

# Accounting undergraduates' perspectives on integrating forensic accounting into the curriculum in Sri Lanka

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** This study examines the current level of forensic accounting education in Sri Lanka and its level of sufficiency from the viewpoint of accounting undergraduates studying in Sri Lankan government universities.

**Research methodology:** Data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire targeting third and fourth-year accounting undergraduates of Sri Lankan government universities. To achieve the research objectives, descriptive statistics were used as analytical tools.

**Results:** The study revealed that existing auditing course modules and stand-alone forensic accounting course units do not adequately cover forensic accounting topics in response to the rising demand for forensic accountants' services in Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan government universities are required to restructure the integration of forensic accounting education with greater coverage. Moreover, as per accounting undergraduates, the precise method of covering forensic accounting within accounting education would be to introduce a separate degree program that covers all forensic accounting discussions.

**Limitations:** The main limitation of this study is that it focuses only on the perspectives of government university undergraduates. Perceptions of accounting undergraduates in private universities and professional qualification institutions that offer accounting degree programs were not considered.

**Contribution:** This study provides insights for university administrators on how to integrate forensic accounting into the accounting curriculum. Moreover, the suggested modifications will provide undergraduates with the skills required to practice forensic accounting after graduation.

**Keywords:** *Accounting Education, Accounting Undergraduates, Forensic Accounting, Sri Lanka*

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## 1. Introduction

Forensic accounting is identified as (Nunn, McGuire, Whitcomb, & Jost, 2006) a way of looking into financial transactions and commercial circumstances for the purpose of discovering the truth and forming a professional judgment regarding any potential fraud. It analyzes financial data for use in judicial procedures and investigates fraudulent activities using accounting techniques. Forensic accounting has grown in popularity among researchers and other relevant parties worldwide as a profession that accountants support to combat fraud (Ebaid, 2022).

Due to the rise of managerial and employee fraud, embezzlement, and other economic crimes that occur in today's society, it is becoming clear that professional accountants with the necessary forensic accounting skills are required to prevent, identify, and examine fraudulent activities. The front-page headlines of mainstream newspapers worldwide have been dominated by accounting and financial fraud over the past few years ([Mehta & Bhavani, 2017](#)). Major accounting scandals involving firms such as Enron and WorldCom have expanded the public understanding of fraudulent activities and false financial reporting ([Ebaid, 2022](#)). The necessity for forensic accountants has increased as a result of this increased awareness of fraud.

In light of the rise in fraud and corruption, especially in Sri Lanka with the current economic crisis, forensic accounting services are becoming increasingly necessary ([Munasinghe, 2022](#)). Furthermore, because the availability of information through social media and other channels is high, individuals in the current Sri Lankan setting are more aware of fraud and other financial crimes. They demand independent investigation regarding such economic fraud. Competent professionals and other relevant authorities are responsible for conducting such reviews to improve transparency. In such a situation, the forensic accountant's function is more crucial than ever before.

Within today's commercial environment, there is a higher level of necessity for forensic accountants. However, not every person possesses the wide range of abilities and traits that build up a highly competent forensic accountant. Advanced written and verbal communication skills are essential to forensic accountants. To be a successful professional in this field ([Nunn et al., 2006](#)), one must have a proper accounting foundation, in-depth awareness of audit procedures, risk evaluation, control processes, fraud detection, and knowledge of the fundamentals of the judicial process. Advanced levels of skills are needed to analyze complex financial transactions in a specialty accounting field that deals with fraudulent activities and their complexity.

The development of a highly systematic approach in relation to forensic accounting education is required because of the rising need for forensic accounting experts ([Seda & Kramer, 2014](#)). Universities located in developed economies, particularly in the USA, have commenced integrating forensic accounting into the higher education system as a response to the growing necessity for forensic accounting to give accounting graduates the competencies and skills required for practicing as forensic accounting professionals. Most of the colleges in developed nations are currently in the process of updating their conventional accounting curriculum in order to include forensic accounting course units and also offer majors, bachelor's degrees, and master's degrees in forensic accounting ([Kramer, Seda, & Bobashev, 2017](#)).

In addition, several government universities within Sri Lanka, including the University of Sri Jayewardenepura (USJ) and the University of Kelaniya (UOK), currently provide course units/degree programs in forensic accounting. The University of Kelaniya first offered an Auditing and Forensic degree in Sri Lanka, and the University of Sri Jayewardenepura has added forensic accounting as a distinct course unit to the existing accounting specialized degree program ([Priyangika & Bandara, 2017](#)).

There are several studies on the present level of forensic accounting education within Sri Lanka and its future direction from the perspectives of academics and practitioners. However, to the best of our knowledge, there have been few studies on Sri Lanka's current level of forensic accounting education and its sufficiency from the viewpoint of accounting undergraduates. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by studying the perception of accounting undergraduates studying in Sri Lankan government universities towards the current level of forensic accounting education within Sri Lanka and its level of sufficiency.

This study aims to 1. assess the degree of necessity of forensic accounting within the current Sri Lankan context; 2. assess the prevailing status of integrating forensic accounting into accounting education in Sri Lankan state universities; and 3. Identify the most appropriate approach for integrating forensic

accounting into accounting education. The questionnaire was mainly used to collect data, and data analysis was performed using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 23). This will provide direction to the Sri Lankan government university authorities on how to structure an accounting curriculum that incorporates forensic accounting concepts.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Concept of forensic accounting**

Forensic accounting is identified as ([Rezaee & Burton, 1997](#)) a promising trend, particularly as a result of today's litigious corporate surroundings, the occurrence of fraudulent business practices, and accounting professionals' increased emphasis on fraud prevention and detection. A forensic accountant's role seems to be quite distinctive from that of a traditional accountant and auditor's fiduciary duties of reviewing annual accounts ([Gangwani, 2020](#)).

Although many definitions of Forensic Accounting demonstrate that the concept is still growing, constant movement in definitions can also cause confusion. Without emergence, the term "forensic accounting" may reflect considerable variations in business schools, scholars, and accounting professionals. It may further mislead the public about the functions that forensic accounting professionals may offer. It is necessary to have a universally accepted terminology ([Botes & Saadeh, 2018](#)).

However, there is currently no universally accepted definition for forensic accounting. The definition is generally determined by forensic accountants' background, experience, and practice. As a result, ([Ebaid, 2022](#)) numerous institutions and scholars have identified different definitions of forensic accounting.

forensic accounting refers ([Nunn et al., 2006](#)) to the procedure of examining economic transactions and aspects of a business in order to determine the truth and form an expert opinion about potential fraudulent activities. Forensic accounting is a broad field that includes financial statement inquiries and litigation support. As with any forensic examination, accountants must challenge all information presented. The purpose of the investigation was to arrive at an impartial and fair financial assessment of the company. Furthermore, forensic accounting is frequently confused with fraud investigations or fraud auditing (DiGabriele & Huber, 2015)([DiGabriele & Huber, 2015](#)). It covers a much broader range of issues than fraud does.

Forensic accounting ([PwC, n.d.](#)) provides training for chartered accountants to investigate cases, conflicts, legal support, insurance claim reviews, and other issues that may end up before a court of law. Also, in numerous litigation support and investigatory accounting settings, forensic accountants merge their knowledge and understanding with investigative skills to uncover fraudulent activities ([ACFE, n.d.](#)).

Therefore, since forensic accounting is a sophisticated interdisciplinary field when developing appropriate educational practices, it is critical to focus on a comprehensive definition of forensic accounting ([Alshurafat, Beattie, Jones, & Sands, 2020](#)).

### **2.2. Necessity of forensic accounting for Sri Lanka.**

Sri Lanka is an island country in the South Asian region located in the Indian Ocean. As a developing country, Sri Lanka has a higher rate of complexity regarding fraud and corruption levels. Fraudulent activities and corruption are more common in public-sector entities in developing nations, and perpetrators are frequently not held accountable. Sri Lanka ranked 102nd out of 180 countries in the world, which suggests that critical corruption issues exist within the country ([International, 2021](#)). In developing nations, corruption is mostly driven by the absence of transparency in the public sector, inadequate legal systems, economic isolation, and bureaucratic traditions ([Ebaid, 2022](#)).

Numerous factors have contributed to the economic crisis that Sri Lanka is currently experiencing. Corruption, fraud, and malpractice were the primary causes of this crisis. The most prevalent types of corruption include soliciting bribes from public officials, facilitating payments made to avoid bureaucratic red tape, nepotism, and cronyism. The principal anti-corruption legislation is the Penal Code and the Bribery Act, which penalize misconduct and attempted fraud in the manner of extortion, as well as both active and passive bribing. There is no explicit difference between bribery and facilitation payments, although the Prevention of Corruption Act forbids gifts with the intention of promoting corruption. Although the government of Sri Lanka has begun to enforce anti-corruption laws, enforcement is nevertheless hindered by deficiencies in funding and expertise understanding, and strong political elites frequently escape punishments for corruption charges ([Integrity, 2020](#)).

In recent years, Sri Lanka has experienced many financial scandals because of the rising rate of corruption and fraud. For example, [Wickramasinghe and Anthony \(2017\)](#) reported that the country experienced the largest financial loss as a result of the bond scam on February 27, 2015. Regarding the possible consequences, the situation remains unclear. Further, the bankruptcy of the Golden Key, Pramuka Bank, and ETI Finance, which left thousands of depositors helpless and distraught after losing their money, caused some of the largest financial scandals in Sri Lankan history. In addition, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka has received information about various forms of financial fraud and scams carried out via social media networks, Internet-based applications, and mobile payment apps. Most of these scams are carried out via web or mobile app-based easy loan schemes that entice the public. Fraudsters encourage consumers to share highly confidential customer information and data ([CBSL, 2021](#)).

In the recent past, Sri Lanka has experienced massive protests against corruption and poor economic management. Many protestors and policy experts have cited government corruption as a contributing factor in the economic crisis in Sri Lanka. The World Bank stated that it is "working very closely with public institutions to define robust controls and fiduciary supervision to ensure these funds reach the poorest and most vulnerable" before offering new financing, whereas the IMF has sought "structural transformation to address corruption vulnerabilities" ([HRW, 2022](#)).

This has led to public concern at the incidence of significant corporate frauds, with the phrase "Where were the auditors?" becoming more popular. Although fraud deterrence, fraud prevention, and fraud investigation are inextricably related to the accounting and auditing professions, each profession plays a unique role in living up to the assumption that they will function as detectives. Forensic accounting has become crucial in the world of finance and accounting to close the gap between the public's view and auditing practices ([Priyangika & Bandara, 2017](#)).

Therefore, the prevalence of corruption and fraud highlights the importance of forensic accounting services in Sri Lanka.

### ***2.3. Skills required for forensic accounting***

Numerous researchers have recognized that practicing forensic accounting requires an accountant to have skills and capabilities that go far beyond conventional audit and investigation skills. The skills required by forensic accountants differ significantly from those required by auditors. Forensic accountants should have creative thinking about the methods that a fraudster utilizes to commit, conceal, and comprehend fraudulent activities. Furthermore, they must clearly and accurately communicate the results to different stakeholders, considering individuals who have less knowledge of auditing and accounting ([Ebaid, 2022](#)).

Essentially ([Prabowo, 2013](#)), a forensic accountant requires three essential ingredients: mindset, technique, and experience. The first component, the mindset, is the most complicated to establish. Mentality refers to how one thinks when conducting forensic accounting tasks. This is based on core aspects, such as the potential to distinguish between right and wrong, the courage to rise up against what is right and what is wrong, the capability to withstand work-related pressures, and a brain-teaser mindset. Furthermore, forensic accountants should be familiar with the various methodologies used in

the fraud investigation process. This awareness can be obtained through the education and training offered by educational institutions or other organizations. Forensic accountants must also have adequate expertise in the fraud investigation process. Thus, they can apply knowledge gained through training and education. However, undoubtedly, there is no single forensic accountant in the world who possesses all the requisite skills in fraud investigation. This problem can be resolved by a multidisciplinary team.

Further ([Howieson, 2018](#)), forensic accountants are particularly vulnerable to the misrepresentation of ethics and legal compliance because of the cross-disciplinary and highly specialized nature of the profession. However, a forensic accountant, as a professional, is supposed to act in an ethical manner and in the interests of the public. By implementing a morally superior ethical framework for their practices, forensic accountants can increase and maintain service quality and creditability in their service. According to virtue ethics ([Howieson, 2018](#)), a "good" forensic accountant will not only be proficient in technical skills and knowledge and acquire the riattitudestude, such as self-control and courage, but will also establish the virtue of phronesis, or practical wisdom.

In addition, forensic accounting professionals frequently work in legal contexts where they must be well-versed in laws, legal procedures, and other rules and regulations. In addition to legal expertise, forensic accountants are supposed to have excellent specialized competencies in financial accounting, valuation, and other related technical tools and procedures ([Howieson, 2018](#)). Further, given the services provided by forensic accountants, the practitioner necessitates solid written as well as verbal communication abilities for the workplace, as well as techniques and analytical skills in addition to an academic qualification in accounting ([Van Akkeren, Buckby, & MacKenzie, 2013](#)). This skill is especially significant in expert testimony whenever a forensic accountant elaborates on findings to a judge and jury. Specialist reports are routinely used and investigated, and it is essential to properly communicate the findings ([Digabriele, 2008](#)).

In conclusion, accounting professionals will be able to cope with the diverse services provided by forensic accountancy firms if they have expertise in critical thinking and writing capabilities as well as the capacity to utilize electronic database tools, collect evidence, analyze results, and communicate the results. Therefore, it is clear that whatever course advances in the field of forensics or fraud investigation should focus on improving these skills.

#### ***2.4. The necessity of forensic accounting education***

Forensic accounting is a crucial topic, particularly given today's litigious corporate surroundings, the occurrence of fraudulent business procedures, and the accounting profession's greater emphasis on fraud detection ([Priyangika & Bandara, 2017](#)). The rise in corruption cases indicates the need for study designs that improve examiners' and investigators' capacities to prevent and trace suspected fraud ([Bierstaker, Brody, & Pacini, 2006](#)).

The majority of the highly reported corporate financial reporting scandals, including Enron and HealthSouth, were the primary impetus for this discussion in forensic accounting education. Provided that the frequency rate of fraudulent activities reported by global fraud surveys supports the notion that fraudulent activities continue to remain a major global concern, accounting undergraduates, future professionals, and audit officers should be educated on a variety of forensic accounting topics ([Seda & Kramer, 2014](#)).

Numerous studies have focused on the significance of forensic accounting education in providing graduates with the skills required to perform forensic accounting upon graduation ([Ebaid, 2022](#)). The subject of forensic accounting is in high demand, and it may be time for universities and institutions to modify their curriculum content to fulfill market demands. A specialized curriculum in forensic accounting is crucial because standard accounting graduate programs do not provide everything that is close to the curriculum in forensic accounting required for practice in the field ([Yusof, Kadir, & Nor, 2007](#)).



Universities should provide forensic accounting education at the undergraduate degree level in order for graduating accounting students to be effective in the ethically challenging, practically scrutinized, and regulated business environment ([Rezaee, Crumbley, & Elmore, 2004](#)). Universities that provide or intend to provide a separate forensic accounting course module or incorporate forensic accounting-related concepts into the accounting curriculum use a module approach to structuring courses that cover all three aspects of fraudulent activity, litigation consulting, and expert witnessing ([Rezaee et al., 2004](#)).

Furthermore, the formation of forensic education and training as a distinct discipline may assist in regulatory oversight of the forensic accounting profession (Tiwari & Debnath, 2017)([Tiwari & Debnath, 2017](#)). It is vital to have a distinct certification for forensic accountants in order to provide self-assurance and acknowledgment in their career, to use a mechanism for ongoing professional growth and learning, and to have a secure accounting profession free of competition ([Priyangika & Bandara, 2017](#)).

### **2.5. Expectational gap in forensic accounting education**

It is anticipated that the requirements for and involvement in forensic accounting will increase. To achieve this demand, universities and accounting programs should offer forensic accounting courses at the undergraduate level. According to Chinese students ([Rezaee et al., 2004](#)), forensic accounting studies are required at both the graduate and undergraduate levels.

Although there has been an increase in the depth and scope of forensic accounting education offered in universities in developed economies, there is still a supply demand gap in developing countries ([Ebaid, 2022](#)). It continues to be seen whether the course content satisfies the knowledge and skill requirements of prospective forensic accounting professionals ([Oyerogba, 2021](#)). Universities must understand the broad requirements of the forensic accounting profession. This may guarantee that course modules include specific knowledge and skills suited to a diverse range of services provided by forensic accounting firms ([Van Akkeren et al., 2013](#)). The primary barriers to delivering forensic accounting teaching ([Kramer et al., 2017](#)) seem to be internal restrictions (e.g., faculty's administrative structure and curriculum structure), not due to a lack of demand in the industry or by undergraduates.

In Sri Lankan accounting education ([Abayadeera & Watty, 2014](#)), there is an expectation-performance gap in core skills. As a result, it is vital to acquire a deep awareness of the contributing factors that cause discrepancies in accounting education in relation to generic skills. Curriculum reforms that focus on developing comprehensive and well-designed course content that outlines the course modules, experiences, and actions focused on preparing skilled and highly competitive accounting graduates should be considered by university academics.

The primary cause for the constrained use of forensic accounting is the absence of knowledge and education. Consequently, incorporating forensic accounting into undergraduate and postgraduate courses is critical. Furthermore ([Kaur, Sood, & Grima, 2022](#)), since a competent forensic accountant necessitates knowledge of big data, big data courses should be involved in forensic accounting education. The integration of forensic accounting into the coursework of higher education institutions is required, as this will raise awareness and familiarize people in the industry with the fundamentals of forensic accounting ([Akinbowale, Klingelhöfer, & Zerihun, 2020](#)).

## **3. Research methodology**

### **3.1. Population and Study Sample**

The population of the study was accounting undergraduates enrolled in the third and fourth years of the Department of Accounting of the government universities of Sri Lanka. Undergraduates in their final levels of study, in particular, have already studied the majority of the course units offered included in the curriculum, including auditing and assurance courses, and are therefore more likely to evaluate the integration of forensic accounting subject matters in the accounting curriculum. The study sample included 160 accounting undergraduates who enrolled in third and fourth year of Department of Accounting of the government universities of Sri Lanka from the population mentioned above.

### **3.2. Sources of Data and Data Collection**

Data were gathered using survey methodology. An online questionnaire was sent to accounting undergraduates enrolled in the third and fourth years of the Department of Accounting of government universities.

There are certain steps in the question-creation process.

1. It is crucial to achieve the objectives of the study by considering the overall research scenario. The questionnaire was developed on the basis of the results of a previous literature review.
2. A pilot study was conducted in a similar manner. twenty (20) undergraduates who were part of the research population, answered the questionnaire.
3. Google Forms containing the final version of the questionnaire were made available online.

The questionnaire consists of two main sections ( A and B), and in Section B, there are five sub-sections. Section A of the developed questionnaire classified the respondents according to their demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, university, and current academic year of study. Section B consists of five subsections, focusing mainly on accounting undergraduates' perspectives on forensic accounting education. Subsection one focuses on the need for forensic accounting for Sri Lanka, sub-section two focuses on the perception towards integration of forensic accounting into the accounting curriculum in Sri Lanka, sub-section three focuses on undergraduates' attitudes towards the benefits of integrating forensic accounting into accounting education, sub-section four focuses on undergraduates' attitudes on the most appropriate approach for integrating forensic accounting in accounting education, and sub-section five focuses on undergraduates' attitudes on topics relating to forensic accounting, which they expect to cover within accounting education.

### **3.3. Data Analysis Strategies**

The results of the online survey were analyzed using IBM's Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 23). Before proceeding to the analysis stage, the collected data were screened and cleaned. Descriptive Statistics were used to describe the participants. The mean, median, and mode, which are identified as measures of central tendency, measures of dispersion such as variance, and standard deviation, were used to describe the collected data of the study. Previous studies ([Ebaid, 2022](#)) have also used these analytical techniques.

## **4. Result and discussion**

These conclusions have a significant influence on policy development. Therefore, it is essential to establish the reliability and validity of the output under these conditions. The reliability of such a study depends heavily on the accessibility of data collection, which is a significant concern. If any inconsistencies in the obtained data are identified, this may be a sign that the research was not properly conducted. The survey was conducted using Google Forms and sophisticated settings were employed to ensure that every response was recorded. Missing values were eliminated from the dataset using this option, and no such values were present in the submitted responses.

### **4.1. Descriptive Statistics of demographic characteristics**

The questionnaire was distributed to accounting undergraduates of government universities within Sri Lanka. The University of Kelaniya recorded the highest participant rate of 23.1% while the University of Wayamba recorded the lowest participation rate of 16.3% and the participants who represented "Other" category were 1.2%.

Third- and fourth-year undergraduate students participated in this research study. Among them, 45.0% of the undergraduates were in the age–22-23 years and 48.7% were under the age–24-25 years. 55% of the participants were in the fourth year of study, and the lowest percentage (45 %) were third-year undergraduates. Among the 160 participants, 87 were female and 73 were male. As a percentage measure, 54.4% were female undergraduates and the remaining 45.6% were male undergraduates.

The results indicate that the nature of the sample is heterogeneous and is a diversified representation.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Demographics	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Gender	male	73	45.6
	female	87	54.4
	Total	160	100.0
Age	22-23	72	45.0
	24-25	78	48.7
	above 25	10	6.3
	Total	160	100.0
University	University of Colombo	30	18.8
	University of Kelaniya	37	23.1
	University of Rajarata	33	20.6
	University of Sri Jayewardenepura	32	20.0
	University of Wayamba	26	16.3
	Other	02	1.2
	Total	160	100.0
Academic Year	Fourth year	88	55.0
	Third year	72	45.0
	Total	160	100.0

Source: Processed data by SPSS (2023)

#### 4.2. Degree of necessity in relation to forensic accounting within the current Sri Lankan context

##### 4.2.1. Undergraduates' perceptions of the need for forensic accounting.

Table 2. Undergraduates' perception for the need of forensic accounting

Question	No		Not Sure		Yes	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Q1: Do you believe that there have been more instances of corruption, fraud, dishonesty, etc. in Sri Lanka over the recent few years?	2	1.3	21	13.1	137	85.6
Q2: Do you believe that Sri Lanka's current auditing and assurance procedures are adequate to identify corruption, fraud, dishonest behaviour, etc.?	134	83.8	18	11.3	8	5
Q3: Do you believe that forensic accountants can indeed be useful in uncovering frauds, corrupt practices, misbehaviour etc.?	0	0	15	9.4	145	90.6
Q4: Do you believe that there is a rising demand for forensic accountants in Sri Lanka?	1	6	19	11.9	140	87.5

Source: Processed data by SPSS (2023)

The first subsection of queries is directed to ascertain undergraduates' perspectives on the demand for forensic accounting. This subsection contains four questions: As presented in Table 2, the majority of undergraduates (137 undergraduates, 85.6% of the study participants) were concerned about the



massive rise in corruption cases, fraudulent activities, and a lack of integrity in Sri Lanka. This may have occurred because of massive protests against the former government's corruption practices, which have been widely reported in the media. Table 2 also demonstrates that the majority of undergraduates (134 undergraduates, or 83.8% of the survey participants) concluded that the prevailing auditing and investigation procedures were inadequate to diagnose these diverse and large instances of fraud. Using explanations of the auditing and investigation coursework in Sri Lankan universities, this could be clarified. This coursework offers slight consideration to techniques for detecting fraud and corruption, or educating students on the essential skills required to do so, rather than focusing on describing and explaining the conventional procedures for evaluating the crucial items of the financial reporting framework with standards on auditing. Given the undergraduates' perception of the rise in cases of misconduct and corruption in current history, along with the insufficiency of the conventional auditing process in discovering this corruption and abuse of power, it should not be hard to believe that the majority of the participants (145 undergraduates, 90.6% of the survey participants) concluded the significance of forensic accountants' role in assisting the government's attempts to discover fraudulent behavior and corruption. The majority of undergraduates (140 undergraduates representing 87.5% of survey participants) predicted that the trend for forensic accountants' services would rise in the near future.

#### **4.3. The prevailing status of integrating forensic accounting into accounting education in Sri Lankan state universities**

##### **4.3.1. Undergraduate perceptions of the integration of forensic accounting.**

Table 3. Undergraduates' perception of the integration of forensic accounting

Question	No		Not Sure		Yes	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Q1: Does the current accounting course content at your university include a separate course that covers forensic accounting?	30	18.8	0	0	130	81.3
Q2: Do the auditing modules you're learning at university contain forensic accounting topics?	33	20.6	63	39.4	64	40
Q3: Do you believe that your university's accounting curriculum adequately addresses forensic accounting topics?	90	56.3	11	6.9	59	36.9
Q4: Do you believe that forensic accounting concepts should be covered more broadly in the Sri Lankan accounting curriculum?	0	0	6	3.8	154	96.3

Source: Processed data by SPSS (2023)

The second subsection examines how forensic accounting is presently embedded into Sri Lankan universities' accounting curriculum, how satisfied undergraduates are with the degree of integration, and what participants would like it to be integrated.

As shown in Table 3, 130 undergraduates agreed that their university's accounting program includes a separate forensic accounting course module, and to some extent, auditing and assurance courses that are currently part of the accounting coursework in Sri Lankan universities cover forensic accounting topics.

Most participants (154 students, 96.3% of respondents) indicated their preference for Sri Lankan universities to include forensic accounting concepts in their accounting syllabuses in response to the perception of the rising demand for forensic accountants' services.

#### 4.3.2. Undergraduate perceptions of the benefits of forensic accounting integration.

Table 4. Undergraduates' perception of the benefits of forensic accounting integration-Mean Ranking

Benefits	Mean	St. D	Rank
B1: Prepare and assist undergraduates regarding engage in litigation support consulting	4.55	0.687	1
B2: Prepare and assist undergraduates regarding engage in expert witnessing	4.53	0.680	2
B3: Prepare and assist undergraduates regarding conducting fraud investigations	4.51	0.699	3
B4: Responsive to the growing need for undergraduates with forensic accounting training and expertise	4.50	0.690	4
B5: Succeed in making university students more attractive to employers	4.48	0.681	5
B6: Fulfils societal demand for services in forensic accounting	4.47	0.750	6
B7: Minimize corporate crime in the economy of Sri Lanka	4.43	0.696	7
B8: Enhance the credibility of financial reporting	4.39	0.734	8
B9: Encourage ethical corporate governance methods	4.34	0.691	9

Source: Processed data by SPSS (2023)

The third subsection explores undergraduates' views on the perceived benefits of including forensic accounting in accounting curricula. Undergraduates were required to rate their agreement with nine of the foreseeable advantages of incorporating forensic accounting into accounting education on a five-point Likert scale.

These findings demonstrate that undergraduates generally concur with the significance of all benefit statements. Table 4 reveals the top five declarations from the students' perspective as follows:

1. Prepare and assist undergraduates in engaging in litigation support consulting (mean = 4.55).
2. Prepare and assist undergraduates in engaging in expert witnessing (mean = 4.53).
3. Prepare and assist undergraduates in conducting fraud investigations (mean = 4.51).
4. Responsive to the growing need for undergraduates with forensic accounting training and expertise (mean = 4.50); and
5. Succeeding to make university students more attractive to employers (mean = 4.48).

These findings enhance undergraduates' desire to pursue new career opportunities, which may offer them more employment opportunities once they graduate.

#### 4.4. Appropriate approach for integrating forensic accounting into accounting education

##### 4.4.1. Undergraduate perceptions of the appropriate approach for integration.

Table 5. Undergraduates' perception of the appropriate approach for integration

Approach	N	%
A1: Offer a forensic accounting course unit as a separate course	28	17.5
A2: Incorporate forensic accounting into current auditing courses	11	6.9
A3: Offer forensic accounting as a distinct and specialized degree programme (ex: bachelor's degree in Forensic accounting)	121	75.6

Source: Processed data by SPSS (2023)

In the fourth subsection, the researcher discovers undergraduates' perspectives on the best way to incorporate forensic accounting into accounting education. Respondents were required to select the most suitable way for integration from three approaches: offering a forensic accounting course unit as a separate course, incorporating forensic accounting into current auditing courses, and offering forensic accounting as a distinct and specialized degree programme (e.g., bachelor's degree in forensic accounting). According to Table 5, the majority of undergraduates (121 undergraduates, or 75.6% of respondents) concurred that the precise method for teaching forensic accounting is to Offer forensic accounting as a distinct and specialised degree programme (ex: bachelor's degree in Forensic accounting)

#### 4.4.2. Undergraduates' Perceptions of Forensic Accounting Concepts/Topics.

Table 6. Undergraduates' perception of forensic accounting topics-Mean Ranking

	Topics	Mean	St. D	Rank
T1:	Types of fraudulent activities (ex: employees, management)	4.34	0.742	1
T2:	Fundamentals of fraudulent activities	4.30	0.783	2
T3:	Methods of investigating frauds	4.29	0.786	3
T4:	Techniques and models for expert witness and testimony	4.19	0.756	4
T5:	Models and techniques for litigation	4.18	0.762	5
T6:	Systems for detecting and deterring fraud	4.14	0.921	6
T7:	Cyber and computer crimes	4.11	0.915	7
T8:	White-collar crime, economic crime, and criminology	4.06	0.811	8
T9:	Components of frauds: opportunity, pressure, and rationalization	4.02	0.816	9
T10:	Assessment of Internal controls and reporting	3.28	1.366	10
T11:	Concepts relating to fraudulent financial statements	3.44	1.117	11
T12:	Compliance with applicable rules and regulations	3.30	1.162	12
T13:	Professional regulations for forensic accounting	2.57	1.268	13

Source: Processed data by SPSS (2023)

The fifth subsection examines participants' views on the forensic accounting concepts that they suppose the accounting curriculum should cover. Thirteen forensic accounting topics were presented to the participants and they were asked to rank the significance of each topic. These findings demonstrate that participants acknowledged the significance of each topic discussed. The five areas of study that students consider crucial, as per Table 6, are as follows:

1. Types of fraudulent activities (e.g., employees and management) (mean = 4.34)
2. Fundamentals of Fraudulent Activities (mean = 4.30)
3. Methods for investigating fraud (mean = 4.29)
4. Techniques and models for expert witness and testimony (mean = 4.19); and
5. Models and techniques for litigation (mean = 4.18).

The first research question focuses on the degree of necessity in relation to forensic accounting within the current Sri Lankan context. Statistical analysis shows that accounting undergraduates in Sri Lankan universities recognize the significance of forensic accounting as a practitioner whose capabilities are becoming increasingly required as a result of the state's continuous rise in corruption and fraud. Undergraduates are also interested in studying forensic accounting to be employed in this field after graduating from university. These findings are supported by earlier studies ([Ebaid, 2022](#)), which observed that accounting undergraduates have a favorable impression of the forensic accounting field

and prefer to be employed as forensic accounting professionals over accountants in private companies and government entities.

The second research question focuses on the prevailing condition of integrating forensic accounting into accounting education in Sri Lankan government universities. With the statistical analysis, the majority of the undergraduates prefer Sri Lankan universities to include an increasing number of forensic accounting concepts in their accounting syllabuses in response to the rising demand for forensic accountants' services, and it will prepare and assist undergraduates in engaging in litigation support consulting, expert witnessing, and conducting fraud investigations.

The third research question focuses on the most appropriate approach for integrating forensic accounting into accounting education. According to several past surveys, undergraduates preferred learning forensic accounting as a separate course unit rather than integrating it into existing auditing and assurance courses as a way to introduce concepts into the accounting curriculum ([Priyangika & Bandara, 2017](#)). In addition to the findings of prior studies, this study shows that students in Sri Lanka prefer a distinct degree program, particularly related to the field of forensic accounting, over a single course unit. Further, in terms of the course content, the study's findings indicate that while undergraduates in Sri Lanka are interested in all aspects of forensic accounting, the concepts they would like to gain knowledge on the most are connected to types of fraudulent activities (e.g., employees, management), fundamentals of fraudulent activities, methods of investigating fraud, techniques and models for expert witness and testimony, and models and techniques for litigation.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study was designed to investigate how forensic accounting is incorporated into accounting education in Sri Lanka, a developing nation, from the perspective of accounting undergraduates in Sri Lanka's government universities.

Based on these findings, undergraduates have been aware of the rise in fraud and corruption cases in recent years, believe that forensic accounting education is crucial to combating this corruption, and anticipate future growth in demand for forensic accountants' services. According to undergraduates, the preferred method for incorporating forensic accounting into the accounting curriculum is to offer a separate degree program that consists of forensic accounting-related concepts. The findings of this study offer critical information to officials at Sri Lankan state universities. Accounting curriculum development in Sri Lankan government universities is critical to integrating forensic accounting into accounting studies. Graduates who are qualified to practice as forensic accountants and can assist the government's attempts to prevent fraud and optimize the economic resources that can be utilized to enhance the well-being of the entire society. This incorporation enhances the efficiency of Sri Lankan government universities in meeting current social requirements.

### **5.1. Limitations**

This study focused only on accounting undergraduates at all government universities in Sri Lanka. This is limited to government university students in Sri Lanka. Therefore, further research studies can focus on accounting undergraduates in private universities and other institutions that offer accounting degree programs.

### **5.2. Suggestions**

Although the study only focused on Sri Lankan government undergraduates, future studies can be conducted to examine the level of forensic accounting education in different contexts. In addition, the aspects used in this analysis were derived from previous literature, but future researchers may add additional forensic accounting topics for further analyses.

### **5.3. Implications of the study**

This study aims to provide information that could be beneficial for administrators of Sri Lankan government universities to consider offering a separate degree program for forensic accounting and

integrating forensic accounting concepts into accounting education after considering the recent changing market conditions and the accounting profession in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, these suggested modifications will provide undergraduates with the necessary skills required to practice forensic accounting after graduation and will reduce the gap between the demand and supply of forensic accountants.

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