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THE MILITARY EDUCATION SYSTEM AS THE FOUNDATION FOR ENSURING THE NATIONAL SECURITY OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA[****]

Abstract

The effective preparation of officer personnel within the Ministry of Defence and the Serbian Armed Forces constitutes a key prerequisite for the successful execution of duties related to the safeguarding of national security. The specific tasks and hierarchical structure of the defense system require that the officer corps – as direct participants in the decision-making process – exert a significant influence on operational efficiency and system functionality. Accordingly, the education and training of officers are of critical importance for the development of their professional competencies, which directly affect the overall level of

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national security. Contemporary security challenges, the transformation of the nature of modern conflicts, and the evolution of security strategies necessitate reforms aimed at aligning academic curricula with the principles of modern military operations and the demands of the current security environment. This paper presents an empirical study focused on evaluating the applicability of knowledge acquired at the Military Academy in the context of performing officer duties at various hierarchical levels of military decision-making. The research is based on an analysis of the correlation between knowledge obtained through military education and the requirements imposed by operational and tactical military practice. The methodological framework encompasses both quantitative and qualitative data analysis collected through surveys, employing appropriate statistical techniques to determine the extent of the relationship between the educational process and officers' professional competencies. The findings indicate that officers perceive greater applicability of knowledge acquired through military studies at the tactical level, while at the operational level of decision-making, knowledge from the social sciences is considered relatively more important. These insights contribute to a deeper scientific understanding of the relationship between academic education and military practice, and they provide a foundation for the systematic improvement of curricula with the aim of optimizing the educational process and enhancing its practical relevance.

Keywords: military, education, training, officers, decision-making, military sciences, national security

INTRODUCTION

The rapid pace of scientific and technological advancement, coupled with the presence of global challenges that pose a real threat to the very existence of life on Earth, places increasing demands on the international community, individual states, and each citizen. One of the decisive factors in a country's economic power and the high standard of living of its population today is intellectual property, which enables the offering of promising projects and technologies on the global market. The issues of innovation and, consequently, the quality of intelligence – which is directly linked to the level of education and

culture of a nation's population – have come to the forefront (Adler 2025). The scope and quality of the overall national product are directly dependent on the level of education and culture of its producers, that is, the country's population. The higher the educational and cultural level of the population, the greater and more advanced the national product. Even now, modern, highly developed countries achieve up to 40% of national product growth through an efficient education system (КонсультантПлюс 2022). Each year, governments around the world allocate funds for science and determine expenditures for research and development (Конотоп *и др.* 2022, 66). In the modern world, education should be viewed as a leading mechanism for societal development and a foundation for reproducing its spiritual potential. The presence of an efficient and sustainably developing education system should be regarded as a guarantee of both internal and external societal security, a crucial condition for ensuring sovereign existence, and an integral component of stability and security.

In the postmodern era – characterized by the use of knowledge-intensive technologies during the transition from an "industrial" to an "informational" civilization – education and security are closely intertwined categories. Moreover, the strategic development doctrines of the vast majority of advanced nations are based on the concept of continuous growth and the increasing role of education within the national security system. In line with global trends, education determines the prospects for socio-economic and cultural development, as well as the resilience of the state (Tikly 2019). Fundamentally, education represents one of the core state institutions and, as such, becomes a decisive factor in economic efficiency and the national security of the state as a whole. A state may withdraw from financing specific projects in any sector of the economy, but it cannot afford to withdraw from the education sector. A country that loses the ability to educate and train personnel for the needs of its own economy, science, and culture forfeits its historical prospects for progressive development. The assurance and maintenance of national security continue to significantly depend on the armed forces – their morale, motivation, and professional competencies – which are shaped by academic education and professional training (Milošević Stolić i Marček 2019). The current national security objectives of the Republic of Serbia, as outlined in the 2019 National Security Strategy (NSS) and other strategic-doctrinal documents, point to the necessity of establishing an appropriate educational system. In this context, the

societal and economic justification for the existence of the Military Academy (MA) and the National Defence School (NDS) within the University of Defence (UoD) arises from the Republic of Serbia's need to educate and train officer personnel. For 175 years, the most consistent and stable source of officer cadre for the Serbian Armed Forces (SAF) has been the military education system centered around the Military Academy (Đukić 2025). In this regard, the system for officer training holds a vital position within the national security framework, as it is directly linked to maintaining and enhancing the defensive capabilities of the state. Organizationally subordinate to the Ministry of Defence (MoD) but structurally part of the national university system, the University of Defence plays a pivotal role in the education, training, and qualification of officer personnel for the Ministry of Defence and the Serbian Armed Forces. It also conducts research in the field of military sciences and houses the Institute for Strategic Research.

The correlation between practical training and academic education represents a significant challenge across numerous professional domains (Jensen 2025). This issue is well-documented in policing (Cordner 2019; Williams, Norman, and Rowe 2019; Bartkowiak-Théron 2019), medicine (Ten Cate and Carraccio 2019), and military education (Kime and Anderson 1997). Within modern military academies, cadets preparing for officer roles simultaneously acquire military skills and develop strategic thinking, aiming to integrate practical training with academic education (Hornstra *et al*. 2024, 1). Contemporary globalization trends and the development of emerging technologies place new demands on the process of military education and training. This study focuses on the professional development of military academy cadets, emphasizing the necessity of integrating academic and practical components within the educational process. In line with this, Lindsay and Goldfarb argue that artificial intelligence (AI) should not be viewed as a replacement for human decision-making, but rather as an augmentation and support tool (Goldfarb and Lindsay 2022, 7–50). In the military context – especially regarding decision-making by officers – this position is particularly significant (Jensen 2025; Collazzo 2025). The integration of AI into the assessment and decision-making process enables officers to complement personal experience and intuition with the analytical capabilities of modern algorithms, thereby enhancing the speed, accuracy, and relevance of decisions in high-risk and complex situations (Miljković i Beriša 2023, 82; Collazzo 2025; Jensen 2025; Adler 2025).

The overarching goal is to develop a well-educated and highly competent officer corps, capable of performing tasks efficiently in both national and international contexts, in accordance with modern standards and value frameworks (Anishchenko 2024). This requires bridging the gap between skill-based training and academic education to ensure comprehensive and effective preparation of cadets for the complex professional roles of commissioned officers. Achieving this objective necessitates a balance between academic and vocational-specialist education, as well as the integration of social-humanistic and technical-technological disciplines. The contemporary era of information technologies demands continuous adaptation of educational approaches, with particular emphasis on the development of abstract thinking. This development is facilitated through university-level education and the promotion of lifelong learning. In turn, this underscores the importance of continuous professional military education, within which officers must become proactive problem-solvers and collaboration-oriented experts.

In today's complex security environment – characterized by heightened uncertainty and ambiguity, especially within the military profession – critical thinking in the decision-making process emerges as a foundational component of effective military leadership. In that context, it is essential to continuously monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of educational programs based on scientifically relevant methodological approaches.

DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS IN THE FIELD OF SECURITY AND DEFENSE

One of the key instruments for achieving state sovereignty is its armed forces, which must be capable of protecting national interests and national security. Accordingly, a state's position in the international arena depends on the level of development of its armed forces. One of the critical components of a state's military organization is the military education system, designed to provide timely, comprehensive, and high-quality personnel support. An example of this is Ukraine, which has incorporated training programs on unmanned systems, cybersecurity, and drone technologies in its higher military education institutions since 2014 (Ministry of Defence of Ukraine 2025; *Interfax-Ukraine* 2025; Shevchenko *et al.* 2024; Buriachok *et al*. 2023).

The conceptual and theoretical frameworks of security and defense studies are based of broadly defined and complex notions of security and defense. In the contemporary era, the concept of security encompasses a wide range of challenges – from internal issues at the state level, through regional threats, to global phenomena such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, radicalization, human trafficking, smuggling, and organized crime.

The dynamics of the modern security environment require a comprehensive approach that transcends traditional frameworks of defense policy. This expanded understanding of security simultaneously challenges classical forms of professional advisory and governance, necessitating an interdisciplinary approach. Such an approach includes the integration of knowledge and skills from the intelligence community, the military, judicial bodies, and police, as well as expertise in the fields of regional and local politics, social and economic sciences (Bures and Pernica 2016, 1).

Modern military operations are marked by increasing complexity, which necessitates adaptations in the education of future officers (Mitrović and Bojanić 2021). According to Bekkers and Sweijers, operations occur across multiple domains – land, sea, air, space, information, and the human dimension – and at different levels – strategic, operational, and tactical – thus requiring a multidisciplinary approach (Bekkers and Sweijers 2019; NATO's Strategic Warfare Development Command 2023). Additionally, potential adversaries' inherent unpredictability and escalation of military capabilities further complicate operational environments (Soldaat and Tuinman 2023). This underscores the need to enhance the professional competencies of officers, which include not only technical and tactical skills but also the ability to engage in strategic thinking and decision-making under uncertainty (Anishchenko and Razumeyko 2022). Leadership, combat readiness, and survival skills remain key elements of military training. As Hornstra *et al.* emphasize, in developing these skills, there is always a clear correlation between learning activities and specific performance outcomes (Hornstra *et al.* 2023a). For example, weapons handling exercises at the shooting range are directly linked to the ability to use them effectively in combat. However, limiting cadet development solely to military skills proves insufficient in the face of contemporary security challenges.

Parallel to military training, the development of cadets' cognitive and analytical capacities – particularly in the realm of strategic thinking

– has gained importance. These skills are cultivated through academic education, which increasingly occupies a central place in military academy curricula. Unlike military training, academic education often lacks a direct and immediate link between the knowledge acquired and its practical application (Hornstra *et al*. 2023a). For instance, cadets study cultural norms and values in academic courses, which may be crucial in diplomatic engagements during stabilization missions, even though the specific context for applying such knowledge is usually unknown during instruction. To fully grasp the modern concept of security, armed forces and broader national security systems must adapt to emerging and increasingly complex threats. Future officers – cadets – as well as members of other components of the national security apparatus, must be equipped to operate under conditions of uncertainty and, as the literature suggests, must learn to "combat the disease of certainty in decision-making" (Thomas and Gentzler 2013, 70). In this regard, education plays a central role: the fundamental assumption is that members of the armed forces must be educated to respond effectively to challenges in the unpredictable national security environment. Modern military education is no longer viewed merely as training in technical and tactical skills but rather as a process of developing reasoning ability, critical thinking, and strategic reflection (Sookermany 2017). In Lithuania, the education of highly qualified officer-leaders is aligned with the Sectoral Qualifications Framework for the military profession, with particular emphasis on developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The cultivation of these competencies is primarily advanced through student-led activities, in contrast to traditional professor-centered modes of content delivery (Dudzevičiūtė 2025).

It is important to emphasize that a potential disruption to the development of reasoning and critical thinking skills lies in the lack of integration between skill acquisition and academic education. At modern military academies, such as the Royal Netherlands Military Academy (NLDA), cadet training is typically conducted through two parallel, yet often unintegrated, educational processes. On one hand, military instructors deliver training focused on the development of practical military skills; on the other, civilian academic staff provide academic education using their own pedagogical methodologies, frequently without mutual coordination (Hornstra *et al*. 2023a). This divided approach results in cadets being left to independently reconcile and integrate two distinct cognitive frameworks: the military one, which relies on rapid

decision-making under time pressure and with limited information, and the academic one, which emphasizes analytical reasoning based on more comprehensive information and under less temporal constraint (Jansen, Brænder, and Moelker 2019).

An example of such military thinking can be found in standardized NATO procedures for tactical operations planning, which require officers to analyze and compare various courses of action within a short timeframe and based on available data (North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO] 2024). In operational settings, officers are often confronted with situations that require simultaneous application of tactical skills and strategic reasoning – necessitating integrated knowledge. For instance, during a combat operation, a commander must simultaneously manage fire control and unit leadership (practical skills) while coordinating logistics and proactively influencing soldier behavior to avoid negative media exposure that could jeopardize the mission (strategic reasoning).

There is no guarantee that integration of these components will occur spontaneously, nor will it be effective or safe in real-world conditions. Therefore, it is of critical importance that the professional development of cadets includes the systematic promotion of integration between military skills and academic education within the context of strategic thinking (Hornstra *et al.* 2023a). A key step in this direction is establishing mutual understanding and coordination between military training programs and the academic curriculum delivered by civilian faculty.

The functionality and long-term stability of the national security system are founded on the systematic application of knowledge and competencies acquired through military education, both within military and civilian institutional structures, thereby ensuring an integrated approach. Adapting to an increasingly unpredictable security environment entails mutual learning and operational interdependence among diverse actors in the security sector (Kalu 2008). Within the European Union, there is a growing emphasis on a joint response to global security threats through international cooperation (Bojanić, Marček, i Ristić 2019, 12). While multilateralism represents a valuable asset in building common capacities, it simultaneously challenges nation-states in preserving sovereignty in the defense domain.

CURRICULUM OF THE MILITARY ACADEMY OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

The educational system at the Military Academy is designed in accordance with contemporary academic standards and is structured across three levels of higher education: undergraduate (bachelor's), master's, and doctoral studies. In line with implementing the Bologna Declaration principles and applying the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), the study programs are organized into four-year undergraduate, one-year master's, and three-year doctoral cycles. This structure enables the systematic development of cadets' cognitive, analytical, and professional competencies, ensuring their comprehensive preparation for the complex and dynamic demands of the modern security and defense system.

Undergraduate Academic Studies

Undergraduate studies at the Military Academy are designed to prepare cadets for effective decision-making and command responsibilities at the tactical level. The curriculum is based on an integrated approach that combines theoretical and practical education, with an emphasis on foundational knowledge in the fields of social sciences, management, economics, organizational sciences, mathematics, and natural sciences, as well as in engineering, mechanical engineering, transportation, electrical engineering, computer science, and military sciences. The program integrates academic disciplines, military training modules, and physical education to ensure the comprehensive development of professional competencies.

During the first two years, students engage with general education content, while the final two years are focused on professional specialization through dedicated study tracks, including: "Land Forces, Military Electronic Engineering, Military Mechanical Engineering, Technological Engineering of Materials and Protection, Military Transportation Engineering, Military Aviation, and Defense Economics. The Land Forces program includes elective areas – modules (Infantry, Armored Units, Artillery, Engineering, and River Units)" (Vojna akademija 2025). The Military Electronic Engineering program includes modules aligned with the roles and missions of the Serbian Armed Forces, such as: "Artillery-Missile Units for Air Defense, Electronic

Warfare Units, Telecommunication Services, Technical Services, Information Services, and the Air Surveillance and Reporting Service" (Vojna akademija 2025). The primary objective of these programs is to ensure the systematic and purposeful preparation of cadets for their first command duty – as platoon leaders – as well as for other entry-level positions within the defense system.

Advanced levels of higher education in the field of Military sciences

The higher levels of academic education at the MA encompass master's and doctoral studies in the field of military sciences. These programs represent a continuation of professional and scientific development for officers, aimed at acquiring and deepening competencies relevant to addressing complex problems within the defense system and the broader security environment.

The purpose of the master's academic studies is to enhance existing and develop advanced knowledge, skills, and analytical capacities that enable officers to critically analyze, interpret, and solve strategic and operational challenges in the field of defense through the application of an interdisciplinary approach. Particular emphasis is placed on the ability to critically engage with relevant academic and professional literature in the context of real operational and organizational situations.

Doctoral studies are oriented toward the education of highly qualified researchers in the field of military sciences who are capable of independent scientific research and managing complex projects of national importance. The primary objective at this level of education is the development of personnel who, by relying on scientific methods and the highest academic standards, can contribute to the innovative advancement of doctrine, theory, and practice in the domain of defense, as well as to the broader development of scientific thought in both social and academic contexts.

Officer Professional Development Programs

The officer professional development program encompasses a series of advancement courses, including the Basic Command and Staff Course, Command and Staff Advanced Course, General Staff Training, and Advanced Studies in Security and Defense. The Basic Command

and Staff Course aims to systematically develop leadership competencies and professional qualifications necessary for officers to perform complex command and staff duties. The program focuses on preparing officers to effectively assume the roles of company commanders, deputy battalion commanders, and staff officers within battalion-level units.

The Command and Staff Advanced Course is designed to provide strategic and professional education to officers for effective command of tactical units at the battalion level, either within branches or services, and for key staff duties within brigade-level commands and higher organizational structures of the Serbian Armed Forces and the Ministry of Defense.

General Staff Training represents the highest level and a key component of formal military education within the defense system of the Republic of Serbia. Its primary objective is to enable officers to acquire advanced knowledge and skills necessary for commanding tactical units at the brigade level and for executing complex staff and leadership duties at the operational level of command, within the General Staff of the Serbian Armed Forces (GS SAF) and organizational units of the Ministry of Defense. The structure of the program is aligned with relevant national doctrinal and regulatory defense frameworks, as well as with interoperability standards for participation in multinational operations.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION FOR THE COMPLEX DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN A MILITARY CONTEXT

The execution of officer duties at all levels of decision-making requires a clearly defined and efficient decision-making process, shaped by the specific characteristics of the hierarchical structure and mission of the military organization (Kuczynski 2023). The process of command and leadership entails the systematic direction of the functioning of military organizational structures, grounded in scientific principles and methodology (Jevtić, Miljković, and Đorđević 2024, 38). Using force under unpredictable circumstances, limited resources, and time pressure further complicates this process. Poor decisions tend to multiply upward through the chain of command, while the availability and quality of information directly reflect the individual's professional competence. Decision-making, as a core component of military leadership, involves

a cognitive, recursive, and nonlinear mechanism that relies on data analysis, logical reasoning, and the implementation of actions (Farmer 2022; Ernst *et al*. 2023; Adler 2025). This process is influenced by numerous factors – including psychological, organizational, and political dimensions – where cognitive ability has the greatest impact on the effective performance of leadership tasks. Knowledge is a mediator between cognitive ability and job performance, while work experience contributes to the accumulation of applicable knowledge.

In the military system, decision-making occurs on three levels: tactical, operational, and strategic. The tactical level involves the direct command of units in combat; the operational level encompasses the coordination of multiple tactical formations; and the strategic level includes the formulation of long-term military policy and strategy. While operational and strategic planning are typically structured and formalized processes, tactical decision-making is characterized by a high degree of dynamism and uncertainty. The complexity of these processes underscores the need for continuous academic and professional development of officers to ensure their ability to effectively manage challenges across all levels of decision-making (Jevtić, Miljković, and Đorđević 2024, 41).

METHODOLOGY

Research objective

As part of the research project "The Military Profession in Serbia within the Contemporary Security Environment," conducted by the Institute for Strategic Research, an empirical study was carried out in units of the Serbian Armed Forces during 2024. One of the primary objectives was to determine whether, and to what extent, the knowledge acquired through academic studies at the MA contributes to the effective performance of military leadership duties at various decision-making levels within the MoD and the SAF. Additionally, comparisons were made with professional SAF personnel who had completed their education at civilian higher education institutions or the Reserve Officer School before entering professional service. The focus of the research was the current accredited academic program in military sciences.

The sample was selected based on convenience, though it was exhaustive concerning the subject matter, and comprised two groups

of participants. The study included 452 respondents, divided into two groups: (1) officers holding command positions – 13 captains, 44 senior captains, 62 majors, and 52 lieutenant colonels (N = 171) – who had completed Command and Staff Development (CSD); and (2) junior officers – 196 second lieutenants and 85 lieutenants, of whom 176 graduated from the MA and 85 from the Reserve Officer School – currently serving in command roles (N = 281). The study was conducted in September and October 2024 and surveyed officers who had recently assumed leadership duties after graduating from the MA, those who had completed the Basic Command and Staff Course (BCSC), and those who had completed Command and Staff Development. The sample included both male and female participants, with an average age of 36 and an average of 14 years of service in officer positions. While all respondents held officer ranks, 346 had graduated from the Military Academy, while the remainder had obtained degrees from other universities.

Instruments

The study employed evaluation scales developed specifically for the purposes of this research. Respondents assessed the extent to which the knowledge acquired during their academic studies had been useful in the practical execution of officer duties, both during tactical-level assignments and while performing tasks within the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces at tactical and operational levels. Assessment was conducted using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated "not useful at all" and 5 indicated "extremely useful."

Data processing methods

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, analysis of variance (F-test), Pearson's correlation coefficient, and factor analysis. Data processing was conducted using the statistical software package SPSS, version 15.0.

RESULTS OF THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Relevance and Practical Applicability of Undergraduate Academic Courses at the Tactical Level during Initial Officer Duties:

- The analysis of the results demonstrates that the average applicability of undergraduate academic courses in performing initial officer duties is above the overall mean (M = 3.10), with values ranging from 1.29 to 4.49. These empirical findings underscore the relevance and practical orientation of the curriculum and confirm its alignment with the operational requirements of officer responsibilities, providing a basis for informed recommendations to enhance educational effectiveness.
- The statistical analysis did not reveal significant differences in the perception of the applicability of curricular content with respect to gender ($F = 0.762$; $p = 0.481$).
- The highest degree of applicability during professional practice was observed in mandatory courses, particularly *Weaponry with Shooting Instruction*, *Military Physical Training with Methodology of Physical Education* (M = 4.46), *Command in Combat Operations of Basic Tactical Units* (M = 4.09), *Telecommunication Support* (M = 3.72), and *Unit Tactics by Branches* (M = 3.95). In contrast, the lowest applicability levels were recorded in courses such as *French Language* (M = 1.24), *German Language* (M = 1.39), *Fundamentals of Electromechanics and Electronics* (M = 1.69), as well as *Mathematics 1B* and *2B*. These findings suggest that courses directly oriented toward the development of practical and tactical skills demonstrate significantly higher applicability in real service conditions compared to general education disciplines.

Factor structure of course usefulness

Based on the Guttman-Kaiser criterion, the applied factor analysis identified six fundamental (latent) dimensions that reflect the applicability of undergraduate academic courses in the context of performing initial officer duties. These dimensions collectively account for 82.1% of the total variance, as follows:

- Scientific-Professional Factor – 45.48%
- Theoretical-Methodological Factor – 15.15%
- Specific Academic Skills Factor – 6.65%
- Supplementary Applied Disciplines Factor – 5.20%
- Organizational-Leadership Factor – 3.40%
- Additional Foreign Language Factor – 2.74%

The analysis of the correlation matrix indicates relative independence among the identified factors, except for moderate positive

correlations between the third factor and both the first and fifth factors, suggesting a complementary relationship and a significant association between the first and fifth factors.

Comparison of usefulness by scientific fields

The analysis of the results indicates that the highest degree of applicability was achieved in courses within the professional-scientific field (M = 3.76), as well as in *Military Physical Training with Methodology of Physical Education* (M = 4.22), when considered as a separate category. Conversely, the lowest level of applicability was recorded in the natural-mathematical field (M = 1.76), with a statistically significant difference confirmed in comparison to other domains ($F = 21.426$; $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that *Military Physical Training with Methodology of Physical Education* exhibits significantly higher practical applicability than courses in mathematics (MD = 2.376; $p < 0.001$), social sciences (MD = 1.557; $p < 0.001$), and technical sciences (MD = 1.389; $p < 0.001$), though not when compared to military science courses. In contrast, mathematics-related courses showed a significantly lower level of applicability relative to military sciences (MD = -1.783; $p < 0.001$) and technical sciences (MD = -0.932; $p = 0.025$). At the same time, courses in military sciences demonstrated greater practical relevance than those in technical (MD = 0.941; $p = 0.033$) and social sciences (MD = 1.061; $p = 0.008$), while no statistically significant differences were found between technical and social sciences. These results suggest that the educational process is most strongly oriented toward developing practical knowledge and skills within military and related disciplines, thereby underscoring their relevance for tactical-level decision-making.

The relevance and suitability of undergraduate academic courses, in the context of acquiring and applying professional competencies for performing duties at the tactical level of decision-making, differ during internship compared to work within the MoD and the SAF:

- The average perceived usefulness of core academic subjects in performing tasks within the Ministry of Defence and Serbian Armed Forces at the tactical level was rated high (M = 4,24), with a range from 2.92 to 5.00.
- The highest-rated subjects in the context of tactical leadership tasks were Tactics 1 and Tactics 2 (N = 12; M = 5.00). Among compulsory

subjects, the highest ratings were for Military Physical Training (M = 4.81), Armaments and Shooting Practice 2 (M = 4.81), as well as Fundamentals of Weapons Construction, Fundamentals of Command, and Military History (all M = 4.81). Conversely, the lowest-rated subjects were Fundamentals of Electrical Engineering and Electronics (M = 2.81), along with subjects from the natural-mathematical field: Chemistry (M = 2.95), Physics (M = 3.05), and Mathematics (M = 3.19). These results correspond to the assessments of applicability during professional internship.

- It was observed that all subjects from the core academic studies were perceived as more useful in the context of initial duties compared to the internship period, except for elective subjects. This category does not include Branch Tactics ($F = 12.861$; $p < 0.001$) and Branch Armaments and Shooting ($F = 11.097$; $p < 0.002$), whose necessity for application is still evident in operational practice.
- All observed scientific fields demonstrated significantly higher usefulness within initial duties at the tactical level in the defense system compared to their application during the internship ($F = 35.471$; $p < 0.001$). This indicates the importance of work experience in developing the ability to assess the practical value of knowledge acquired during studies at the Military Academy.
- The highest-ranked scientific field in terms of practical applicability for initial duties at the tactical level is military sciences (M = 4.75), while the lowest-ranked is the natural-mathematical field (M = 3.10). This difference is statistically significant ($F = 22.406$; $p < 0.001$). Subjects from the natural-mathematical field have significantly lower usefulness compared to subjects from social sciences (MD = -1.25; $p < 0.001$) and technical sciences (MD = -0.97; $p < 0.001$). Simultaneously, subjects from military sciences show higher usefulness compared to technical sciences (MD = 0.65; $p = 0.015$).

The perceived usefulness of core academic subjects at the Military Academy differs when performing duties at the tactical versus the operational level within the MoD and the SAF:

- The overall perception of the usefulness of core academic subjects at the Military Academy in the context of performing duties at the operational level was rated as high (M = 3.68), with ratings ranging from 2.05 to 4.76.
- Within the scientific-professional subject factor, the highest applicability was demonstrated by English Language (M = 4.76),

Military Physical Training (M = 4.62), Information Technologies (M = 4.52), and Introduction to Strategy (M = 4.76). Conversely, the lowest-ranked subjects originated from the natural-mathematical scientific field: Chemistry (M = 2.53), Mathematics and Physics (M = 2.86), Fundamentals of Electrical Engineering and Electronics (M = 2.05), as well as Sociology (M = 2.82).

- It was established that the core academic study program of the Military Academy is significantly more useful in the context of performing duties at the tactical level compared to the operational level ($F = 29.026$; $p < 0.001$).
- Analysis showed that approximately half of the subjects exhibit statistically significant differences in perceived usefulness between the two decision-making levels, with reduced usefulness noted at the operational level. However, for most subjects ranked highest and lowest, the differences are minimal. This includes subjects in mathematics, as well as three subjects from social sciences (Military Psychology and Andragogy, Military Law and International Humanitarian Law, Fundamentals of Economics) and three from technical sciences (Armored Combat Vehicles, Telecommunications Security, Fundamentals of Electrical Engineering and Electronics).
- Regarding scientific fields, three areas – social sciences ($F = 4.329$; $p < 0.044$), technical sciences ($F = 75.975$; $p < 0.001$), and military sciences ($F = 28.617$; $p < 0.001$) – showed significantly greater usefulness at the tactical level compared to the operational level. No statistically significant difference in perceived usefulness was observed between the two levels for natural-mathematical sciences.
- At the operational level of decision-making, subjects from social sciences exhibited the highest degree of usefulness, while subjects from the natural-mathematical field had the lowest usefulness, representing a statistically significant difference ($F = 75.59$; $p < 0.001$). Natural-mathematical sciences showed significantly lower applicability compared to military sciences ($MD = 1.14$; $p < 0.001$) and technical sciences ($MD = 0.62$; $p < 0.02$). Simultaneously, social sciences were somewhat less applicable than technical sciences ($MD = 0.647$; $p < 0.015$).

The relevance and purposefulness of professional development programs – most notably the Basic Command and Staff Course (BCSC) – are of critical importance at the operational level, as they contribute

directly to the acquisition and effective application of professional competencies required for command and decision-making roles:

- At the operational level of duties within the MoD and the SAF, the content of the BCSC demonstrates greater usefulness compared to core academic subjects at the Military Academy ($F = 44.54$, $p < 0.001$).
- All BCSC subjects have high average ratings ($M = 4.48$), ranging from 4.12 to 4.83.
- The highest-ranked subject is Tactics ($M = 4.83$), while the lowest-ranked elective subject is Operations Modeling ($M = 4.18$).
- Factor analysis indicates that the BCSC curriculum comprises two distinct usefulness factors at the operational decision-making level, jointly explaining 82.57% of the total variance:
  - First factor: General Security Factor (63.24%).
  - Second factor: Skills Factor (19.33%).
- These two factors are completely independent ($r = -0.02$, $p > 0.05$).

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The conducted research has shown that the knowledge acquired during undergraduate studies and the first level of professional development at the Military Academy, Department of Land Forces, has a high degree of practical application in performing initial officer duties. In this way, the adequacy and alignment of curricula with the requirements of service within the Land Forces study program are confirmed. At the same time, significant differences were observed in the priorities of academic subjects and scientific fields between the two levels of study, which are directly conditioned by the differing demands of the decision-making process. These findings create space for formulating relevant conclusions and recommendations aimed at improvement:

- The structure of the curriculum demonstrates a logical and professional progression within the military profession, where effective military leadership necessitates the integration of academic knowledge and practical skills that characterize a competent and successful officer.
- Subjects highly rated at the undergraduate level, especially at the tactical level, largely correspond to the requirements of direct personnel management and unit leadership. Conversely, content from natural and mathematical sciences, although often perceived as abstract and theoretical, contributes to the development of logical

thinking, a critical component in decision-making processes at higher command levels. The usefulness of subjects such as foreign languages becomes increasingly pronounced with growing professional experience, particularly in the context of international cooperation and overseas education.

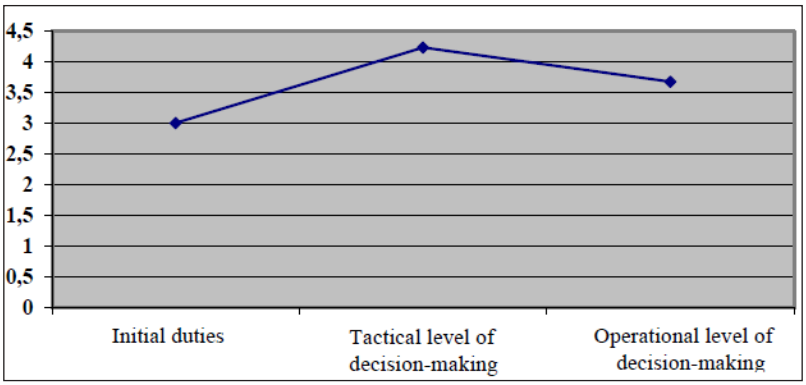
- Comparative analysis of perceived subject usefulness by cadets and officers at the tactical level reveals a high degree of alignment, indicating consistency in assessing the practical relevance of the curriculum. However, officers' work experience contributes to greater awareness of the importance of certain subjects, reflected in a broader spectrum of highly valued disciplines.
- Although the overall assessment of the applicability of undergraduate subjects is higher at the tactical level, it is evident that success at the operational level is partly based on augmented knowledge and skills gained through service experience, as well as competencies not fully covered by the curriculum.
- Subjects highly ranked for the operational level are characterized by multidisciplinarity and cross-branch applicability. These include content enabling effective performance in staff duties, modern information systems, and maintaining the psychophysical capacity of military leaders.
- Differences in dominant scientific fields between tactical and operational decision-making levels stem from varying demands and priorities. While the tactical level emphasizes the application of weapons, systems, and tactical procedures, the operational level primarily relies on planning skills and operational management.
- The second-cycle study program at the Military Academy, particularly in the domain of operational-level decision-making, focuses on planning force employment on the battlefield. This constitutes the essence of duties at this level, contrasting with previous generations whose competencies were more limited in information technologies and their application in operational planning, as well as in conducting complex simulations and military exercises.

The results can be summarized in the following conclusions, as illustrated in the presented graphs:

- The degree of applicability of knowledge acquired during studies at the Military Academy varies depending on the hierarchical level at which decisions are made within military leadership (Figure 1).

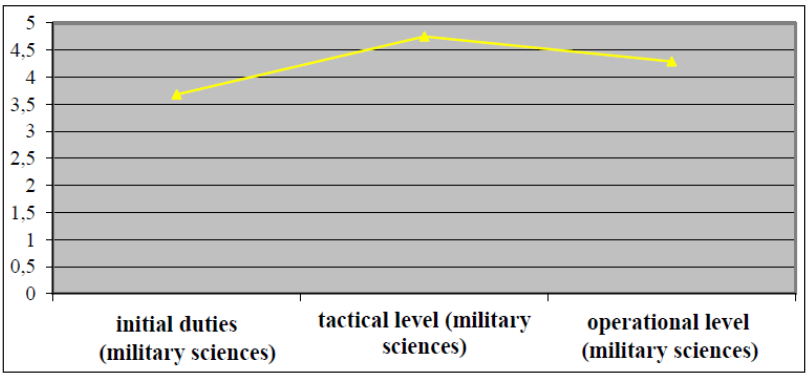
- The relevance and application of knowledge from various scientific fields in the military context depend on the decision-making level, with dominant scientific domains shifting from the tactical to the operational level (Figure 2).
- For effective performance at the operational decision-making level, the knowledge and skills obtained during the Specialization for Command and Staff Duties (Basic Command and Staff Course, BCSC) play a critical role, representing a pivotal stage in the professional development of officers (Figure 3).

Figure 1. Level of usefulness of the curriculum of the MA's Undergraduate Academic Studies at initial assignments and in performing leadership duties at various decision-making levels



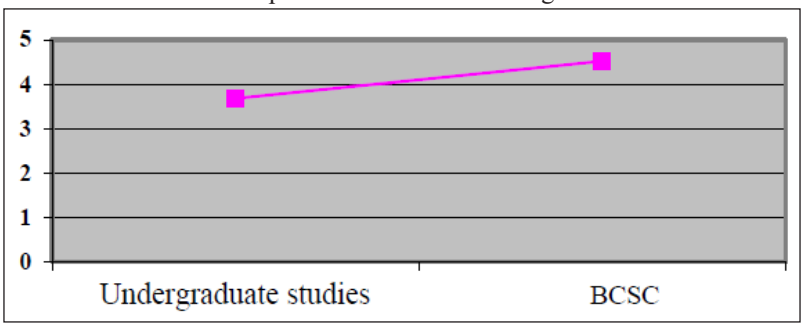
Source: Authors

Figure 2. Scientific Fields with the Highest Utility in the Curriculum of the MA's Undergraduate Academic Studies in the Performance of Duties at Each Level of Decision-Making



Source: Authors

Figure 3. Level of usefulness of the Military Academy's curriculum in the performance of duties by military leaders at the operational decision-making level



Source: Authors

Guidelines for future research

This study is based on the perceptions of the respondents, which entails certain methodological limitations. While the obtained results provide valuable insights into the practical usefulness of the curriculum content in military leadership, it is necessary for future research to expand and deepen the data set in order to achieve more reliable and comprehensive conclusions.

Specifically, the following gaps in the available data have been identified:

- Lack of information regarding the objective performance success of the respondents in their duties;
- Absence of academic grades for individual courses during studies;
- Exclusion of the impact of courses from previous curricula no longer in use;
- Lack of analysis of potential content deficiencies in the current curriculum;
- Omission of assessment of the influence of teaching staff on the quality and effectiveness of the acquired knowledge;
- Potential subjectivity in course evaluations, which may be influenced by factors such as personal attitudes toward the course or instructor, motivation level, current mood, cognitive bias, or fatigue during surveying.

For these reasons, it is recommended to conduct broader, multidimensional research that incorporates objective performance

indicators and qualitative methods to fully understand the effectiveness and further enhance the relevance of the Military Academy's curriculum.

CONCLUSION

The Military Academy represents a unique institution in the Republic of Serbia, legally authorized to conduct training and higher education for officers of the MoD and the SAF. In accordance with the demands of the defense system's transformation and alignment with the concept of total defense, the Military Academy is undergoing a reform process, which includes a revision of the curriculum.

Scientific evaluation of the effectiveness of the curriculum in the context of practical application of acquired knowledge at various levels of command is a critical element for the qualitative improvement of the military education system. Decision-making, as an essential competency of a military leader, requires the integration of cognitive abilities and knowledge, with knowledge serving as a mediator of paramount importance.

Therefore, military education attains the status of one of the key factors in maintaining and strengthening national security. Due to its specificity, it can be regarded as an operational personnel, scientific, technical, and cultural reserve of the state, capable of effective utilization amid economic and political reforms to overcome the consequences of crises.

Empirical data demonstrate that the Military Academy's courses are significantly applicable in practice; however, the degree of their relevance varies depending on the specific course, study cycle, and decision-making level (tactical or operational). These findings indicate the necessity for further research through a more comprehensive scientific project that would incorporate additional performance indicators and provide well-founded recommendations for optimizing the curriculum in line with the real needs of the military profession.

All of the above enables the fulfillment of the military organization's demand for officers whose professional level must meet both the long-term conditions for enhancing the operational efficiency of the armed forces and the tasks of reforming higher vocational education at the national level, while taking into account contemporary global trends.

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СИСТЕМ ВОЈНОГ ОБРАЗОВАЊА КАО ОСНОВА ОБЕЗБЕЂЕЊА НАЦИОНАЛНЕ БЕЗБЕДНОСТИ РЕПУБЛИКЕ СРБИЈЕ[****]

Резиме

Ефикасна припрема официрског кадра у Министарству одбране и Војсци Србије, представља кључни предуслов за успешно извршавање дужности у обезбеђивању националне безбедности. Специфични задаци и хијерархијска структура система одбране захтевају да старешински кадар, као непосредни учесник у процесу доношења одлука, остварује значајан утицај на оперативну ефикасност и његову функционалност. Сходно томе, образовање и обука официра су од суштинског значаја за развој њихових професионалних компетенција, што се директно рефлектује на укупни ниво безбедности државе. Савремени безбедносни изазови, трансформација физиономије савремених сукоба и еволуција безбедносних стратегија намећу неопходност реформи усмерених ка усклађивању академског програма са принципима савремених војних операција и захтевима безбедносног окружења. Овај рад представља емпиријску студију усмерену на вредновање степена применљивости стеченог знања на Војној академији у контексту

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практичног извршавања официрских дужности на различитим хијерархијским нивоима војног одлучивања. Истраживање се заснива на анализи повезаности између знања стеченог током војног образовања и захтева које намеће оперативна и тактичка војна пракса. Методолошки оквир истраживања обухвата квантитативну и квалитативну анализу података прикупљених путем анкетирања, уз примену одговарајућих статистичких техника за утврђивање степена повезаности између образовног процеса и професионалних компетенција официра. Анализа показује да старшине уочавају већу примену знања са војних студија на тактичком нивоу, док се на оперативном нивоу доношења одлука уочава релативно већа важност знања из друштвених наука. Ови налази доприносе научном разумевању односа између академског образовања и војне праксе, те представљају основу за систематско унапређење наставних планова и програма у циљу оптимизације едукативног процеса и његове практичне релевантности.

Кључне речи: војска, образовање, обука, официри, доношење одлука, војне науке, национална безбедност

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