

INTRODUCTION

Financial stress poses a significant challenge to college students’ academic success, impairing focus, performance, and persistence. This study explores a classroom-based intervention aimed at reducing that stress and increasing financial literacy by integrating the Money Habitudes II activity into coursework across two academic disciplines. The goal is to help students gain insight into their financial behaviors, build confidence, and foster emotional well-being. By creating space for reflection and learning within a supportive classroom environment, the study examines whether experiential financial wellness tools can promote lasting behavioral change and strengthen students’ academic resilience.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

This study was implemented during the Fall 2024 semester at a mid-South university. 155 participants undergraduate students. These courses were delivered in both online and in-person formats, allowing for a diverse sample of student experiences. The Money Habitudes II tool was selected for its engaging and accessible format: a 54-card deck and 6 Habitudes. Prior to the activity, students completed an online survey assessing financial wellness and stress levels After completing the Money Habitudes exercise online or in-person, a follow-up survey was administered to assess changes. The surveys included both quantitative measures and open-ended questions to capture behavioral and attitudinal shifts.



DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

PRE-SCORES	M	SD	POST-SCORES	M	SD
"I could handle a major unexpected expense."	2.60	.99	"I can now better handle a major unexpected expense."	3.11	.88
"I am securing my financial future."	3.04	.93	"I am better able to secure my financial future."	3.15	.89
"Because of my money situation, I feel like I will never have the things I want in life."	2.33	.95	"Because of my money situation, I better understand why I feel like I will never have the things I want in life."	2.65	1.06
"I can enjoy life because of the way I'm managing my money."	3.10	.78	"I can better enjoy life because of the way I'm managing my money."	3.34	.84
"I am just getting by financially."	2.89	1.09	"I better understand why I am just getting by financially."	3.15	1.02
"I am concerned that the money I have or will save won't last."	3.23	1.12	"I better understand why I am concerned that the money I have or will save won't last."	3.22	.87
"I always pay my bills on time."	4.27	1.06	"I better understand why I always pay my bills on time."	3.92	.99
"I follow a weekly or monthly budget and have the ability to manage my finances well."	2.95	1.23	"I better understand follow a weekly or monthly budget and have the ability to manage my finances well."	3.74	.91
"I know how to stop myself from spending too much."	3.47	1.13	"I know how to better stop myself from spending too much."	3.84	.78
"I know where to find the advice I need to make decisions managing money."	3.69	1.22	"I know where to find the advice I need to make decisions managing money."	3.85	.84
I have written financial goals and know what I need to be doing daily to achieve them.	3.71	1.01	I now have written financial goals and better know what I need to be doing daily to achieve them.	3.13	.93
I have money in an emergency fund to help me pay for unexpected expenses.	2.82	1.74	I now better understand why I have money in an emergency fund to help me pay for unexpected expenses.	4.58	1.21
I use and review a written budget (or app, computer program, etc) on a regular basis to guide my spending decisions.	4.15	1.11	I know use and review a written budget(or app, computer program, etc) on a regular basis to guide my spending decisions.	3.41	1.19
I analyze my spending patterns to find ways I can improve my financial management.	3.61	.96	I analyze my spending patterns to find ways I can improve my financial management.	2.94	.99
I worry about money. I am distracted by financial concerns and feel stress over my finances.	2.87	1.00	I am more aware of when I worry about money, distracted by financial concerns, and feel stress over my finances.	2.57	.90
I can usually find ways to reduce my expenses to avoid unnecessary borrowing.	2.51	.93			
If I currently have a student loan, I know my total outstanding balance and the required minimum monthly payment to meet this obligation after I graduate.	2.24	.87			
			How useful was the Money Habitudes activity/assignment in helping you understand your financial habits and attitudes?	3.47	.84

RESULTS

- ✓ Financial confidence increased, as students' ability to handle a major unexpected expense rose from a mean of 2.60 to 3.11, and enjoyment of life through money management improved from 3.10 to 3.34.
- ✓ Budgeting skills and financial planning awareness also improved, as students' scores for following a weekly/monthly budget rose from 2.95 to 3.74, and their ability to stop overspending increased from 3.47 to 3.84 after they began using tools and strategies more intentionally.
- ✓ There was a gain in students’ understanding of emergency preparedness, especially the importance of having an emergency fund jumped from 2.82 to 4.58.
- ✓ Students became more aware of how financial stress affects their well-being, signaling increased emotional insight even if some behaviors remained unchanged.
- ✓ The Money Habitudes activity was well-received, rated 3.47 out of 5 for usefulness, with over 90% of students indicating it revealed new insights into their financial habits supporting its value as a simple, scalable tool for enhancing financial literacy in diverse classrooms

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

- ✓ Reduced financial stress among students improves concentration, academic engagement, and course performance, reinforcing the connection between financial wellness and academic success.
- ✓ Experiential financial education fosters behavioral changes such as improved budgeting and reduced impulsive spending, contributing to students’ long-term economic stability.
- ✓ Embedding financial literacy in diverse disciplines demonstrates its feasibility as a scalable intervention that can be implemented across various academic settings with minimal resources.
- ✓ Implication: Integrating financial literacy into academic curricula through a simple, low-cost model can reduce student stress, enhance personal and academic success, and be scaled across disciplines and institutions to support long-term financial and educational outcomes.
- ✓ The need for continued research and policy efforts to integrate financial wellness into higher education curricula to improve student retention and overall well-being.