

# Effective Financial Education Strategies: Empowering Students with Personal Application

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## Abstract

Financial education is most effective when it is both personalized and applicable to learners' lives. Instruction that reflects individual backgrounds, interests, and learning styles fosters engagement, ownership, and improved outcomes. When financial concepts are taught in real-world contexts, learners are more likely to recognize their relevance and apply them meaningfully. This paper integrates five established learning theories: Bloom's Taxonomy, behaviorism, constructivism, experiential learning, and social learning theory. These frameworks support differentiated instruction in financial education and inform the design of inclusive, learner-centered pedagogy. The study's primary contribution is its application of these theories to specific financial topics, including investment planning, retirement strategies, financial counseling, and estate planning. Assignments and instructional tools provided in the appendix illustrate how theory-informed strategies can be implemented in practice. These classroom-tested activities promote financial literacy, support behavioral change, and enhance instructional effectiveness across diverse learner populations. By bridging theoretical models with applied learning experiences, the paper offers educators a practical framework for improving financial education.

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## Introduction

In contemporary educational environments, the importance of differentiated instruction has become increasingly evident. Learners enter classrooms with varied backgrounds, learning styles, and cognitive profiles, requiring pedagogical approaches that are responsive to individual needs (Eikeland & Ohna, 2022; Tomlinson, 2017). Tomlinson (2001) emphasizes the value of differentiated instruction in mixed-ability classrooms, advocating for teaching strategies that accommodate differences in student readiness, interests, and learning preferences. Desimone (2009) further identifies

professional development as a key mechanism through which educators acquire the skills necessary for effective instruction. Together, these perspectives underscore the broader educational shift toward learner-centered models that prioritize adapting to the needs of the learner (Dole, 2016; McCombs, 2001). This shift is particularly relevant in the context of financial education.

The ultimate goal of financial education, according to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, is financial well-being (CFPB, 2023). However, financial education has been associated with a range of financial behaviors and outcomes

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(Alexander & McElreath, 1999; Fernandes et al., 2014; Urban et al., 2020). Numerous studies have linked it to improvements in financial literacy, decision-making, and overall financial well-being (Hilgert et al., 2003; Lusardi & Mitchell, 2014; Mandell & Klein, 2009). At the same time, conflicting findings suggest that its impact on financial literacy varies considerably across different contexts and populations (Hensley, 2015; Jump\$Start Coalition for Personal Financial Literacy, 2006). The need for effective financial education has become increasingly salient in light of evolving economic conditions and the growing complexity of personal financial decision-making (Choung et al., 2023; Giesecke & Waschik, 2025; Kalayci & Serra-Garcia, 2016; Ullah et al., 2024).

Scholars have called for a comprehensive framework and attempted to assess financial education programs (Fox et al., 2005; Hathaway & Khatiwada, 2008; Lyons, 2005, Lyons et al., 2006), yet such efforts must also account for learner diversity and instructional design. However, there are no accepted standards of excellence for evaluating program effectiveness, and no single curriculum adequately meets the needs of all learners (Hensley, 2015; McCormick, 2009). The effectiveness of financial education is influenced by individual differences in learning styles and preferences (Cassidy, 2004; Ziernwald et al., 2022) along with instructional design (Salas-Velasco et al., 2021).

This paper responds to these challenges by examining how established learning theories can inform the instructional design of differentiated financial education. The integration of behaviorism, constructivism, social learning theory, experiential learning, and Bloom's Taxonomy provides a framework for understanding how individuals learn and apply financial concepts. Application of these theories can improve how financial education is taught and how learners can engage with financial content, develop skills, and apply knowledge in real-world contexts.

The motivation for this study is both practical and pedagogical. It seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice by demonstrating how learning theories can be operationalized in the context of financial education. Through detailed

examples and instructional tools, the paper aims to empower educators with strategies that enhance the relevance, accessibility, and effectiveness of financial education across a range of topics, including investment planning, retirement strategies, financial counseling, and estate planning.

### Theories of Learning

Several theories of learning offer insights into how individuals acquire knowledge, skills, and behaviors. Some prominent theories include:

#### *Bloom's Taxonomy*

Bloom's Taxonomy, a well-established framework in educational psychology, offers a structured approach to cognitive learning (Bloom et al., 1956). It encompasses various levels of thinking skills, from basic to advanced, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of educational objectives and teaching methodologies.

- a) Knowledge: This level involves recalling previously learned material, including facts, terms, basic concepts, and generalities. For instance, in financial planning, knowledge might entail remembering key investment terms such as "dividend yield" or "asset allocation."
- b) Comprehension: At this level, understanding of facts and ideas is demonstrated by explaining their meaning, interpreting them, or describing main ideas. In a financial context, comprehension could involve explaining the significance of economic indicators or interpreting financial statements to assess a company's performance.
- c) Application: Application involves utilizing acquired knowledge in new or novel situations to solve problems. For example, in financial planning, applying knowledge might mean using investment principles to construct a diversified portfolio tailored to a client's risk tolerance and financial goals.
- d) Analysis: Analysis entails breaking down information and materials into parts to examine details and relationships. In financial planning, this could involve analyzing market trends, dissecting financial statements to identify strengths and

weaknesses, or evaluating the impact of various economic factors on investment decisions.

- e) Synthesis: Synthesis involves compiling information in different ways, building structures or patterns from diverse elements, and integrating parts to form a coherent whole. In financial planning, synthesis might involve creating a comprehensive financial plan that integrates various components such as budgeting, retirement strategies, estate planning, and investment strategies.
- f) Evaluation: This level entails presenting opinions by making judgments about the value and merit of ideas and materials. In financial planning, evaluation might involve assessing the effectiveness of investment strategies, evaluating the risk-return trade-offs of different financial products, or critiquing the ethical implications of certain financial decisions.

Instructors can use Bloom's Taxonomy to scaffold financial education assignments, starting with basic recall of financial terms and progressing to evaluation of complex financial strategies. For example, a budgeting module might begin with identifying expense categories (knowledge), then move to analyzing spending patterns (analysis), and culminate in students designing and defending a personalized budget plan (synthesis and evaluation).

This progression helps students build confidence and competence while allowing educators to assess learning at multiple cognitive levels. This scaffolding structure can also be applied to exams. Research shows improved performance on exams that begin with lower-level questions (Perlini et al., 1998) with further consideration for online exams using question banks to randomize questions in groups based on difficulty level with all students progressing through that scaffolding (Becker et al., 2022).

Extending beyond Bloom's cognitive domain, Warmath and Zimmerman (2019) argue for the need to apply Bloom's two other domains of knowledge (affective and psychomotor) to conceptualize financial literacy. According to Bloom et al. (1956), the cognitive domain incorporates students' acquisition of knowledge,

and the affective domain focuses on the development of students' interest, attitudes, and values. The psychomotor domain focuses on objectives related to motor skills and physical development. In their work, Warmath and Zimmerman drew on these established educational domains to develop a formative scale measuring financial literacy: skills needed for a financial decision (psychomotor), self-efficacy to make the financial decision (affective), and the capacity to develop financial knowledge to apply in future situations (cognitive and psychomotor).

Warmath and Zimmerman's (2019) use of Bloom's cognitive domains for their composite approach to financial literacy can be leveraged to innovate financial education. From a pedagogical standpoint, educators can supplement teaching financial concepts with building skills and improving self-efficacy. Scaffolded learning across Bloom's domains of knowledge can begin with teaching foundational content such as budgeting and credit and moving into hands-on practice through real-world financial decision-making simulations such as buying a car or a home (Lusardi, 2019). For the affective domain, developing individual financial goals can help to increase confidence by building personal connections with the content.

### *Behaviorism*

Behaviorism posits that learning occurs through observable behaviors that are shaped by environmental stimuli and reinforcement. Central to behaviorism is the concept of conditioning, where behaviors are either reinforced through rewards or diminished through punishment. The work of psychologists such as Ivan Pavlov, who studied classical conditioning (Pavlov, 1927), and B.F. Skinner, known for his research on operant conditioning (Skinner, 1938), contributed to the development of behaviorist theory (Watson, 2017).

Instructors can apply behaviorist principles by designing structured reinforcement systems that encourage consistent financial habits. For example, a classroom savings challenge can reward students for tracking expenses over time, reinforcing delayed gratification and goal setting. Educators might also use token economies, where students earn points for completing financial

tasks such as creating a budget, analyzing a credit report, or negotiating a mock bill. These points can be exchanged for privileges or recognition, reinforcing desired behaviors. Additionally, frequent low-stakes assessments with immediate feedback help reinforce foundational knowledge and correct misconceptions before they become ingrained.

#### *Constructivism*

Constructivism suggests that individuals construct their understanding of the world through active engagement with their environment (Bruner, 2009). Learning is viewed as a process of constructing meaning to realistic and relevant contexts through the integration of new information with existing knowledge and experiences (Honebein, 1996). The importance of social interaction with multiple perspectives, collaboration, and hands-on experiences in facilitating learning within a constructivist framework (Bruner, 2009; Honebein, 1996).

In financial education, learners can collaborate with peers to solve financial problems, share experiences, and construct their understanding of financial concepts. Real-world case studies provide authentic contexts for learners to explore and apply their knowledge, fostering collaborative learning environments where individuals can learn from each other's perspectives and experiences. Offering opportunities for personalized exploration, such as through senior theses aligned with individual interests, can enhance engagement and learning outcomes (Fogarty & Mayo, 1999).

#### *Experiential Learning Theory*

Experiential learning theory suggests that learning is a cyclical process involving concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1975). Learners engage in continuous cycles of learning by doing, reflecting, and applying their experiences to new situations. (Burke, 2013; Kolb et al., 2014). Previous research shows that students engaging in hands-on activities perform significantly better on standardized tests (Stohr-Hunt, 1996).

In financial education, learners actively experiment with financial concepts and reflect on

their experiences to enhance their financial decision-making abilities. A real-world example of experiential learning in action comes from credit card fees that consumers learn to avoid (Agarwal et al., 2008) and is further supported by respondents reporting learning more from personal financial experiences than formal financial education (Hilgert et al., 2003). In institutions of higher education, student managed investments have been used (Grinder et al., 1999) as has opportunities to work with real clients (Eyssell, 1999).

#### *Social Learning Theory*

Social learning theory posits that learning occurs through observation, imitation, and modeling of others' behaviors. Developed by Albert Bandura, social learning theory emphasizes the role of social context, role models, and reinforcement in shaping behavior (Bandura, 1977).

Financial education begins early with financial socialization. Here, a child's financial knowledge base and relationship with money are influenced by the financial behaviors of parents with long-term effects (Danes, 1994; Gudmunson & Danes, 2011; Kim & Chatterjee, 2013). Gutter et al.'s (2010) study found that in addition to parental modeling, peers influence college students' financial behaviors and attitudes. For instance, peers can model positive money management behaviors and sensible financial decisions. Application in the classroom can look like designing group activities that can reinforce good habits such as collaboratively designing budgets. Additionally, homework or projects can include parent or family member interviews to discuss financial decisions to reinforce financial concepts learned in class while leveraging the students' household knowledge (González et al., 1993).

#### **From Theory to Practice**

The learning theories discussed above provide a general framework for understanding how students engage with financial education in the classroom. These theories offer insight into how learners process information, develop skills, and build financial knowledge. While this theoretical foundation is important, its full value is realized when applied to specific instructional practices. The next section demonstrates how these theories

inform the design of targeted assignments and learning tools across key financial topics. These topics include investments, retirement planning, financial counseling, and estate planning. Each one is accompanied by examples that show how theory-driven strategies are used to support student learning. These examples are grounded in actual classroom activities and instructional materials, all of which are included in the appendix. This transition from general theory to applied practice is intended to help educators implement effective, learner-centered financial education.

### Application for Specific Financial Topics

#### *Investments*

Personal investment planning provides a clear opportunity to apply constructivist, experiential, and social learning theories. These frameworks guide the design of activities that help students build personalized investment strategies, reflect on financial decisions, and learn collaboratively through peer engagement.

Investment planning is a critical aspect of personal finance that involves strategic decision-making to grow wealth and achieve long-term financial goals. Learners are introduced to investment basics through interactive lessons that use real-world examples to illustrate key concepts. They engage in hands-on exercises to build investment portfolios tailored to their financial objectives and risk tolerance levels. Students determine their individual risk tolerance assessments to determine their comfort levels with risk and discuss personalized diversification recommendations.

Through personalized investment plan reviews and feedback, individuals receive guidance on optimizing their investment strategies. Appendix A outlines an assignment requiring students to develop a comprehensive investment plan for a hypothetical client and a personalized five-year financial strategy. This project incorporates constructivism, experiential, and social learning theory elements.

#### Constructivism Applied:

- Active Learning and Reflection: Students construct their understanding by developing

investment plans tailored to real-life scenarios. By reflecting on personalized feedback, they integrate new knowledge with prior experiences.

- Problem-Solving in Context: Creating a plan for a hypothetical client and themselves allows learners to apply financial concepts to practical situations, fostering deeper comprehension.
- Collaborative Learning: Engaging with peers and instructors through discussions and feedback sessions enhances their understanding by exchanging diverse perspectives.

#### Experiential Learning Applied:

- Hands-On Experience: Students actively create investment plans, which provides concrete experiences that reinforce learning.
- Real-World Application: Designing plans for a hypothetical client and themselves encourages learners to apply theoretical concepts in practical, real-life contexts.
- Reflection: After receiving feedback, students reflect on their strategies, which deepens their understanding and helps refine their investment approaches.
- Feedback Loop: Continuous feedback from instructors fosters iterative learning, allowing students to adjust and improve their plans based on real-world scenarios. This hands-on project exemplifies constructivism by emphasizing active engagement and collaboration, leading to meaningful learning experiences.

#### Social Learning Theory Applied:

- Observation and Modeling: Students learn by observing peer approaches and instructor demonstrations, enhancing their understanding of effective investment strategies.
- Peer Collaboration: Group discussions and peer reviews facilitate shared learning experiences, allowing students to learn from each other's insights and feedback.
- Feedback and Support: Constructive feedback from both peers and instructors creates a supportive environment that

encourages learners to refine their strategies based on collective input.

- Emulation of Best Practices: By engaging with exemplars students adopt effective behaviors and decision-making processes in their investment planning.

Understanding the different types of investments is essential, and learners explore this topic through case studies that examine various investment vehicles and their risk-return profiles. Group discussions on investment selection strategies foster collaboration and the sharing of insights among peers. Professor-led feedback on investment choices ensures that learners gain a deeper understanding of the implications of their investment decisions and can make informed choices aligned with their financial goals and risk tolerance levels.

### *Retirement Planning*

Retirement planning instruction benefits from integrating constructivist and experiential learning approaches. These theories support the use of realistic scenarios, hands-on simulations, and reflective exercises that help students connect retirement concepts to their personal financial goals.

Financial education on retirement planning emphasizes the importance of understanding various retirement income sources and optimizing their mix for financial security in retirement. Real-world case studies and group discussions reflecting on what retirement means on a personal level provide elements of constructivism and experiential learning. Learners explore different approaches to retirement savings through case studies showcasing diverse strategies. They engage in group discussions to identify challenges and develop solutions related to retirement goals.

Through the analysis of retirement income sources such as Social Security, employer-sponsored retirement plans, individual investment options, and annuities students learn strategies to plan for their individual vision of retirement. Individualized feedback on optimizing the retirement income mix ensures that learners can tailor their plans to meet their specific needs and goals, empowering them to

make informed decisions and achieve financial security in retirement.

Foundational knowledge on Bloom's Taxonomy can be measured through definitional questions, while higher levels require more depth. Developing a comprehensive retirement planning project that applies elements of constructivism with overlap into experiential learning, is outlined in Appendix B.

This project incorporates real-life scenarios of retirement account selection tailored to individual circumstances, interactive exercises simulating retirement savings calculations, and personalized feedback from the professor on retirement goals and strategies. By engaging in hands-on activities and receiving personalized guidance, learners gain practical skills and insights essential for navigating the complexities of retirement planning.

### *Constructivism Applied:*

- Real-Life Scenarios: Students apply knowledge to realistic situations, tailoring retirement account selections to individual circumstances, which helps them construct understanding based on personal relevance. (Experiential learning theory overlap.)
- Interactive Exercises: Engaging in simulations for retirement savings calculations allows learners to actively participate, building knowledge through experience. (Experiential learning theory overlap.)
- Personalized Feedback: Receiving tailored guidance from the professor encourages reflection and adaptation, reinforcing learning by connecting theoretical concepts to practical application. (Experiential learning theory overlap.)
- Hands-On Activities: Through active involvement, students construct their understanding of retirement planning complexities, enhancing their problem-solving skills.

### *Financial Counseling*

Financial counseling education draws heavily on behaviorist, experiential, and social learning principles. These theories inform the use of reinforcement strategies, role-play exercises, and

peer feedback to help students develop practical counseling skills and financial self-awareness.

Students begin this course by learning about their personal relationship with money, something that likely began with financial socialization (Danes, 1994), and identifying their own financial attitudes. Students share their first memory of money with the class and engage in instructor-led discussions on positive financial behaviors. Elements of behaviorism and experiential strategies here include hands-on budgeting exercises tailored to individual income and expenses.

Debt management strategies are another essential component of financial education, supported by case studies illustrating effective debt repayment plans. Through interactive sessions on debt consolidation and negotiation techniques, learners develop practical skills for managing debt effectively. Credit is also addressed, with step-by-step guidance on how credit scores are created and calculating the impact of poor credit. Experiential learning theory is again implemented as learners obtain and analyze their own credit report (Appendix C1) and learn how to improve their credit history.

Additionally, learners engage in personalized budget reviews and receive recommendations from the professor. Group discussions on overcoming budgeting challenges further allow elements of social learning theory to encourage collaboration and development of strategies for effective cash flow management. On-campus resources, such as the food bank, career services, counseling, landlord/tenant disputes, and law clinics are covered along with community resources. As a practical project students create and virtually share a recipe of a cheap yet healthy meal they made (Appendix C2).

In addition to budgeting, debt management, credit score improvement, and goal setting, financial counseling addresses critical topics such as dealing with mortgages, car repossession, and medical bill negotiation. Learners engage in comprehensive discussions and practical exercises aimed at understanding the complexities of mortgage financing, including the implications of default and foreclosure. They explore strategies for preventing car

repossession, such as renegotiating loan terms or exploring alternative financing options. Additionally, learners learn negotiation techniques for addressing medical bills, including advocating for lower fees, negotiating payment plans, or seeking financial assistance programs.

These concepts are applied throughout the semester with in-class client/counselor role-play sessions, combining elements of constructivism, behaviorism, and experiential learning theories. Students assume the roles of counselor or client, beginning with instructor-defined scenarios and progressing to student-generated cases that reflect greater complexity. During class, feedback is offered by the professor and classmates. At the end of the semester, students create video where they apply the concepts they have learned, demonstrating mastery of the communication and financial counseling skills learned throughout the semester. This project is available in Appendix C3.

As evidenced, multiple learning theories were thoughtfully applied throughout the course. Here is how the learning theories are applied to the coursework described:

#### Behaviorism:

- Budgeting Exercises: Students engage in hands-on budgeting tailored to their finances, reinforcing positive financial behaviors through practice.
- Discussions on Financial Attitudes: Sharing first memories of money and discussing positive behaviors encourages habit formation through reinforcement.

#### Experiential Learning:

- Debt Management and Credit Analysis: Interactive sessions and personal credit report analysis provide practical, real-world experiences that enhance understanding of financial concepts.
- Role-Playing: In-class client/counselor role-plays simulate real financial counseling scenarios, allowing students to practice and reflect on their skills.
- Practical Projects: Creating and sharing a budget-friendly meal recipe involves hands-on learning, making financial management relevant and applicable to daily life.

### Constructivism:

- Collaborative Learning: Group discussions on budgeting challenges and debt management strategies allow students to construct knowledge through shared experiences and problem-solving.
- Role-Play Sessions: Students create complex client scenarios, building their understanding by actively engaging in realistic financial counseling situations.
- Video Role Play Project: Creating a video to demonstrate financial counseling skills allows students to synthesize their learning and apply it in a practical context.

### Social Learning Theory:

- Peer Feedback: In role-plays and discussions, students learn from observing and receiving feedback from classmates and the instructor, enhancing their skills through modeling.
- Group Discussions: Collaborative sessions on budgeting and resource management foster learning through shared insights and strategies.

These projects effectively integrate various learning theories, providing students with comprehensive, applied learning experiences that develop practical financial skills and critical thinking.

### *Estate Planning*

Estate planning instruction incorporates constructivist, experiential, and social learning theories to help students engage with complex legal and financial concepts. These theories support the use of case studies, document drafting, and collaborative discussions that promote applied learning and critical thinking.

Best practices in financial education extend to comprehensive estate planning, a crucial aspect of personal finance that ensures the orderly distribution of assets and the fulfillment of one's wishes upon incapacitation or death. Learners engage in interactive lessons on the basics of estate planning, exploring fundamental concepts and legal principles. Through case studies illustrating estate planning decisions and their consequences, individuals gain insights into the importance of thoughtful planning and decision-

making. Furthermore, learners receive individualized feedback on estate planning documents and strategies, empowering them to tailor their plans to their unique circumstances and objectives. Appendix D provides an assignment to create a comprehensive estate plan for the student (D1) along with a dissecting a will assignment (D2), which serves as practical references for learners as they navigate the complexities of estate planning. These assignments incorporate constructivism, experiential, and learning theory elements.

Wills and trusts are central to estate planning, and learners delve into these topics through guided exercises in drafting legal documents for their own estate plans. Professor-led discussions provide guidance on wills and trusts design and execution.

Understanding the role and responsibilities of a power of attorney is essential in estate planning, and learners participate in role-playing scenarios to grasp the significance of this legal designation. Personalized guidance on selecting and appointing power of attorney agents equips individuals with the knowledge to make informed decisions regarding their representatives. Feedback sessions on the power of attorney choices ensure that learners understand the implications of their decisions and are prepared to navigate potential challenges effectively.

Healthcare directives are another critical component of estate planning, and learners engage in interactive discussions to explore various options and considerations. Step-by-step guidance on completing healthcare directives empowers individuals to articulate their medical preferences and end-of-life wishes. Professor-led feedback on healthcare directive choices ensures that learners' directives align with their values and preferences, providing clarity and peace of mind regarding their healthcare decisions. Through comprehensive education and practical guidance, individuals gain the tools and confidence to navigate the complexities of estate planning effectively and safeguard their legacy for future generations.

Again, multiple learning theories were applied in the course:

Constructivism:

- Case Studies: Analyzing real-world scenarios helps students construct knowledge about estate planning by connecting legal concepts to practical applications.
- Creating Estate Plans: Developing personalized plans encourages learners to actively engage with the material, building their understanding through hands-on activities.
- Role-Playing: Scenarios involving power of attorney enhance understanding by allowing students to immerse themselves in realistic situations.

Experiential Learning:

- Drafting Legal Documents: Exercises in creating wills and trusts provide practical experience, reinforcing learning through application.
- Interactive Discussions: Engaging in guided discussions on healthcare directives and estate planning components allows students to reflect and apply their knowledge.
- Individualized Feedback: Tailored feedback on estate planning documents helps students refine their strategies and understand the real-world implications of their choices.

Social Learning Theory:

- Professor and Guest Speaker-Led Discussions: Observing expert demonstrations and participating in discussions fosters learning through observation and collaboration.
- Feedback Sessions: Peer and professor feedback on decisions regarding power of attorney and healthcare directives helps learners improve their understanding by modeling best practices.
- Collaborative Learning: Group discussions on estate planning options enable students to learn from each other's insights and experiences.

These methods collectively empower learners with practical skills and confidence to navigate the complexities of estate planning effectively.

## Discussion

This study presents a structured approach to improving financial education through the application of differentiated instructional strategies. Each theory contributes to instructional design by offering strategies that support learner engagement, skill development, and application of financial concepts. However, these theories also present limitations that must be addressed to ensure effective implementation. Bloom's Taxonomy provides a structured progression of cognitive skills, but its assumption of linear development may not reflect the varied readiness of learners, particularly when foundational knowledge is uneven. Behaviorism emphasizes reinforcement of observable behaviors, which can oversimplify financial reasoning and may encourage short-term compliance rather than long-term behavioral change. Constructivism depends on learners having sufficient prior knowledge to build new understanding, which can be problematic when students enter with limited financial experience. Experiential learning promotes hands-on engagement, yet simulations may not fully capture the emotional and contextual depth of real financial decisions. Social learning theory relies on modeling effective behaviors, but peer influence can reinforce poor habits if not carefully guided.

To address these challenges, the paper provides practical examples of assignments and instructional tools that educators can implement across a range of financial topics. These include investment planning, retirement strategies, financial counseling, and estate planning. Each example is grounded in classroom-tested activities and aligned with specific learning theories, offering instructors a clear path from theory to practice. The inclusion of detailed assignments in the appendix further supports educators in adapting these strategies to their own teaching contexts. By combining theoretical insight with applied pedagogy, the paper contributes to the development of more effective and inclusive financial education.

Addressing the diverse learning needs of students remains a crucial aspect of effective financial education. While efforts have been made to cater to various learning preferences, some learners

may still find certain topics less engaging or relevant.

Future research should explore how these instructional strategies influence higher-order learning outcomes. Building on Bloom's Taxonomy, studies could examine how synthesis and evaluation are fostered through differentiated instruction and whether certain theories are more effective in promoting these advanced cognitive skills. Comparative research could also assess which learning theories lead to stronger student outcomes in financial education, including retention, behavioral change, and decision-making confidence. Classroom-based studies that measure the impact of these approaches across diverse learner populations would offer valuable insights into instructional effectiveness and equity. Desimone (2009) suggests the creation of a common framework to study the impact of professional development on both teachers and students, an idea that can be applied to differentiated financial education.

Looking forward, innovation in educational technologies presents new opportunities to improve the accessibility and delivery of financial education. Artificial intelligence can support adaptive learning environments that respond to individual student needs, while online platforms can expand access to high-quality content and interactive tools. These technologies enable personalized learning pathways, real-time feedback, and data-informed instruction. They also offer potential for simulating complex financial scenarios, tracking learner progress, and tailoring support based on individual performance. However, their integration must be guided by pedagogical principles to ensure that technology enhances rather than replaces meaningful learning experiences. Future research should examine how AI-driven tools and digital platforms can support differentiated instruction, promote financial literacy, and improve long-term financial outcomes. A collaborative effort among educators, financial professionals, and institutions will be essential to ensure that these tools are used effectively and equitably.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Investment Planning**

#### **A1 Investment Plan**

##### **Objectives**

1. Understand client goals.
2. Write investment policy statement.
3. Create diversified portfolios to meet those goals.
4. Explain your reasoning at a high level for the professor.
5. Explain/educate your client on what you have done and why.

Write an investment plan for two clients.

- There are three things to turn in for each client:
  1. Written investment plan for client. Make it pretty.
  2. Diversified portfolio
    - a. Use only investments offered by Fidelity.
    - b. No Target Date Funds
  3. Write up of reasoning behind investment choices at a high level for Professor Stebbins.

Meet your clients!

1. Bobby Braxton is a patent attorney living in Colorado.
  - a. He is 42 years old and has not begun saving for retirement. He has no idea what risk tolerance is but doesn't want to lose all of his money.
  - b. He earns approximately \$200,000 annually.
  - c. He has 2 young children and a wife. None of them work.
  - d. He wants to pay for both children to go to Texas A&M or somewhere with an equivalent cost.
2. You!
  - a. It's 5 years after you graduate from Bama.
    - a. Roll Tide!
  - b. You can be employed wherever you want, married or not, kids or not.
  - c. Basically it's where you envision yourself in 5 years.
  - d. Create your goals (at least 3) and invest for those goals.

## Appendix B

### Retirement Planning

#### Comprehensive Retirement Planning Project

1. Please read through the file called “Completed Client Lifestyle Intake Form”. This will provide you with the data you need to create the plan.

*Jack and Jill Jones are your clients. They have come to you because they are very concerned about their retirement. Several of their friends have been retiring as of late and they hadn't really thought about their ability to retire until this year.*

*They would like to know if they are on track to meet their retirement goals. They have been saving much more lately and want to make sure it is enough. Your job is to determine the likelihood of them meeting their goals using MoneyGuidePro (MGP) and to determine what changes would be necessary in order for them to achieve as many of their goals as possible will staying within a reasonable boundary of success.*

2. Once you have completed the MGP analysis, you need to **write-up your findings as you would present them to your client** (see the grading rubric for a more detailed guideline). You may feel free to include (cut and paste) output from MGP analysis and model your discussion after the presentation feature in MGP. The write-up should at minimum include:

- Client goals
- Assumptions used
- Risk tolerance score/portfolio
- Explanation of “likelihood” of meeting goals
- Current likelihood of meeting goals
- Alternative to meet goals (i.e. additional savings and where)
- Your recommendations to meet goals
- Likelihood after recommendations

There is no page limit or expectation in answering the above, only that each topic from the rubric is adequately addressed.

Note: in solving the analysis, you should not use “super solver” to solve your answer. You can adjust each goal individually in the software based off of the ideal and acceptable ranges in conjunction with the importance of each goal.

## **Appendix C**

### **Financial Counseling**

#### **C1 Credit Report**

Obtain your free credit report and check it for errors <https://www.annualcreditreport.com/index.action>  
You can obtain the report from any credit reporting agency you choose. Feel free to share the whole report or just a screenshot with enough shown to prove you obtained the report.  
If you have any questions about your report or want to dispute an error on the report, I am happy to help.

#### **C2 Eating Healthy on a Budget**

If you don't eat, you will die. This assignment is designed to help you stay alive and better understand how to eat healthy on a budget.

This assignment is worth 2 assignment grades.

The Assignment:

- Make a healthy meal for less than \$5 per serving.
  - Include cost per serving (receipt or list cost of each ingredient)
- What is healthy?
  - [https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2021-03/DGA\\_2020-2025\\_StartSimple\\_withMyPlate\\_English\\_color.pdf](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2021-03/DGA_2020-2025_StartSimple_withMyPlate_English_color.pdf)
- Provide recipe.
- Take a picture of the meal.
- Cite the source of the recipe if applicable.
- Post all of the above to the discussion board. (Note: you can claim your meal in advance by posting what meal you're claiming on the discussion board. This way I don't have half the class making the same meal.)

This could be a bulk meal prep of a week + worth of food and then divided into individual meals. This could be a meal for multiple people.

Restrictions:

- No frozen/pre-made meals
  - Note: meal prep services like HelloFresh might have introductory offers that could be gamed, but for the purposes of this assignment, this is a meal you make yourself.
- No sandwiches
- No use of food pantry/WIC/SNAP type benefits. These are definitely great resources when in need, but again not in the spirit of this assignment.

Resources:

[Nutrition on a Budget | Nutrition.gov](#) Find tips for eating healthy on a budget and saving money when food shopping.

[Eating Cheap but Eating Healthy \(Rutgers NJAES\)](#) SSHW Worldwide Challenge Daily Motivational Messages from Rutgers NJAES.

## Stebbins & Quito

### C3 Counselor/Client Role Play

Role play a counseling session with a friend! Show your ethos with the way you dress, the location (you are encouraged to use the counseling lab on the 3rd floor of Adams Hall), and anything else that might help. Show the communication skills we learned and the surviving debt content covered to help your client with their issue(s).

The video should be at least 10 minutes. You can share them with me in UA Box or emailing me ([rstebbins@ua.edu](mailto:rstebbins@ua.edu)) when you've completed the video.

Videos are due xx/xx at 11:59PM.

## Appendix D

### Estate Planning

#### D1 Comprehensive Estate Plan

##### **Client profile:**

Look in a mirror. It's YOU! You must create an estate plan for yourself today and another one at age 50. You can have a family or not, whatever you envision for yourself at age 50. Make any reasonable assumptions needed to create the plan, explaining the assumption and why it was made. Please write the plan to yourself. So, for Billy Smith, it would be written to Billy from Smith Financial Planning (or whatever firm name).

##### **What is needed in your estate plan?**

1. Cover letter to yourself giving an overview of the plan.
2. Client profile should include a detailed net worth statement with a notation on how each asset (including digital assets) will be retitled (beneficiary designation, titling, will, trust) and where the asset will go. Note any valuation discounts that might apply. Example:

Asset	Value	Recipient	Contingent recipient	Retitling mechanism
401k	\$100,000	Spouse	Children, per stirpes	Beneficiary designation
<b>Total</b>	<b>Sum of assets</b>			

3. List and explain the documents you should have in place.
4. Write a will for yourself.
  - a. Identify the clauses and explain what they are for/why they are needed. See exemplar.
5. Write a living will.
6. Write a healthcare power of attorney.
7. Beneficiary designations for all accounts that allow beneficiary designations.
8. Title at least one asset in a way that avoids probate.
9. Required for age 50:
  1. Use at least two trusts to create 'strings' and explain:
    - a. Type of trust
    - b. Beneficiary/beneficiaries
    - c. Strings
10. Explain your reasoning for all recommendations.

#### C2 Dissect a Will

The probate process is public, meaning you can access a will at your local courthouse. Your assignment is to do just that: choose a will with an identical or similar last name to yours. Using the provided Will Checklist, identify the clauses present and type/put them in the checklist document. Note: this does not mean you have to put every single bequest, just one and include any contingent beneficiary/executor/guardian if present.

This assignment is worth 4 assignments in the grade book.

- Why close to my last name?
  - To help you confront your mortality, potentially motivating you to plan for your own estate.
  - To better understand and empathize with your clients' when estate planning is brought up.
  - So you do not all turn in the same will.
- How do I find a will?
  - [https://probate.tuscco.com/ProbateWeb/Search/SearchType?key=probate\\_wills](https://probate.tuscco.com/ProbateWeb/Search/SearchType?key=probate_wills)
  - Or, visit in person:
    - **Main Office:**  
Tuscaloosa County Courthouse  
714 Greensboro Avenue, Suite 121  
Tuscaloosa, AL 35401-1891

**Office Hours:** 8:30 am to 5:00 pm

- What do I turn in?
  - The checklist
  - The will
- How do I turn it in?
  - Submit it here.
    - Save the checklist as YourLastNameWillChecklistS24
    - Save the will as YourLastNameWillDissectedS24
      - Scan it, turn it into a PDF, take pictures of each page, something that lets me see the will so I can check your work.
    - If you're not sure you successfully uploaded it, email me (rstebbins@ua.edu) with the will and checklist attached.