the text were masked because of an overly technical focus; (ii) that the text was underpinned by the values and assumptions of capitalism; and (iii) that the text emphasised the needs of shareholders over other stakeholder groups. While acknowledging the ideological characteristics of their recommended textbook, a number of lecturers explained that they tried to make students aware, or challenge, the assumptions underpinning their recommended text. However, a number of difficulties were noted in this respect: (i) students do not fully understand the significance of alternative perspectives; and (ii) many students may empathise¹¹ with the assumptions underpinning their recommended text. The latter point is similar to Power's (1991) observations, in that students may be "volunteers" in the accounting education process because they identify with the dominant view of the world. A number of lecturers felt that their recommended texts were not ideological, and did not promote the interests of any particular group, because they perceived their texts to be

merely “technical”. In this sense, arguably, the assumptions and values underpinning the texts were somewhat obscured by their technical focus.

The majority of the lecturers interviewed stated that they recommended other supplementary reading to students in an attempt to expose students to wider contextual issues. In this respect, lecturers attempted to address any limited perspective offered by the textbook by exposing students to other materials which present a different view. Given that accounting associations have highlighted the need to improve the critical thinking skills of accounting students (for example, AAA, 1986), we would argue that an awareness of alternative perspectives is an essential feature in the development of such skills (Popkewitz & Fendler, 1999). While supplementary reading clearly has a role to play, there is no reason to assume that textbooks cannot help facilitate this process as well – by incorporating a range of views and perspectives into their content.

Finally, three of the lecturers highlighted that what they taught on their course was influenced by professional accreditation. Again, it was noted that this contextual condition of accounting education was something which students generally wanted – and was something which could be used as a marketing tool. However, it was also suggested that there was a real concern about university accounting education becoming preliminary professional training.

Findings from this study address some of the methodological issues raised in Section 3. In particular, as Thompson (1990) argues, simply because a text exhibits ideological characteristics it does not necessarily follow that it will have ideological effects. Similarly, Apple (2004) maintains that the education process should not be viewed as a simple “input-output” process, whereby students become imbued with a

dominant ideology. Instead, Apple (2004) encourages researchers to look more closely at the education process itself, and to become more aware of the contestation and resistance that takes place. The results from this research would suggest that lecturers are aware of a dominant ideology in their textbooks and, to an extent, take measures to introduce wider contextual issues on their course and provide supplementary reading material. However, this study has also highlighted a number of structural issues which limit the extent to which such wider material can be introduced. For example, three lecturers noted that professional accreditation was as a possible barrier, since certain minimum requirements had to be met, arguably leaving less scope to introduce alternative perspectives. In addition, some lecturers suggested that students do not have the intellectual capacity to comprehend alternative perspectives at introductory level – this seems a somewhat disparaging view of the calibre of accounting students. According to Sikka et al. (2007, p.14), this tension appears to be limited to accounting education; for example, they suggest that “sociology, philosophy, politics and many other branches of social science... encourage learning through a dialectical relationship that emphasizes relationship between theory and practice to advance understanding”. Furthermore, they point out that in other social science disciplines, students would come across the ideas of major figures in their field and the historical development of ideas related to their subject. Finally, some lecturers suggested that accounting students might identify with the dominant ideology they encounter. Indeed, a clear limitation to this study is that the other main recipients of accounting textbooks were not consulted – i.e. the students. Further research may seek to explore their views on such matters, and to ascertain the extent to

which they identify with the dominant worldview they encounter or the extent to which they are aware of other perspectives.

If, as suggested by a number of participants in this study, accounting education in general, and accounting textbooks in particular are, to a significant extent, an uncritical reflection of the readily contestable ideology implicit in accounting practice, is it not incumbent upon us as lecturers in higher education to make students aware of alternatives? If not, do we not merely encourage the passive receipt of information? If this is so, then we must consider whether our roles are more akin to accounting trainers as opposed to accounting educators. On this point, it is perhaps worth noting Dewey's (1966) observation that one "trains" an animal whilst a human being is "educated".

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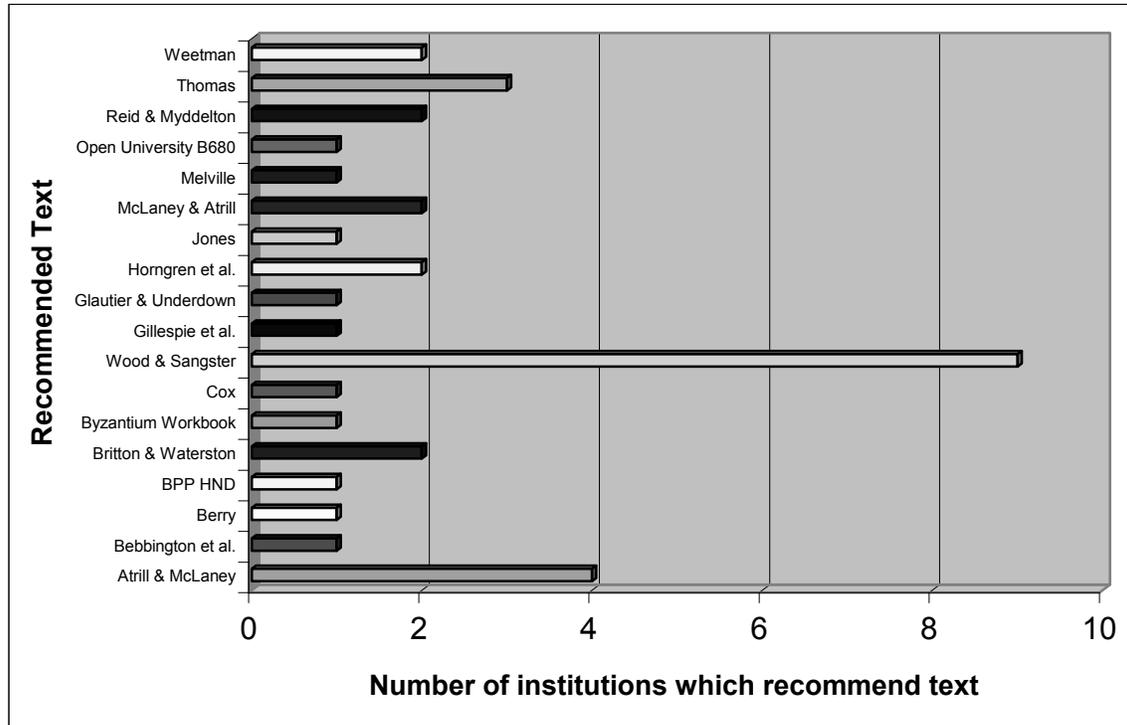
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Weetman, P. (2002). *Financial Accounting: An Introduction*, FT Prentice Hall, Harlow.

Wilkinson-Riddle, G. & Patel, A (1997). *Workbook for Interactive Accounting: The Byzantium Workbook*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Wood, F. & Sangster A. (2005). *Business Accounting 1*. Harlow: FT Prentice Hall.

Figure 1 – Recommended financial accounting textbooks used on accounting and business degree programs at UK Higher Education Institutions



Note: Full title of each text is as follows: Weetman (2002) *Financial Accounting: An Introduction*; Thomas (2005) *An Introduction to Financial Accounting*; Reid & Myddelton (2005) *The Meaning of Company Accountants*; Open University (2001) *Financial Accounting B680 Study Pack*; Melville (1999) *Financial Accounting*; McLaney & Atrill (2005) *Accounting: An Introduction*; Jones (2006) *Accounting*; Hornrgren et al. (2005) *Introduction to Financial Accounting*; Glautier & Underdown (2000) *Accounting: Theory and Practice*; Gillespie et al. (2004) *Principles of Financial Accounting*; Wood & Sangster (2005), *Business Accounting 1*; Cox et al. (2004) *Business Accounts*; Wilkinson-Riddle & Patel (1997) *Workbook for Interactive Accounting: The Byzantium Workbook*; Britton and Waterston (2006), *Financial Accounting*; BPP (2004) *Finance (HND)*; Berry (1999) *Financial Accounting: An Introduction*; Bebbington et al. (2001) *Financial Accounting: Practice and Principles*; Atrill & McLaney (2004) *Accounting and Finance for Non-Specialists*.

Table 1 - Background information about the respondents

Characteristic	No	%
Gender		
Male	12	33.33
Female	22	61.11
No Reply	2	5.56
Age		
21-30	1	2.78
31-40	7	19.44
41-50	18	50.00
51+	9	25.00
No Reply	1	2.78
No of Years Teaching Experience		
1-5	2	5.56
6-10	5	13.89
11-15	12	33.33
15+	14	38.89
No Reply	3	8.33
No of Years Teaching Financial Accounting		
1-5	2	5.56
6-10	5	13.89
11-15	13	36.11
15+	15	41.67
No Reply	1	2.77
Type of Students Taught		
Accounting specialists	15	41.67
Non-specialists	8	22.22
Mix of specialist and non-specialist	6	16.67
Other	6	16.67
No Reply	1	2.77

Note: This table describes the background information of the respondents to the on-line questionnaire survey of lecturers who teach introductory financial accounting.

Table 2 - Financial accounting textbooks recommended in relation to type of student enrolled on course

Textbook	Total	Mostly accounting specialists	Even Mix	Mostly accounting for non- specialists	Other
Atrill & McLaney	4	0	1	3	0
Bebbington et al.	1	1	0	0	0
Berry	1	0	1	0	0
BPP HND	1	1	0	0	0
Britton & Waterston	2	1	1	0	0
Byzantium Workbook	1	0	0	1	0
Cox	1	1	0	0	0
Wood & Sangster	9	5	2	2	0
Gillespie et al.	1	1	0	0	0
Glautier & Underdown	1	0	1	0	0
Hornngren et al.	2	1	1	0	0
Jones	1	0	1	0	0
McLaney & Atrill	2	0	0	1	1
Melville	1	1	0	0	0
Open University B680	1	0	0	0	1
Reid & Myddelton	2	0	0	0	2
Thomas	3	2	0	0	1
Weetman	2	1	0	1	0

Note: For the five respondents who selected 'other', all indicated that they taught introductory financial accounting on MBA courses. Also, one of the respondents who recommended Wood & Sangster failed to indicate the type of student typically enrolled on the course that he/she taught.

Table 3 - Respondents' views about materials additional to the recommended text

Question	No	%
Panel A -In addition to the textbook students are recommended to read ...		
Professional journal articles	20	55.56
Newspaper articles	17	47.22
Other textbooks	17	47.22
Chapters from other textbooks	17	47.22
Academic journal articles	12	33.33
Panel B -Additional reading material is recommended ...		
To supply an alternative perspective	24	66.67
To increase awareness of current issues	22	61.11
To encourage independent learning	19	52.78
To encourage critical thinking skills	19	52.78
Because the textbook is not comprehensive	17	47.22
Panel C -The proportion of the course not covered by the recommended textbook		
0-9%	8	22.22
10-19%	8	22.22
20-29%	9	25.00
30-39%	3	8.33
40-49%	6	16.67
50%+	1	2.78
No Reply	1	2.78

Table 4 - Respondents' perceptions of stakeholder coverage in recommended texts

Panel A Financial accounting textbooks discuss the information needs of ...					
	No	Mean	SD	t-test	p-value
Shareholders	30	3.53	1.01	13.77	0.00
Analyst/Advisers	33	2.85	0.91	11.73	0.00
Managers	32	2.78	0.97	10.33	0.00
Trade Creditors	32	2.59	0.84	10.77	0.00
Government	33	2.36	0.60	12.99	0.00
Customers	32	2.31	0.69	10.72	0.00
Employees	33	2.21	0.55	12.77	0.00
General Public	32	2.16	0.77	8.53	0.00
NGOs	30	1.80	0.89	4.94	0.00
Panel B Financial accounting textbooks should discuss the information needs of ...					
	No	Mean	SD	t-test	p-value
Shareholders	33	4.27	0.80	23.46	0.00
Analyst/Advisers	33	3.73	0.91	17.20	0.00
Managers	33	3.70	0.95	16.28	0.00
Employees	33	3.27	1.10	11.90	0.00
Trade Creditors	32	3.25	1.02	12.53	0.00
Customers	33	3.09	1.10	10.92	0.00
Government	33	3.06	1.00	11.86	0.00
General Public	33	3.06	1.06	11.18	0.00
NGOs	30	2.87	1.22	8.35	0.00

Table 5 - Respondents' perceptions about the content of a financial accounting course

Panel A – A financial accounting course should...					
	No	Mean	SD	t-test	p-value
Develop critical thinking skills	33	4.30	0.77	9.72	0.00
Compare the rules and principles-based approaches	33	4.12	0.65	9.91	0.00
Discuss the wider social context of the subject	34	4.12	0.95	6.89	0.00
Include business ethics	33	3.97	1.02	5.49	0.00
Discuss the historical context of the subject	34	3.77	0.89	5.01	0.00
Panel B - The early stages of a course on financial accounting should ...					
	No	Mean	SD	t-test	p-value
Develop critical thinking skills	34	4.03	1.09	5.52	0.00
Introduce the wider social context of the subject	34	3.85	1.13	4.39	0.00
Compare the rules and principles-based approaches	34	3.77	0.86	5.22	0.00
Introduce the historical context of the subject	34	3.68	1.09	3.61	0.00
Include business ethics	34	3.56	1.13	2.88	0.00

Table 6 Summary of interviewees' profiles

<i>Lecturer</i>	Gender	Age	Years Teaching	Old/New University	Location	Professional Qualification	Recommended Text Author(s)
A	F	41-50	11-15	New	South England	Yes	In-house manual
B	F	41-50	11-15	New	West Scotland	Yes	Black
C	F	41-50	11-15	New	South England	Yes	Britton & Waterston
D	F	31-40	6-10	Old	East Scotland	Yes	Wood & Sangster
E	M	51+	15+	Old	East Scotland	Yes	Weetman
F	F	41-50	15+	Old	North England	Yes	Britton & Waterston
G	M	41-50	11-15	New	East Scotland	Yes	Wood & Sangster
H	M	51+	15+	New	East Scotland	No	Wood & Sangster
I	M	31-40	11-15	Old	West Scotland	Yes	Atrill & McLaney
J	M	41-50	15+	Old	Republic of Ireland	No	Horngren et al.
K	F	31-40	6-10	Old	Northern Ireland	Yes	Thomas

Note: This table shows details of the interviewed lecturers. New university refers to a university formed after 1992. Institutions called 'university' pre-1992 are referred to as 'old' or 'traditional' universities. See Dyson (1995) for a fuller discussion of this. There is a widely held perception that the two types of institution differ in aims and culture.

¹ The authors wish to draw a distinction between what have been broadly categorised as Anglo-American models of capitalism (for example the UK and the USA) and “Rhenish” capitalism (for example, social market Europe and Japan) (Dore, Lazonick & O’Sullivan, 1999, p.102). This distinction is often neglected in extant critiques of accounting and accounting education, which often imply that “capitalism” is a relatively monolithic and homogenous economic structure. While the Anglo-American variant is “commonly regarded as the most individualistic and libertarian of all”, the Rhenish model is less driven by the capital market and exhibits a greater deal of co-operation between capital and labour (Hutton, 1996, p.258; see also, Collison, 2003; Dore et al., 1999). One specific distinction between these models is of particular significance to the arguments developed throughout this paper: that a “key” feature of Anglo-American capitalism is its “preoccupation with maximising shareholder value” (Collison, 2003, p.854). In other words, Anglo-American capitalism institutionalises the maximisation of the interests of one particular constituency in society; it is how accounting textbooks deal with such “highly contestable ideas and values”, and how they are perceived by lecturers, that forms the basis of this paper.

² The primacy accorded to shareholders could be regarded as occurring in spite of the explicit acknowledgement by accounting standard setters of the usefulness of accounting information to a range of stakeholders (see, for example, FASB, 1978). It could be argued that the dominant imperatives of capital markets may be more influential than the normative aspirations of standard setters in this regard.

³ Ideology is used in this paper in accordance with Thompson’s (1990) application of the concept. More specifically, ideology is used in this study in a critical or pejorative sense to refer to ‘meaning in the service of power’. However, whilst this use of the term retains the ‘criterion of negativity’ inherent in a number of contemporary Marxist approaches to ideology, Thompson’s (1990, p. 56) account differs in that it does not imply that ideology need be ‘erroneous or illusory’. Whilst acknowledging that ideology ‘may operate by concealing or masking social relations,’ Thompson (1990, pp. 56–57) notes that these are only ‘contingent possibilities,’ adding: What we are interested in here is not primarily and not initially the truth or falsity of symbolic forms, but rather the ways in which these forms serve, in particular circumstances, to establish and sustain relations of domination.

⁴ This point is also stressed in the sociology of education literature, in particular, in the work of Michael Apple. According to Apple (2004) one must be careful not to view the education process in terms of a simplistic “input-output” model – i.e. where students (the input) become socialized by an ideological curriculum that reflects the interests of dominant groups within society and go on to reproduce those values in varying aspects of their lives (the output). Research in this tradition often speculates on the consequences of the educational process by analysing the *content* of the curriculum alone – i.e. without attending to the views and understanding of the participants in the process. Moreover, according to Apple (2004) such a perspective overlooks a number of pertinent issues; more specifically, it fails to consider the role of contestation and the contingent possibility that students may resist or appropriate the messages they encounter (Apple 2004). For Apple (1995, p.26) the role of contestation and resistance in the cultural sphere suggests that “[not] all aspects of curriculum and teaching are reducible to the interests of a dominant class”. In this sense, in order to maintain hegemony, dominant interests in society must engage in a “continual process of compromise, conflict and active struggle” (Apple, 1995, p.27). However, the very existence of contestation and resistance, according to Apple (1995, p.23) allows for the opportunity to harness or exploit such conflict in order to “win people to the other side”.

⁵ Krueger & Casey (2000) state that interviews are often employed to identify issues that may be explored further in questionnaires, etc. However, they also emphasise that interviews can be used where the “researcher needs information to help shed light on quantitative data already collected” (p.24). This is how the semi-structured interviews were employed in this study.

⁶ Given the constraints imposed by the questionnaire format, respondents were asked to check off items from a list which they deemed to be a desirable component of an ideal accounting course. In this respect, respondents could check off more than one item. There are inherent limitations to this approach, insofar as respondents may check off a number of items that might exceed the time constraints of the course. An alternative approach could have been to give respondents the opportunity to select items, while also noting topics on their course which they were willing to decrease in coverage in order to accommodate new material. However, the aim of this part of the questionnaire was to get a picture of some of the issues respondents would like to see on an “ideal” course.

⁷ Of the 280 recipients of the survey, 110 were female and 170 male. Therefore, the gender profile of respondents is not representative of the sample. While this is clearly a limitation to the present study, Bryman and Bell (2003) suggest that when other research methods are also employed (as is the case with the present study) then non-response bias is less significant.

⁸ Of course it is important to emphasise that newspaper clippings and professional magazines may not offer an alternative perspective to the worldview offered in the textbook. The business media typically operates within the dominant paradigm, and the specialist accountancy press is unlikely to offer serious scrutiny of conventional values or even of vested interests within the “accountancy industry”. The specialised accounting press comprises organs which are largely dependent on advertising, or which are essentially house magazines of professional bodies.

⁹ We use the term critical thinking to imply, in the words of Popkewitz & Fendler (1999, p.46), “how to express and critique the logic of arguments that underpin our everyday activity”. In this respect, in order to critique, or form an opinion about, the assumptions which underpin accounting theory, one would expect students to be exposed to alternative/competing theories.

¹⁰ Thus, the relationship between the lecturer and their recommended textbook was not in one direction. The lecturers selected a textbook which presumably accorded with their view of financial accounting but the text also influenced these views to some extent. This point would of course apply to questionnaire respondents as well as to interviewees. Arguably then, a restricted consideration of stakeholders in a text could result in a similar perception by a lecturer who has adopted it.

¹¹ Such empathy should not of course be regarded as necessarily problematic: students are as entitled as anyone else to their normative position. It may however be precisely because of a dominant discourse that the scope for a more reflective and critical approach to degree studies is constrained (see Collison, 2003).