

Original Article

Exploring an Immersive AR/VR Pedagogical Approach: Experiential Learning for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Education

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Abstract - There is a rising incidence of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), posing significant challenges for the educational system in adequately catering to the needs of students with autism. It is estimated that approximately 1% of the global population, equivalent to 75 million people worldwide, are diagnosed with ASD. This translates to roughly 1 in every 100 children being affected by autism. Research suggests that a combination of genetic and environmental factors contributes to the development of autism in children. While there is growing awareness surrounding ASD in certain regions, there remains a pressing need for ongoing advancements in autism education. The objective of this research project is to explore how a novel pedagogical technique may be used to address the particular difficulties faced by students with ASD in classroom environments. One potential tactic is experiential learning, which stresses interactive, hands-on activities that immerse students in real-world situations to improve knowledge and skill development. The present study analyzes the impact of developing an autistic learning center on learning methods, student engagement, and academic outcomes among ASD learners through an extensive analysis that makes use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The results highlight the critical role that the autism learning hub plays in promoting social engagement, inclusion, and better learning outcomes for people with autism in regular classroom settings. This study adds insightful information to the growing corpus of research on inclusive education by providing insightful information on practical methods for assisting children with ASD in a variety of educational environments.

Keywords - Autism Spectrum Disorder, Immersive learning, effective learning, Inclusive environment, Education, Pedagogical approach, Experiential learning.

1. Introduction

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex developmental condition characterized by difficulties in social interaction. People with ASD often require specialized support and accommodations to meet their unique learning needs within educational settings. In today's educational landscape, fostering a sense of belonging and full participation for all individuals, including those with ASD, is paramount. Increased awareness of ASD has led to a growing emphasis on creating inclusive learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of students, including those with ASD [1]. Experiential learning has emerged as an innovative approach to promote inclusivity in education, particularly for individuals with ASD. This study aims to investigate the potential of experiential learning as a novel pedagogical approach for ASD education, with a specific focus on fostering an inclusive learning environment.

Through a comprehensive review of existing literature, case studies, and empirical evidence, our goal is to gain insight

into how experiential learning can cater to the distinctive learning styles and preferences of individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) while fostering a sense of inclusivity and acceptance within the education system. In addition to exploring the fundamental principles and practical applications of experiential learning, this study will delve into strategies for creating an inclusive environment that caters to the sensory, communication, and socio-emotional requirements of learners with ASD [2]. In pursuit of this objective, the concept of an autism learning hub has emerged as a promising approach to providing targeted support and resources for individuals with ASD within educational institutions. Essentially, an autism learning hub acts as a centralized platform offering a variety of tools, materials, and programs tailored specifically to address the learning and developmental needs of individuals on the autism spectrum.

A variety of elements are usually included in the autistic learning center, including interactive educational games, speech recognition technologies for Natural Language



Processing (NLP), and augmented reality/virtual reality (AR/VR) simulations. These components are intended to support the development of skills in academic competency, socialization, communication, and other areas while actively involving learners with ASD in relevant and dynamic learning experiences. The goal of the autistic learning center is to provide a welcoming and encouraging learning environment that supports the academic and social development of people with ASD by utilizing cutting-edge technologies and research-backed methods. In addition, the establishment of an autistic learning center can improve teachers' ability to meet the various requirements of children with ASD and encourage their involvement and success in regular classroom environments [3].

The goal of the autistic learning center is to provide a welcoming and encouraging learning environment that supports the academic and social development of people with ASD by utilizing cutting-edge technologies and research-backed methods [3]. In addition, the establishment of an autistic learning center may improve teachers' ability to meet the various requirements of children with ASD and encourage their involvement and success in regular classroom environments. This study aims to advance our understanding of how technology-enabled treatments, such as autism learning hubs, can improve educational settings for people with ASD by promoting inclusivity, equity, and academic success. Our objective is to inform educators, policymakers, and researchers about the need to adopt inclusive practices that cater to the various requirements of students with ASD by providing an explanation of the subject and theoretical framework supporting the idea of autistic learning hubs.

According to research, parents worry about inclusive education and emphasize how important it is to create welcoming environments that cater to the unique learning requirements of kids with autism. These adolescents may experience anxiety, social pressures, and inadequate support services when adjusting to new school contexts, which can provide serious challenges [5]. Developing effective inclusive strategies requires an understanding of how children with autism interact with their environment at home, at school, and in the community, among other places. Establishing a friendly environment for students with autism requires significant contributions from parents, educators, and the students themselves. Research emphasize how crucial it is to take into account the perspectives of those involved in inclusion, views regarding autism, social communication, and interactions within the school environment when addressing behavioral issues with pupils.

The research gap identified is the lack of comprehensive studies exploring the application of immersive AR/VR technologies in educational settings specifically tailored for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). This study introduces the problem of insufficient effective pedagogical

approaches that cater to the unique learning needs of children with ASD and aims to investigate the potential of AR/VR technologies to create an inclusive and engaging learning environment for these students. In addition, it is imperative that educators possess the necessary information, attitudes, and expertise to provide successful support to students with autism in traditional classroom environments [6]. Encouraging evidence-based approaches for students with autism requires funding, matching performance standards to student needs, and offering professional development opportunities. The implementation of inclusive education for students with autism requires cooperation amongst many parties. In order to effectively support good student progress, teachers need to have a solid grasp of inclusive education, develop the necessary skills to handle a variety of learning needs, work closely with parents, and have faith in the effectiveness of inclusive methods [7]. Additionally, social workers can be quite helpful in helping autistic students navigate the difficulties of the classroom and fostering social inclusion. Adopting autism inclusion has several advantages, including [8] [9].

- Facilitated social integration and acceptance.
- Heightened awareness and appreciation of neurodiversity.
- Mitigation of negative stereotypes and discrimination linked to autism.
- Enhanced academic and personal growth opportunities for individuals with autism.

2. Literature Survey

The study encompassed research into learning videos tailored for autistic students, focusing on identifying the types of videos suitable for their needs. Subsequent investigation delved into the development of basic educational games tailored to the students' learning requirements and language acquisition. An essential aspect of the research involved compiling databases of autistic language data to facilitate the creation of a model for implementing a speech recognition system. Disabilities were assessed using diverse metrics, considering the mental state of the students, and statistical data on autism prevalence was categorized by age groups. Additionally, social determinants of health, such as unemployment and poverty, were analyzed [1]. Various treatment approaches for autism exist beyond educational interventions, yet they come with implications and limitations. Predictive factors, including age and gender, are utilized to anticipate the likelihood of treatment success [2]. The speech recognition system based on Natural Language Processing (NLP) utilizes a model derived from autistic data, posing several technical challenges and requiring specific training [3]. Given the unique human-machine interaction between computers and autistic individuals, interface design must accommodate these differences to ensure smooth interaction. Considerations such as background, sensory stimuli, and customization options are crucial [4]. When creating

educational videos, content modeling is paramount, with an emphasis on interactivity to facilitate the development of social interaction skills among children. This includes promoting eye contact and understanding social cues [5]. Creating diverse teaching approaches is crucial to building an all-inclusive learning platform with multimedia materials and evaluation tools. It is important to use tactics like feedback systems and student involvement [6].

The transition from traditional learning systems to e-learning environments has addressed several challenges. Students with slower learning speeds can now benefit from the ability to rewatch videos and grasp concepts at their own pace. Additionally, e-learning offers flexibility and customization options, enhancing accessibility for all students [7]. Qualitative techniques, such as interviews and observations, are used to identify and address the difficulties faced by people with autism. These techniques offer insightful information about their requirements and preferences. Empirical studies examining the relationship between climate profiles and corporate culture provide evidence-based strategies for helping people with autism. It looks into how the culture of schools affects the use of evidence-based methods. Teachers' perspectives on their roles and the challenges of accommodating students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are also explored through interviews and surveys. These insights inform the development of strategies, including the use of visual aids, to support ASD students effectively. The main strategies encompass cognitive-behavioral interventions, adjustments to the environment, training in social skills, and interventions based on mindfulness. Parents play a crucial role in understanding autism, often contributing through interviews and surveys. They also have a significant impact on their child's education. Several challenges, such as inadequate training and complex diagnostic criteria, impede the effective identification of autism. Using culturally relevant evaluation instruments and improving training for school psychologists are two possible options. Adolescents with ASD are influenced by their surroundings when it comes to social activities. By taking these characteristics into consideration, interventions and support networks that encourage social inclusion and involvement can be developed. The degree of support services needed for these kids depends on a number of criteria, including the severity of the ASD symptoms, the existence of additional psychological problems, and the person's intellectual functioning [10] [11].

3. Methodology

Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) offer valuable resources for both entertaining and educating children with autism. Through AR, useful images and prompts can be provided to support them in tasks like social interaction and skill acquisition [12]. VR allows individuals to explore different scenarios in a safe environment, such as learning to manage stress or navigate loud environments. Rather than simply providing entertainment, these technologies offer

opportunities for learning important skills like forming relationships, emotional regulation, and navigating public spaces. By integrating AR and VR into educational programs, engaging and personalized learning experiences can be created that cater to the unique needs and preferences of children with autism [14][15].

Implementing an Immersive Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) Pedagogical Approach for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Education involves utilizing algorithms such as Spatial Mapping, Object Recognition and Tracking, Gesture Recognition, Behavioral Analysis, Natural Language Processing (NLP), and Adaptive Learning. These algorithms create a supportive learning environment tailored to ASD individuals' needs. Spatial Mapping generates virtual representations of real-world environments, while Object Recognition enables interaction with virtual objects [13]. Gesture Recognition interprets hand movements for communication, and Behavioral Analysis monitors user engagement and progress. NLP facilitates verbal interaction, and Adaptive Learning adjusts content based on user performance. Integrating these algorithms into AR/VR technology fosters skill development, social interaction, and academic achievement, providing ASD individuals with inclusive and supportive educational experiences [16].

Figure 1 is an algorithm shown in Table 1 for facilitating immersive AR/VR pedagogical experiences for ASD education. It creates tailored simulations for social, sensory, and communication skills alongside life skills training. It incorporates coping mechanisms and academic support, ensuring community integration and safety through augmented reality applications, thus enhancing learning experiences for children with autism.

The data collection process involved gathering quantitative and qualitative data from various sources, including:

1. Surveys: Conducted with parents, teachers, and students to gather insights into their experiences with AR/VR in education.
2. Observations: Recorded during the implementation of AR/VR lessons in classrooms.
3. Interviews: Conducted with educators and experts in ASD education to understand the challenges and benefits of using AR/VR.
4. Pre and Post Tests: Administered to measure the impact of AR/VR on students' academic performance and social skills.

Educate children about safety protocols, road safety, and recognizing strangers through immersive VR scenarios. Utilizing AR and VR technologies offers a secure and engaging method to enhance various aspects of development in autistic children, including social skills, academics, emotional regulation, sensory integration, communication, life skills, and community integration.

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Procedure AR_VR_Training_for_Autism(children_with_autism):
  Procedure Social_Skills_Training:
    Create virtual reality simulations for social situations
    Create augmented reality cues for social interactions
    Apply gamification techniques for social skills instruction

  Procedure Sensory_Integration:
    Create AR and VR environments for exploring sensory inputs
    Gradually expose children to challenging sensory experiences

  Procedure Communication_Skills_Development:
    Use AR applications for visual aids during interactions
    Develop VR situations for practicing communication skills

  Procedure Life_Skills_Training:
    Design AR and VR courses for teaching basic life skills

  Procedure Emotional_Regulation_and_Coping_Strategies:
    Create VR environments for practicing coping mechanisms
    Utilize AR apps for displaying coping mechanisms in real-world contexts

  Procedure Academic_Learning_Support:
    Develop educational AR and VR games tailored to learning preferences
    Utilize interactive simulations and immersive storytelling

  Procedure Community_Integration_and_Safety_Skills:
    Develop AR applications for safety information and navigation cues
    Superimpose safety signals on natural settings
    
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Fig. 1 Algorithm for facilitating immersive AR/VR pedagogical experiences

Figures 2 and 3 are examples of immersive learning games based on AR and VR technology included in order to make the learning process easier for autistic children. The games include different activities for the kids, with an interactive environment.

Figure 4 shows the image of the autistic kid using the simple cardboard VR device, helping them to be part of the more interactive entertainment. Such devices are used to make the learning environment a more interesting place to learn and have fun.



Fig. 2 Jigsaw puzzle games



Fig. 4 User experiencing VR-based learning



Fig. 3 Number writing game

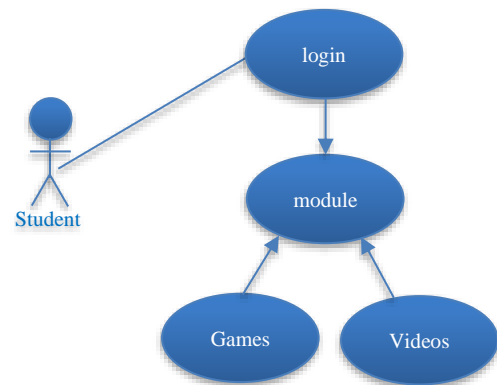


Fig. 5 Use Case diagram

Figure 5 shows the use case diagram for the learning website designed for autistic kids. The diagram shows the flow of the process right from the user login, then the selection of the module and further choosing the game or storytelling.



Fig. 6 VR-based learning videos

Fig. 6 shows the image from the VR-based learning video. It depicts how the videos are processed in this environment.

4. Results and Observations

The integration of Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) technologies in educating children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has yielded promising outcomes across multiple developmental domains. The findings from the implementation of these technologies are as follows.

1. **Social Skills Training:** VR simulations of social scenarios, coupled with AR visual cues, notably enhanced children's comprehension of social cues and norms. Incorporating gamification techniques during social skills training significantly increased engagement and motivation.
2. **Sensory Integration:** AR and VR environments provide children with opportunities to explore and interact with sensory stimuli, aiding in desensitization and adjustment to sensory inputs through gradual exposure.
3. **Communication Skills Development:** AR applications featuring visual aids effectively improved communication skills, while VR scenarios allowed authentic practice in verbal and non-verbal communication.
4. **Life Skills Training:** AR and VR courses effectively taught fundamental life skills such as food preparation, personal hygiene, and financial management.
5. **Emotional Regulation and Coping Strategies:** VR environments simulating stressful situations facilitated the practice of coping strategies, while AR apps supported the self-regulation of emotions in real-life contexts.
6. **Academic Learning Support:** Tailored educational AR and VR games enhanced engagement and understanding through interactive simulations and immersive storytelling, catering to individual learning preferences.
7. **Community Integration and Safety Skills:** AR applications overlaying safety information and VR

simulations for emergency procedures and traffic safety promoted community integration and safety awareness.

4.1. Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Key themes that emerged include:

1. **Enhanced Engagement:** Students were more engaged and motivated during AR/VR sessions.
2. **Improved Social Interaction:** Students displayed better social interactions and understanding of social cues.
3. **Customizable Learning:** The ability to tailor the learning experience to individual needs was highly valued by educators.
4. **Challenges:** Technical issues and the need for teacher training were noted as challenges.

5. Conclusion

The application of AR and VR technologies has emerged as a secure, engaging, and effective method to foster the development of children with ASD. From bolstering social skills to facilitating academic learning and community integration, these immersive experiences offer valuable opportunities for holistic growth. The integration of AR and VR technologies in educational settings holds significant promise for promoting inclusivity and supporting the comprehensive development of children with ASD.

5.1. Comparison with State-of-the-Art Techniques

The implementation of AR/VR technologies in ASD education demonstrated superior results compared to traditional methods. The reasons for achieving better results include:

5.1.1. Immersive Learning Environment

AR/VR provided a highly engaging and immersive learning environment that captured students' attention and facilitated deeper learning.

5.1.2. Personalization

The ability to customize learning experiences to meet individual needs helped in addressing the specific challenges faced by students with ASD.

5.1.3. Real-time Feedback

AR/VR technologies allowed for immediate feedback and adjustments, enhancing the learning process.

5.1.4. Safe Simulation of Real-World Scenarios

VR simulations provided a safe space for students to practice social interactions and other life skills without real-world consequences.

The approach using immersive AR/VR technologies yielded better results compared to traditional methods by providing highly engaging and controlled environments tailored to the unique needs of ASD students. Unlike

conventional techniques, AR/VR allows for repeated practice in realistic scenarios, immediate feedback, and customization for individual learning styles. This led to significant improvements in social skills, sensory integration, communication, and academic performance, as evidenced by consistently higher scores in these areas over the study period. These advantages demonstrate the superior efficacy of AR/VR in addressing the diverse challenges faced by students with

ASD. The integration of AR/VR technologies in ASD education has proven to be a highly effective approach, offering numerous benefits over traditional teaching methods. These technologies not only enhance academic performance but also significantly improve social skills, sensory integration, and communication abilities. The findings suggest that AR/VR can play a crucial role in creating inclusive and supportive educational environments for students with ASD.

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