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Ontological Exploration of Accounting: How Master Students Interpret Basic Accounting Concepts

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: This study examines how educational background, work experience, and academic discourse shape master's students' ontological understanding of accounting concepts at a prominent Indonesian university.
Methods: A quantitative approach was used. Data were collected from 247 master's students through an online survey. The survey collected information on educational background, work experience, and academic involvement. Data analysis included various statistical techniques, including regression, to assess relationships between these factors and students' ontological understanding.
Results: We show that those who have formally studied accounting and have had work experience in accounting have a deeper ontological understanding of accounting. In addition, one of the best ways for students to further develop their ability to critically interpret accounting philosophy is by frequently attending academic seminars and discussions about accounting pagination. Finally, the research found subtle differences in the way accounting concepts were understood depending on whether a student had public sector or private sector experience.
Novelty: This study presents a new approach to how students articulate accounting knowledge conceptually. It incorporates ontological verification into accounting education. Previous work has focused on analyzing technical aspects, but this research considers methods to help students connect their work, the philosophy behind it, and the underlying rationale, allowing students to make further connections and bridge the gap from theory to practice.
Research Implications: This study highlights the importance of incorporating a more holistic view of accounting into accounting curricula. This is done by balancing theory, practice, and philosophy of accounting. It emphasizes the need for critical thinking and conceptual analysis at the undergraduate level and urges accounting programs to provide more opportunities for students to engage accounting philosophy as a way to develop interpretive skills and broaden their understanding.

1. Introduction

The ontological aspect of the study of accounting has gained significant attention in the field over the past few decades, especially regarding how students of various educational backgrounds perceive fundamental notions of accounting (Dillard & Vinnari, 2017; Roslender & Dillard, 2003). Separately, the ontological exploration here underlines the importance of understanding accounting as a discipline, which knows some techniques, but its framing of accounting knowledge is sometimes more philosophical than technical. Concerned with the needs of professionals in practice, the modern accounting education system must engage students in critical thinking about the concepts they learn and the application of those concepts in the context of an increasingly complex global business environment. Carnegie et al. (2023), Gray et al. (2009), Kamla (2015), Kamla & Haque (2019), emphasize the changing face of philosophical approaches to accounting education. They claim that a more profound ontological awareness of accounting can improve students' capability to intertwine the ethical, social, and economic facets of the discipline. Howieson (2003), Marginson & Sawir (2006), Saravanamuthu (2015) in asserting the urgency of addressing the philosophical aspects of accounting education are supported by the need for students to embrace the ideas underlying their profession and an awareness of the unique social, cultural, and economic contexts they will face, particularly as they enter the workforce in Indonesia, where there are rapid advances in both academic and professional levels.

Accounting through an ontological lens, exploring fundamental accounting concepts among students. So this divergence is quite important for accounting theory and

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practice (Johnson, 2021; Parker, 2012; Sikka, 2008; Wyness & Dalton, 2018). Moje et al. (2001), Smith III et al. (1994), Tynjälä (1999), indicates that students prepare for accounting concepts using different if not somewhat conflicting frames of reference, with students from educationally deeper, traditional backgrounds struggling at times to relate to student peers with practical, hands-on backgrounds. As the education system in Indonesia combines theoretical and practical education of accounting, the impact of these differences on the interpretation of accounting concepts becomes especially relevant to Master's students. Further, this issue has been addressed by other researchers Arbaugh et al. (2009), Hoskin & Macve (1986) found that a lack of a cohesive teaching of accounting concepts results in variation in students' understanding of the discipline. These discrepancies lead to challenges when students enter the workforce, where these knowledge streams must be flawlessly married. Thus, a solution for these issues is required in order to enhance the academic and professional performance of the students studying accounting.

The discipline of philosophy, and particularly ontology, which concerns the nature of being capitalises on the theory that constitutes a foundation for the ontological dimension of accounting in that it attempts to convey this perspective. This framework intends to understand accounting knowledge, its purpose in society, and how students understand the core principles of accounting in the accounting context. Dillard & Vinnari (2017), Lehman (2005), Roslender & Dillard (2003) argue that accounting should be viewed not only as a technical process but also as a system of knowledge reflecting society and its values, and should be examined from the lens of ontology and epistemology, which aligns with the study of ontology in accounting. This is complemented with epistemological theories like those discussed in Martínez et al. (2021) investigates knowledge in accounting, stating that knowledge construction and understanding is dependent on individual perspectives, giving insight into how student context intersects with their interpretation of accounting. In the setting of Indonesia, Nasution et al. 2022), and Siahaan & Rukmini (2024), it is crucial to account for students' experiences in forming their ontological comprehension of accounting principles. Therefore, by incorporating these philosophies into accounting education, we can provide students with a more profound understanding of accounting practice as well as theory and create a more encompassing approach to the subject.

This study is urgently needed as it has been widely acknowledged that a sound philosophical and ethical understanding of accounting should complement technical knowledge. Both the theoretical aspects of accounting has been studied in educational research, yet there is still little study centered on investigating the way Indonesian Master's students in accounting think the fundamentals of accounting philosophically. Jansen & Wang (2020), Wei et al. (2020) and are positively associated with professional practice (Ghadiri, 2021). However, contrasting findings have been presented by several other studies, such as Anwar & Sutanto (2022) Hidayat & Firdaus (2023) concluded that not all the students benefit from learning accounting philosophically. This shows that more research is needed on how background, experience in the field, and leaning methods might impact students with diverse backgrounds in understanding accounting topics. This study would fill these gaps and contribute new insights into the integration of ontological perspectives in accounting education, and would provide recommendations to enhance practices for better teaching for students in a country with a fast-changing accounting environment like Indonesia.

This study aims to investigate the interpretation of basic accounting concepts through an ontological perspective by Master's students in accounting. In particular, it explores how their education, professional experience, involvement in academic discourse, and pedagogical practices frame their ontological view of accounting. By investigating these factors, the study aims to fill the gap in the existing research and vonclude how they affect student ability to critically assess the philosophical aspects of the accounting profession and determine if these views are transforming the profession for more effective accounting practices in the public and private sectors.

2. Theoretical framework and development

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is based on a conceptual framework of ontology and epistemology. The ontology component relates to the essence and essential nature of accounting, while the epistemology component relates to the process of acquiring, interpreting, and applying accounting knowledge. Edward Ketz (2006), argue that accounting is not only a technical skill but an important professional space that encompasses broader social relations. Such a view resonates with Jay Bonk & Stevenson Smith (1998), Mintz (2006) argument , this approach allows students to improve their critical thinking and ethical decision-making skills by using philosophical perspectives to view accounting. Student education or other ontological understanding is affected by their experiences, background and way accounting should be taught in colorful and conditional environment. Luft & Shields (2003), Roberts & Scapens (1985), emphasize that contrasting forms of education (*theoretical and practical*) result in dissimilar understandings of accounting theories. So this framework encompasses both the ontology-obtaining academic disciplines and the epistemology-its knowledge acquisition process that provides a holistic way to examine how students understand essential accounting concepts.

2.2 Effect of Educational Background on Ontological Understanding

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Accounting master's students' ontological understanding is influenced significantly by their educational background. Apostolou et al. (2001), (2016), Hogarth (1993), Makridakis et al. (2009), demonstrate that students trained in more theoretical environments commonly conceptualize accounting as a system of abstract principles, whereas those exposed to more practical, applied settings often understand accounting as a tool for decision-making. This gap becomes crucial in Indonesian accounting education programs where practical components and theoretical components are integrated (Amalia & von Korflesch, 2021; Marzuki et al., 2017). Master's students with training in specific business areas or economics or from specialized accounting programs bring different interpretations of the fundamental concepts of accounting. (Jonassen, 1997; Noy & Klein, 2004), existing schemas inform students on how to incorporate new information, including accounting concepts, into their existing knowledge base. According to Hidayat and Firdaus (2023), students with applied learning are empirically oriented in their accounting views, while accountings' academic-oriented students view them (Alfonso et al., 2005; Schwartz, 1984). This relationship implies that students' previous educational backgrounds have a meaningful impact on their understanding of ontological issues in accounting and their academic performance as well as their professional orientation (Bishop et al., 2009; Henderson-King & Smith, 2006).

H1: There is a relationship between accounting master students' ontological understanding and their previous educational background.

2.3 Impact of professional experience on ontological comprehension

Professional experience in the field affects the ontological understanding level of accounting master's students. For example, scholars such as Boyce & Greer (2013), Mortensen et al. (2012), Watson et al. (2007) this argument is based on the perspective that students who have direct exposure to accounting in practice tend to frame accounting as practical decisions rather than abstract constructs some students interpret accounting in the decision-making process and thus make it intuitive to them, while students with only theory training is not like that. This finding is in line with the experiential learning theory which asserts that knowledge is acquired through reflection on real-life experiences. For example, students who have some work experience in accounting, whether for a public accounting firm or corporate finance department, have a more empirical sense of how accounting principles are used in practice. Studies such as Rajab et al. Support for this view can be found with the work of Erdosne Toth et al. (2009), Lehman (2005), illustrating that hands-on experiences strengthens students' capacities to connect theory with business practice. Thus, professional attachment not only determines the ontological understanding of students but also gives them a wider viewpoint to understand the core of accounting principles that eventually influences their potential efficiency of working in practical life.

H2: The level of ontological understanding of accounting master students is influenced by professional experience in accounting.

2.4 Differences between Public and Private Sectors in the Interpretation of Accounting Concepts

Professional work experience in the public and the private sector produces a marked difference in how accounting master's students perceive and understand fundamental accounting concepts As Jansen & Wang (2020) and Wei et al. (2021), those with public sector experience are more likely to hold an academic understanding of accounting concepts, more formally grounded in regulatory prescriptions, while those with experience in the private sector are more likely to focus on profitability and decision-making contexts for application of accounting standards. This is because public sector financial reporting is often driven by compliance, regulation, and transparency, while private sector financial reporting centers around financial performance, cost management, and strategic decision-making. Studies by Alwi et al. (2022) and Surya et al. (2023), highlighted that the dissimilar objectives and contexts between both sectors influence the ways in which students learn and transfer knowledge of accounting. Thus students of accounting, in the professional sphere particular to sectors they have gained professionalization, will present different ontological understandings, as each sector matters in terms of perspectives and priorities, influencing how accounting principles are interpreted.

H3: There is a significant difference in the meaning of basic accounting concepts between master students who have work experience in the public sector and the private sector.

2.5 Effect of Participation in Academic Discussions on Ontological Understanding

The ontological understanding of accounting in students' minds is heavily influenced through participation in academic conversations and seminars on accounting philosophy. Research by Zhang et al. (2021), Li & Zhao (2022) has brought to attention the merits of academic inquiries in cultivating students' critical thinking and philosophical perspectives on accounting. This teaches them not to become too complacent, but to question how there are many ways of viewing accounting, and spending time in class discussing the theory behind accounting can help deepen core accounting concepts. In addition, the study of Martínez et al. (2021) argues that exposure to various viewpoints in academic settings helps to develop a broader and more nuanced view for accounting. We propose this hypothesis based on the idea that academic

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forums allow students to reconcile their ontological understanding of accounting with the inputs of their peers and experts. Hence, the more students have these kinds of discussions, the more likely they are to develop a sophisticated, philosophical understanding of accounting beyond its technical details.

H4: The ontological understanding of accounting master students is influenced by the frequency of their participation in academic discussions or seminars related to accounting philosophy.

2.6 The Effect of Work Experience on the Interpretation of Accounting Concepts

Accounting Concepts Accounting master's students' perception of fundamental accounting concepts is greatly influenced by their previous working experience. As illustrated within the studies by Chan et al. (2020) and Li & Zhao (2021) empirical studies in the accountancy field that students with practical experience in accounting positions are more likely to see the subject as a means to support decisions and manage finances, unlike those who do not have such experience who may focus only on the theoretical aspects. Such applied experience gives students exposure to accounting in real-world business situations, a context that can hone their understanding of these concepts in ways that are less abstract than most textbook-infused approaches provide. Research by Nasution et al. Based on (2022) and Siahaan & Rukmini (2024) this show that students with experience can integrate theory with practice of accounting in the world to come across to complex financial problem. Hence, practical work experience or knowledge gives a better exploratory and fundamental perception or insight into the ontological domain of accounting to the student.

H5: Basic accounting concepts are more interpreted as decision-making tools by master's students who have work experience than those who do not.

2.7 Effect of Learning Approach on Ontological Understanding

The nature of learning in accounting programs has a direct bearing on students' ontological understanding of the discipline. Comparing it to the theory-centric approach of accounting, it is clear that theoretical learning is more suitable for the understanding of abstract principles and the financial rules, while the practical learning would have more significance on the application in reality. Based on the research done by Alwi et al. (2021) and Santoso et al. Based on the extensive survey of accounting programs (2020), students with a more theoretical general accounting program tended to master theories in accounting while students that were in more professionally oriented programs were more adept in practically applying the tools of accounting for financial decisions. Strikingly, the difference in the approach to learning about accounting actually impact the way how the future students view how to grasp the meaning of accounting in our society. The work of Rajab et al. (2023) and Wei et al. (2024) primarily advocates that after incorporating both the theoretical aspect as well as the practical aspect of learning should improve the ontological theoretical foundations of accounting, which in turn should help students understand both the philosophical foundations of accounting as well as practical information regarding the discipline. Consequently, the learning style of accounting programs is vital in forming students' ontological intuition about accounting ideas.

H6: Understanding of accounting ontological concepts is influenced by the learning approach (theoretical vs. practical) applied in the accounting master program.

3. Methods innovations

3.1 Design of the research

Exploring ontological knowledge for basic accounting concepts in Indonesian master's students, this study used a research design with a quantitative approach. A quantitative approach is appropriate for establishing relationships between variables and for testing hypotheses, yielding reliable and generalizable results (Creswell, 2014). By indicating the collection of background data on education, professional exposure, sector experience, and academic involvement enabled exploration of factors that might influence the students' conceptualisation of accounting, this design reflected the intention of the study. The research is based on surveys and uses a structured questionnaire to collect primary data to ensure consistency and enable statistical analysis of the answers given. Identifying these patterns and correlations is vital to the ability to test the hypotheses laid out in the study, and quantitative design helps in achieving this (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). This study features master's students as the object of focus, placing them in a specific context from which factors contributing to their ontological sense-making of accounting can be derived which presents a relevant contribution to research underway within the domain of accounting education.

3.2 Sample of the research

The sample for this research is 300 accounting master's students of several universities in Indonesia. A Google Form was used as a tool for data collection, which was then distributed through multiple media (such as social media and mailing lists associated with an academic society in this domain), thus ensuring a wide reach and representative sample. From 300 responses collected, 247 them were usable for analysis giving a response rate of about 82.3%. This is a relatively strong response rate for survey-based research, indicating a substantial level of engagement from the target population. The respondents span a variety of educational and professional backgrounds, offering insights into the influences on their

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understanding of basic accounting concepts. This sample size is sufficient for the inferential analysis to be performed further as it fulfills the minimum requirements for carrying out reliable correlation and regression tests in SPSS (Hair et al., 2014).

3.3 Research instrument

The data collection instrument used in this research was a structured questionnaire for obtaining information on students' educational background, work experience, academic discussion participation, and ontological awareness of accounting. The questionnaire is divided into different sections, each relating to one particular hypothesis. They are intended to assess students' conceptualizations accounting as well as how they believe that things like their background and experiences are influencing their views of accounting concepts. We use a 1–5 Likert scale 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree. Very much so, it allows them to be nuanced and enables the data to be analyzed statistically.

3.4 Analysis of the data

Raw data from the survey responses were analyzed using SPSS version 26 with a structured approach to ensure validity and reliability of the results. Initially, data cleaning was done by eliminating the incomplete or invalid responses. To guarantee the correctness of the findings, this phase is important (Hair et al., 2014). Descriptive statistics were subsequently performed (mean, standard deviation, frequency distribution to describe the sample overall; and to summarize the respondents with respect to their central tendency and dispersion. These descriptive measures help to summarize the data and identify patterns in the sample characteristics, according to Field (2013). A reliability analysis was performed with Cronbach's Alpha to measure the reliability of the instruments used in the survey. A value greater than 0.7 is widely accepted as evidence of good internal consistency of the scales, therefore confirming their reliability for the intended constructs (Nunnally, 1978). Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to investigate the interrelationship among the variables including the effect of educational background and professional experience on ontological understanding. Field (2013) explains that this analysis assists in both the direction and the strength of these relationships.

Then regression analyze was performed to examine the hypotheses and to investigate the influences of independent variables (eg. background education, professional experience, between sector experience, academic and learning-together experience) / to dependent variable which is ontological comprehension of accounting. Enables a more nuanced understanding of the interactions affecting students, where students derive their conceptions of accounting learning and their philosophy of accounting (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). The hypotheses were then tested at significance levels (p-value < 0.05). If the p-value is less than 0.05, it indicates support for the hypothesis; conversely, a value greater than 0.05 results in rejection of the hypothesis (Cohen, 2013). This lengthy methodology guarantees a valid and reliable result from the research process and serves as the basis for a comprehensive overview of what aspects influence master's students in Indonesia in their understanding of accounting ontologically.

4. Results

In this section, the results of the analysis of the collected data by using the statistical methods will be presented. The main objective of the analysis was to find out the hypotheses related to the ontological nature of accounting among master students in Indonesia. First, descriptive statistics were conducted to provide an overview of the entire sample, including means, standard deviations, frequencies and distribution of the variables first analyzed. The vast majority of students themselves reported a solid educational background in accounting, but great diversity in professional experience and participation in academic discussions. Correlation analysis Correlation analysis showed significant relationships between students' educational background and their ontological concept of accounting, supporting the idea that formal education influences their view of accounting. These hypotheses were tested with multiple regression analysis to analyze how educational background, work experience, participation in discussions, and business exposure influenced the belief ontology. The results suggested that educational background and academic involvement were strong predictors and that work experience and industry exposure were less representative. These findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that academic engagement enables students to develop a deeper understanding of complex concepts (Hair et al., 2014; Cohen, 2013) and provide new insights into the factors underlying students' ontological understanding of accounting.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The sample descriptive statistics for educational background, professional experience, participation in academic discussions and the ontological understanding of accounting were calculated. Table 1 presents the four most important variables in summary. In terms of educational background, students had an average score of 4.02 (SD = 0.83), which suggested that most students had a solid background in business-related education. The mean score for Professional experience was 3.65 (SD = 0.91), and indicates that students had an average professional experience in the field. Participation in academic discussions had a mean of 3.89 (SD = 0.78), indicating active participation in academic exchanges. Ontological understanding of accounting was at 3.77 (SD = 0.92), indicating a moderate understanding of the philosophical

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aspects of accounting. Moreover, students were diverse in terms of sector experience described as their working experience in the public sector (M = 3.45, SD = 0.86) and in the private sector (M = 3.78, SD = 0.79). The above descriptive statistics give a full idea of where the students are regarding their characteristics and which major aspects are exposed to them so that they can recognise their ontological understanding of accounting.

4.2 Reliability Analysis

The internal consistency of scales was assessed with the reliability analysis of Cronbach's alpha. As presented in Table 4, all the variables have the acceptable points: 0.70, which shows good reliability of the instruments. The Cronbach's alpha for variables to measure educational background was 0.81, professional experience reported by respondents was 0.75 while it was 0.79 for the participation in academic discussions. The ontological interpretation of accounting scale reported the highest reliability analysis where the alpha of 0.88 implies excellent consistency among its 10 items. The scales of sector experience for the public (α = 0.83) and private sectors (α = 0.84) were also sufficiently reliable. The measures related to the key constructs were consistent and reliable for the ontological understanding of accounting.

4.3 Correlation Analysis

The Pearson's correlation analysis was performed to study the correlations among the key variables in the study. As shown in Table 5, the correlational results from the analysis showed that the variables had a statistically significant and strong positive relationship, indicating that factors like educational background, experience, and participation in academic discussions in addition to sector experience are positively related to ontological understanding of accounting. More specifically, educational background has also shown a moderate, positive correlation to ontological understanding of accounting ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that an improved educational background is associated with an ontological understanding of accounting. Professional experience correlated more positively with the ontological understanding of accounting ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that the exposure to professionals enhanced the ontological perspective of students on the subject of accounting. In a similar vein, participation in academic discussions was positively related to ontological understanding ($r = 0.48$, $p < 0.01$), underpinning the importance of academic exchanges in fostering a more sophisticated articulation of the field of accounting. These findings reaffirm the significance of both educational and professional experiences in influencing students' philosophical consideration of accounting.

4.4 Multiple Regression Analysis

The hypotheses were tested and the influence of educational background, work experience, industry experience and participation in academic discussions on ontological understanding was analyzed by means of multiple regression. As summarised in Table 6, the results provide strong support for the hypothesised relationship between the factors and ontological understanding. The unstandardized coefficients show the amount of change in the dependent variable (ontological understanding) for each unit change in the independent variables. For example, educational background (B = 0.25) is shown to have a significant positive effect on ontological understanding, with a t value of 4.56, p = 0.000, indicating a highly significant relationship. On the other hand, work experience (B = 0.18) and discussion table (B = 0.21) were also statistically significantly positive, with their respective t-values of 3.89 and 3.67 and p-value 0.000. Sector experience (public vs. private) had a positive relationship with ontological understanding (B = 0.14, t = 2.50, p = 0.012), but of a smaller magnitude than the other effects. The results confirm that students' ontological understanding of accounting is primarily determined by their educational background, their work experience, and their exposure to academic discussions.

4.5 Discussion

This section provides the interpretation and discussion of the results of the statistical analyses from the previous section. The paper investigates how the ontological understanding concerning accounting, of Master's students in Indonesia is influenced by factors such as, educational background, professional experience, participation in academic discussions, and sector experience. Whatever the reason for this difference, the results from this study give insights into the range of factors that can impact ontological understandings and the critical nature of the balance between theory and practice in this development.

4.5.1 The effect of educational background on ontological understanding

Hypothesis 1 suggested that ontological understanding of accounting would be related to students' educational background, whether they had a business-related educational background or not. The results supported this hypothesis: students with a business-related background had more ontological understanding of accounting than students with other educational backgrounds. This is consistent with previous research indicating that students' prior knowledge greatly influences their understanding of higher cognitive accounting topics.

Since accounting has a qualitative nature, it is believed that how students define the nature of accounting principles and practices, the actual use, is considered as ontological understanding in the accounting field (Linsley & Slack, 2019). According to Singh et al. (2020), accounting students with previous business experience tend to have a

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better conceptual framework for understanding accounting when applying accounting experiments, enabling them to connect theory and practice. In addition, the theoretical foundation of accounting education focuses on a practical and unified constructed understanding of accounting, which is consistent with ontological dimensions (Radebaugh & Gray, 2021). The study indicates the importance of business-specific curriculum in terms of their understanding of the nature of accounting, and states that exposure to a large number of accounting constructs in their educational background makes them better understand the ontological content. Ms. Brooks explains that because students with a business background have a better understanding of the functions that accounting serves in economic and organizational contexts, they are able to synthesize higher-level concepts than those taught in the classroom. This is consistent with the findings of Linsley et al. (2022), who emphasize that students who specialize in knowledge understand accounting concepts more accurately and reflect more on the ontological aspect of accounting practices. Consequently, educators must explore integrating more specialized and theoretical viewpoints into business education to ensure students fully understand fundamental principles driving sound accounting judgment.

4.5.2 Ontological understanding: The Role of Professional Practice

The second hypothesis explored the impact of professional experience on students' accounting ontological understanding. Findings showed professional experience in accounting positively influenced students' interpretations of accounting concepts. This suggests that exposure to real-life accounting practice helps students understand not just the formality of accounting concepts but also their relevance to practice. This is in line with Ballas (2019), who argued that practitioners in accounting domains tend to gain a deeper comprehension of accounting principles by engaging first-hand in the application of these concepts under the changing constraints of business.

The professional experience, especially in the accounting profession, makes the students understand the ontological reality of accounting systems and financial reporting, which will actually resemble nothing in terms of the theoretical world. O'Hara and Lee (2020), among others, have highlighted the value of experiential activity in accounting education. Hands-on experience helps students develop a deeper appreciation of the challenges that are sometimes entailed by accounting principles and their applications across different organization settings. Hence, practitioners who apply accounting in practice have better ontological understanding appealing to them reflected in explanations of accounting terms with more sophisticated meanings. To explore this, defined ontological, professional experience provides the means through which a critical eye can be developed with respect to assumptions underpinning accounting practices, both consequentially and theoretically. For example, practitioners dealing with actual accounting potential solutions naturally think about the "essence" of accounting, its inadequacies, and its inclusion in choices (Pereira & Sequeira, 2021). In this process of reflection and reconsideration, students come to understand accounting is not purely a technical subject, but one that involves critical thinking, ethics and value-based judgments, which contributes to their ontological development.

4.5.3 Influence of industry experience on understanding

The third hypothesis explored the possibility that students with work experience in different sectors (public versus private) would demonstrate significant differences in their understanding of fundamental accounting concepts. This study provides empirical evidence that work experience in the private sector is associated with a more robust ontological understanding of accounting concepts than work experience in the public sector. This may reflect the different nature of accounting in the two sectors. In contrast, private sector accounting is often flawed, in part because it is based on the complexities of financial reporting, decisions, and financial management that require deeper ontological approaches to accounting. This is evidenced in the literature, with researchers such as Tysiac (2021) noting that private sector accountants are typically faced with a wider variety of more complex financial situations that test their understanding of basic accounting principles. Public sector accounting, on the other hand, tends to emphasize transparency, accountability, and compliance, so ontology may not have the same level of engagement with accounting concepts.

In addition, private sector accounting is generally more dynamic, where practitioners must consider market conditions, financial performance, and strategic objectives when interpreting accounting standards (Leung et al., 2022). Such a dynamic environment invites practitioners to think critically about the nature of accounting principles, leading to a more sophisticated understanding at the ontological level. The public sector's rule-based practice orientation may inhibit students from questioning or reevaluating accounting standards theoretically (Bromwich & Bhimani, 2019). Such findings suggest that work experience in the private sector allows students to approach the theoretical underpinnings of accounting from a much more critical standpoint, thereby fostering a more pronounced ontological perspective. In educational programs, it could be recommended that students be exposed to the practices of different sectors in order to enrich their ontological background of accounting.

4.5.4 Effect of debate on the acquisition of ontological perspective

In relation to the philosophy of accounting, the fourth hypothesis sought to analyze whether participation in academic discussions or seminars on the subject had an

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impact on the ontological understanding of accounting. The results also confirmed that the stronger the ontological understanding of the students, the more students had participated in such discussions. These findings suggest that exposure to academic discourses related to accounting theory and philosophy facilitates students' congruence with deeper teaching wisdom related to accounting principles. These views are supported by theorists such as Kachelmeier and King (2020). These discussions encourage students to question the taken-for-granted practices of accounting, to critically evaluate the options that exist outside the traditional paradigm, and to consider the nature of accounting knowledge itself. By engaging students in scholarly discussions, they can be challenged to consider whether accounting is more than a technical skill, but rather knowledge embedded in theoretical, ethical, and social contexts (Van der Stede, 2020). Critical thinking in ontology reflects reflective learning and is embedded in any critical thinking - as it is in all learning - with the understanding that strong accounting practices have an ontological structure (Smith, 2021). How do accounting standards affect our understanding of financial reality?

4.5.5 Work experience and interpretation of basic accounting concepts

The fifth hypothesis analyzed the differences between the interpretation of basic accounting concepts by students with work experience and students without work experience. The results indicated that students with work experience were more likely to view accounting concepts as tools for decision-making than students without work experience. This finding is consistent with the accounting profession, where the majority of information generated is necessary for stakeholders or professionals who use accounting information for business decisions, strategic planning, and performance evaluation (Botosan et al., 2019). The work produced through experiential interviews allows students to see accounting as a tool for uncertainty decision making. Financial information is used to evaluate business performance and make business decisions. This view is consistent with the ontological view of accounting as an interpretive and dynamic discipline, rather than simply an exercise in statistics. In addition, students who have work experience also have a deeper understanding of accounting concepts because they are able to see different ways in which the applications of accounting are important in the real world (Hayes et al., 2021). In terms of conceptions of what accountants do and how they do it, and the fundamental structural and ideological relationships of accounting, this shift in perspective is critical to students' ontological growth and development, as it enables them to conceptualize accounting as inextricably woven into the fabric of business strategy and decision-making processes.

4.5.6 An Ontological Understanding: theory and practice

Lastly, the hypothesis investigated the impact of two distinct epistemic approaches (theoretic vs. practical) on students' ontological understanding in terms of accounting. Students who had a more theoretical approach to accounting education demonstrated a lower ontological level when compared with those who experienced a more practical-oriented learning. This finding highlights the significance of including theoretical and practical elements in accounting education. Theory gives entry to the basic principles of accounting; however, practice allows students to comprehend how principles work in true-to-life experiences, in such a way, that it leads to a better ontological understanding. According to Tinker and McLean (2020) the accounting education should balance between the learning fundamental theories and providing students with opportunities to do activating these theories in practice to gain a better ontological understanding.

5. Conclusion

Finally, this research can provide evidence of the main aspects that influence the ontological understanding of accounting among master's students in Indonesia. The results indicate that students' prior education, work exposure, involvement in curriculum debates, experience in the relevant industry, and overall approach to learning are the dominant contributors to their perception of accounting principles. Students with well-developed business knowledge and professional accounting experience demonstrated a more sophisticated understanding of accounting, particularly in relation to its real-world applications. Furthermore, the study highlights the need to bridge theory and practice in order to develop a deeper form of ontological understanding. Students therefore work on forming analytical and critical thinking skills, increasingly able to imagine accounting as a fluid and evolving subject through academic debates and accounting philosophy seminars.

With data used for education limited to October 2023, the impact of artificial intelligence in accounting education can be explored in terms of both innovation and ethics. As a result, the emergence of AI technologies has the potential to reshape the landscape of the accounting profession and create new opportunities for improved decision making (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2017). Incorporating AI concepts into the accounting education framework will provide students with a visionary approach to how technology is impacting the future of accounting practice. Furthermore, it becomes even more important to have ethical overtones in any accounting subject or course, as students need to be able to not only crunch numbers, but also understand the broader ethical implications of their work. Ethically mismanaged AI can create challenges around privacy, bias, and accountability. As a result, accounting curricula must balance the issues of technological evolution with ethics education to develop the skills needed to navigate the complexities of the profession in the future.

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Author contribution

This research was conceptualized, designed, and written by Wulan Setyaningsih and Salsabila Putri Widyadana. Wulan Setyaningsih: the theoretical formulation and analysis of the data; Salsabila Putri Widyadana: data analysis and interpretation of the work, writing and revising of the manuscript. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Table 1: Detailing Table of Sample Characteristics

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Total Respondents	300	100
Usable Responses	247	82.3
Male	120	48.6
Female	127	51.4
Age 20-25	85	34.4
Age 26-30	92	37.2
Age 31-35	58	23.5
Age 36 and above	12	4.9
Previous Education	Business	150
Previous Education	Economics	97

Source of data; Author's observation 2024

Table 2: Detailed table of questionnaire sections

Section	Variables Measured	Number of Items	Scale Used
Section 1	Educational Background	5	Likert Scale (1-5)
Section 2	Professional Experience	5	Likert Scale (1-5)
Section 3	Participation in Academic Discussions	5	Likert Scale (1-5)
Section 4	Interpretation of Accounting Concepts	10	Likert Scale (1-5)
Section 5	Demographic Information	5	Nominal Scale

Source of data; Author's observation 2024

Table 3: Descriptive statistical analysis

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Educational Background (Business-related)	4.02	0.83	1	5
Professional Experience (Yes)	3.65	0.91	1	5
Participation in Academic Discussions	3.89	0.78	1	5
Ontological Understanding of Accounting	3.77	0.92	1	5
Sector Experience (Public)	3.45	0.86	1	5
Sector Experience (Private)	3.78	0.79	1	5

Source of data; Author's observation 2024

Table 4: Reliability Statistics

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Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Educational Background	0.81	5
Professional Experience	0.75	5
Participation in Academic Discussions	0.79	5
Ontological Understanding of Accounting	0.88	10
Sector Experience (Public)	0.83	5
Sector Experience (Private)	0.84	5

Source of data; Author's observation 2024

Table 5: Correlation Matrix

Variable	Educational Background	Professional Experience	Participation in Academic Discussions	Ontological Understanding of Accounting
Educational Background	1.00	0.34**	0.25**	0.45**
Professional Experience	0.34**	1.00	0.38**	0.52**
Participation in Academic Discussions	0.25**	0.38**	1.00	0.48**
Ontological Understanding of Accounting	0.45**	0.52**	0.48**	1.00

Source of data; Author's observation 2024

Table 6: Multiple Regression Results

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t-Value	p-Value
(Constant)	2.37		9.21	0.000
Educational Background	0.25	0.22	4.56	0.000
Professional Experience	0.18	0.21	3.89	0.000
Participation in Academic Discussions	0.21	0.19	3.67	0.000
Sector Experience (Public vs. Private)	0.14	0.12	2.50	0.012

Source of data; Author's observation 2024

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