



# An Experiential Study on Empathic Design in Interior Architecture Education

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## ABSTRACT

*Design students should be able to design living environments and products according to diverse users' needs, problems and expectations. The aim of this research is to explore the role of empathy as a design learning tool in interior architecture education. Moreover, the intention is to determine and analyze the reflections after the role-playing technique is experienced. This study is conducted with the graduate design students and three tasks were assigned to them. In the first task, the students took visually impaired people's role and acted in real life activities in a café. Then, they expressed their role-playing reflections and design reflections through semi-structured interviews. Lastly, Verbal Protocol Analysis is used in determining and categorizing the relevant affective and cognitive empathic expressions that were recorded. Color and light, orientation, safety and accessibility were mostly expressed as design issues in reflections. Furthermore, findings indicated that cognitive empathic expressions were widely used than affective expressions.*

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## 1. Introduction

Designers have a responsibility to respond diverse user's needs, problems and expectations. In order to achieve this goal, designers need to empathize with users, since empathic understanding serves designers in immersing in the lives, experiences and ways of living of the users. So, designers need to develop their empathic ability and should reflect it on their products or projects. Dictionary definition of empathy is "the ability to share someone else's feelings or experiences by imagining what it would be like to be in that person's situation." ("Empathy",

n.d.). The two components of empathy are cognitive empathy and affective (emotional) empathy. Strayer (1987) stated, "[f]rom a cognitive perspective, empathy consists of either understanding the psychology of others (i.e. their thoughts, intentions, feelings, etc.) or, more specifically, their feelings" (p. 218). Affective empathy is a process of appreciation of others emotions and responding to and sharing emotions (Dökmen, 1988). Also,

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