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Original Research Article

A Contemplation on the Profound Objectives of Architectural Education in Contemporary Iran; Case Study: Architecture Studio III at the University of Tehran*

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Abstract

Problem statement: Architectural education in contemporary Iran faces significant challenges due to outdated teaching methods that fail to align with the demands of the postmodern era. Current educational systems remain tied to rigid, standardized approaches from the modern period, limiting their ability to adapt to new sociocultural realities.

Research method: This research investigates the essential characteristics and needs of architectural education in the postmodern context, proposing innovative objectives for nurturing architects in modern Iran. The study combines reflective analysis, descriptive methods, and the author's firsthand teaching experiences in Atelier 3 at the University of Tehran over 12 semesters (2017–2023), alongside reviews of academic literature and library resources.

Conclusion: Key findings suggest that architectural education must move away from uniform standardization toward flexible, diverse teaching models. This shift requires rethinking -not dismantling- existing structures. Alongside specialized objectives (knowledge, technical skills, and insight), the study advocates for profound objectives in education -economic literacy, social responsibility, cognitive development, and mental health- proposing a blended pathway for progress. Crucially, educators must evolve from being mere knowledge providers to facilitators of collaborative, student-centered learning environments. Such a shift enables postmodern architectural educators to inspire students' holistic professional and personal development.

Keywords: *Profound Objectives, Architectural Education, Standardization, Creativity, Postmodern Iran.*

Introduction and Problem Statement

The importance of education and the transfer of knowledge and experience to future generations is undeniable. As H.G. Wells aptly noted, civilization is a race between education and catastrophe (Wells, 1920, 594). Architectural education, as part of this process, has undergone extensive transformations throughout history. However, in contemporary Iran,

architectural education faces numerous challenges rooted in a lack of understanding of postmodern characteristics and neglect of creativity and other human dimensions in student development.

Future architects must not only master their field but also prepare for life in the complex, pluralistic, and rapidly changing postmodern world. The current standardized university education, limited to technical knowledge transfer, no longer suffices to meet these needs or to prepare students for the "third wave" of civilization. Alvin Toffler, the renowned futurist and author of *The Third Wave*, argues that after the first wave (agricultural revolution) and the second wave (industrial revolution),

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humanity is witnessing a third wave of civilization. This wave, marked by family fragmentation, economic instability, political paralysis, and value system collapse, will bring transformative changes. The new civilization will be built on non-nuclear families, restructured schools, and innovative businesses, establishing rules beyond homogenization, synchronization, and centralized power/energy (Toffler, 1980, 17). In such a context, continuing to rely on modern-era standardized educational methods -rooted in the Industrial Revolution- is not only ineffective but also an obstacle to progress.

In the postmodern era, access to basic information is effortless, yet educational methods often prioritize memorization and repetition, turning students into passive consumers of knowledge rather than fostering creative, questioning minds. This approach has led to frustration, diminished motivation, and weakened individual capabilities among students (Eslami, 2014, X). For students in the postmodern era -equipped with information and digital tools- classrooms feel monotonous, and lessons seem repetitive.

Therefore, architectural education in Iran requires a fundamental transformation to fulfill its role in nurturing the next generation of architects. To achieve this, it is essential to understand the differences in architectural education across three periods: traditional, modern, and postmodern. Additionally, we must recognize the limitations of the standardized structures of modern education, which dominate Iranian architecture schools, and explore ways to address them—whether through deconstruction, restructuring, or other methods. This study seeks to establish new, profound objectives while strengthening the connection between instructors and students. Its innovation lies in introducing a hybrid educational approach that operates on two parallel paths: the primary path focuses on specialized architectural education, while the secondary path involves creative exercises aimed at developing students' human dimensions and achieving deeper educational goals. This combination can simultaneously enhance technical skills and personal growth.

By integrating theoretical foundations of postmodern education with practical implementation in the studio environment, this research bridges the gap between theory

and practice. The exercises are inspired by theoretical concepts such as eliminating educational standardization, increasing teaching flexibility, and encouraging active student participation in the learning process. Conducted in the specific context of Iran over six years (2017–2023) at the University of Tehran's Faculty of Architecture, this study involved a group of students in exploring these innovative methods.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This section examines the theoretical framework and literature review of architectural education across three periods: traditional, modern, and postmodern. The goal is to provide a conceptual framework for understanding the evolution of educational approaches in architecture, from the past to the present. By reviewing sources and previous studies, this section identifies the origins and development of teaching methods in architecture, serving as a basis for analyzing the current state and proposing future solutions.

In the traditional period, architectural education was well-defined and rooted in the authority of tradition. Knowledge was passed down from master architects—individuals of wisdom, skill, and high social standing—to apprentices gradually over time (Hojjat, 2012, 103–117). Apprentices not only learned construction techniques but were also deeply influenced by their masters' behavior and ethics. Over many years, they absorbed the subtleties of the craft and life lessons, eventually reaching maturity and independence at various stages based on their talent and capacity (Taqi, 2010). This hands-on approach effectively transferred knowledge and experience across generations. However, with the profound and extensive changes that occurred in the modern world, one-on-one education was no longer effective.

Until the mid-18th century, many countries lacked formal public education systems. The Industrial Revolution and the advent of modernity created an unprecedented demand for widespread education. The Global Education Reform Movement sought to standardize education and align it with economic goals (Robinson, 2021, 19). Standardized teaching methods soon influenced architectural education, and instead of the “master architect” passing on the secrets of architecture to the “apprentice” over years of collaborative

work in the construction sites, the “architecture professor” began teaching architectural knowledge to “architecture students” in a few university semesters (Hojjat, 2010, 17). Modern academic architectural education originated in the 17th century in France, where the Royal Academy of Architecture was established in 1671. This academy is considered a turning point in ending the traditional apprenticeship system. After the French Revolution, the Royal Academy was dissolved, and the École des Beaux-Arts was founded in 1819. This school emphasized classical design and design competitions, introducing the atelier system as part of its teaching methodology (Nadimi, 1996). Alongside the changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution and the rise of modern architecture, the need for new education increased significantly, leading to the establishment of the Bauhaus School in Germany in 1919 under the leadership of Gropius (Salama, 2021, 60). The Bauhaus integrated art, industry, and design, emphasizing hands-on experimentation with materials and forms to create a new formal design language (Nadimi, 1996). In Iran, modern architectural education began in the 19th century with the establishment of the Dar al-Funun. However, the most significant development was the founding of the School of Fine Arts in 1940 by André Godard (Gharavi Khansari, 2022, 8). This school adopted the atelier system based on the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, where each atelier was led by a professional architect, and students worked on practical projects under their guidance (Nadimi, 1996). Notably, traditional Iranian architects were excluded from this new academic system, and modern architectural education in Iran was directly modeled on Western systems without integrating local traditions (Taqi, 2010). With the formation of modern architectural education in Iran, the traditional architect either disappeared from the scene or was relegated to roles such as builder, bricklayer, plasterer, etc., occupying the position of the executor of the ideas of the “architect-intellectual” (Hojjat, 2002). The construction boom during the modern era increased the demand for architecture graduates. The proliferation of architectural institutions across the country aimed to support the quantitative expansion of modern education and standardize teaching methods to meet the needs of the construction industry.

Over time, with the advent of the postmodern era -marked by the end of grand ideologies and a declaration of war against all forms of totality and universality (Lyotard, 2001, 199) a complex, chaotic, and unpredictable world emerged. This new world shifted its focus from rigid and structured systems to change, fluidity, uncertainty, individual experiences, personal narratives, and cultural diversity (Wheatley, 2021). After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the educational system of Iranian architecture schools also changed, with greater emphasis placed on student participation in social projects. From the early 1980s, after the Cultural Revolution and the reopening of universities, Iranian architecture schools began a divergent education period, and their numbers increased day by day (Hojjat, 2010, 14). The post-revolutionary educational system faced challenges such as a lack of coordination between theoretical and practical courses. Additionally, new curricula required more time for implementation and evaluation, and some professors and students had difficulty adapting to these changes (Nadimi, 1996). Architectural education in postmodern Iran remains entangled in the educational structures of the modern era, with standardized curricula continuing to dominate numerous architecture schools across the country.

It can be concluded that in the traditional period, architectural education focused on the transmission of knowledge through traditional, hands-on methods. In the modern era, education shifted toward standardization and uniformity. However, in the postmodern era, architectural education has embraced pluralistic approaches and diverse methodologies. Table 1 highlights the differences in architectural education across the traditional, modern, and postmodern periods.

Current architectural education in the postmodern era requires changes. Salama (2021) argues that contemporary ateliers are still largely influenced by the approaches of the Beaux-Arts and Bauhaus, even though architectural education represents the first step into a new age that combines social and artistic paradigms and is rapidly evolving. While teaching methods in the postmodern era have shifted from teacher-centered to student-centered, and methods like self-directed learning are replacing traditional modern methods such as lectures and standardized exams

(Wheatley, 2021), current architectural education in Iran faces numerous problems.

According to research by Hejazi and Shafae (2020), issues such as student admission processes, mismatch between educational content and job market needs, lack of training in interactional and professional ethics skills, and insufficient professional experience among professors are among these problems. Additionally, based on findings by Monshi et al. (2023), the architectural education system in Iran shows significant differences compared to advanced industrial countries in terms of up-to-date practices, the use of innovative teaching methods, and the content of curricula. Current structures fail to meet the evolving needs of architecture students, and the standardization of curricula is incompatible with the demands of today’s postmodern world.

Research Methodology

The research methodology of this study combines reflective and descriptive-analytical approaches. Data were collected through library resources, academic articles, and the author’s practical teaching experiences. The reflective method, as one of the main research strategies, involved designing educational exercises by the instructor based on the new

objectives of nurturing the architect, followed by evaluating and refining these methods using feedback from students and other professors. In the reflective research/teaching approach (applied to both theoretical and practical courses), achieving educational outcomes provides a clear vision for instructors to continue their path. Additionally, this reflection helps strengthen students’ confidence and enhance their knowledge (Abdelalim et al., 2020, 1). This approach reduces the gap between educational theories and their practical implementation in the classroom, allowing the researcher to evaluate their theoretical foundations in practice and make adjustments as needed.

This research was conducted over 12 academic semesters in Atelier 3 of the University of Tehran’s Faculty of Architecture, with the primary focus on the undergraduate courses Design 2 and Design 3, totaling 8 hours per week. In this study, the instructor acted not as a traditional “lecturer” but as a “mentor and facilitator.” The impact of creative exercises on student learning was assessed through qualitative feedback, direct observation, and analysis of their progress. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with students and fellow faculty members, and the outcomes of the exercises, including their long-term effects on students’ personal and professional growth, were

Table 1. Comparison of Architectural Education Methods in the Traditional, Modern, and Postmodern Periods. Source: Hojjat, 2002, 2010; Wheatley, 2021; Nadimi, 1996.

Aspect of Comparison	Traditional Period	Modern Period	Postmodern Period
Objective of Education	Transfer of wisdom, insight, and traditional knowledge through practical experience	Transfer of standardized technical knowledge and professional skills to meet industrial needs	Nurturing creativity, critical thinking, and human dimensions for life in a complex society
Role of Instructor/Mentor	The “Master” as a source of knowledge, transmitting wisdom to apprentices	The “Professor” as a transmitter of information and technical skills	The “Mentor” as a facilitator of the learning process, guiding students
Role of Student	The apprentice as a learner and trainee, gradually receiving knowledge from the master over the years	The student as a passive receiver of standardized information and skills	The student as an active participant in the learning process and a creator of knowledge
Teaching Method	Hands-on based learning emphasizing experience and practice	Classroom-based learning using standardized textbooks.	Creative learning through practical exercises, group projects, and continuous feedback
Content of Education	Traditional knowledge, wisdom, and practical skills tied to local culture and traditions	Technical, computational, and standardized skills for industrial needs	Multidimensional knowledge including technical skills, creativity, critical thinking, and social skills
Instructor-Student Relationship	A master-disciple relationship based on respect and the transfer of experience	A formal relationship based on the transfer of information from instructor to student	A collaborative and empathetic relationship based on cooperation and mutual support in the learning process
Evaluation	Assessment based on practical experience and the apprentice’s ability to perform traditional tasks	Assessment based on standardized tests and grading according to fixed rules	Evaluation loses its definitive role due to the absence of clear criteria.

analyzed. Student feedback, collected in the form of short writings at the end of each session and longer essays at the end of each semester, served as the primary data source for this research.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984) was used as the framework for the reflective research method. This cycle consists of four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. In this study, creative exercises were designed and implemented based on contemporary topics and educational objectives. The impact of these exercises on students was then evaluated, and new educational concepts were extracted. These concepts led to the refinement and improvement of subsequent exercises, and the experiential learning cycle was repeated (Fig. 1).

Discussion

Architectural education in Iran today is largely based on the standardized structures of the modern era, lacking the dynamism and flexibility that are key characteristics of the postmodern period. The curricula for undergraduate, master's, and doctoral programs in architecture are highly structured and rule-based, which has prevented the current educational system from keeping pace with the rapid and complex changes of the postmodern era. To bring about a transformation in architectural education and transition into the multifaceted and pluralistic space of postmodern education, a thorough and careful examination is required. This process necessitates an understanding of the fundamental differences between modern standardized

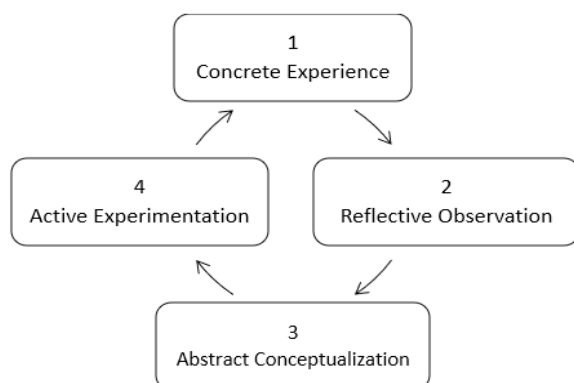


Fig.1. Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, a Framework for the Reflective Research Method. Source: Kolb, 1984.

education and the diverse, flexible methods of postmodern education, an analysis of how to address current educational structures (whether by working within them, deconstructing them, or dismantling them), and ultimately, the proposal of new educational objectives aligned with the needs of the contemporary world.

• The Transformation of architectural education: from modern standardization to postmodern plurality

The shift in architectural education from modern standardization to postmodern plurality reflects profound philosophical and cultural transformations in contemporary educational systems. In the modern era, higher education was built on Enlightenment ideals that emphasized rationality, science, and linear progress. Universities were seen as institutions that produced and disseminated objective knowledge and universal truths (Wheatley, 2021). Jean-François Lyotard, a postmodernist philosopher and pioneer in critiquing modern educational systems (Irwin, 2017, 1), explains how the grand narratives that underpinned modern education have lost their relevance in the postmodern world (Lyotard, 2001, 152–150). In his book *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard argues that modern education, with its excessive focus on efficiency and producing a workforce for the industrial revolution, had strayed from its core mission of fostering critical and liberating thought (Lyotard, 2001, 146). These views align with Ken Robinson's critique of modern educational standardization; he challenges the standardization movement for neglecting creativity, experiential learning, and non-quantifiable values. According to Robinson, the modern educational system, centered on standardized testing, not only destroys essential skills like critical thinking but also fails to meet the needs of today's dynamic economy (Robinson, 2021, 36).

In contrast to modern paradigms, the postmodern paradigm emphasizes plurality, difference, and creativity. Postmodernism rejects modernist ideas such as absolute rationality and linear progress, asserting that knowledge and truth are socially constructed. Therefore, higher education in the postmodern era emphasizes cultural diversity, personal experiences, and decentralized structures (Wheatley, 2021). Lyotard argues that redefining education in the postmodern era depends on cultivating intuition,

imagination, and the ability to integrate diverse fields of knowledge (Fani, 2004, 81). The escape from standards and structures is a current topic in education, particularly in creative disciplines like architecture. Around the world, inspiring educators are working creatively to provide learners with “personalized,” “compassionate,” and “community-oriented” education (Robinson, 2021, 14). In the postmodern era, “teaching” gives way to “learning,” which focuses on motivating learners to acquire and produce information, refine it, and utilize these information resources themselves (Eslami, 2014). In postmodernism, the mission of universities shifts from solely focusing on research and knowledge production to teaching practical skills and preparing students for real-life challenges (Wheatley, 2021). This new mission includes uncovering hidden talents, promoting self-awareness, stimulating curiosity, and nurturing creativity (Hojjat, 2004). These changes in the mission of higher education also apply to architecture. Architectural education in the postmodern era is undergoing a significant transformation. Innovative educational experiences, such as those examined in the book *Radical Pedagogies* (Colomina et al., 2022), are evidence of this shift. These experiences reject predetermined guidelines and emphasize the interdisciplinary nature of architecture, redefining conventional educational frameworks. Although many of these projects were short-term, they now inspire researchers to rethink architectural education. The advantage of pluralistic approaches to architectural education is that students, by experiencing various methods, come closer to their unique design processes (Taqi, 2010) and learn that the answers to many of life’s questions lie beyond defined standards and fixed rules.

This transition from the standardized industrial model of education to a fluid one is not merely a reflection of philosophical changes but also a response to the tangible needs of today’s polyphonic society. In this context, architectural education is redefined not as a one-way transfer of information but as an interactive process in which students, through direct experience, constant critique, and creative reconstruction of concepts, become active participants in knowledge production. Although this transformation brings challenges such as initial confusion or difficulties in qualitative assessment, it is the only viable

path to keep pace with the pluralistic and dynamic world of the 21st century.

• Proposing destructuring in architectural education

The postmodern era is characterized by short-lived structures and constant disruptions. Every educational structure -whether it be the Beaux-Arts ateliers, the technical classes of the Bauhaus, the traditional structures (Qaravi, 2023, 244), or the paperless studio (Rouhi, 2019, 7) with its diverse design approaches such as rationalism, empiricism, productivism, and progressivism (Rezaei, 2014, 19) is temporary and perpetually on the verge of breaking down. Deepening architectural education in the postmodern era requires moving beyond structure-centric paradigms and adopting a destructuring approach. Destructuring, as a key concept, refers to the process of dismantling and analyzing cultural and social foundations. It suggests that addressing contemporary educational crises is only possible through radical critique and rethinking dominant patterns and structures (Bagheri, 1996, 78). In this process, teachers, by critiquing the educational structures defined for students, can act as intellectuals and participate in destructuring the dominant educational culture. Destructuring means moving beyond rigid, standardized educational frameworks and creating a flexible space to nurture creativity and the human dimensions of students. This concept differs from mere diversity or chaos in education, as its primary goal is not simply to create variety but to deepen the educational experience. Destructuring does not mean breaking down old structures but rather freeing oneself from them and focusing on the roles of both the mentor and the student in the educational process. Such deep education, shaped by the human connection between mentor and learner, is possible within any structure. It does not even matter what subject is being taught: design, theoretical principles, technical design and building details, project management, etc. What matters is that the mentor is aware of their mission, their role, and the objectives of nurturing architects—architects who, above all, are human beings!

Ken Robinson argues that the relationship between the teacher and the learner, along with their mutual interaction, forms the foundation of education. In his

view, it doesn't matter how regressive curricula or exams are; the key to change in education lies in the quality of instruction and the teacher's primary role as a facilitator (Robinson, 2021, 127). From Lyotard's perspective, the death knell for the traditional teacher (as a mere transmitter of information) has sounded because the task of education in the present age is not to repeat information but to enhance the student's ability to connect multiple domains of knowledge (Lyotard, 2001, 152–154). To escape the standardization of teaching methods in the postmodern era, attention must be paid to the two formative elements of teaching methods: the mentor and the learner.

In this paradigm, the classroom -with its human, multifaceted, joyful, and dynamic environment- can function like a living space, fostering logical thinking and the development of lateral thinking (Eslami, 2014). A lively and joyful classroom is possible only when both the mentor and the learners genuinely enjoy being there. The moment of "enjoyment" in learning occurs when talent and passion intersect (Robinson, 2021, 114). In English, the phrase "Being in your element" refers to the sense of satisfaction and joy experienced when doing something one is skilled at and passionate about (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). For example, someone skilled in cooking and passionate about preparing ingredients and cooking food experiences this joy profoundly. The condition for the learner to experience the moment of "enjoyment" in learning is that the instructor effectively plays the role of facilitator, enjoys teaching, and is skilled in it. Awareness of the new goals of architectural education in the postmodern era can help the mentor fulfill their important role.

• Specialized and profound objectives of architectural education in the postmodern era

Architectural education in the postmodern era faces a complex challenge: it must prepare young people for entering the architectural profession and achieving economic independence while also equipping them to thrive in a diverse and rapidly changing society. Most importantly, modern education must empower them to build meaningful and purposeful lives in an unpredictable future (National Advisory Committee, 1999). As architectural education shifts from modernist standardization to postmodern plurality -prioritizing mentor-student

relationships over rigid structures- the role of mentors in advancing architectural education has become increasingly clear. Postmodern mentors must prepare students for a new world by aligning with both specialized and profound educational objectives.

The content objectives of specialized courses can be divided into categories such as providing information and creating the ability to analyze and apply this knowledge in architectural design. Additionally, there is a somewhat unknown stage in architectural design called inner intuition or insight (Taghi, 2010). Furthermore, students need proficiency in architectural software and practical skills for professional work in offices, which universities often fail to adequately address (Hejazi & Shafae, 2020). Therefore, the specialized educational objectives can be divided into three categories (Hojjat, 2010, 22) which can be reviewed separately:

Knowledge: Technical, historical, and computational information that students must acquire. With the decline of modernist teaching methods, knowledge is now sourced from diverse materials and innovative approaches. Mentors must be proficient in digital tools to achieve these objectives.

Skills: Abilities such as graphical thinking, design software proficiency, parametric design, and construction expertise. Universities must modernize their teaching of these skills through practical methods like internships and workshops.

Insight: The application of knowledge and skills through ethical and visionary approaches. This dimension shapes students' worldviews and cultivates architectural foresight (Hojjat, 2010, 22).

At a deeper level, architectural education must nurture students' human character. Beyond technical knowledge, it should foster creativity and cultural identity (Taghi, 2010). Attitudes like environmental protection and social responsibility are critical to shaping future architects (Nadimi, 1996). These profound objectives, neglected in modernist standardization, represent a pivotal shift in postmodern higher education. Postmodern architectural education must align with 21st-century needs. The 21st Century Learning Framework identifies four categories (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2019):

Interdisciplinary Skills: Global awareness, financial literacy, civic literacy, health literacy, and environmental literacy.

Learning and Innovation Skills: Creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and collaboration.

Information, Media, and Technology Skills: Digital literacy, data analysis, and AI proficiency.

Life and Career Skills: Flexibility, adaptability, self-direction, and responsibility

Robinson broadly categorizes modern educational objectives into four areas: economic, cultural, social, and personal (Robinson, 2021, 70), aligning with Parsons’ “General Action System” (Scott, 2014), which emphasizes cultural, social, personal, and biological systems.

Inspired by these frameworks, this study proposes four profound objectives for postmodern architectural education (Fig. 2):

Economic: Prepare students for responsible and independent economic activity, including financial literacy and basic economic concepts like profit/loss, inflation, and investment.

Social and Civic: Cultivate cultural sensitivity, teamwork, tolerance, civic literacy, and social activism, as architects bear significant responsibility in addressing societal challenges. **Cognitive Development:** Develop lifelong learning skills, creative and critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital/analytical competencies to navigate a complex world. **Mental Health:** Prioritize students’ psychological well-being through self-awareness, stress management, mindfulness, emotional intelligence, time management, confidence-building, and work-life balance.

In comparing “Profound Objectives” with the “Hidden Curriculum” -which encompasses implicit messages and norms within the educational environment it is important to note that the hidden curriculum primarily relates to institutional norms and can either align with or contradict formal objectives (Mohammadi Mehr, 2012). In contrast, the profound objectives of architectural education focus on the foundational concepts of nurturing architects across economic, social, civic, cognitive, and mental health dimensions.

The subsequent critical question is: How can specialized and profound objectives be simultaneously achieved in architectural education? The proposed solution is to implement a dual-path educational model (Fig. 3). In this model, every mentor integrates two parallel tracks:

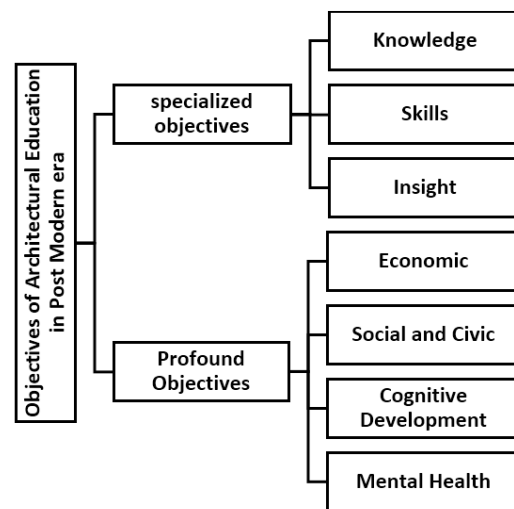


Fig.2. Diagram of Architectural Education Objectives in the Postmodern Era. Source: Authors.

1.Primary Path: A structured, specialized curriculum focused on technical training.

2.Secondary Path: A fluid, vibrant, and diverse supplementary track that initially appears complementary but gradually reveals deeper life experiences, critical reflections, and existential inquiries.

Profound education should not be treated as separate topics within the curriculum but must be strengthened as essential and widespread functions across all areas of education (National Advisory Committee, 1999). Architectural education must maintain flexibility and variety in its approaches, ensuring that students -as the center of the learning process- develop their knowledge through hands-on experience and reflection (Nadimi, 1996). This combined method creates lively classrooms, no matter the subject or curriculum, where every mentor plays an inspiring and influential role. While mentors’ role as information providers has become less important in the postmodern era, their role in guiding and supporting students has grown in importance. Learning flourishes through empathy and connection between mentors and learners (Schwartz, 2021, 21). Education is a living process focused on human beings -individuals with motivation, emotions, and talents- who are shaped by their surroundings (Robinson, 2021, 66). At its core, education depends on the relationship between mentor and learner, as well as peer connections, which creative teaching makes possible (National Advisory Committee, 1999, 101).

As a practical example of combining specialized and

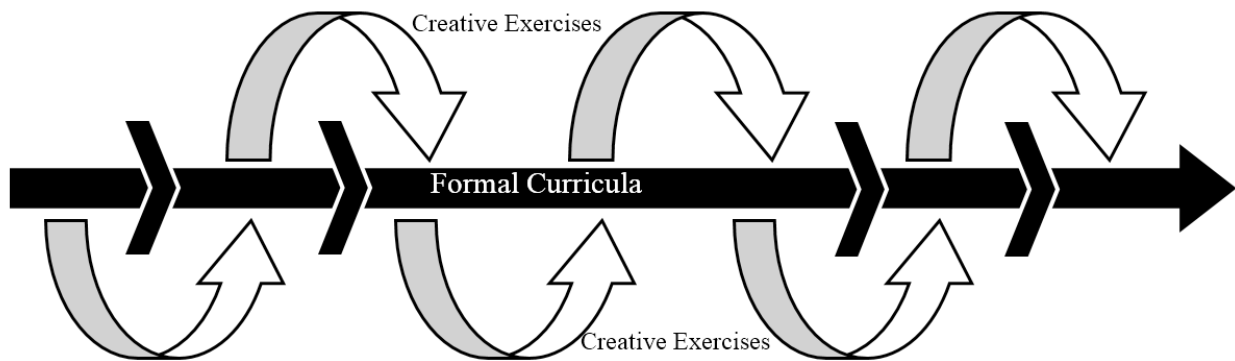


Fig. 3. Diagram of the Integration of Formal Curricula and Creative Exercises with Profound Objectives. Source: Authors.

profound objectives in architectural education, we can examine the initiative carried out in Atelier III at the University of Tehran's Faculty of Architecture. This effort focused on redefining mentor-learner relationships while maintaining academic standards and respect. The goal was to create a lively and energetic classroom environment. Although the main focus was on standard architectural outputs such as plans, sections, and elevations, the deeper goal went beyond design itself. It aimed to prepare students with the skills and mindset needed for personal and social life in the postmodern era.

• Case study: creative and profound exercises in architecture studio 3 at the University of Tehran

This section presents three sample exercises with profound architectural education objectives. These exercises, conducted for undergraduate architecture students, were introduced midway through the main design process within short time frames. The results of this integrated approach revealed that incorporating creative exercises not only enhanced student engagement in the learning process but also fostered a stronger sense of ownership toward their projects and a more profound understanding of concepts such as user needs and architecture's social implications.

For example, students who engaged in role-playing exercises and reconstructions of users' lived experiences were able to establish meaningful connections between architectural design and the socio-cultural context of their projects. This case study aims to provide a practical example of innovative teaching methods in architectural education, demonstrating that by moving beyond the rigid frameworks of modern-era pedagogy, educators can cultivate a vibrant and adaptable learning environment

where education is redefined as an interactive and human-centered process.

The teaching methods employed in this studio were carefully adapted based on the instructor's assessment of the students' needs and the unique requirements of each semester. While these specific exercises may not be directly transferable to other contexts, the underlying pedagogical framework can be effectively applied across various educational settings.

• Let's Play!

The design theme for one semester was a kindergarten project. To design for children, the twenty-year-old architecture students first needed to become children themselves. It was the first session, and before revealing the semester's main project, the students were suddenly faced with an unexpected exercise: "Let's Play!"

The students were divided into groups of four. Each group had one hour to invent an entirely new group game for children. Then, each team taught their game to the others, and everyone took turns playing them. Afterward, the games were critiqued by their peers: Which game was the most exciting? Which was hard to learn? Which one fell flat? But none of that truly mattered. What mattered were the shouts of excitement during play, the laughter that bubbled up as the students rediscovered the joy of being children, and the newfound empathy they developed for their architectural audience—the very children they would design for.

Only after this lively exercise did the semester's main project—the kindergarten design—finally unfold. Over the following months, the students worked to create spaces that their inner child would love. In the final review, their

designs radiated a childlike energy, full of playfulness and vibrancy—a direct result of their shifted perspective on designing for children. Along the way, they also relearned a profound lesson from children’s games: unlike the serious world of adults, winning and losing don’t really matter. What matters is the present moment and the sheer joy of playing. Whether we win or lose, let’s play!

One student reflected in their final report:

“I’ll never forget those first days... sitting together, playing, talking. Those colorful gatherings in class all pointed to one shared experience: something entirely new!”

Another wrote:

“In the early sessions, we focused on immersing ourselves in the design challenge—getting closer to the feelings and world of the children who would eventually use our space.”

• The chicken coop exercise

The studio’s theme was residential design. Students had gathered, expecting to hear about municipal permits, floor area ratios, parking requirements, and other technicalities from their instructors. But in the opening minutes of the first session, they were met with a box full of chirping chickens. The classroom fell silent as the tiny cheeps filled the air. Students exchanged bewildered glances—had they walked into the wrong class? Had the instructor mistaken them for veterinary students? Then came the surprise: each student was handed a live chicken and given their assignment: “You have two hours to build a cardboard coop for your chick!”

At first, the baffled students hesitated. But as reality set in, they began constructing shelters—gradually realizing this

was no joke. What initially seemed simple soon proved challenging: the nest had to allow the chick to eat and drink, protect it from “predators” (like pretend cats), and withstand wind and rain. The studio buzzed with laughter and chatter as students played with their chicks, tested prototypes, and refined their designs (Fig. 4). When the exercise concluded, the lesson crystallized: “If you want to design homes for people, you must understand their needs—just as you instinctively considered every need of your chick while building its safe, functional nest.” In subsequent sessions, this important lesson became clear. The houses they designed showed remarkable attention to detail—every corner thoughtfully considered, every space responding to human desires and necessities (Fig. 5).

• The complaint diary

During intermediate sessions of a residential design semester, students were asked to gather together. The students, who were accustomed to seeing their instructor as always energetic, were suddenly faced with 15 minutes of continuous complaints from him about social conditions, car problems, air pollution, etc. They looked at each other in surprise. When all the complaints ended, the students were told: “Now it’s your turn to say whatever is on your mind and complain.” At first, they were shy, but gradually they started complaining about everything from social issues to university classes and their various concerns.

Then the exercise was explained: “Go to your homes and write complaints about every part of your house that dissatisfies you.” By the next session, a complete list of



Fig. 4. Students constructing cardboard coops for chickens during the first session of the residential design studio. Photo: Mahdi Babaizade, 2018



Fig. 5. Final 1:20 scale model presentation of the residential design. Student's Name: Aysan Jafarzadeh. Source: author (2018)

design and construction flaws in several houses had been compiled. Here are some excerpts from different students' complaint lists:

- “Our kitchen is long and narrow, so people constantly bump into each other while working there...”
- “When our entrance door opens, the entire house is visible from end to end...”
- “We can hear the neighbors both through the walls and through the ceilings...”
- “The small width of the closet doors causes clothes to get compressed and wrinkled when closing them...”

Clearly, these criticisms resulted from the students' long-term experience living in these spaces, though they hadn't consciously paid attention to them before. This exercise awakened the students' curiosity. They now understand how important architectural details are in home design because these details directly affect how people feel about living in those spaces. The complaint exercise was a way to develop a sense of responsibility in architectural design.

Conclusion

The results obtained from students' written reflections and discussions between the instructor and students after completing the exercises demonstrate that through this combined approach with creative exercises, students not only showed improvement in their technical and

professional skills but also emphasized their personal growth and increased self-confidence.

One of the most significant aspects that captured students' attention was their encounter with deeper existential and subconscious layers of themselves during the exercises. Some students mentioned even several years after completing the exercises that they still reflect on some of the challenges posed by these exercises and occasionally write about them.

In [Table 2](#), the specialized and profound objectives of the mentioned exercises have been examined and compiled. Implementing profound educational goal-based exercises in the field of architecture has led to the following key insights:

“Enhancing Evaluation Skills”: Involving students in the process of grading their peers' work helps develop their critical assessment and professional judgment abilities.

“Presentation Skills”: Oral presentation exercises and persuading classmates not only improve students' ability to express ideas but also introduce them to the realities of receiving feedback and engaging in constructive competition.

“Writing as a Reflective Tool”: Asking students to document their personal experiences and emotions—though sometimes met with resistance—allows them to express inner feelings and engage in self-evaluation.

Table 2. Specialized and Profound Objectives in Sample Training Exercises. Source: Author

	Category	“Let’s Play!”	“Chicken Coop” Exercise	“Complaint Diary”
Specialized Objectives	Knowledge	Understanding architectural spatial organization and movement through game design	Experiencing needs assessment and feasibility study in architectural design	Designing construction details and defect identification in existing buildings
	Skills	Developing object integration skills for creating play spaces	Gaining 1:1 scale modeling skills through coop construction	Practicing architectural writing.
	Insight	Understanding user interaction with architectural works through game mechanics	Finding simple architectural solutions for fundamental needs (security, stability)	Developing architectural observation skills for familiar yet unexamined spaces
Profound Objectives	Economic	Attracting audience interest in competitive game markets	Completing defined projects (coop) with limited materials (cardboard) on deadline	Understanding architecture’s economic value and proper design’s role in construction
	Socio-Civic	Observing behavioral similarities/ differences in gameplay	Addressing non-biological life needs (security, social connection)	Recognizing diverse family needs and apartment-living cultural critiques
	Cognitive Development	Enhancing teamwork in game design and peer critique	Practicing consultation and avoiding redundant solutions (“not reinventing the wheel”)	Developing critical thinking about life issues
	Mental Health	Reconnecting with childhood’s pure experience beyond winning/losing	Strengthening human-animal-nature connections through caretaking	Addressing suppressed frustrations through conscious complaint articulation

This method, especially when confidentiality is assured, positively impacts students’ mental well-being.

“Adapting to Contemporary Needs”: The success of these exercises depends on connecting with the younger generation. Using relatable language, tools, and real-world topics reduces the mental gap between instructors and students. Younger instructors, due to their closer age and mindset, facilitate this connection.

“Capturing Attention Through Wordplay”: Using creative names for exercises and sparking curiosity before class increases student engagement and focus. This approach helps transform the classroom into a dynamic and appealing space.

“Emotional Support”: When instructors support students during personal struggles, it not only strengthens trust but also turns the teacher-student relationship into a more human-centered interaction. By acknowledging the emotional aspects of learning, this approach fosters holistic growth.

Training architects in the postmodern era is significantly more complex than architectural education during the modern period. While the modern era’s response to

educational methodology was “standardization,” this approach no longer satisfies the intellectual and emotional needs of contemporary Iranian students grappling with numerous challenges including an uncertain future, intense social tensions, anxiety, confusion, depression, and hopelessness. Postmodern architectural education faces a fundamental question: Should architecture schools teach students how to walk, or merely show them the path? (Hojjat, 2010, 15). The transition from modern to postmodern education presents an opportunity to cultivate virtuous and liberated individuals who, while maintaining self-reliance and inner vitality, pursue achievable and realistic goals. This path transcends conventional academic activities like research, paper writing, and grade acquisition, leading instead to localized educational approaches (Eslami, 2014). Moving beyond standardized architectural education requires transformative teaching methodologies that emphasize the reciprocal relationship between instructor and student, rather than fundamental structural changes.

The objectives of architectural education in the postmodern era, divided into specialized goals (including knowledge,

insight, and skills) and profound goals (encompassing economic, socio-civic, cognitive development, and mental health aspects), are proposed for the comprehensive development of architecture students. In achieving these profound educational objectives, the teacher-student relationship emerges as the most crucial vehicle for transformation and progress toward deep, creative learning. Educators must teach more than just subjects and concepts because they are teaching human beings. The instructor's primary responsibility is establishing meaningful connections with learners (Schwartz, 2021, 12). Teachers can be exceptionally influential, particularly when they present course material in engaging and stimulating ways. Much like skilled chefs who artfully conceal nutritious but unappealing vegetables in delicious desserts, educators can motivate students to learn more through enjoyable methods. Great teachers form the heart of great schools. By assuming diverse roles, they fulfill three fundamental purposes for students: inspiring through their passion for teaching, building confidence by helping students acquire essential knowledge and skills, and nurturing creativity by encouraging experimentation, questioning, and innovative thinking (Robinson, 2021, 153). Teaching is an art. While acquiring technical skills may be the initial requirement, the essence lies in each educator's internal resources. Every teacher must creatively develop their teaching approach from within.

For future studies, it is recommended that professors teaching theoretical courses incorporate profound objectives and creative exercises into their classroom structures and publish their findings. Additionally, subsequent research should examine the impact of creative exercises and the development of human dimensions and social skills on students' future professional lives, while also investigating the long-term effects of fostering creativity. The future of architectural education depends on redefining architecture schools as dynamic workshops that prioritize the development of "architect-citizens" - responsible, creative individuals sensitive to cultural and social contexts. Only then can we hope that future generations of architects will become new narrators of the relationship between humans, society, and architecture.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in conducting this research. (A conflict of interest occurs when personal financial or non-financial interests of the author(s) interfere with the research outcomes, potentially influencing either the research process or the honest reporting of results.)

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