

Research on the Pathways and Teaching Practices for Cultivating Employability of Public Finance and Taxation Students in Provincial Universities

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Abstract: In recent years, the employment situation for finance and taxation majors in provincial universities has become increasingly challenging, making the cultivation of competitive graduates a key goal of higher education. Taking a provincial university as a case study, this research analyzes the main challenges currently facing students' employability and explores effective pathways and teaching practice strategies for improvement. The study finds that the key factors influencing employability include the foresight of the knowledge system, the depth of practical ability development, and the overall enhancement of professional competencies. Accordingly, this paper proposes a "Knowledge–Ability–Quality" integrated cultivation system, aiming to comprehensively enhance students' employability through curriculum optimization, deepened university-industry cooperation, construction of innovative practice platforms, and implementation of career competency training camps. Based on typical teaching cases, the study summarizes the practical outcomes and experiences, and points out directions for future improvement.

Keywords: Provincial Universities; Finance and Taxation Major; Employability Development; Teaching Practice

1. Introduction

With the deep integration of the global economy and the sweeping digital wave, the finance and taxation industry is undergoing unprecedented transformations. In the booming digital economy era, cutting - edge technologies such as big data, artificial intelligence, and blockchain are being increasingly applied in the finance and taxation field. For example, the full - scale popularization of electronic invoices and the wide - spread use of intelligent tax filing systems have not only significantly improved the industry's work efficiency but also reshaped the entire business process and operation model. Traditional finance and taxation work is gradually shifting towards an intelligent and data - driven model, which means that the requirements for professional talents in the industry have also changed profoundly. ^[1] Today's finance and taxation professionals are required not only to be proficient in traditional tax policies and financial accounting theories but also to possess the ability to use emerging technologies for data analysis, risk assessment, and decision - making support.

At the same time, the frequent adjustment of tax policies has become the new normal in the industry. To adapt to different stages of economic development and the needs of macro - economic regulation, countries are constantly introducing new tax policies. This requires practitioners to have a keen ability to interpret policies, quickly understand and accurately implement new policies to ensure the tax compliance of enterprises or institutions. Moreover, with the intensification of market competition, the demand for innovation in the industry is also increasing. Finance and taxation professionals need to continuously explore new business models and service methods to meet the diverse needs of customers. However, provincial universities face many difficulties in cultivating finance and taxation professionals. In terms of faculty resources, compared with key universities, provincial universities have relatively fewer high - level teachers.^[2] Some teachers' knowledge update speed cannot keep up with the development of the industry, making it difficult for teaching content to closely adhere to the actual situation of the industry. In the construction of practical training platforms, due to limitations in funds and resources, provincial universities cannot provide students with sufficient and high - quality practical opportunities. At the same time, the cooperation between universities and enterprises is often

not in - depth enough, lacking a long - term and stable cooperation mechanism, which makes it difficult for students to access real - world business scenarios and projects. These factors combined make the graduates of finance and taxation majors in provincial universities lack competitiveness in the job market, and it is difficult to effectively guarantee the quality of employment. Therefore, it is of great practical significance to deeply study the cultivation paths and teaching practice strategies for the employability of finance and taxation students in provincial universities. This research aims to analyze the main challenges currently faced and explore practical improvement solutions, hoping to provide useful references for the teaching reform of related majors in provincial universities.

2. Analysis of Employment Status

Employment data serves as a crucial indicator reflecting the quality of talent cultivation and the alignment between market demand and graduate supply.^[3] Recent employment trends for finance and taxation majors in provincial universities reveal a complex and concerning picture that warrants serious attention from educators and policymakers alike.

From a macro perspective, while the overall employment rate for finance and taxation graduates remains relatively high, hovering around 90% according to three-year survey data from a representative provincial university, this surface-level success masks deeper structural issues in employment quality. The most striking problem lies in the severe shortage of high-quality employment opportunities. Less than 30% of graduates secure positions in prestigious institutions such as tax authorities, major accounting firms, or financial departments of large enterprises - the traditional dream destinations for these majors. The majority are forced to accept positions in small and medium-sized enterprises or private companies, often with significantly lower salaries, poorer benefits, and limited career development prospects.

The mismatch between academic preparation and actual employment is particularly alarming. A substantial proportion of graduates - estimated at 35-40% based on follow-up surveys - end up working in completely unrelated fields such as sales, general administration, or customer service. This represents not only a tremendous waste of educational resources but also indicates a fundamental disconnect between university curricula and real-world industry requirements. Many graduates report feeling that their four years of specialized education provided little practical value for their eventual careers.

Several interrelated factors contribute to this troubling situation:

Curriculum Obsolescence: Many programs continue to emphasize theoretical knowledge from outdated textbooks while neglecting emerging areas like digital taxation, fintech applications, and international tax planning. Course content often fails to keep pace with rapid changes in tax policies and financial regulations.

Practical Skill Deficits: Employers consistently complain about graduates' lack of hands-on experience with essential tools like tax declaration systems, financial analysis software, and enterprise resource planning platforms. Internship programs, where they exist, tend to be superficial and poorly structured.

Competency Gaps: Beyond technical knowledge, graduates frequently lack critical professional skills including data analysis capabilities, cross-departmental communication skills, and business English proficiency - all increasingly demanded in modern financial workplaces.

Career Guidance Failure: Many students enter the job market with unrealistic expectations and inadequate job-seeking skills, unaware of alternative career paths where their training could be valuable, such as financial consulting or compliance roles.

The consequences of this mismatch extend beyond individual career frustrations. At the institutional level, it threatens the reputation and competitiveness of finance and taxation programs. For the broader economy, it represents a misallocation of human capital that could hinder regional financial sector development. Addressing these challenges will require comprehensive curriculum reforms, stronger industry partnerships, and more robust career support systems to ensure graduates can meet the evolving demands of the financial workforce.

2.1 Outdated Knowledge Content

The curriculum system for finance and taxation majors in provincial universities currently faces multiple challenges in adapting to the digital transformation of the industry. The traditional teaching model, which overemphasizes theoretical knowledge of tax laws and basic accounting principles, has become increasingly disconnected from the practical demands of modern tax practice. While core theoretical foundations remain important, the curriculum fails to adequately incorporate emerging fields such as digital tax administration, blockchain-based tax compliance, and AI-powered financial analysis that are revolutionizing the industry. This curriculum gap stems from several institutional constraints.^[4] Many faculty members, while strong in academic research, lack practical experience with contemporary tax technologies and digital transformation processes in the tax sector. The textbook updating cycle often takes 3-5 years, rendering much of the content obsolete given the rapid changes in tax policies and digital tools. Crucially, the curriculum lacks hands-on components with current tax administration software like the Golden Tax System, big data analytics platforms, and electronic invoice management systems that are now standard in tax practice. The consequences are particularly evident in graduate employment outcomes. Employers report that new hires from provincial universities often require extensive retraining on digital tax platforms and data analysis tools. Many graduates find themselves at a competitive disadvantage compared to peers from vocational colleges or universities with stronger industry ties. This skills mismatch is most apparent in areas like cloud-based tax planning, cross-border e-commerce taxation, and tax risk assessment modeling - all critical competencies in today's job market that remain underrepresented in traditional curricula. To address these challenges, provincial universities need to establish closer collaboration with tax authorities and accounting firms to update curriculum content, develop joint laboratory facilities for digital tax technologies, and create faculty secondment programs to enhance teachers' practical expertise. Only through such systemic reforms can these institutions ensure their graduates remain competitive in the evolving finance and taxation job market.

2.2 Insufficient Practical Skills

The practical teaching system in provincial universities' finance and taxation programs exhibits significant deficiencies that hinder the development of students' professional competencies. Currently, the practical training components suffer from three major limitations: resource constraints, authenticity gaps, and curriculum integration challenges. Most institutions lack sufficient laboratory facilities to simulate real-world tax and financial environments, with computer labs often equipped with outdated software versions that don't reflect current industry practices. The simulation cases used in courses are frequently oversimplified or based on hypothetical scenarios that fail to capture the complexity of actual business operations, particularly in areas like tax dispute resolution or cross-border tax planning. A critical weakness lies in the internship mechanisms^[5]. While top-tier universities maintain strong partnerships with major accounting firms and tax authorities, provincial universities typically only provide short-term, observational internships at local small-medium enterprises, offering limited hands-on experience. In tax audit courses, for instance, students might practice with standardized case templates but miss opportunities to handle authentic audit evidence, interact with clients, or navigate the ambiguities common in real audit engagements. This results in graduates who understand theoretical procedures but struggle with practical judgment calls when encountering incomplete documentation or unusual transactions. The consequences manifest clearly in employment outcomes. Industry surveys indicate graduates from these programs require 6-12 months of intensive on-the-job training to reach basic competency levels, compared to 3-6 months for graduates from programs with robust practical training. Employers particularly note deficiencies in digital tool application, client communication skills, and the ability to adapt theoretical knowledge to novel situations. To address these gaps, provincial universities need to invest in modern tax simulation platforms, develop case libraries based on real anonymized business scenarios, and establish deeper collaborations with regional tax bureaus and accounting firms to create more authentic learning experiences that bridge the theory-practice divide.

2.3 Deficiency in Professional Competencies

The modern finance and taxation industry demands comprehensive professional competencies that extend far beyond technical knowledge, presenting significant challenges for graduates from provincial universities. While these students may possess adequate theoretical understanding of tax policies and accounting principles, they often lack the multidimensional skill set required in contemporary practice.

Three critical competency gaps are particularly evident: professional soft skills, career planning capabilities, and workplace adaptability.[6]In terms of professional soft skills, many students demonstrate deficiencies in cross-departmental communication, client consultation techniques, and collaborative problem-solving - all essential abilities in actual tax practice. Team project assessments reveal that nearly 40% of students struggle with articulating technical tax concepts to non-specialists or mediating differences in team settings. This contrasts sharply with industry expectations where professionals must regularly interact with clients, government agencies, and cross-functional teams. The career planning aspect reveals more systemic issues. A recent graduate survey showed that over 60% of final-year students could not articulate clear career pathways beyond generic goals like "working in finance." This planning vacuum leads to unfocused job searches and poor self-positioning in the employment market. Many students default to applying indiscriminately for any finance-related position rather than targeting roles matching their specific competencies. Workplace adaptation presents perhaps the most immediate challenge. Employers report that new hires from provincial universities typically require twice as long to become productive compared to graduates from programs with stronger industry linkages. The adjustment difficulties stem not just from technical skill gaps, but more fundamentally from an inability to navigate organizational cultures, understand unwritten workplace norms, or independently resolve novel problems. For instance, many struggle with basic professional scenarios like reconciling conflicting instructions from different managers or adapting standard procedures to atypical cases.

These competency shortfalls collectively diminish graduates' employment competitiveness, particularly when vying for positions at leading accounting firms or corporate finance departments. While provincial universities have made progress in updating technical curricula, the development of these critical professional capacities requires more systematic attention through measures such as:

- Integrated soft skill training embedded across all courses
- Structured mentorship programs connecting students with industry professionals
- Realistic workplace simulation projects
- Comprehensive career development frameworks starting from freshman year

3. Construction of a Tripartite Integrated Cultivation System of Knowledge, Ability, and Competency

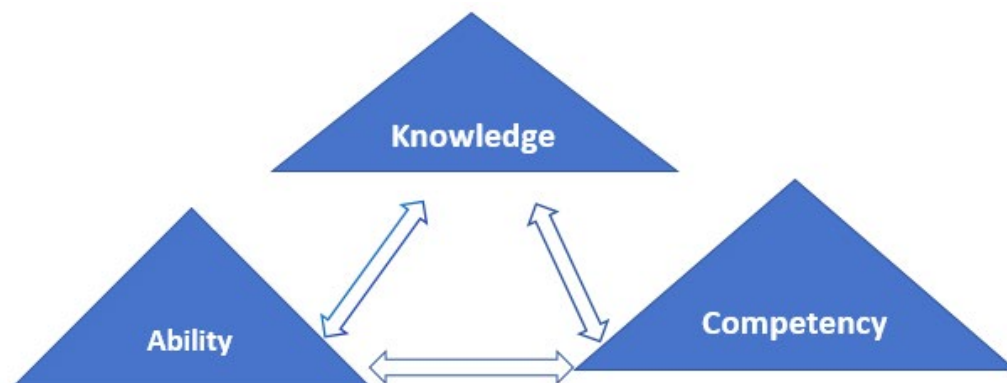


Figure 1 Construction of a Tripartite Integrated Cultivation System

This framework systematically integrates knowledge acquisition, skill development, and competency enhancement to foster holistic student growth, aligning educational outcomes with real-world societal and professional demands (see figure 1). Knowledge acquisition is not just about rote learning of theoretical concepts. In the context of finance and taxation, students need to absorb a wide range of knowledge. They must have a solid grasp of fundamental taxation principles and keep abreast of the latest regulatory changes. For example, new international tax treaties and domestic policy adjustments require students to continuously update their knowledge base. This knowledge serves as the building blocks for their future professional practice. Skill development focuses on practical applications. Students are trained to use advanced financial software for tax calculations and data analytics tools to process large - scale tax - related data. They also engage in hands - on projects like tax planning for real - life businesses, which hones their problem - solving and decision - making skills.

These skills are directly applicable in the workplace, enabling them to handle complex financial and tax tasks efficiently. Competency enhancement emphasizes the development of soft skills and professional attitudes. Teamwork is crucial as finance and taxation often involve cross - departmental cooperation. Students participate in group projects where they learn to communicate effectively, delegate tasks, and resolve conflicts. Additionally, ethical awareness is instilled through case studies and discussions. They understand the importance of integrity in financial reporting and tax compliance, which is highly valued by employers and society. Overall, this integrated framework ensures that students are well - rounded and prepared for the challenges of the modern finance and taxation industry.

3.1 Theoretical Foundation and Design Logic of the Training System

The transformation of finance and taxation education in provincial universities requires a fundamental paradigm shift from traditional knowledge transmission to comprehensive competency development. This study proposes an innovative three-dimensional "Knowledge-Ability-Quality" framework (Figure 1) that synergistically combines Outcome-Based Education (OBE) principles with competency-based modeling to create a market-responsive talent cultivation system.

3.1.1 Theoretical Underpinnings

The framework draws upon two complementary educational theories. The OBE approach, pioneered by Spady (1994), employs backward design methodology that begins with clearly defining the ultimate competencies graduates must possess, then systematically constructs curriculum and learning experiences to achieve these outcomes. This is integrated with the competency model (McClelland, 1973) which conceptualizes professional requirements through three dimensions: cognitive knowledge (knowing), operational skills (doing), and affective qualities (being). The fusion of these frameworks ensures both vertical alignment with educational objectives and horizontal integration with industry needs.

Three-Dimensional Framework Architecture:

Knowledge System: The Cognitive Foundation

The knowledge dimension establishes the theoretical bedrock through:

Core taxation theories (incidence analysis, optimal taxation)

Evolving regulatory frameworks (BEPS 2.0, Pillar Two implementation)

Interdisciplinary knowledge spanning digital economy, environmental economics, and behavioral finance

For example, the curriculum incorporates emerging topics like NFT taxation and carbon border adjustment mechanisms within weeks of regulatory developments, ensuring real-time relevance. This dynamic knowledge system moves beyond static textbook content to cultivate adaptive learning capabilities.

Ability System: The Operational Core

Practical competency development focuses on:

Technical mastery of industry-standard platforms (e.g., blockchain tax compliance tools, ERP systems)

Complex problem-solving through authentic case studies from M&A tax disputes

Innovation capabilities for addressing novel challenges like DeFi taxation

The program embeds progressive skill development through simulated tax clinics, where students progress from basic compliance tasks to advising on multinational tax strategy.

Quality System: The Professional Differentiator

Comprehensive quality cultivation emphasizes:

Professional ethics through dilemma scenarios (e.g., client pressure for aggressive tax positions)

Cross-cultural communication in global tax team simulations

Metacognitive skills for continuous professional development

These qualities are cultivated through longitudinal development portfolios that track growth across the program.

3.1.2 Implementation Mechanism: The Triple-Helix Structure

The “curriculum instruction–practical training–competency cultivation” operational model creates an integrated ecosystem:

Curriculum Innovation:

Modular courses co-designed with Big Four accounting firms

Micro-credentials in emerging areas like tax analytics

Interdisciplinary capstones combining tax, data science, and strategy

Practical Training Enhancement:

Phased internships progressing from observation to responsibility

On-campus tax clinics serving regional SMEs

VR simulations of cross-border tax audits

Competency Development:

360-degree competency assessments

Executive mentorship programs

Reflective practice journals

3.1.3 Alignment with National Priorities

This framework directly supports China’s education modernization 2035 agenda by:

Implementing the “industry as foundation” vocational education principle

Addressing digital economy talent demands

Promoting integration of ideological education and professional development

3.2 Forward-Looking Reconstruction of the Knowledge System

Facing the challenges brought by the digital transformation of the finance and taxation industry—such as the rollout of the Golden Tax Phase IV system and the widespread adoption of electronic invoices—the knowledge system must reflect both foresight and dynamism.

First, a modular curriculum design is adopted, dividing the original curriculum into:

Professional Fundamentals Module (e.g., Principles of Tax Law, Public Finance),

Industry Frontiers Module (new courses like Smart Tax Practice, Blockchain and Tax Governance),

Interdisciplinary Module (e.g., Big Data Tax Analysis, Python Applications in Taxation).

Notably, 20% of course content is updated annually through joint curriculum development with industry partners.

Second, interdisciplinary integration is strengthened by offering elective courses that combine taxation with law and IT—such as Case Studies in Tax Audits, jointly taught by faculty from both finance and law departments. Through simulated cases of corporate invoice fraud, students develop their ability to identify legal risks. To support changes in professional certification systems, a “lifelong learning support system” is constructed. On one hand, international certifications like ACCA and CMA are embedded in elective courses as modular content. On the other hand, a “credit bank” system allows students to convert MOOCs and professional certifications into academic credits. Data from a pilot provincial university shows that in 2022, the proportion of students taking interdisciplinary electives reached 47%, an increase of 28 percentage points compared to pre-reform figures.

3.3 Deepening the Pathways for Practical Ability Development

Practical training must combine “progressive stages” with “immersion in real-world contexts.” At

the university-industry collaboration level, 12 practice bases have been co-established with partners such as the provincial tax bureau and Deloitte. An innovative “3+1” training model is implemented—three years of on-campus study followed by one year of full-time internship in an enterprise. In the sixth semester, students participate in a “real-accounting season,” where under faculty supervision they complete tasks such as comprehensive tax filing and tax planning proposals.

The practical teaching system follows a three-stage logic:

Foundation stage (Year 1): Students learn basic skills like operating VAT invoicing systems via virtual simulation platforms.

Specialization stage (Year 2): Includes simulated tax audits and data visualization of tax-related big data.

Integration stage (Year 3): Involves real business projects, such as a listed company’s cross-border M&A tax restructuring project. Student teams must complete policy reviews, risk assessments, and deliver solution presentations within four weeks.

Competitions act as catalysts for skill development. A three-tier competition framework (campus–provincial–national) has been established. Over the past three years, students have participated in events such as the “Hengxin Cup” Tax Skills Competition, achieving a 63% award rate. Notably, the national championship-winning team in 2021 designed an “Intelligent Matching System for Tax Incentives for SMEs,” which has since been adopted by two accounting firms.

3.4 Comprehensive Strategy for Enhancing Professional Competency

The cultivation of professional competency must transcend the traditional ideological and political education model and adopt a three-pronged approach: professional ethics, workplace soft skills, and psychological capital. In terms of ethics, a course titled Ethical Decision-Making for Tax Professionals has been developed, featuring 20 scenarios involving ethical dilemmas such as invoice falsification and tax avoidance. Using role-play, students are guided to make value-based judgments. Workplace soft skills are developed through immersive scenarios. A simulated on-campus tax advisory firm operates with enterprise standards: students handle client consultations, present proposals, and undergo KPI evaluations. Additionally, the “Tax Service Volunteer Post” program, jointly run with the local tax bureau, engages over 200 students annually in personal income tax filing assistance. Employer evaluations report an average communication efficiency score of 4.2 out of 5. To address widespread workplace anxiety, the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) model is adopted. A Taxation Workplace Stress Management workshop uses techniques such as sandbox simulations and stress interviews. Students complete an average of 40 hours of psychological adaptability training before graduation. Follow-up surveys show a 19% decrease in post-employment adjustment difficulties within the first three months among participants.

3.5 Construction of a Collaborative Mechanism for the Integrated Model

Collaboration among the three dimensions requires institutional support and an integrated evaluation system. In terms of curriculum integration, the Tax Planning course employs a “lecture–case study–ethical debate” model. For example, while teaching cross-border tax planning techniques, students analyze a multinational company’s transfer pricing case from three dimensions: professional compliance, business rationale, and social responsibility. The practical training platform reinforces competency development through a “dual feedback mechanism.” Corporate mentors provide monthly quantitative assessments of students’ workplace competencies (e.g., punctuality, teamwork), while students must reflect on their weaknesses and formulate improvement plans in their practice reports.

The evaluation system breaks away from traditional score-centric assessments, establishing a multi-dimensional structure:

Knowledge assessments (40%)

Practical outcomes (30%)

Competency evaluations (30%)

For competency evaluations, professional tools such as the DISC behavioral assessment—commonly used by HR departments—are incorporated. Data from a pilot class shows that after implementing the new system, students demonstrated significant improvements in dimensions

such as “complex problem-solving ability” (increased by 35%) and “ethical sensitivity” (increased by 28%).

4. Conclusion

This study, rooted in the transformation demands of the finance and taxation industry in the digital economy era, constructs a “Knowledge–Ability–Quality” integrated training system. Through theoretical innovation and practical exploration, it provides a systematic solution for enhancing the employability of finance and taxation students in provincial universities. Empirical research indicates that this system effectively addresses the limitations of traditional training models—such as outdated knowledge, superficial practical training, and lack of competency development—through modular knowledge restructuring, progressive practical empowerment, and immersive competency cultivation. In light of the ongoing impact of technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data on the finance and taxation sector, future efforts should focus on further developing integrated “technology + professional” courses, refining dynamic adjustment mechanisms in university-industry collaboration, and exploring personalized career development pathways. This research not only offers a replicable practical paradigm for application-oriented talent training in provincial universities, but also contributes theoretical insights to the supply-side reform of vocational education. Its core value lies in the deep coupling of the education chain, talent chain, and industry chain, enabling dynamic alignment between student employability and industry needs, and providing high-quality finance and taxation talent for regional economic development.

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