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Forensic accounting in higher education in the Republic of Serbia: assessing students' needs for the introduction and design of educational programs in the field

Forenzičko računovodstvo u visokoškolskom obrazovanju u Republici Srbiji: procena potreba studenata za uvođenjem i oblikovanjem nastavnih programa iz ove oblasti

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Abstract

The study explores the level of awareness, self-assessed knowledge, and attitudes of management and IT students at the University of Belgrade regarding forensic accounting and the role of education in promoting this increasingly relevant and important discipline. The research was conducted using a structured questionnaire with 18 items on a sample of 142 students. The results were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods, as well as latent class analysis, in order to identify patterns of knowledge and attitudes among respondents based on their gender, study program, and year of study. Findings indicate that, although most students are generally aware of the existence of forensic accounting, only a small percentage consider themselves sufficiently knowledgeable, while exposure to this topic through formal education remains limited. Students generally perceive forensic accounting as an attractive and useful field for their professional development. They favor interactive and practical teaching methods, particularly those focused on modern, technology-oriented approaches to fraud detection. Latent class analysis segmented the respondents into two distinct groups based on their attitudes toward forensic accounting. Students in higher years of study were more likely to belong to the class with a stronger affinity for this discipline, while gender and study program had no significant impact on class membership.
Keywords: *forensic accounting, higher education, educational program, assessment*

Sažetak

Studija istražuje nivo informisanosti, samoevaluiranog znanja i stavova studenata menadžmenta i informatike Univerziteta u Beogradu u vezi sa forenzičkim računovodstvom i instrumentalizacijom edukacije u pogledu ove sve više aktuelne i značajne discipline. Istraživanje je sprovedeno, koristeći strukturirani upitnik sa 18 pitanja, na uzorku od 142 studenta, pri čemu su njegovi rezultati analizirani primenom deskriptivne i inferencijalne statističke metode, kao i analize latentnih klasa, kako bi se identifikovali obrasci znanja i stavova među ispitanicima, u odnosu na njihov pol, studijski program i godinu studija. Rezultati ukazuju da, iako većina studenata ima osnovnu svest o postojanju forenzičkog računovodstva, samo niži procenat smatra da poseduje potrebno znanje, dok je izloženost sludenata kroz formalno obrazovanje o ovoj temi ograničena. Studenti generalno vide forenzičko računovodstvo kao atraktivnu i korisnu oblast za njihov profesionalni razvoj, favorizuju interaktivne i praktične metode nastave, kao i teme koje su vezane za savremene, tehnološki orijentisane metode detekcije prevara. Kroz analizu latentnih klasa segmentisane su dve grupe studenata u odnosu na njihove stavove prema ovoj oblasti, pri čemu su studenti viših godina studija u većoj meri svrstavani u klasu sa izraženijim afinitetom ka ovoj disciplini, dok pol i studijski program studenata nisu imali uticaj na klasu u koju su oni uvršćeni.
Ključne reči: *forenzičko računovodstvo, visoko obrazovanje, obrazovni programi, ocena*

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1. Introduction

Fraud can be defined as a deliberate act carried out by one or more individuals within management, employees, regulatory bodies, or third parties, involving manipulative activities to adjust or gain an unlawful advantage (Dorris, 2018). Fraud may take various forms and can lead to the destabilization of national economies, undermine consumer trust, and generally increase the cost of living (Syeda, Zhang, & Pan, 2002). The Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE, 2024) identifies three main categories of occupational fraud: asset misappropriation, fraudulent financial reporting, and corruption. Forensic accounting techniques are used to uncover the entire fraud chain, providing a comprehensive analysis of key elements of fraudulent activity by answering the questions of who, what, where, why, and how the fraud occurred (Mojsoska & Dujovski, 2015). Forensic accounting is a multidisciplinary skill requiring knowledge not only in financial accounting but also in tax and commercial law, criminology, psychology, and related fields (Mitrić et al., 2012).

Given the frequent occurrence of fraud, embezzlement, and other financial crimes in modern society, as well as the increasing sophistication and complexity of various forms of financial fraud, accountants and auditors must possess appropriate training and skills in forensic accounting to effectively identify such criminal activities (Houck et al., 2006). Empirical research, such as the study conducted by Kaur et al. (2022), confirms a positive correlation between forensic accounting and fraud detection, indicating that greater adoption and development of this discipline lead to more effective fraud identification, ultimately benefiting society as a whole. Forensic accounting has gained increasing importance in recent decades within Serbia's economic environment, including the public sector and other industries, which is also reflected in the work of the judiciary (Vitomir et al., 2022). However, as this study shows, the presence of forensic accounting content in the curricula of faculties related to management and information technology is limited, as is the level of self-perceived knowledge in this field among students at these faculties in Serbia. This paper provides an overview of the concept and significance of forensic accounting, highlights previous research findings regarding its integration into educational content—particularly in higher education—and outlines the desirable personality traits and skills necessary for effectively performing the role of a forensic accountant, as identified in earlier studies.

The subject of this research is the level of awareness and perceived knowledge of forensic accounting among students at the University of Belgrade enrolled in management and IT programs, as well as their perceptions of the career significance and practical relevance of this discipline. The study also explores their attitudes toward the inclusion and structuring of forensic accounting courses in faculty curricula. The research aims to evaluate the cognitive, affective, and aspirational dimensions related to forensic accounting, including an analysis of the relationships between these dimensions and student characteristics such as gender, year of study, and primary area of academic focus. To this end, a questionnaire consisting of 18 items was developed and completed by 142 students from the University of Belgrade in April 2025. Using descriptive analysis, inferential statistical tests, and latent class analysis, the study assessed patterns in students' knowledge and attitudes, as well as factors influencing their interest in further education and professional involvement in forensic accounting.

The latent class analysis, conducted using a Bayesian Gaussian mixture model, segmented respondents into two distinct classes based on self-assessed awareness and knowledge of forensic accounting, perceived career relevance and practical applicability, and attitudes toward including forensic accounting as a course in university curricula. The first latent class included students who demonstrated a strong interest in applying forensic accounting knowledge in practice, showed a high level of readiness for further training and simulation-based learning, considered forensic accounting relevant for fraud prevention and employability, and preferred practical, hands-on instructional methods. The second latent class consisted of students with less pronounced interest in the field, lower readiness for additional engagement beyond formal coursework, and moderate or neutral views on the practical application of forensic accounting knowledge. Inferential dependency tests were conducted to determine whether gender, study program, and year of study influenced the classification of respondents into one of the two latent classes. These insights are important for contextualizing curriculum content, designing targeted courses, and developing differentiated educational strategies based on students' interests, prior knowledge, and motivation.

2. The concept and significance of forensic accounting

Forensic accounting is a mechanism used to prevent, detect, and respond to damage caused by fraudulent activities both within and outside an organization. Bologna and Lindquist (1987) define forensic accounting as "the application of financial skills and investigative mindset to unresolved issues, conducted within the context of rules of evidence." As a relatively new and increasingly important discipline, forensic accounting combines financial expertise, knowledge of fraud, and a deep understanding of business reality and the functioning of the legal system (Bhasin, 2007). Horty (1999) defines forensic accounting as "the science concerned with the relationship and application of knowledge from finance, accounting, taxation, and auditing to analyze, investigate, examining, testing, and considering issues related to civil and criminal law and legal practice, with the aim of uncovering the truth upon which an expert opinion can be formed."

In general terms, forensic accounting is focused on determining "where the money went, how it got there, and who is responsible" (Efiong, 2012), including the preparation of a report once fraud has been confirmed,

which can be used as evidence in court proceedings. Mojsoska and Dujovski (2015) point out that forensic accounting techniques are employed to uncover the entire fraud chain, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the key elements of fraudulent conduct by answering the questions: who committed the fraud, what exactly was done, where the irregularities occurred, why it happened, when the fraud occurred, and how it was carried out. Alshurafat et al. (2019) emphasize that forensic accounting includes a broad spectrum of activities, such as fraud investigation, litigation support, business valuation, and digital forensics. According to Bhasin (2007), typical activities performed by forensic accountants include: investigating and analyzing financial evidence to identify irregularities, fraud, or financial abuse; developing and using computer applications to facilitate the analysis and presentation of financial data; communicating findings that can serve as legal evidence; providing support in legal proceedings, including expert witness testimony in court; and preparing visual aids to support the presentation of evidence during trials. Forensic accountants are also engaged in auditing business accounting systems, providing recommendations for improving internal control systems and internal audits based on their expertise (Bhasin, 2007). Afriyie et al. (2023) also point out that forensic accounting is valuable in uncovering and exposing weaknesses in internal control systems, identifying existing gaps and vulnerabilities that enable fraud to occur, and thereby contributing to fraud prevention by reducing the risk of future fraudulent activities.

Therefore, forensic accounting is a challenging, multidisciplinary skill requiring knowledge not only of financial accounting but also of tax and commercial law, criminology, psychology, and related fields (Mitrić et al., 2012), and as such, it cannot be equated with auditing. The standards of forensic accounting originate from legal practice (Gray, 2008), whereas the standards of traditional financial accounting have been shaped by business practices (Radojević & Stanković, 2023). Mitrić et al. (2012) emphasize that the relationship between auditing and forensic accounting is a dynamic process that evolves over time due to political, social, and cultural events. This dynamic nature stems from the fact that political, social, and cultural developments directly influence the institutional and regulatory framework within which accounting and auditing practices operate.

3. Forensic accounting in formal education and professional development

Previous research indicates that the demand for professionals in the field of forensic accounting will increase over time, suggesting that education in this area is a key component in fraud prevention and detection. It also emphasizes the need to integrate forensic accounting into university curricula—either as standalone study programs or as modules within broader academic programs (Rezaee & Burton, 1997; Kramer et al., 2017). Similarly, Kaur and Mukherjee (2023) highlight that enhanced understanding of core forensic accounting techniques significantly improves early fraud detection, making the inclusion of forensic accounting in undergraduate and postgraduate courses essential. Kleyman (2006) argues that attending a forensic accounting course can expose students to a different side of accounting, training them to gather evidence, provide litigation support, and testify in court. Regarding employment opportunities in this field, Carnes and Gierlanski (2001) analyzed the mismatch between the supply and demand for auditors with forensic accounting skills and noted that universities were slow to respond to this imbalance.

Kramer et al. (2017) conducted a survey involving educators and practitioners to assess their perspectives on forensic accounting education, concluding that there are significant differences between the two groups regarding course content and preferred teaching methods. According to the study, practitioners believe that topics going beyond traditional accounting should be included and place greater value on experiential learning methods, such as case studies, simulations, and hands-on exercises. Alshurafat et al. (2020) examined various teaching methods in forensic accounting education and proposed that instruction should emphasize experiential learning. This approach simulates the real-world work of forensic accountants across technical, theoretical, and ethical dimensions, leading to greater student engagement and the development of practical competencies. Chetry et al. (2025) state several challenges that hinder the expansion of forensic accounting education in India, such as limited awareness, lack of resources, shortage of trained faculty and perceived scarcity of career opportunities.

In the context of learning outcomes that should be provided through forensic accounting courses, Meservy et al. (2006) conducted a study among certified fraud examiners and identified several key skills often absent from university curricula. These include interviewing and interrogation skills, sources of evidence, fraudulent financial reporting schemes, criminology, techniques related to computer and internet fraud, and interpersonal skills. DiGabriele (2008) listed essential skills for forensic auditors, including oral and written communication, critical thinking, solving unstructured problems, analytical ability, deductive reasoning, legal knowledge, and the ability to remain composed under stress. Similarly, Davis et al. (2009) noted that analytical skills are crucial for forensic accountants, emphasizing the importance of seeing the bigger picture and possessing the ability to express opinions in legal contexts, communicate effectively, and simplify complex issues. McMullan and Sanchez (2010) identified interpersonal skills, persistence, and puzzle-solving abilities as the most important personality traits for this profession. Bhasin (2007) highlighted the need for a variety of qualifications and skills for the forensic accountant role, including computer proficiency and knowledge of network systems, which enable effective investigations into electronic banking and computer-based accounting systems. These technical competencies are particularly important in today's business environment, where most financial

transactions and records are digital, increasing the need for analyzing electronic trails, detecting database fraud, and uncovering digitally concealed misconduct. Recent literature also highlights the importance of advanced analytical models, such as the Beneish M-score, which play a meaningful role in identifying potential irregularities and manipulations in financial statements (Đorđević et al., 2025).

Earlier studies also show that the availability of formal education in forensic accounting has significantly increased in recent years (Seda & Kramer, 2008). Not only do hundreds of universities now offer specific forensic accounting courses, but many also provide full academic programs, minors, or certification tracks in this field. Kleyman (2006) reviewed examples of institutions and programs in the U.S. and reported impressive results from these initiatives. In Europe, according to the Studyportals website at the time of writing this paper, there are eight undergraduate programs in forensic accounting (Studyportals, 2025a) and twelve master's programs, including in countries such as the Netherlands, France, Germany, Norway, and the United Kingdom (Studyportals, 2025b). Additionally, the Educatly platform lists a total of 45 programs that include forensic accounting in their curricula across Europe, comprising 13 undergraduate, 18 master's, 8 doctoral, and 4 short courses (Educatly, 2025).

Thus, prior studies and practical evidence actively suggest that integrating forensic accounting courses into university curricula reflects the growing demand for a skill set that is sufficiently sophisticated to address the increasing complexity and fraud threats faced by modern businesses (Efiong, 2012). However, several studies have also confirmed that, in general, students and professionals show a low level of awareness regarding the concept and significance of forensic accounting, especially in developing countries (Alharasis et al., 2025; Efiong, 2012). A study published by Mitrić et al. (2012) noted that in Serbia, forensic accounting is an underdeveloped field in both education and practice. It is often equated with auditing and regarded as such even in academic circles, with forensic accountants frequently being mistaken for auditors. To strengthen the role of forensic accounting in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is essential to adopt a unified law that clearly defines its theoretical framework, including the concept, scope of work, and competencies of forensic accountants, while the introduction of forensic accounting into higher education programs in economics, and subsequently into the final grades of secondary schools, is a necessary step (Veledar et al., 2022). The project in the Republic of Croatia, initiated in 2016 at the University Department of Forensic Sciences, University of Split, aimed at developing occupational and qualification standards in the field of forensic finance and accounting, has been completed. In the first part of the project, the occupational standard Forensic Expert in Finance and Accounting was developed, and in the second part of the project, the focus was on developing a qualification standard which has to ensures the acquisition of competences defined in the occupational standard "Forensic Expert in Finance and Accounting" (Bartulović, 2021). The Republic of the North Macedonia is in the 87th place according to the index for the perception of corruption at the world level, making it a relevant and challenging area for in-depth analysis. In this context, the application and further development of forensic accounting emerge as particularly important (Joldeska & Kosarkoska, 2023). In 2011, the Association of Accountants, Treasurers, and Auditors of Slovenia established a dedicated department for forensic accountants (Ozli, 2025).

4. Research Methodology

The presented research employed a multidimensional analysis of data obtained through a questionnaire consisting of 18 questions (Table 1). This included the use of both descriptive and inferential analysis methods, incorporating techniques such as latent class analysis and principal component analysis. The sample included a total of 142 students from various years of study, enrolled in different faculties of the University of Belgrade, specifically in study programs related to the fields of information technology and management. Table 1 presents an overview of the questions included in the research questionnaire, along with the corresponding answer options for each item. Table 2 presents the number of respondents by gender, study program, and year of study.

Table 1. Questions presented in the questionnaire

Code	Question	Offered Answers
Q1	Have you previously heard of the term forensic accounting?	Yes; No.
Q2	How would you rate your current knowledge of forensic accounting?	Advanced; Intermediate; Basic; None.
Q3	From which sources did you learn about forensic accounting? (multiple answers allowed)	Media; Internet; Professional literature; Classes; Practical experience; Other; I have not learned about it.
Q4	Are you aware of the existence of international certification in the field of fraud detection (e.g., ACFE – Certified Fraud Examiner)?	Yes; No.
Q5	How familiar are you with the concept of digital forensics?	I know the area very well; I am familiar; I am somewhat familiar; I am not familiar at all.
Q6	Does your faculty offer a course that covers forensic accounting?	Yes; No; I don't know.
Q7	The course Forensic Accounting should be:	A mandatory course; An elective course; It should not exist; I have no opinion.

Table 1. Continued

Code	Question	Offered Answers
Q8	Which topic do you think is especially important to be included in forensic accounting courses?	Fraud and money laundering; Use of digital evidence; Investigation of abuse and fraud; Auditing and control techniques; The accountant's role in legal proceedings; Ethical issues in forensic work.
Q9	Forensic accounting is an important field for fighting fraud. To what extent do you agree with this statement?	Strongly agree; Mostly agree; Neutral/Can't assess; Mostly disagree; Disagree.
Q10	Forensic accounting should be part of the curriculum at all faculties dealing with management and information technology. To what extent do you agree with this statement?	Strongly agree; Mostly agree; Neutral/Can't assess; Mostly disagree; Disagree.
Q11	I would like to work in the field of forensic accounting in the future. To what extent do you agree with this statement?	Strongly agree; Mostly agree; Neutral/Can't assess; Mostly disagree; Disagree.
Q12	Forensic accounting is a field with employment potential. To what extent do you agree with this statement?	Strongly agree; Mostly agree; Neutral/Can't assess; Mostly disagree; Disagree.
Q13	Would you be interested in attending additional courses or training in forensic accounting outside of your faculty?	Yes; No; I am not sure.
Q14	What type of instruction would suit you best for acquiring knowledge in forensic accounting?	Guest lectures from professionals; Case studies from real investigations; Workshops and hands-on practice; Traditional lectures; Online courses; A combination of the above.
Q15	Do you believe that cooperation with institutions such as the tax administration, police, or courts would be useful for practical teaching?	Yes; No; I don't know.
Q16	Would you participate in simulated financial fraud investigations as part of your faculty program?	Yes; No; I don't know.
Q17	Do you believe that students should learn about: (multiple answers allowed)	Analysis of digital traces; Use of software for fraud detection; Data security and information protection; Transaction analysis using artificial intelligence; I don't believe this is relevant.
Q18	How much do you believe in the applicability of forensic accounting knowledge in real business situations in Serbia?	Very much; Moderately; Not sure; Slightly; Not at all.

Source: Authors

Table 2. Number of respondents by gender, study program, and year of study

Gender		Study Program		Year of Study			
Male (M)	Female (F)	Informatics (IT)	Management (Man.)	First	Second	Third	Fourth
80	62	78	64	16	38	36	52

Source: Authors

The questions included in the research questionnaire can be grouped into the following categories:

- Awareness and perceived knowledge of forensic accounting includes questions related to students' awareness of the field of forensic accounting (Q1, Q4, Q5), including the sources of information and knowledge acquisition (Q3), the existence of courses in their academic programs that address the topic of forensic accounting (Q6), and self-assessment of their level of knowledge in this area (Q2).
- Career relevance and practical applicability of forensic accounting includes questions related to: the perceived importance of forensic accounting in combating fraud (Q9), students' interest in pursuing a career in this field (Q11), their perception of employment opportunities (Q12), willingness to undergo additional training (Q13), and the potential for applying knowledge in real-world settings (Q18).
- Attitudes towards incorporating and structuring forensic accounting courses in university curricula, including questions related to whether such a course should exist and whether it should be mandatory or elective (Q7, Q10), preferred teaching formats (Q14), key topics in the field that should be included in instruction (Q8, Q17), and openness to institutional cooperation and practical teaching in course implementation (Q15, Q16).

To evaluate the statistical significance of factors including gender, year of study, and academic program, a variety of inferential tests were applied, depending on the type of independent variables (i.e., factors) and the type of responses. When gender and academic program were used as factors, Pearson's chi-square test (χ^2) was applied to examine the association between two nominal variables (McHugh, 2013), and the Mann–Whitney U test, a non-parametric statistical test used to compare the distributions of an ordinal or non-normally distributed numerical dependent variable between two independent groups (Mann & Whitney, 1947). When year of study was used as the factor, the following tests were used: the Cochran–Armitage test, a non-parametric test used to detect the existence of a monotonic trend between a binary dependent variable and an ordinal independent variable

(Armitage, 1955), or to detect a trend of positive outcomes across ordered categories; Pearson's chi-square test (χ^2) for questions with three or more categorical, unordered responses, where the ordinal nature of the year of study was disregarded; and the Spearman test, a non-parametric test measuring the strength and direction of a monotonic relationship between two ranked variables (Spearman, 1904). The results of statistical tests were interpreted based on p-values, representing the probability that the observed result occurred by chance, assuming no real relationship between the variables. Conventionally, results are considered statistically significant if the p-value is less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$) across all applied tests.

Using latent class analysis, based on a Bayesian Gaussian mixture model and a set of 12 questions, two latent classes of students were identified. These classes reflect aggregate differences in levels of knowledge, interest, and belief in the practical value of forensic accounting. This analysis deepens the understanding of varying student attitudes toward forensic accounting with respect to their gender, year of study, and academic program.

4. Research results and discussion

The first section of the research results presents an overview of the descriptive analysis and the application of statistical tests to assess inferential relationships between respondent factors and their answers. The second section presents the results of the latent class analysis.

4.1. Descriptive and inferential analysis

Tables 3 and 4 provide an overview of the descriptive and inferential findings derived from the questionnaire data. Table 3 presents the distribution of responses across various answer categories, disaggregated by key respondent characteristics such as gender, study program, and year of study, allowing for an initial descriptive insight into participants' attitudes, knowledge, and experiences related to forensic accounting. Table 4 displays the results of inferential statistical tests, aimed at examining the statistical significance of the associations between respondent characteristics and their responses to individual questionnaire items.

Table 3. Number of responses by answer categories, respondent categories, and questions

Q	Answer	All	Gender		Study Program		Year of Study			
			M	F	IT	Man.	First	Second	Third	Fourth
Q1	Yes	110	61	49	64	46	7	32	26	45
	No	32	19	13	14	18	9	6	10	7
Q2	Advanced	6	3	3	1	5	0	2	3	1
	Intermediate	28	15	13	19	9	0	9	8	11
	Basic	74	44	30	40	34	5	23	17	29
	None	34	18	16	18	16	11	4	8	11
Q3	Internet	83	52	31	55	28	9	19	19	36
	Professional literature	49	21	28	27	22	2	14	15	18
	Media	36	27	9	20	16	1	11	9	15
	Lectures	33	18	15	18	15	3	8	8	14
	Practice	25	14	11	12	13	2	6	7	10
	Other	15	8	7	9	6	1	3	8	3
	I haven't learned about it	7	1	6	3	4	3	1	0	3
Q4	Yes	71	39	32	44	27	3	20	17	31
	No	71	41	30	34	37	13	18	19	21
Q5	Not familiar at all	20	9	11	10	10	8	5	1	6
	Familiar to some extent	86	53	33	47	39	6	20	22	38
	Familiar	29	15	14	19	10	2	10	11	6
	Very familiar	7	3	4	2	5	0	3	2	2
Q6	Yes	17	6	11	6	11	1	8	3	5
	No	95	61	34	57	38	8	23	22	42
	I have no knowledge about it	30	13	17	15	15	7	7	11	5
Q7	Mandatory	57	38	19	31	26	3	14	10	30
	Elective	61	34	27	35	26	7	20	17	17
	It should not exist	2	2	0	1	1	0	1	1	0
	No opinion on the matter	22	6	16	11	11	6	3	8	5
Q8	Fraud and money laundering	21	13	8	8	13	3	6	5	7
	Use of digital evidence	26	13	13	20	6	2	12	5	7
	The role of the accountant in legal proceedings	11	4	7	7	4	1	2	6	2
	Audit and control techniques	16	6	10	8	8	4	4	3	5
	Ethical issues in forensics	4	4	0	1	3	0	1	2	1
	Investigation of abuse and fraud	64	40	24	34	30	6	13	15	30
Q9	Strongly agree	61	43	18	36	25	5	18	13	25
	Mostly agree	53	26	27	30	23	3	16	15	19
	Cannot assess	23	9	14	11	12	8	4	7	4
	Mostly disagree	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
	Disagree	4	1	3	1	3	0	0	1	3

Table 3. Continued

Q	Answer	All	Gender		Study Program		Year of Study			
			M	F	IT	Man.	First	Second	Third	Fourth
Q10	Strongly agree	68	45	23	41	27	6	20	14	28
	Mostly agree	48	27	21	25	23	3	13	16	16
	Cannot assess	21	7	14	11	10	7	5	4	5
	Mostly disagree	2	0	2	0	2	0	0	1	1
	Disagree	3	1	2	1	2	0	0	1	2
Q11	Strongly agree	67	43	24	37	30	6	21	14	26
	Mostly agree	43	23	20	27	16	1	13	16	13
	Cannot assess	25	12	13	11	14	8	4	5	8
	Mostly disagree	5	1	4	3	2	1	0	0	4
	Disagree	2	1	1	0	2	0	0	1	1
Q12	Strongly agree	67	42	25	38	29	6	21	14	26
	Mostly agree	32	17	15	15	17	2	8	11	11
	Cannot assess	39	19	20	23	16	8	9	9	13
	Mostly disagree	2	2	0	1	1	0	0	2	0
	Disagree	2	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	2
Q13	Yes	96	58	38	56	40	5	27	24	40
	No	21	13	8	7	14	1	6	7	7
	I'm not sure	25	9	16	15	10	10	5	5	5
Q14	Case studies	79	41	38	46	33	11	19	20	29
	Guest lectures from practitioners	77	43	34	45	32	7	24	20	26
	Workshops and practical work	61	39	22	34	27	5	19	16	21
	Online courses	19	13	6	10	9	1	6	5	7
	Traditional lectures	9	6	3	6	3	2	2	2	3
	A combination of the above	33	22	11	19	14	3	10	7	13
Q15	Yes	118	70	48	66	52	8	34	29	47
	No	5	3	2	2	3	1	1	2	1
	I'm not sure	19	7	12	10	9	7	3	5	4
Q16	Yes	104	61	43	60	44	8	26	28	42
	No	16	14	2	8	8	1	8	2	5
	I'm not sure	22	5	17	10	12	7	4	6	5
Q17	Use of fraud detection software	86	45	41	55	31	8	20	21	37
	Analysis of transactions using artificial intelligence	79	44	35	45	34	1	19	23	36
	Analysis of digital traces	70	43	27	41	29	6	13	14	37
	Data security and information protection	55	30	25	36	19	9	18	11	17
	I do not consider this relevant	22	15	7	10	12	4	9	4	5
Q18	Very much	105	58	47	62	43	7	25	32	41
	Moderately	12	10	2	2	10	4	4	2	2
	I'm not sure	10	3	7	7	3	4	5	0	1
	Slightly	14	9	5	7	7	1	4	2	7
	I don't believe at all	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1

Source: Authors

Table 4. Results of statistical significance tests of the relationship between gender, study program, and year of study and the responses to the questionnaire questions

	Gender		Program		Year of study	
Q1	χ^2	0.037	χ^2	1.54	Cochran –Armitage Z	0.85
	p	0.848	p	0.214	p	0.197
Q2	Mann–Whitney U	2477.0	Mann–Whitney U	2561.0	Spearman ρ	0.122
	p	0.991	p	0.773	p	0.147
Q3 / Internet	χ^2	2.648	χ^2	9.295	Cochran –Armitage Z	0.531
	p	0.104	p	0.002	p	0.298
Q3 / Professional literature	χ^2	4.22	χ^2	0.000	Cochran –Armitage Z	0.359
	p	0.030	p	1.000	p	0.360
Q3 / Media	χ^2	5.85	χ^2	0.000	Cochran –Armitage Z	0.415
	p	0.016	p	1.000	p	0.339
Q3 / Teaching	χ^2	0.001	χ^2	0.000	Cochran –Armitage Z	0.272
	p	0.971	p	1.000	p	0.393
Q3 / Practice	χ^2	0	χ^2	0.298	Cochran –Armitage Z	0.229
	p	1	p	0.585	p	0.410
Q3 / Something else	χ^2	0	χ^2	0.020	Cochran –Armitage Z	-0.009
	p	1	p	0.886	p	0.503

Table 4. Continued

	Gender		Program		Year of study	
Q3 / I did not learn about it	χ^2	3.648	χ^2	0.072	Cochran –Armitage Z	-0.395
	p	0.056	p	0.788	p	0.654
Q4	χ^2	0.029	χ^2	2.304	Cochran –Armitage Z	0.770
	p	0.866	p	0.129	p	0.221
Q5	Mann–Whitney U	2452.0	Mann–Whitney U	2585.5	Spearman ρ	0.045
	p	0.8972	p	0.6768	p	0.5987
Q6	χ^2	7.52	χ^2	3.93	χ^2	15.07
	p	0.023	p	0.143	p	0.020
Q7	Mann–Whitney U	3078.0	Mann–Whitney U	2528.0	Spearman ρ	0.305
	p	0.008	p	0.889	p	0.001
Q8	χ^2	8.87	χ^2	9.51	χ^2	18.13
	p	0.114	p	0.090	p	0.256
Q9	Mann–Whitney U	3163.5	Mann–Whitney U	2791.5	Spearman ρ	0.121
	p	0.002	p	0.1933	p	0.216
Q10	Mann–Whitney U	3122.0	Mann–Whitney U	2810.0	Spearman ρ	0.112
	p	0.004	p	0.163	p	0.2549
Q11	Mann–Whitney U	2938.5	Mann–Whitney U	2639.0	Spearman ρ	0.048
	p	0.042	p	0.529	p	0.627
Q12	Mann–Whitney U	2808.5	Mann–Whitney U	2510.5	Spearman ρ	0.049
	p	0.146	p	0.951	p	0.615
Q13	χ^2	5.12	χ^2	4.67	χ^2	26.18
	p	0.077	p	0.097	p	0.000
Q14 / Traditional lectures	χ^2	0.089	χ^2	0.148	Cochran –Armitage Z	–0.594
	p	0.766	p	0.700	p	0.553
Q14 / Workshops and practical work	χ^2	1.996	χ^2	0.000	Cochran –Armitage Z	–0.059
	p	0.158	p	1.000	p	0.953
Q14 / Case studies	χ^2	1.049	χ^2	0.511	Cochran –Armitage Z	–0.325
	p	0.306	p	0.475	p	0.746
Q14 / Guest lectures	χ^2	0.000	χ^2	0.557	Cochran –Armitage Z	–0.379
	p	1.000	p	0.456	p	0.705
Q14 / Online courses	χ^2	0.797	χ^2	0.000	Cochran –Armitage Z	+0.331
	p	0.372	p	1.000	p	0.741
Q14 / Combination of the above	χ^2	1.358	χ^2	0.022	Cochran –Armitage Z	+0.268
	p	0.244	p	0.882	p	0.789
Q15	χ^2	3.390	χ^2	0.539	χ^2	17.027
	p	0.184	p	0.764	p	0.009
Q16	χ^2	14.10	χ^2	0.600	χ^2	3.21
	p	0.001	p	0.741	p	0.011
Q17 / Digital trace analysis	χ^2	1.075	χ^2	0.478	Cochran –Armitage Z	40.25
	p	0.300	p	0.489	p	0.001
Q17 / Use of fraud detection software	χ^2	1.044	χ^2	6.278	Cochran –Armitage Z	23.48
	p	0.307	p	0.012	p	0.001
Q17 / Data security and information protection	χ^2	0.028	χ^2	3.353	Cochran –Armitage Z	-23.80
	p	0.866	p	0.067	p	0.001
Q17 / Transaction analysis using artificial intelligence	χ^2	0.000	χ^2	0.141	Cochran –Armitage Z	-23.80
	p	0.998	p	0.707	p	0.001
Q17 / I do not consider this relevant	χ^2	0.969	χ^2	0.545	Cochran –Armitage Z	-24.54
	p	0.325	p	0.460	p	0.001
Q18	Mann–Whitney U	2527.0	Mann–Whitney U	2765.0	Spearman ρ	0.194
	p	0.804	p	0.1531	p	0.046

Source: Authors

As shown in Table 3, regarding the first question: "Have you previously heard of the term forensic accounting?", the majority of respondents (77.5%) answered affirmatively. Female respondents (79%) were slightly more familiar with this term compared to male respondents (76.2%). However, the Pearson χ^2 test showed that the relationship between gender and the answer to this question was not statistically significant, as presented in Table 4. Looking at academic programs, students in informatics (82.1%) were slightly more familiar with the term than students in management (71.9%), but this relationship was also not statistically significant ($p = 0.214$). The highest familiarity with forensic accounting was found among fourth-year students (86.5%), followed by second-year (84.2%) and third-year students (72.2%), while first-year students showed a considerably lower level of familiarity (43.7%). However, the Cochran–Armitage test showed that the year of study and the answer to this question were not statistically significantly related ($p = 0.197$), meaning we cannot reliably claim there is a positive trend in responses in relation to students' academic progression.

A total of 74 respondents assessed their knowledge of forensic accounting (Q2) as basic (52.1%), 23.9% stated they don have any knowledge about the topic, 19.7% reported an intermediate level of knowledge, while only 4.2% considered their knowledge to be advanced. Of those, 3.7% of male respondents and 4.8% of female respondents assessed their knowledge as advanced. When broken down by academic program, only one informatics student rated their knowledge as advanced, while five

such students were from the management program. No first-year student rated their knowledge as intermediate or advanced. Among second-year students, 28.9% did so, followed by 30.5% of third-year and only 23.1% of fourth-year students. As with the previous question, as shown in Table 4, there is insufficient evidence to claim that perceived knowledge of forensic accounting is statistically significantly related to students' gender, academic program, or the year of study.

Among the sources of information about forensic accounting (Q3), the majority of respondents indicated the Internet (58.4%) as the primary source, followed by professional literature (34.5%), media (25.4%), formal education (23.2%), and practical experience (17.6%). According to the responses, male students more frequently obtained information from the Internet (65% M / 50% F) and media (33.8% M / 14.5% F), while female students relied more on professional literature (45.2% F / 26.3% M). Statistical significance testing showed a statistically significant difference between male and female respondents regarding the use of professional literature and media. However, no significant gender differences were found for the other sources of information. Formal education and practical training were less frequently cited by both groups as sources of knowledge whereby 22.5% of men and 24.2% of women reported acquiring knowledge through formal education, indicating a low impact of formal academic instruction on knowledge acquisition in this field. Similarly, 17.5% of men and 17.7% of women gained knowledge through practical experience.

Students of informatics cited the Internet as their primary source of knowledge about this field in 70.5% of cases, whereas this percentage was significantly lower among students from the management program (43.7%). This difference was confirmed by the statistical significance test ($p = 0.006$), even though management students also identified the Internet as their dominant source of information. The statistically significant finding that informatics students more frequently use the Internet as a source of information about forensic accounting aligns with their digital affinities and skills. In contrast, no significant differences were found among respondents regarding other sources of knowledge based on their academic program, suggesting that institutional and informal exposure to the topic of forensic accounting is not related to students' academic orientation.

Relatively speaking, first-year students used professional literature as a source of information to a significantly lesser extent whereby only 12.5% reported acquiring information in this way, and were also less informed through lectures and practical training compared to students in higher years. Second-year students used the media as a source of information somewhat more than students in other years. Third-year students were the most likely to use professional literature, while fourth-year students relied most heavily on the Internet, with 69% reporting it as their source of knowledge about forensic accounting. However, the Cochran–Armitage trend test showed that the use of the analyzed sources of information related to forensic accounting does not display a statistically significant trend in relation to students' year of study.

Regarding the question of whether respondents had previously heard of the existence of international certification in the field of fraud (Q4), half of the respondents answered affirmatively, while the other half responded negatively. None of the analyzed student factors were found to be statistically significantly associated with awareness of international forensic accounting certification. This points to a general lack of institutional dissemination of information about international certification among students, regardless of their gender, academic program, or year of study. As for students' level of familiarity with the concept of digital forensics (Q5), the majority of 60.6% stated they were somewhat familiar with the field, 25.4% claimed to be familiar or very familiar, and 14.1% said they were not familiar with it at all. The analysis of the statistical significance of student characteristics presented in Table 4, together with descriptive data, showed that, similar to the previous question, there is no strong pattern of dependence between students' familiarity with digital forensics and their gender, academic program, or year of study.

A majority of 66.9% of students stated that their faculty does not offer a course that covers forensic accounting (Q6), 12% reported that such a course exists, while 21.1% stated they were not informed on the matter. This further reinforces the need to formalize and strengthen formal education in this field. Results from the inferential analysis showed a statistically significant association between gender and responses to this question ($p = 0.023$), with a higher percentage of female students responding affirmatively (17.7% F / 7.5% M). A statistically significant relationship was also found between year of study and responses ($p = 0.020$), implying that upper-year students are more likely to recognize the existence of such a course or its components within other courses. On the other hand, no statistically significant difference was observed between students of different academic programs in their responses ($p = 0.143$), suggesting that perceptions of the course's existence are not systematically linked to students' academic orientation. These findings indicate insufficient awareness and knowledge among students about forensic accounting, as well as a lack of systematic integration of this topic into their faculty's educational program, highlighting the need to build more structured institutional support to deepen students' understanding of forensic accounting.

A total of 42.9% of respondents stated that they believe that forensic accounting should be offered as an elective course, as shown in Table 3, while a slightly smaller number (40.1%) believe it should be a compulsory course (Q7). Only 2 respondents thought this course should not be included in the educational program, while 15.5% had no opinion on the matter. The answer options to this question were treated as ordinal variables in the inferential

analysis, as they are naturally ranked according to the strength of positive or negative attitudes toward the introduction of the course. Accordingly, the Mann–Whitney U test was used to analyze differences in opinions based on gender and academic program. The test showed a statistically significant relationship between gender and responses ($p = 0.002$), with male students expressing more positive attitudes than female students. For instance, 47.5% of male respondents believed the course should be mandatory, compared to 30.6% of female respondents. No statistically significant relationship was found between academic program and responses. Additionally, the Spearman's rank correlation test was used to analyze the relationship between year of study and attitudes toward the course, confirming a statistically significant positive correlation ($p = 0.001$). This implies that students in higher years of study are more likely to hold positive attitudes about the need to introduce a course focused on forensic accounting and to assign it a more prominent role in the curriculum.

Similarly, regarding respondents' answers to the tenth question, the majority of 47.9% of them fully agreed with the statement that forensic accounting should be included in the curricula of faculties dealing with management and information technology (Q10), while 33.8% mostly agreed with this statement. Only 3.5% of respondents disagreed or mostly disagreed with it. In terms of inferential relationships, the results of the Mann–Whitney U test showed statistically significant differences in attitudes between male and female respondents ($p = 0.004$), with men generally expressing a higher level of agreement with the statement compared to women (on a 1 to 5 scale: 4.45 M / 3.98 F). On the other hand, the difference in attitudes between IT and management students was not statistically significant ($p = 0.163$), as was the case with question Q7, suggesting a universal attitude among respondents regarding the inclusion of forensic accounting in their academic programs. Furthermore, results from the Spearman's test for analyzing the relationship between year of study and expressed attitude showed no statistical significance ($p = 0.255$), suggesting that agreement with the statement does not systematically vary by year of study, unlike the result observed for question Q7.

In the eighth question, students were asked to select the topic they consider most important to be included in the teaching of forensic accounting (Q8). For the largest portion of respondents of 45.1% of them the most significant topic was "Investigation of abuse and fraud." Another 18.3% selected "use of digital evidence" as the most important topic, while the third most important topic, according to 14.8% of respondents, was "fraud and money laundering." As shown in Table 4, neither gender, academic program, nor year of study was statistically significantly associated with students' selection of the topic they considered most important for inclusion in the curriculum.

Among the respondents, 80.3% fully or mostly agreed that "forensic accounting is an important area in the fight against fraud" (Q9), 16.2% were undecided, and only 3.5% disagreed or mostly disagreed with the statement. The Mann–Whitney U test showed that gender was a statistically significant factor influencing responses ($p = 0.02$), with male respondents expressing a higher average level of agreement with the statement (average ratings: 4.36 M / 3.97 F). As with other responses concerning the perceived importance of forensic accounting and existing knowledge in this field, first-year students were the least likely to fully agree with the importance of the field (31.2%), while fourth-year students were the most likely to perceive it as significant (48.1%). However, third-year students were noticeably less likely to see the field as important (36.1%) compared to second-year students (47.4%). Inferential tests showed that neither the year of study nor the academic program were statistically significant factors in forming students' opinions regarding this question.

The largest portion of respondents of 47.2% of them fully agreed that they would like to work in the field of forensic accounting in the future, while 30.3% mostly agreed. Only 4.9% disagreed or mostly disagreed with pursuing a future career in this field (Q11). As with the previous question, male respondents showed greater interest in career development in this field compared to female respondents (average ratings: 4.32 M / 3.95 F), and the Mann–Whitney U test confirmed a statistically significant association between gender and responses to this question ($p = 0.04$). Although most students expressed a positive interest in working in forensic accounting in the future, inferential test results indicated no statistically significant differences in that interest based on academic program or year of study, pointing to a generally high and consistent appeal of this field regardless of these two analyzed factors.

Regarding the perceived employment potential of the forensic accounting field (Q12), the largest proportion of respondents (47.2%) fully agreed that this field is promising for employment, while 22.5% mostly agreed with this statement. A total of 27.5% of respondents were unable to form an opinion, and only 2.8% disagreed or mostly disagreed with the statement. Significance tests for respondent factors showed that there were no significant differences among the analyzed groups regarding this question, which practically means that regardless of gender, academic program, or year of study, students uniformly perceive forensic accounting as a highly promising field for employment.

Closely related to the previous question is the question concerning the extent to which respondents believe in the applicability of forensic accounting knowledge in real business situations in Serbia (Q18). As many as 74% of respondents strongly believe in this applicability, 8.4% believe in it to a moderate extent, 7% were unsure, while 10.6% believe in it to a lesser extent or not at all. Unlike gender and academic program, inferential tests revealed a statistically significant difference in responses based on the year of study. Third-year students expressed the highest confidence in the application of forensic accounting knowledge in the Serbian business context, with an adjusted average score of 4.78. They were followed by fourth-year students (4.44), second-year

students (4.32), and first-year students, who also had an average score of 4.32. Such student perceptions are consistent with views in the relevant literature, which indicate that the application of forensic accounting contributes to more informed managerial decision-making, strengthens risk management processes, and enhances the overall security of business operations (Cvetković et al., 2024).

A majority of students, 67.6% them, stated they were interested in attending additional courses or training in forensic accounting outside of their faculty (Q13), while 14.8% responded negatively to this question, and 17.6% were undecided. Based on the results of the chi-square test, where responses were treated as an ordinal variable with three categories, interest in additional training in forensic accounting significantly varied depending on the year of study ($p = 0.000$), while differences by gender and academic program were not statistically significant. These findings suggest that, in general, senior students show greater interest in professional development, which may result from a higher degree of career orientation or a greater awareness of the applicability of the field, as indicated by the inferential analysis related to question 18.

In terms of preferred teaching methods for a potential course in forensic accounting (Q14), the largest number of respondents (55.6%) selected "case study analysis" as one of their answers. Additionally, it is noticeable that 54.2% chose "guest lectures from professionals," and around 43% indicated "workshops and practical exercises." Only 6.3% of students chose "traditional lectures" as a preferred teaching method, which suggests that the conventional theoretical approach has relatively low support among respondents and that students prefer more practical forms of instruction. According to the results of the chi-square test of independence, these preferred teaching methods were not statistically significantly associated with respondents' gender or academic program. Furthermore, the Cochran–Armitage test showed no statistically significant trend in the choice of preferred teaching methods across years of study.

In question Q15, which examined students' attitudes toward the usefulness of collaboration with institutions such as the tax administration, police, or courts in the context of practical education, the majority of respondents showed a positive attitude. As many as 83.1% of students believe that such cooperation would be beneficial, while 13.4% expressed indecision regarding their response. Only 3.5% of respondents held a negative view. These results indicate a clearly expressed need to involve relevant institutions in the educational process, in order to provide students with a better understanding of the practical aspects of forensic accounting and to support their orientation toward solving real-world problems. Although gender and academic program did not show a statistically significant influence on attitudes toward institutional collaboration, the year of study did ($p = 0.009$). Fourth-year students had a positive attitude in 90.4% of cases, second-year students in 89%, third-year students in 80.5%, while only 50% of first-year students shared this view.

Regarding students' interest in participating in financial fraud investigation simulations within formal education (Q16), the majority of the responders (73.2%) stated they would participate in such activities, while 26.8% either had no opinion or responded negatively. The chi-square test indicated that gender was statistically significantly associated with responses ($p = 0.001$), with 76.2% of male students responding positively compared to 69.3% of female students. Year of study also proved to be a significant factor ($p = 0.011$), where, as in other questions with statistically significant variation based on year, fourth-year students demonstrated the highest level of interest, followed by second-year, third-year, and first-year students, respectively. On the other hand, academic program was not a significant factor in students' responses to this question.

Analysis of the results for question 17 shows that students largely recognize the importance of contemporary topics related to forensic accounting. The most frequently selected topic was "Use of fraud detection software," chosen by 86 respondents (60.6%), followed by "Transaction analysis using artificial intelligence" with 79 selections (55.6%), and "Digital trace analysis" with 70 votes (49.3%). The least selected option was "I do not consider this relevant," which was chosen only 22 times (15.5%), indicating a high level of general acceptance of these topics as important in their academic education. Descriptive statistics by year of study show clear differences in the perception of importance. Senior students were significantly more likely to recognize the relevance of digital and software tools for fraud prevention, while junior students more frequently highlighted topics such as data security and were more likely to consider certain areas as irrelevant. These findings were confirmed by the Cochran–Armitage test for trend, which showed that as the year of study increases, the frequency of certain responses either increases or decreases accordingly. As shown in Table 4, gender did not influence the frequency of student responses for any option, and the differences between IT and management students were not statistically significant, except in the case of the topic "use of software," where IT students more frequently recognized its importance ($p = 0.012$).

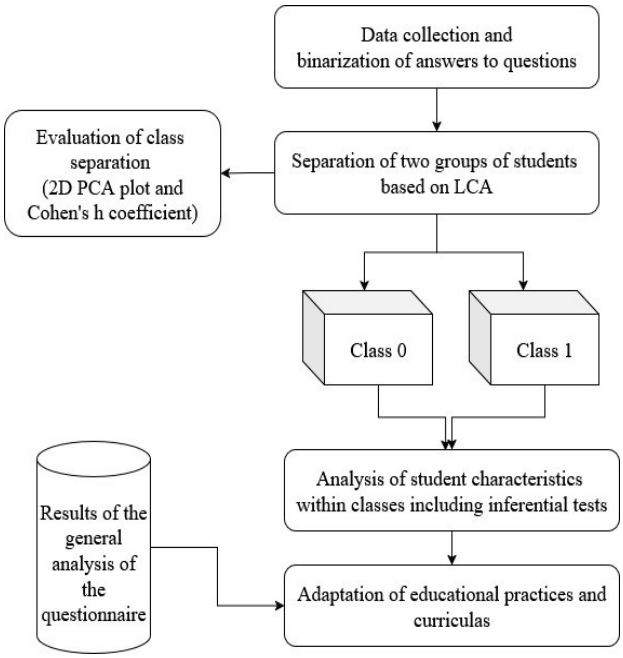
4.2. Latent class analysis of respondents

The goal of applying latent class analysis (hereinafter LCA) in this research was to identify and segment two homogeneous groups of students, which reflect different levels of information, interests and attitudes towards the field of forensic accounting, based on their patterns of answers to questions related to forensic accounting. Identification of the two latent classes of students enables the development and implementation of targeted and adapted teaching programs and educational interventions which can have a positive impact on the quality of education and employability of students.In particular, students who belong to the latent class with a higher

degree of information, interest and positive attitude towards forensic accounting can benefit from advanced, specialized courses and practical workshops that deepen their knowledge and skills in the field. On the other hand, students from the latent class with a lower level of information and less pronounced interest require a different approach in teaching such as: a focus on basic concepts, interactive teaching methods and additional support through mentoring or additional educational resources. The Figure 1 depicts the methodological procedure applied in the study, including data collection and binarization, latent class segmentation, class separation evaluation, analysis of student characteristics, and adaptation of educational approaches in accordance with the obtained results.

LCA is a technique for modeling latent categorical variables based on a probabilistic approach, with the goal of identifying mutually homogeneous groups of respondents, i.e., latent classes, based on responses to multiple observed categorical variables. These latent classes differ in their patterns of responses (Lazarsfeld & Henry, 1968; Collins & Lanza, 2010). Unlike traditional classification methods, LCA does not assume predefined groups; instead, it derives them from the available dataset by estimating the probability of each observation belonging to each latent class.

Figure 1. Diagram of the analytical procedure and adaptations to learning approaches based on student responses



Source: Authors

Based on this analysis, conducted on a set of 12 binarized questions, including those related to: awareness and perceived knowledge of forensic accounting (Q1, Q4, Q6), career relevance and perceived practical relevance of forensic accounting (Q9, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q18), and attitudes regarding the inclusion of forensic accounting courses in university curricula (Q7, Q10, Q15, Q16), for which the binarization method is shown in Table 5, students were classified into two latent classes that reflect characteristic patterns in awareness, interest in the field, and perception of the significance and career potential of forensic accounting. The LCA included only those questions where the responses were inherently dichotomous or could be aggregated into a binary format. Binarization was carried out to ensure consistent and methodologically sound application of the probabilistic latent classification model, which assumes that the observed variables are categorical and independent within each latent class (Lazarsfeld & Henry, 1968; Collins & Lanza, 2010). This dichotomization allowed for interpretation of the results in terms of the probability that a respondent demonstrates awareness, interest, or a positive attitude which are crucial for identifying latent response patterns. The decision to use two classes stems from a desire for parsimony and interpretability of the model, as a smaller number of classes allows for clearer segmentation of students in terms of their knowledge and interest in the field of forensic accounting.

Table 5. Binarization of Responses by Question

Question	Binarization Method
Q1	Yes = 1, No = 0
Q4	Yes = 1, No = 0
Q6	Yes = 1, No / No information = 0
Q7	Mandatory / Elective = 1, Other = 0
Q9	Completely / Mostly = 1, Other = 0
Q10	Completely / Mostly = 1, Other = 0
Q11	Completely / Mostly = 1, Other = 0
Q12	Completely / Mostly = 1, Other = 0
Q13	Yes = 1, Other = 0
Q15	Yes = 1, Other = 0
Q16	Yes = 1, Other = 0
Q18	Very / Moderately = 1, Other = 0

Source: Authors

To develop the model, a Bayesian Gaussian Mixture Model (hereinafter BGMM) was used, a probabilistic approach to cluster analysis that falls under unsupervised learning methods. It is based on a mixture of multiple distributions, with each data point assigned a probability of belonging to each latent class. Unlike the standard Gaussian Mixture Model, BGMM introduces a Bayesian component by defining a prior distribution over the model parameters, allowing for a more flexible and robust estimation when the sample is limited or when the data is characterized by high uncertainty (Bishop, 2006). In this study, the BGMM approach was implemented using the scikit-learn library for the Python programming language (Pedregosa et al., 2011), through the Bayesian Gaussian Mixture class, with a predefined number of two components.

Table 6 presents the distribution of respondents according to their characteristics by latent classes, where a total of 84 students were assigned to class 0, and 58 students to class 1. Class 0 includes 51 computer science students and 33 management students, while Class 1 includes 27 IT students and 31 students from the management track. Only 25% of first-year students were assigned to class 0, 60.8% of second-year students were assigned to the same class, while this percentage for third- and fourth-year students was 58.3% and 69.2%, respectively. At the same time, the

proportion of male respondents assigned to this class was 63.8%, while the proportion of female respondents assigned to this class was 53.2%.

Table 7 shows the percentage of respondents who answered affirmatively, i.e gave an answer that corresponds to the value 1 in the binarized answer structure to each of the 12 questions within both classes. Generally, higher percentages suggest a greater degree of awareness, interest, and a positive attitude toward the topic of forensic accounting, while lower values indicate a lack of knowledge or lower interest. In addition, within the same table, the values of Cohen's h coefficient (Cohen, 1988), which measures the size of the difference between two proportions or probabilities, are shown, in order to further demonstrate the differences in the answers to these questions of both classes of respondents.

Table 6. Distribution of respondents by latent classes

Latent Class	Gender	Program	First year	Second year	Third year	Fourth year	Total
0	Male	Computer Science	1	6	5	19	31
0	Male	Management	1	5	4	10	20
0	Female	Computer Science	1	8	7	4	20
0	Female	Management	1	4	5	3	13
1	Male	Computer Science	1	2	5	4	12
1	Male	Management	3	8	4	2	17
1	Female	Computer Science	6	4	2	3	15
1	Female	Management	2	1	4	7	14

Source: Authors

Table 7. Percentage of affirmative responses by latent class and values of Cohen's h

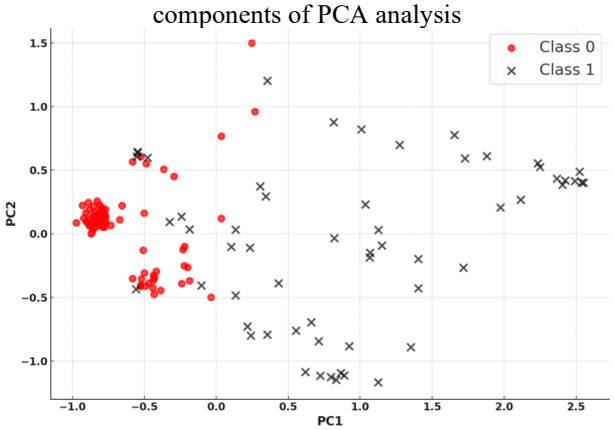
Latent Class	Q1	Q4	Q6	Q7	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q15	Q16	Q18
0	100%	70%	11%	100%	100%	100%	96%	85%	95%	100%	100%	100%
1	45%	21%	14%	59%	52%	55%	50%	48%	28%	59%	34%	57%
Cohen's h	1.67	1.03	0.09	1.39	1.53	1.47	1.17	0.82	1.58	1.39	1.9	1.43

Source: Authors

Latent class 0 is characterized by high values across almost all indicators, indicating a high degree of awareness, interest, and conviction in the importance and employability potential of forensic accounting among the group of 84 students. All students in this class had previously heard of the term forensic accounting (Q1), 96% expressed interest in pursuing this field (Q11), and 95% would gladly attend additional courses in this area (Q13). High results in this class were also recorded regarding confidence in the practical application of knowledge (Q18 – 100%) and belief that this field has good employment prospects (Q12 – 85%). In contrast, latent class 1, which includes 58 students, shows lower average values in nearly all items, suggesting a lower level of awareness, less expressed interest in the field, and less confidence in the practical application of forensic accounting and its employability benefits. Only 45% of respondents in this class had previously heard the term forensic accounting (Q1), 50% express interest in the field (Q11), and only 28% indicate they would attend additional courses in this area (Q13).

Regarding the Cohen's h coefficient, the results presented in Table 7 indicate that all values of Cohen's h coefficient, with the exception of question Q6 (h = 0.09), which refers to the existence of a forensic accounting course at the university and is not related to the knowledge and attitudes of students regarding this field, are significantly above the threshold value for a medium effect (h = 0.50), with the majority exceeding the threshold for a large effect (h = 0.80), which according to Cohen's interpretation (Cohen, 1988) represents strong differences in the response patterns between the two formed classes. Overall, the results confirm the existence of a dichotomous pattern in the perception, knowledge and interest in forensic accounting among students, which can have important implications for the design of teaching content and promotion strategies of this area within higher education.

Figure 2. 2D Projection of respondents from different latent classes in relation to the three principal components of PCA analysis



Source: Authors

To examine the statistical significance of differences in latent class membership in relation to respondents' characteristics, Pearson's chi-square tests were conducted for the factors of gender, study program, and year of study, along with the Cochran–Armitage test for trend related to the year of study. The results of these tests are presented in Table 8. The results show that, despite descriptive analysis indicating differences among respondent groups regarding their attitudes towards forensic accounting,

gender (p = 0.274) and study program (p = 0.135) are not statistically significantly associated with the respondents' latent class. However, a significant association was identified between year of study and latent class membership (p = 0.019), along with a significant trend in this relationship (p = 0.000), where students in higher years were significantly more often assigned to the class characterized by greater knowledge and positive attitudes toward this field. This finding suggests that the educational process and exposure to the subject matter during studies contribute to shaping students' interest and their perception of the importance of forensic accounting.

Table 8. Test results for assessing dependence between respondents' characteristics and assigned latent class

Characteristics	Pearson		Cochran–Armitage	
	χ^2	p-value	Z	p-value
Gender	1.20	0.274	/	/
Study Program	2.24	0.135	/	/
Year of Study	9.95	0.019	24.81	0.000

Source: Authors

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study clearly demonstrate a strong interest among students in forensic accounting and highlight the necessity of a strategic approach to incorporating this discipline into the formal curricula of management and information systems programs at the University of Belgrade. Although the majority of students in the sample (77.5%) had previously heard of this discipline, a large proportion (76%) perceived their knowledge as basic or insufficient, regardless of gender, study program, or year of study. Only 50% of respondents were aware of international certification in the field, while 74.7% reported being only partially or not at all familiar with the concept of digital forensics. Furthermore, only 23.2% of respondents learned about forensic accounting through formal education, with most obtaining information via the internet and professional literature. Gender significantly influenced the source of information: female respondents more frequently used professional literature, while male respondents relied more on media. At the same time, 66.9% of respondents stated that their faculty does not offer a course related to forensic accounting, highlighting its insufficient representation in the curricula of faculties with programs in management and information systems. In terms of general awareness and perceived knowledge of forensic accounting, the findings show a basic awareness of the discipline among students, but also a lack of perceived knowledge and institutional support, which significantly limits the development of professional competencies in this field in the Republic of Serbia.

Regarding the perceived career relevance and practical applicability of forensic accounting, most students (80.3%) believe that this field is important in the fight against financial fraud, with male respondents expressing higher agreement with this statement than female respondents. Only 4.9% rejected the possibility of pursuing a career in forensic accounting, while male students showed greater interest in career development in this field than their female peers. A significant portion (69.7%) fully or mostly believe in the realistic employment opportunities within this domain, and 74% believe that knowledge of forensic accounting can be applied in real business situations in Serbia. Additionally, it was noted that 67.6% of respondents expressed interest in attending additional courses or training in forensic accounting outside of faculty settings, with this interest varying significantly by year of study. These findings confirm that students perceive forensic accounting as an attractive and valuable field for professional development, further justifying the need for increased accessibility to both formal and informal education in this area.

When it comes to students' opinions on including and designing forensic accounting courses in university curricula, only 1.4% believe that this subject should not be part of the academic program. Opinions were divided on whether it should be a compulsory or elective course, regardless of the students' field of study. Generally, male students were more likely to recognize the importance of the subject compared to female students, and students in their fourth and second years showed higher support compared to those in other years. Students identified the following as the most important topics to include in educational programs on forensic accounting: "Using software for fraud detection," "Transaction analysis with artificial intelligence," and "Digital trace analysis," indicating a clear focus on modern, technology-driven fraud detection methods among students. In another question, which evaluated preferred forensic accounting topics for inclusion in the curriculum, students ranked "Investigation of abuse and fraud" as most important, followed by "Use of digital evidence" and "Fraud and money laundering," although the latter received significantly fewer responses. Regarding teaching methods, students overwhelmingly preferred interactive learning formats such as workshops, simulations, and case-based approaches. Only 6.3% of students preferred "traditional lectures" as a desirable teaching method, suggesting that the classical theoretical approach has relatively low support among students. Additionally, students showed strong support for institutional collaboration in teaching with relevant actors such as tax authorities, prosecutors, and auditing firms. In fact, 83.1% of students expressed willingness to participate in simulations of financial fraud investigations, with statistically significant correlations between responses and year of study fourth-year students expressed the highest interest, followed by second, third, and first-year students, and also gender, with male respondents showing more interest. Overall, students favor practical, engaging, and interdisciplinary approaches that would better prepare them for real-world business challenges.

The latent class analysis enabled the identification of two student groups: one, comprising 84 students, that is more informed and interested in forensic accounting, and another, consisting of 58 students, characterized by lower awareness, less interest, and lower confidence in the practical application and employability potential of forensic accounting. Although descriptive analysis of these latent classes suggests a higher presence of male and

information systems students in the more informed group, inferential tests showed no statistically significant relationship between study program or gender and class membership. This indicates the universal relevance of forensic accounting in an educational context. However, a significant relationship was found between year of study and class membership, suggesting that progression through university years increases the likelihood of being classified in the group with a greater interest in forensic accounting. This implies that exposure to educational content through formal education contributes to developing positive attitudes and professional orientation toward this field, as well as a preference for practical teaching methods among students.

Based on the obtained results, it can be concluded that there is a strong need for systematically and strategically integrating forensic accounting into formal curricula in the Republic of Serbia, as well as for designing additional educational initiatives aimed at developing student knowledge and career orientation in this field. These educational programs should focus on practical and interactive teaching methods, cooperation with industry and relevant institutions such as tax authorities, police, and courts, and the application of experiential and multidisciplinary learning methods. Furthermore, it is essential to promote the importance of this field, especially among first-year students and those with lower levels of awareness, in order to gradually foster awareness and motivation for professional development in this domain. Such an educational strategy would not only enhance student knowledge and competencies but also contribute to strengthening the integrity of the financial system and combating economic crime in the Republic of Serbia over the long term.

Note: Informed consent was obtained before the survey was conducted.

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