

Research on Teaching Reform Strategies for the Architectural Interior Design Major Driven by Design Competitions

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Abstract: Design competitions in architectural interior design serve as an effective catalyst for innovation and rapid advancement in the field, increasingly becoming a vital component of teaching outcome showcases within the discipline. By participating in these competitions, teachers and students engage with real-world design challenges, honing their problem-solving abilities. Competitions not only provide students with a platform to showcase their talents but also offer teachers opportunities to reflect on the curriculum and update their teaching philosophies. Guiding students in professional design competitions allows teachers to gain deeper insights into industry trends and market demands, enabling them to refine teaching content and methodologies, thereby enhancing teaching quality. This paper explores the impact of integrating design competitions into the classroom teaching system for architectural interior design majors, aiming to develop professional talent and elevate the quality of education.

Keywords: Architectural interior design; Design competition; Teaching reform

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1. Introduction

On April 13, 2021, significant instructions were issued regarding vocational education, highlighting its pivotal role in the new journey of comprehensively building a modern socialist country. These instructions emphasized the promising future and immense potential of vocational education, calling for the establishment of high-level vocational colleges and programs, promoting vocational integration, enhancing the adaptability of vocational education, and accelerating the development of a modern vocational education system. The aim is to cultivate a greater number of high-quality technical professionals, skilled craftsmen, and artisans for major industries^[1]. Higher vocational education is employment-oriented, driven by market demands for skilled social talent. It focuses on cultivating highly skilled individuals for enterprises, emphasizing job-specific competencies and practical vocational abilities. Its mission is to align education with production and learning, training high-level talent for frontline roles in production, construction, management, and service

sectors, while prioritizing employment as its primary goal and service as its fundamental purpose.

The architectural interior design major is a key discipline within China's vocational education system. However, traditional teaching methods often remain confined to theoretical instruction, leaving students with limited opportunities for practical application^[2]. As the design industry evolves rapidly, design competitions have emerged as a critical platform for fostering and enhancing students' professional skills, innovation, and teamwork. Increasingly, students and educators are engaging in design competitions, recognizing their importance. Design, as a field rooted in creativity and practice, benefits significantly from students' participation in competitions, which serve as a valuable avenue for developing innovative thinking and hands-on abilities. Teachers also play a crucial role, as their guidance and teaching methods are influenced by the process of preparing students for competitions. Introducing design competitions into the classroom as a teaching method provides students with opportunities to engage in practical work and gain real-world experience^[3].

2. Current situation of the development of architectural interior design courses

With the continued growth of the market economy, public expectations for both material living standards and spiritual enrichment have risen. This has created higher demands for the architectural interior design profession. In response, designers have integrated diverse elements and innovative concepts into their work, resulting in unique design styles and driving the rapid advancement of China's architectural interior design field.

However, several challenges persist in this field. Issues such as outdated design concepts, a lack of innovation awareness, and insufficient professional knowledge reserves have significantly constrained the development of the architectural interior design profession^[4]. Addressing these issues is essential for the sustained growth and evolution of this discipline.

2.1. Low students' quality and weak learning awareness

Most students majoring in architectural interior design in higher vocational colleges come from technical secondary schools or are non-art majors admitted through the general college entrance examination. These students often have a weak cultural foundation, lack formal art training, and demonstrate limited independent learning and innovation abilities in the art field. These shortcomings result in poor teaching outcomes in the classroom.

2.2. Pseudo-propositional project-guided teaching process

Currently, the teaching of interior design in higher vocational colleges primarily adopts a project-based approach, focusing on guiding students through the entire process of project design from start to finish, driven by assignment briefs. While this method aims to cultivate students' comprehensive design skills, it tends to emphasize theoretical knowledge in the classroom, offering limited practical opportunities^[5].

3. Application effect of design competitions in teaching architectural interior design

Practice shows that introducing design competitions into the teaching process can effectively address the aforementioned issues. Participating in competitions enhances students' learning interests and supports their

future development. Achieving good results in competitions boosts students' self-confidence, which helps them face future challenges with resilience and improved psychological quality. This positive influence extends to their peers, encouraging a shift in poor learning attitudes and significantly improving the overall classroom atmosphere ^[6].

3.1. Stimulating creativity, improving practical skills, and fostering teamwork

For instance, in the "Interior Design of Public Buildings" course, a practical project focusing on the renovation design of a campus library is incorporated into the classroom. Students are provided with the assignment brief at the beginning of the course and encouraged to conduct field surveys based on the actual project. By analyzing tangible spatial objects, students develop both rational analytical skills and creative intuition.

During the initial design phase, students engage in drawing and field comparisons to establish a sense of human spatial scale. In later stages, they learn to adjust their plans and align them with real-world conditions, gaining insights into the strengths and weaknesses of various spatial design techniques. Throughout the course, teamwork is emphasized as students collaborate to address challenges. This experience is especially critical for architectural interior design majors, as it mirrors real-world professional scenarios.

This teaching method integrates classroom theoretical knowledge with hands-on project implementation. By deriving knowledge points from practical challenges, students actively participate in the learning process, moving beyond passive knowledge absorption to active problem-solving and critical thinking. Such an approach fosters students' innovative thinking and equips them with the skills to tackle real-world problems ^[7].

3.2. Sparking innovation and enthusiasm

Initially, many students are unaware of relevant competition opportunities. However, when teachers guide outstanding students to participate in competitions using course projects and achieve success, it creates a visible impact. Witnessing these tangible results motivates other students to get involved. Design competitions require participants to use innovative thinking to solve practical problems, providing a challenging environment that stimulates students' creativity and practical abilities. This process not only enhances their skills but also prepares them to better meet the demands of their future careers ^[8].

4. Design competitions as classroom strategies in teaching architectural interior design majors

4.1. Defining teaching objectives

Firstly, based on the needs of application-oriented training, teaching in architectural interior design should prioritize practicality. The teaching objectives should aim to develop students' ability to independently execute architectural interior design projects and collaboratively complete comprehensive line design tasks. Secondly, real-world projects should be incorporated into the classroom, with teaching organized around actual environmental design projects. Students should complete project tasks step by step, adhering to the requirements outlined in the project brief. Design competitions often involve cutting-edge ideas and technologies, providing educators with opportunities to update course content and revise the syllabus. By referencing competition themes, teachers can align course content with market demands, drive curriculum optimization, and enhance both the practical relevance of the course and its forward-looking teaching goals ^[9].

4.2. Integrating competitions into the teaching content system

The learning of design knowledge is a progressive process. In traditional teaching approaches, students often forget previously learned material due to the segmented nature of instruction. To address this, future teaching reforms should encourage teachers to organize student participation in relevant competitions in alignment with the course's phased teaching content. This approach allows competitions to be seamlessly incorporated into the curriculum, fostering the consolidation and practical application of students' design knowledge ^[10].

4.3. Emphasizing investigative learning in the curriculum

Unlike universities, vocational colleges focus more on cultivating practical skills. A well-structured and detailed arrangement of investigative courses is a key trend in the development of vocational education. For example, arranging practical inspections of material courses can provide students with direct exposure to authentic architectural decoration materials, enabling them to understand the application of new materials and technologies in interior design. Organizing field visits to furniture-related courses, such as trips to IKEA, Red Star Macalline, and other home retail enterprises, is another important strategy. These visits allow students to explore market trends, determine furniture pairings, gather inspiration, and build partnerships. This hands-on experience equips students with essential practical knowledge, enhances their design skills, and boosts their professionalism. Consequently, investigative courses should be integrated into the interior design curriculum of higher vocational colleges, establishing an investigative course system as a hallmark of vocational interior design education ^[11].

4.4. Establishing training rooms and studio systems

The studio-based teaching model operates independently of the basic courses taught in schools. For example, the environmental art design studio at Guangzhou Urban Construction Vocational College adopts a student-centered, practice-oriented approach. To meet the demands of practical teaching, the college has built an interior design training center spanning over 3,200 square meters ^[12]. This center includes facilities such as an interior design studio, design drawing room, model-making room, decorative materials exhibition room, woodworking room, and clay craft room. Each training room can accommodate up to 45 students, effectively meeting the professional training requirements for existing teaching tasks.

Similarly, the environmental art design studio of the School of Architecture and Art at Zhejiang Industry and Commerce Vocational and Technical College integrates a talent training model of "post-course competition and creation." This includes professional foundational teaching in the first year, professional skill courses and studio teaching in the second year, and specialized employment-oriented classes in the third year (such as professional courses or apprenticeship classes). In recent years, increasing emphasis has been placed on the quality of students' design drawings and professional education. Core courses and studio projects are closely linked with enterprise collaboration, significantly enhancing students' employability and securing a high-quality employment rate. Students benefit from studio participation in two key ways: They engage in teachers' social practice projects, which strengthen their professional skills through hands-on experience; for competition projects, they receive tailored guidance, fostering continuous learning and communication. Additionally, teachers can provide timely feedback during course instruction, improving both student outcomes and professional recognition. This process encourages teachers to reflect on and refine their teaching practices, optimizing the teaching structure. Thus, combining classroom instruction with studio practice not only strengthens students' comprehensive practical abilities but also provides valuable feedback

and adjustment directions for existing classroom teaching^[13].

5. The influence and implications of incorporating design competitions into classroom teaching reform

5.1. Enhancing teaching quality, teacher development, teacher-student interaction, and institutional reputation

Guiding students to participate in professional design competitions allows teachers to gain deeper insights into industry trends and market demands. This knowledge enables them to update teaching content and methodologies, ultimately improving teaching quality. For instance, teachers can adjust the curriculum and introduce practical components aligned with competition requirements, cultivating students' innovative and practical abilities. Participation in design competitions also demands high professional expertise and guidance skills from teachers. In preparing students for competitions, teachers must continually enhance their own professional knowledge and skills, improving their comprehensive abilities in the process. Furthermore, the joint problem-solving required during competition preparation fosters frequent and in-depth teacher-student interactions, helping to build strong relationships and improve teaching outcomes^[14]. When students achieve excellent results in design competitions, the school's reputation and visibility are enhanced. Schools can leverage these achievements to showcase their professional standards and teaching strengths, attracting more talented students to enroll. Additionally, organizing student participation in competitions highlights the institution's commitment to professional excellence, reinforcing its influence in the field.

5.2. Promoting the integration and sharing of teaching resources

Design competitions involve a wide range of knowledge and resources, requiring collaboration among teachers, students, and enterprises. After students participate in these competitions and achieve results, schools should prioritize the transformation and application of these outcomes. For instance, winning works can be displayed in school exhibition halls or showcased in relevant exhibitions. Additionally, schools can collaborate with enterprises to transform these award-winning works into actual products or services, thereby enhancing the school's visibility and influence. This integration and sharing of resources and cooperation can facilitate the efficient utilization and optimization of teaching resources, ultimately improving teaching quality.

5.3. Strengthening the evaluation and feedback mechanism for design competitions

Throughout the design competition process, teachers should closely monitor students' practice and provide guidance on their thought processes, offering timely evaluations and feedback to help refine their design proposals. Regularly tracking students' progress during training and competitions is essential to identify problems and areas for improvement, enabling timely adjustments. Furthermore, recognizing and rewarding winning students can encourage broader student participation and foster enthusiasm for design competitions.

5.4. Establishing a sustainable mechanism for design competitions

To ensure that design competitions continuously drive teaching reform, it is necessary to establish a sustainable mechanism. A dedicated competition research group should be formed within the Teaching and Research Department to monitor relevant design competitions throughout the year and develop detailed time plans. For instance, competitions such as the National Vocational College Skills Competition, the 10th Zijin Award for

Architectural and Environmental Design, the 14th Jiangsu Interior Design Grand Prix hosted by the Jiangsu Interior Design Society in 2023, and the Jiangsu Young Students Interior Design Grand Prix emphasize themes like ecology and environmental protection, energy efficiency, health, cultural heritage, and innovation. These competitions encourage originality and diversity in submissions, fostering designs that envision a new way of living^[15].

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, participating in design competitions holds significant value for students by enhancing their professional skills, innovative thinking, practical abilities, teamwork, and self-confidence. Schools should create an environment that supports student growth through effective publicity, training guidance, competition organization, detailed training plans, systematic evaluations, and the establishment of long-term mechanisms. Moreover, exploring curriculum reform and teaching methodologies inspired by discipline-specific competitions is highly relevant. Considering issues such as students' weak foundational knowledge, limited theoretical understanding, inadequate practical skills, unfamiliarity with construction technologies, and insufficient integration of theory and practice, this paper proposes an employment-oriented reform strategy for teaching architectural interior design. This strategy, driven by design competitions, aims to strengthen the integration of professional courses with competitions; focus on competency standards by enhancing comprehensive practical training; and utilize a project-driven approach to reinforce the connection between theory and practice. These reforms will better prepare students for real-world challenges and align their skills with industry needs.

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Disclosure statement

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