

# Teaching History of Interior Design Course as a Lifelong Experience

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*Abstract:* - The profession of interior design is a vital practice in shaping life-styles. Each of every life-style brings its cultural identity that shapes through historical inputs. That is to say, designing new environments for users is a process of creating socio-cultural identities. History is a discipline reflects our collective memory/collective identity. In a way, history of interior design reflects our traditions, customs in using environments. Therefore, in the way of educating new interior designers, history courses take role in not only developing a base for profession, but also lead to establish consciousness in the contextual understanding of the profession. In recent years, conception of history courses changes. Understanding history moves from solely classroom practice to life-long daily experience. This study is developing a preparation stage for a large scale research in determine the relation between students' perspective on history as a practice of daily life and the attitudes' on history as a collective set of knowledge in the classroom environment.

*Key-Words:* - Interior design, interior design history course, historical consciousness

## 1 Introduction

Interior design profession start to be a discipline after the industrial revolution in late 18 century. By the rise of mass-production most of the interior design elements started to spread all around the world. Product such as fabrics, furniture, wall paper, carpets etc. were being mass-produced. The magazines about house design stated to be publish. These magazines reflected the new aesthetic understanding of the era. These changes lead new interpretations in the era of design. Before these changes takes place building considered as a unique entity, as an art work and the interior considered as a part of it. All these changes give rise to contemporary perspective in interior design. It started to be a more defined discipline.

As a professional discipline the education of interior design is started to be teach in recent years. In other words the education of interior design is new discipline. Therefore, the history of interior design is a major course to develop a contextual base for the identification of the discipline. Professional identity of the interior design can only be possible with develop a cultural background with the help of historical knowledge.

On the other hand, apart from architectural practice as a shell production, interior architecture focuses

on the core of the shell that serves for human existence. Interior spaces are the environments that people defined their identities with their traditions and cultural customs. "Culture and environment is strongly interrelated with each others. Culture shapes the environment; environment shapes the culture." [1]

An interior space is full of cultural meaning develop through history. People turn spaces to their places with their cultural identities. "Place is an environment that people construct their collective identity. In collective memory, place identities turn in to cultural identity reflecting the traditional values." [2]

Interior designer as a professional basically focuses on functionality, aesthetics with the help of collective cultural identities rooted in history. International Federation of Interior Architects and Interior Designers that is widely known as an international committee of interior designers IFI define the profession as:

*"As a creative enterprise, interior design and interior architecture are a mode of cultural production. They are a place-maker that interprets, translates, and edits cultural capital. In a global world, interior design and interior architecture must*

*play a role in facilitating the retention of cultural diversity.” [3]*

In the light of this perspective, history of interior design courses is vital in both for identifying the profession itself and creates a contextual base for the new designers. It is only be possible with developing historical consciousness. From this point of view, This study is developing a preparation stage for a large scale research in determine the relation between students’ perspective on history as a practice of daily life and the attitudes’ on history as a collective set of knowledge in the classroom environment.

## 2 Teaching History

Notion of history teaching is changing in recent years. Basically, the knowledge accumulation of history is been questioned. It is the question of what the historical knowledge is and the question of is it history or not. Erikson questioned this situation as “We read, discuss, challenge, and absorb the interpretations (or dismissals) of our fellow historians, both past and contemporary. We receive feedback on our work from students, conference attendees, peer reviewers, editors, publishers, interviewers, and members of the general public who attend book talks and post comments on Amazon.com.” [4]. Especially, Erikson’s emphasis is on the abandoned historical knowledge from daily life. Therefore we all considered the historical knowledge from a certain group of professionals’ perspective. In this way, there occurred set of data and teachers give these collective data to the student ask them to memorise these as a historical knowledge.

Starting from Lee Shulman, critics on discipline-specific pedagogy named as “signature pedagogy” and the new approaches in cognitive science the history education reevaluated. [5] Erikson set these approaches in a sequence and started to set findings in experience base teaching with Sam Wineburg, Lendol Calder, and David Pace’s study. This focuses on the experienced based of cognitive approached and test these findings in “sourcing, corroborating, and connecting, among others”. [5] Stéphane Lévesque, Keith Barton and Linda Levstik, Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke correlated history pedagogy as “procedural concepts” “change over time, context, narrative, empathy, significance, and distance from the past, among others”. [6, 7, 8, ]Peter Lee and Rosalyn Ashby, Gaea Leinhardt, and the Visual Knowledge

Project participants discussed critical thinking in history to highlight historians’ use of evidence, argumentation, explanation, and perspective”. [9, 10] At the end, as an evidence to his experience based approached he sets Calder and Bob Bain essential highlight on the inherit of history as “historians problematize previous stories about the past, formulate their own questions, and design and follow processes of inquiry”[11]. In other terms, all these studies focus on the importance of history learning as an intellectual process questioning and creating their own historical consciousness through experience.

Silva and Fonseca also argue the way the historical knowledge set in the literature. They criticised the history teaching and defined the 5 main problems and named these as fetishes in history teaching. These are;

1. The fetish of ‘New Objects’ inspired by New French History: innovation derives from the exploration of themes never before navigated (burnt matches, discarded nappies, calluses on the vocal cords...). Without being problematized this fetish leads to teaching about possible exoticisms and to the loss of general questions of historical knowledge.
2. The fetish of the *demier cri* (the last word or the most recent fashion), related to the previous one with a slight variation in the inspirational source – English, US, Italian, and Polish authors ... The history of the vanquished and the history of private life have gone ... The novelty of the argument emerges as something good in itself, without reflecting on its effective importance. And the same fields of knowledge share the risk of being discarded when they are no longer new: the oldness of New History...
3. The fetish of the cultural scholar isolated from other cultures (university, industrial, non-school, popular traditions). The school sees itself reduced to an island outside of history.
4. The fetish of Academia as the only place of knowledge: a consequence of this is the disqualification of teachers and students in primary and secondary education, as well as of society itself.
5. The fetish of law or of the state which saves everything, ignoring the intellectual and political wills of teaching, students and other social actors involved in the teaching of history. [12]

Besides these facts, the history as a discipline also is in collaborated with other different disciplines. In the era of design history socio-cultural studies,

archaeology and anthropology are collaborative disciplines. Accumulation of knowledge is feed with these disciplines. Moreover the problem of aesthetical value in the field of design history is also considered in the field of philosophy.

Mainly, in this set of problems, anyhow, the main focus is on the discrimination of historical knowledge from daily routine. Especially, because the design course of history also takes role in teaching technical background of the profession it cannot be considered without daily routine. During the course student perceived the basic techniques that leads to recent innovations. The recent reflection of these set of technological knowledge make the student perceive the profession easily. On the other hand, understanding this knowledge, make student to build up a contextual base for creating new designs.

As Robert B. Bain suggests, “the problem for history teachers begins with trying to understand what defines meaning making in history”. Especially in the field of interior design without any “meaning and science-making” perspective it is not possible to create new collective identities that reflect cultural identity [13] Culture identity consists of the patterns of living habits, attitudes and traditions. Culture is the main element shapes how people behave in a certain environment. Moreover, it affects how we conceptualized the environment that we live in. [1] Cultural identity can only be perceived with the perspective open to collective memory shapes with historical knowledge.

### 3 History of Interior Design Course

History of Interior Design course is mainly 2 semester must course in the curriculum of interior design departments. There are same advance level of history courses in the graduate programs also. According to curriculum in the first class they take art history courses and in the second class they take history of interior design. In the first class the main criterion is to meet student with idea of design as an abstract concept. In the second class they meet the idea of interior design with a small scale design problem without any technical input. In the second grade the idea is to develop students’ perception of interior as a three dimensional space. With this perception they learn the human dimensions and ergonomic standards in respect to interior environment with various functions. In the third class there comes the technical knowledge and

environmental psychology issues. At the end of third class they start to build up their own conception and meaning in the era of interior design.

In the last class they ended up their conceptual development and technical improvement with the awareness of human habitation in the interior environment. The interior design education aims to educate student in issues deals with the interior design with both in conceptual and technical level that are correlated with each others already.

In this curriculum, history courses are creating a base level for the conceptual and technical development in the education. The main criterion of the course is to develop student visual perception through historical examples. Basically it is visual based course. With help of visual materials both the socio-cultural perspective and the technical knowledge translate to students. Different than the other disciplines design history course not only accumulate literature knowledge but it adds also to the visual memory. In this sense, it is the main course develops student visual memory and this visual memory enhances the student creativity in design.

Moreover the course focuses on to develop student intellectual level with the debates on different fragment of history; try to compare different periods of historical interiors in their social, aesthetical and technical context. These debates help students to consider the history as sequences of a collective memory. Many studied focuses on the benefits of debates in the class such as Bauer&Wachowiak in 1977[14], Berg in 1979, [15]Elliot in 1993, [16] Gorman, Law &Lindgren in 1981, [17] Moeller in 1985[18], and last Smith in 1990. [19] Both with the help of visual material and the classroom debates a professional perspective is occurred in the students’ cognition.

#### 3.1 Survey in History of Interior Design Course

As it is mentioned above the history of interior design course is an essential course in interior design education. In order to develop a more beneficial classroom experience through the course there carried out a small scaled survey in order to determine the connection between the student special preference and the knowledge accumulation. It is expected to be a leading study for a large scale

study. According to theoretical discussion it is obvious that the students own experience of historical knowledge is lead to a comprehensive achievement in history course. As it is suggested “the problem for history teachers begins with trying to understand what defines meaning making in history”. [20] This study tries to create an introduction in order to understand if the students own meaning making in history affected their learning capacity.

With respect to create a base for a detail study the students in the first course of history of interior design are selected. First history course students are selected because they haven't got any experience on any history courses in the interior design era. This selected course is 12 week course that they learn the interior spaces form the pre historic period up to Baroque period.

The main aim of this specific course is to make student perceive the specific feature in the interior space unique for the historical periods such as Renaissance, Baroque, and Gothic etc. Each week they learn a new period and they learn specific features of the period such as, specifically used forms, shapes, material, techniques etc. The method is to present a slay show of specific interiors. These interiors selected according to their features that reflect the period's identity. Moreover, there carried out debates in similarities and differences between these periods.

These are 26 students in the history of interior design course. Their ages are varied between 18 up to 22. The aim of this survey is to considered the tendencies rather than create a statistical set of data analysis. This survey has got two phases. In the first phase they ask to name their most favourite interior space and in the second phase they expected to analysis a selected interior space. They don't force to select the interior space form historical examples. There are 5 weeks time period between these two phases. The survey evaluates their selection. The study seeks, if they prefer to select their favourite place for analysis after 5 weeks or not. In order to analysis the interior space they have to use their knowledge gain from the course in the classroom.

According to survey only 3 students selected their favourite place for analysing. The other group mainly selected interior spaces form the last classroom lesson for analysing. It may not be the only criteria for the successful classroom experience but it can be considered as a factor that affected the

performance in the history course. With a comprehensive study the relations between the students' daily experiences and development of the historical consciousness should the studied.

## 4 Conclusion

It is obvious history should be our part of daily experience. When it is considered just as a set of archive based data, student never used these data in their daily life. Taking history course is a practice of developing intellectual perspective that leads to specific improvement. If it is considered just as a set of knowledge that has to be memorized, it will not stay in a specific folder in our computer 'brain'. It will just be a set of trash that has to be removed.

From this point of view, history of interior design courses is vital in identifying the profession. It is only be possible with developing historical consciousness. This study is developing a preparation stage for a large scale research in determining the relation between students' tendencies in history as a practice of daily life and the attitudes' on history; persevering it as only collective set of knowledge in the classroom environment.

Consciousness in history leads to improvement in conception of profession itself. Especially in history of interior design course, the knowledge helps in gaining socio-cultural, philosophical and technical perspective. Further studies should be carried out for taking history as a lifelong learning practice. As history for interior design is a collective memory of our cultural identity.

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