

# **From Physical Space to Experiential Systems: Cognitive Shifts in Interior Design Pedagogy through Experience Design**

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**Abstract:** Interior design academic instruction conventionally has viewed space predominantly as a physical entity defined by form, material and enclosure. Nonetheless, contemporary interior design practice has shifted towards engagement-driven environments and extended beyond tangible limitations through digital integration and user interaction. This paper investigates a shift in pedagogical approach, from an emphasis on form-centric to experience-oriented spatial thinking through an experience design module for undergraduate interior design students. As part of broader research enquiry which addresses influences on spatial visualization ability of interior design students, this exploratory study investigated interaction-driven spatial propositions. Trying to break away from the conventional notions of a space, this studio project aimed at integrating a digital interaction to design custom user engagement within the physical form. The study examines shifts in design thinking, narrative construction and sensory integration through the inclusion of digital tools. Visual assessment of student work including conceptual diagrams, journey maps, and spatial narratives indicated their perceptions and user engagement in their proposals. Findings indicate that while students integrate digital tools in their projects, converting experiential intent to equitable spatial systems remained an emerging skill. Projects exhibited significant conceptual ambition and encouraged students to perceive space as participatory and dynamic, situating users as key design elements rather than passive occupants. This indicates the potential of experiential frameworks to reshape design education, encouraging engagement-driven thinking without displacing foundational principles of spatial organization.

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