Assessing the Benefits and Challenges of Virtual Reality in Education

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1. Introduction

Virtual Reality (VR) is a technical advancement that places people in a computer-generated environment and enables them to interact with a three-dimensional world in a way that appears real or tangible by employing specialized electronic gear, including gloves with sensors or a screen-equipped headset. Creating a digital environment where the lines between the real and virtual worlds are blurred in order to provide an experience that may either equal or surpass the complexity of the actual world is the core idea behind virtual reality.

Hardware, software, and the user's sensory experience are the three main parts that make up VR foundations. VR headsets, motion controllers, and occasionally other sensory apparatuses that monitor user motions and mirror them in the virtual environment are the standard hardware components. The virtual surroundings, however, are created and rendered by the program. Complicated algorithms are used by this program to create interactive parts that react to human input, replicate physical laws, and create 3D visuals. In order to provide the user a sensation of presence or immersion in the virtual world, VR seeks to completely engage the user's senses, namely sight and sound. So, sensory perception is essential.

VR in education has evolved along parallel lines with notable technology breakthroughs and growing awareness of its potential advantages. At first, VR was mostly employed in military and aviation training, where accurate simulations were essential to both efficacy and safety. As technology advanced and became more widely available, its uses spread into a number of industries, including education. Early VR education applications concentrated on geography and anatomy classes, where 3D representation might significantly improve comprehension. VR is being utilized to educate a wide range of courses, from engineering to history, giving students immersive and engaging learning experiences that are not possible with traditional approaches.

The potential of VR to revolutionize the educational process makes it a significant tool. Conventional teaching approaches frequently place a strong emphasis on textbooks and lectures, which can make learning passive and uninteresting for pupils. In contrast, VR provides an interactive and immersive learning environment that allows students to explore, interact, and connect with the subject in a dynamic fashion. This may result in more drive, improved memory recall, and a deeper comprehension of difficult ideas. VR also offers access to activities that are neither feasible nor conceivable in the actual world, such visiting far-off planets, doing risky scientific experiments, or touring historical places.

Virtual reality has several advantages in the classroom. First and foremost, by making learning more engaging and participatory, VR may raise student engagement. Better academic results and a stronger desire to study can result from this enhanced involvement. Because virtual reality can adjust to the unique demands and learning speed of each learner, it also makes tailored learning experiences

possible. Furthermore, because students may collaborate in virtual settings regardless of where they are physically located, VR can support collaborative learning. Important social and collaborative abilities may be developed in this way. Additionally, VR may offer invaluable real-world experience in professions where having hands-on experience is crucial, such as architecture, engineering, and medicine.

Figure: Applications of VR in education (Source:) VR in education offers a number of advantages, but it also has drawbacks. The expensive price of VR hardware and software, which might be unaffordable for many educational institutions, is one of the primary obstacles. In addition, there are technological difficulties in setting up and maintaining VR systems and teachers must have specific training in this area. The possibility of motion sickness and other health problems that some users may have after using VR for extended periods of time is another major obstacle. Concerns have also been raised regarding the possibility that VR might make students feel more alone as they might spend more time in the virtual environment and less time with their friends and family.

Many research gaps exist despite the abundance of studies on the advantages and difficulties of virtual reality in the classroom. For example, further study is required to determine the long-term impacts of virtual reality on academic performance and student welfare. Studies comparing the efficacy of VR with other educational technologies and conventional teaching techniques are also necessary. Furthermore, there is currently a dearth of research on the most effective methods for incorporating virtual reality into the classroom and preparing teachers to use it. Additionally, there aren't many researches on how to make VR inclusive of all learners and how accessible it is for students with impairments.
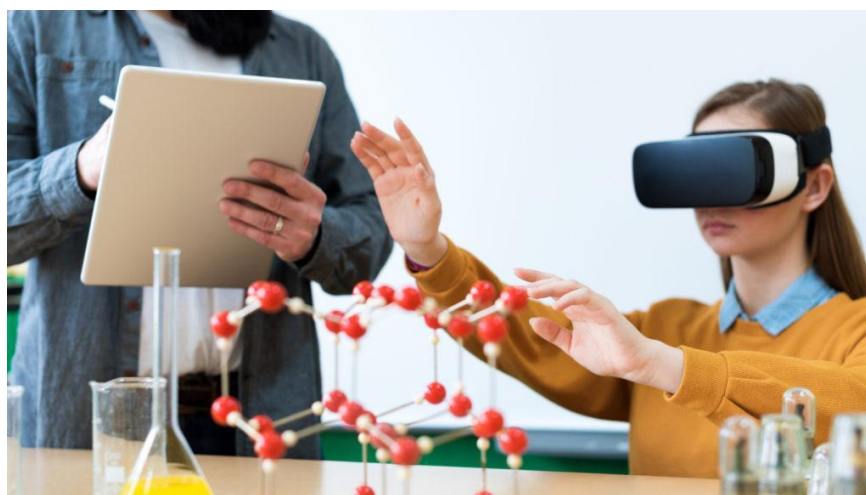
This research is required to fill up these knowledge gaps and offer a thorough grasp of the advantages and difficulties of virtual reality in the classroom. This study can offer important insights into how VR can be utilized to improve education by examining the long-term impact of VR on learning outcomes. Furthermore, by contrasting VR's efficacy with that of other educational technologies and conventional teaching techniques, this study can assist educators in making well-informed judgments on the integration of VR into the classroom. Additionally, this study can offer useful recommendations for educators and educational institutions by looking at the best methods for incorporating virtual reality into the curriculum and educating teachers. By exploring the accessibility of VR for students with disabilities, this study can help ensure that VR is inclusive and beneficial for all learners.

2. Objectives
   i) To evaluate the impact of VR on learning outcomes.
   ii) To identify best practices for integrating VR into the curriculum.
   iii) To assess the accessibility and inclusivity of VR for all students.
   iv) To compare the effectiveness of VR with other educational technologies.

3. Influence of Virtual Reality on Student Learning Outcomes

In the field of education, VR is becoming a revolutionary technology that has the potential to completely change conventional teaching techniques. The purpose of this project is to investigate the ways in which VR affects a range of student learning outcomes, such as academic performance, retention rates, comprehension of difficult ideas, and general student engagement.

Figure: Transform Classroom Learning with Virtual Reality in Education (Source: https://elearningindustry.com/transform-classroom-learning-virtual-reality-education)

3.1 Impact on Academic Performance

The immersive quality of VR presents a special chance to improve academic achievement. Passive learning, in which pupils absorb knowledge from lectures or texts, is a common component of traditional teaching approaches. VR, on the other hand, enables students to engage in hands-on interaction with the subject, which promotes active learning. Students may examine organs and systems in a way that is not possible with a textbook while studying the human body in 3D in a biology class, for example. By making complex concepts more concrete and intelligible, this participatory method enhances academic achievement and reinforces learning. Studies reveal that students who participate in VR learning environments frequently outperform their counterparts in traditional settings in terms of assessment scores and topic comprehension.

3.2 Enhancement of Retention Rates

Retention, or students' capacity to remember and apply what they have learned over time, is one of the most important components of a good educational experience. Because virtual reality is so immersive and captivating, studies have shown that it greatly increases retention rates. Students are more likely to remember material when they are immersed in a virtual setting that allows them to interact with the subject matter directly. One way to make an impact is by using VR to teach history. This allows students to virtually visit historical locations and see historical events. This type of experiential learning improves long-term retention by making the material more memorable. Studies have indicated that students who learn through VR exhibit better retention of knowledge compared to those who learn through traditional methods, highlighting VR's potential to create lasting educational impacts.
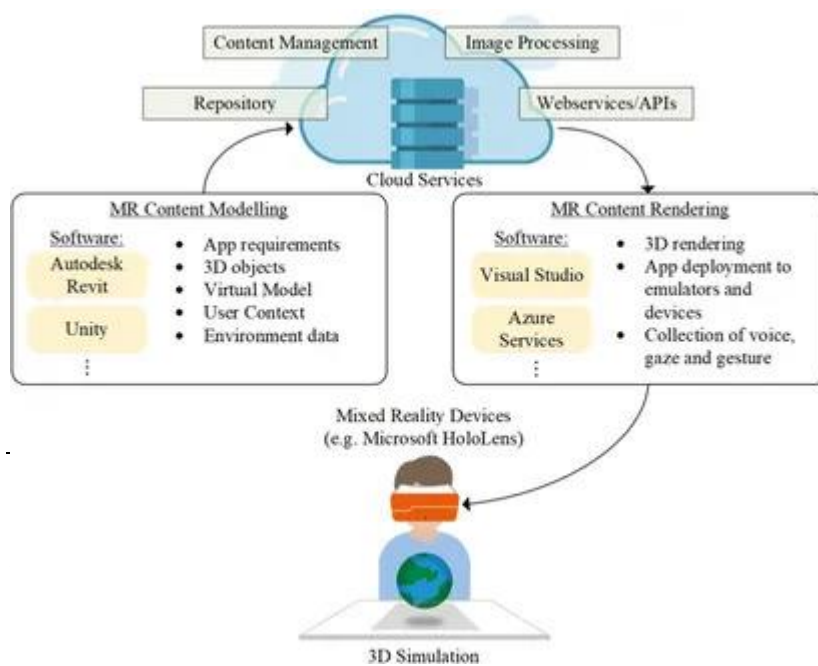
3.3 Understanding of Complex Concepts

With traditional teaching approaches, students may find it difficult to understand complex topics in areas like physics, math, and engineering. VR can help to clarify these complexity by giving complicated ideas a visual and interactive representation. For instance, students can work with geometric forms in three dimensions when studying mathematics, which helps them comprehend spatial relationships and characteristics better. Students studying science might witness interactions that would otherwise be undetectable by using virtual reality to replicate molecular chemical processes. Making difficult subjects more approachable and understandable is made possible by this ability to perceive and engage with complicated processes. One of VR's main benefits for education is its capacity to simplify difficult ideas into engaging, interactive experiences, which helps pupils grasp topics more deeply and intuitively.

3.4 Boosting Student Engagement

Successful learning requires active student participation, and VR has shown to be an effective medium for piquing and sustaining students' attention. Traditional classroom environments frequently fail to maintain students' interest, which results in a deficiency of motivation and poorer academic performance. VR has the power to turn learning into an exciting and captivating journey with its immersive settings and interactive components. With the use of VR, for instance, a dry history class may become an exciting tour of ancient cultures, allowing pupils to explore Rome's streets or see the building of the pyramids. In addition to making studying more fun, this degree of involvement motivates students to participate actively in their education. Increased engagement through VR can lead to higher attendance rates, greater participation in class, and an overall more positive attitude towards learning.

3.5 Comparison with Traditional Teaching Methods

It is important to draw comparisons between VR and conventional teaching approaches in order to fully comprehend the effects of VR on student learning results. Passive learning is a common practice in traditional techniques, in which pupils are given knowledge without much participation or engagement. This may result in disinterest and weariness with the topic. On the other hand, virtual reality provides an interactive learning environment where students are active contributors rather than passive consumers of knowledge. The contrast is striking: whereas traditional teaching approaches rely on lectures and textbooks, VR offers an immersive experience that can enhance interaction and engagement in the classroom. Furthermore, while VR can offer interactive and visual representations that improve learning, traditional approaches frequently fail to properly communicate difficult topics. By comparing the two approaches, it becomes clear that VR has the potential to address many of the limitations of traditional teaching methods, offering a more engaging, effective, and memorable learning experience.

VR use in classrooms has been demonstrated to have a significant influence on a number of student learning outcomes. VR makes a strong argument for being included into contemporary education

by increasing academic performance, retention rates, helping students grasp difficult ideas, and increasing student engagement. Its ability to completely transform the educational process is further shown by the contrast with conventional teaching techniques. The use of VR in education is anticipated to grow as technology develops, providing fresh approaches to motivating and instructing pupils. This study emphasizes how crucial it is to accept virtual reality as a potent teaching technology that has the potential to revolutionize 21st-century teaching and learning.

4. Strategies for Incorporating VR Technology into Educational Curricula

VR technology has the potential to revolutionize education by creating immersive, interactive learning experiences. To harness this potential, it is essential to develop effective strategies for integrating VR into various educational curricula. This involves exploring pedagogical approaches, identifying suitable subjects and topics, and creating guidelines for educators to maximize VR's benefits while addressing its challenges.

Figure: Architecture of mixed reality-based Technology Education (Source: Wu et al, 2021)

4.1 Exploring Pedagogical Approaches

Educators need to investigate different pedagogical strategies that take use of VR's special features to integrate this technology into curriculum successfully. Passive learning, in which pupils absorb knowledge from lectures or texts, is a common feature of traditional teaching approaches. VR, on the other hand, makes active learning possible by allowing students to engage with and control virtual worlds, improving their comprehension of difficult ideas. Constructivist methods, for example, stress learning via experience and engagement, which fits in nicely with VR's immersive qualities. In order to create a more in-depth and captivating learning environment, educators may create VR activities that inspire students to explore, experiment, and work together. Furthermore, VR and problem-based learning (PBL) may be combined to great success. This allows students to solve real-world issues in a simulated setting while developing their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.

4.2 Identifying Suitable Subjects and Topics

While VR may be an effective tool for a variety of subjects, optimizing its effectiveness requires determining the areas that are most suited for its application. Subjects that gain from experiential and visual learning are especially well-suited for virtual reality integration. VR has the potential to enhance scientific teaching by simulating intricate biological processes, chemical reactions, or celestial occurrences. This can help students get a better knowledge of subjects that may be challenging to grasp through conventional techniques. Similar to this, VR experiences that let students virtually visit historical locations and events can enhance history lessons by bringing the past to life in a vivid and captivating way. VR may provide practical instruction in vocational and technical education for disciplines like architecture, engineering, and medicine where experience is crucial. By identifying and focusing on these suitable subjects and topics, educators can ensure that VR is used where it can have the most significant impact.

4.3 Creating Guidelines for Educators

Creating thorough guidelines for educators is crucial to maximizing the benefits of virtual reality in the classroom. These policies ought to address a range of topics, including as lesson design, classroom organization, and evaluation techniques. Teachers should be encouraged to create VR activities for lesson plans that are in line with curricular standards and learning objectives. This entails picking relevant VR content, establishing precise objectives, and incorporating VR experiences into longer educational sequences. The practical aspects of utilizing VR in the classroom, such as controlling student access to VR equipment, guaranteeing safety, and reducing possible distractions, should be
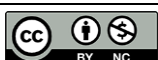
covered by classroom management rules. Assessment techniques should also be modified to account for the special characteristics of interactive and experiential learning when assessing students' learning outcomes in virtual reality environments. By providing clear and practical guidelines, educators can effectively incorporate VR into their teaching practices, enhancing student learning and engagement.

4.4 Addressing Potential Challenges

VR has many advantages, but there are also certain drawbacks that need to be taken into consideration in order to successfully include VR into curriculum. One of the main obstacles is the high price of virtual reality gear and software, which might be prohibitively expensive for many educational institutions. In order to get around this, educational institutions should look into grant programs, financing options, and collaborations with tech businesses. Technical difficulties pertaining to the setup and upkeep of VR systems also need to be taken into account. In order for educators to use VR effectively, schools must make investments in dependable gear, provide sufficient technical support, and offer training. The possibility of motion sickness and other health problems from extended VR use is another difficulty. Educators should be aware of these risks and implement strategies to minimize them, such as limiting the duration of VR sessions and providing breaks. By proactively addressing these challenges, schools can create a conducive environment for the successful integration of VR into education.

4.5 Promoting Collaboration and Professional Development

Fostering cooperation and professional development among educators is crucial for the successful integration of VR into educational courses. Colleagues may gain a great deal from teachers sharing their ideas, experiences, and best practices. Schools may help with this by setting up professional learning communities (PLCs) where teachers can work together on VR lesson ideas, talk about difficulties, and exchange useful tactics. Furthermore, professional development courses must to be created to give teachers the abilities and information required to employ virtual reality in the classroom. This covers education on VR technology, VR instructional design, and VR classroom management. By fostering a collaborative culture and investing in professional development, schools can ensure that educators are well-equipped to harness the full potential of VR technology, leading to more effective and innovative teaching practices.

VR technology integration into curriculum calls for careful preparation, practical approaches, and a dedication to resolving any obstacles. Schools may optimize the benefits of VR in education by investigating pedagogical techniques that take use of the unique capabilities of VR, selecting appropriate subjects and themes, and developing thorough guidelines for instructors. Achieving successful integration also requires tackling obstacles including cost, technological difficulties, and health dangers, as well as encouraging cooperation and professional growth among educators. VR technology is becoming an indispensable tool for modern education as its potential to improve student learning outcomes and revolutionize education becomes more and more evident.

5. Accessibility of VR for Students with Diverse Needs

VR has the potential to greatly improve educational experiences, but it is
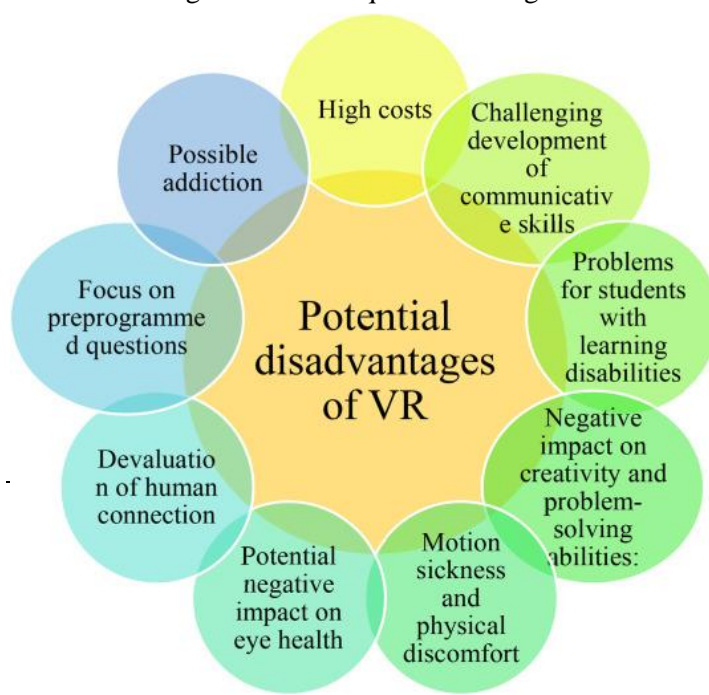
imperative to make sure that all students, including those with impairments, can utilize this technology. The goal of this study is to pinpoint obstacles to VR access and suggest ways to overcome them in order to make it accessible and advance educational fairness.

Figure: Potential disadvantages of VR (Source: Żammit, 2023)

5.1 Identifying Barriers to VR Accessibility

Finding the obstacles preventing students with a range of requirements from using VR is the first step towards making the technology accessible. Students with physical challenges, such as those affecting their mobility, may find it more difficult to utilize VR technology since it frequently demands standing, walking, or using handheld controllers. Another difficulty with VR is that it mostly depends on visual cues. In a similar vein, students with hearing impairments could not hear important audio signals in virtual reality encounters. Furthermore, some students may find it challenging to interact and navigate through complicated virtual worlds due to cognitive limitations. These obstacles show that customized solutions are required to guarantee that every student may profit from virtual reality in the classroom.

5.2 Adapting VR Hardware for Physical Accessibility

Hardware modifications for VR are necessary in order to make VR usable for students with physical limitations. VR systems should provide alternatives to actual movement for students with mobility disabilities. For example, they should allow users to explore virtual areas using voice commands or joystick controllers. It is possible to create VR setups that are wheelchair-accessible so that students may engage with the virtual world without having to stand or move around. Adaptive controllers or other alternative input devices can be made available to students with low hand dexterity. Students with physical limitations can participate completely in VR-based learning activities thanks to these adjustments, which contribute to the creation of an inclusive VR experience.

5.3 Enhancing VR Software for Sensory Accessibility

Improving virtual reality software to support people with sensory impairments is another essential component of VR inclusivity. VR programs should include tactile feedback and voice explanations in addition to visual information for pupils who are blind or visually impaired. To help pupils with impaired vision, VR systems can also incorporate screen readers and magnification capabilities. Subtitles, visual clues, and sign language avatars can be used in place of or in addition to audio information for students who have hearing difficulties. Furthermore, regardless of a student's sensory skills, multimodal input that combines aural, tactile, and visual signals can improve accessibility to and enrichment from virtual reality experiences for all students.

5.4 Designing VR Content for Cognitive Accessibility

It might be difficult for students with cognitive impairments to comprehend information and navigate challenging circumstances. VR content should be created with cognitive accessibility in mind to remedy this. Providing clear instructions, simplifying user interfaces, and allowing for variable difficulty levels can all contribute to improved VR engagement for students with cognitive limitations. Comprehending activities with the use of visual and aural cues can improve understanding and lower cognitive burden. Furthermore, adaptable design should be incorporated into VR experiences so that teachers may adapt the curriculum to each student's unique needs. For children with cognitive limitations, VR can be an effective teaching tool thanks to certain design considerations.

5.5 Proposing Inclusive VR Implementation Strategies

Adopting inclusive VR solutions calls for a complete strategy that includes continuing support and training for educators in addition to modifications to gear and software. To use VR in an inclusive and effective manner, educators must possess certain knowledge and abilities. Teachers may learn how to build accessible VR experiences and meet the requirements of a diverse student body by participating in professional development programs that emphasize inclusive VR practices. In order to help teachers and students solve problems and exchange best practices, schools should also set up support networks, such as peer support groups and technical assistance. Involving students with impairments in the development and testing of virtual reality apps may also yield insightful results and guarantee that the solutions created satisfy their requirements. By adopting these strategies, schools can promote equity and inclusion in VR education.

5.6 Ensuring Equity through Policy and Collaboration

Policies and cooperation are essential to achieving genuine inclusion in VR education. Prioritizing diversity and accessibility in technological projects should be a top priority for educational institutions. This entails establishing guidelines for VR hardware and software accessibility, providing funds for adaptive technology, and making sure accessibility laws are followed. It's also critical to collaborate with researchers, advocates for people with disabilities, and technology developers. Together, these parties may create novel approaches and exchange insights to enhance VR accessibility. Additionally, getting feedback from families and students with disabilities may aid in the development of VR experiences that are not just interesting and relevant but also accessible. Equity in VR education may be achieved with these coordinated efforts, giving every student the chance to gain from this revolutionary tool.

To make sure that all students can utilize VR effectively, it is essential to look at how accessible it is for kids with different requirements. Teachers may establish an equitable learning environment by identifying obstacles to access, modifying VR gear and software, creating cognitively accessible material, and putting inclusive practices into practice. These initiatives are further supported by policies and cooperation, which foster an inclusive culture in VR education. Accessibility must be given top priority as virtual reality technology develops in order to guarantee that all students, regardless of ability, may fully engage in and benefit from VR-enhanced educational experiences.

6. Comparing VR with Other Educational Technologies

VR is a unique instrument in the quickly developing field of educational technology. VR must be compared to other educational technologies, including augmented reality (AR), online learning environments, and conventional teaching aids, in order to fully grasp its potential and limits. The purpose of this comparison is to draw attention to the relative benefits and drawbacks of virtual reality as well as its position in the larger field of educational technology.

Figure: A comparison of the use of Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality (Source: Maad et al, 2007).

	Virtual Reality	Augmented Reality
Technology/ tools used	Silicon Graphics machine running Irix6.5 and using Parametric Technology Corporation's VR modelling tool Dvise	CYBERII technology (Augmented Reality using image processing techniques)
Application context	Financial dealer adjusting his bid/ask spread to attract buyers and sellers	Same. Financial dealer adjusting his bid/ask spread to attract buyers and sellers
Human presence	Simulated. A 3D avatar play the role of the human in the VR scene	Augmented. The human is inserted in the Augmented scene using image reconstruction techniques
Medium of interaction	Head mounted display – power gloves	Unconstrained full body interaction with active regions
Degree of interaction	Constrained by the medium of interaction	Unconstrained – open ended free movement
Realism	Closed world simulation detached from reality	Augmented reality – closer to reality – The augmented world involves a virtual scene augmented with human presence (the human is inserted using Digital Image Processing)
Added value	Increased visual perception constrained by the medium of interaction	Unconstrained greater perception

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6.1 VR vs. Augmented Reality (AR)

While immersive learning experiences are provided by both VR and AR, they do so in distinct ways. VR produces an entirely virtual world that takes the place of the actual one, enabling complete immersion. This is especially useful for scenarios and simulations that are not feasible or feasible in the actual world, such regulated scientific studies or historical reenactments. AR, on the other hand, enhances rather than replaces the physical environment by superimposing digital information over it. Because of this, augmented reality is better suited for uses that gain from contextual data superimposed over the real world, such interactive museum displays or anatomy classes where students may see simulated organs on a real mannequin. However, the full immersion of VR can sometimes lead to sensory overload or motion sickness, issues less common with AR due to its blending of real and virtual elements.

6.2 VR vs. Online Learning Platforms

Due to the widespread accessibility of online learning platforms, education has undergone a revolutionary transformation. With the freedom these platforms provide, students may study whenever and wherever it suits them best. In addition, they offer a plethora of materials, such as discussion boards, interactive tests, and video lectures. They frequently lack the engaging and immersive features that virtual reality provides, though. VR offers hands-on experiences and simulations that improve comprehension and retention, engaging students in ways that internet platforms cannot. A medical student, for instance, can perform surgery in a virtual operating room, which offers a degree of realism and interaction that is not possible with a video instruction. However, compared to online learning platforms, virtual reality demands more specialized hardware and infrastructure, which may prevent it from being widely used.

6.3 VR vs. Traditional Classroom Tools

For millennia, the fundamental resources of education have been textbooks, whiteboards, and tangible manipulatives. These resources are tried-and-true, reasonably priced, and well-known to educators and learners alike. On the other hand, they frequently depend on passive learning strategies, in which pupils absorb knowledge with little to no discussion or involvement. VR, on the other hand, provides interactive learning opportunities that can boost motivation and engagement. For example, in a geography lesson, students can use VR to experience various ecosystems, which can help them comprehend them better than reading about them in a textbook. Despite these benefits, conventional tools require no additional equipment or training and are simpler to use and maintain. In addition, all students may utilize them, irrespective of their financial situation, in contrast to VR, which currently confronts considerable financial and accessibility obstacles.

6.4 Advantages of VR

Virtual reality's main benefit for education is that it may offer chances for immersive, hands-on learning. Higher engagement, improved knowledge retention, and a greater comprehension of difficult ideas can result from this. VR has the ability to replicate real-world settings and situations, providing hands-on training in disciplines like engineering, the arts, and medicine. Virtual reality also enables customized learning, which adjusts to the unique requirements and learning style of the learner. In order to improve fluency and understanding, VR may be used to immerse students in a virtual environment where they can practice speaking and listening in natural settings. Additionally, by giving students access to experiences and materials that they would not otherwise have, VR has the potential to democratize education.

6.5 Disadvantages of VR

VR provides a lot of advantages, but there are a few drawbacks as well that should be considered. The expensive price of VR hardware and software, which might be unaffordable for many educational institutions, is one of the primary obstacles. The use and upkeep of VR systems present technological difficulties as well as the requirement for educators to receive specific training. Furthermore, some users of VR may experience motion sickness and other health problems, especially after extended use. Another worry is that students might become more absorbed in the virtual world and less connected to their peers and the outside world if VR is used, which could lead to a sense of isolation. Finally, there are still many unanswered questions about the long-term effects of VR on learning outcomes and student well-being, highlighting the need for ongoing research and evaluation.

VR's potential and limits may be seen when compared to other educational technologies including augmented reality (AR), online learning environments, and conventional classroom supplies. VR has distinct benefits concerning immersion, interaction, and experience learning. However, it also confronts noteworthy obstacles concerning expenses, accessibility, and technological glitches. Educators and legislators may decide how best to incorporate VR into the classroom and what its respective benefits and drawbacks are by knowing these factors. In order to guarantee that all students can take advantage of virtual reality's revolutionary potential, it is imperative that these issues be addressed as the technology develops and that strategies be looked into for making VR more sustainable and accessible.

7. Conclusion

VR has the potential to revolutionize a number of learning domains, according to research on the technology in education. VR provides immersive, interactive experiences that improve student engagement, retention rates, academic achievement, and comprehension of difficult subjects. The distinct benefits of VR, such as its capacity to offer experience learning and individualized instruction, become clear when contrasting it with other educational technologies like augmented reality (AR), online learning environments, and conventional classroom supplies. Significant obstacles are also highlighted by the study, including expensive fees, technological difficulties, and accessibility problems, especially for students with impairments. It is important to tackle these obstacles in order to successfully incorporate virtual reality into academic programs. The development of software for sensory impairments, the adaptation of hardware for physical accessibility, and the creation of cognitively accessible material are all crucial steps toward inclusion. Optimizing VR's advantages for educators also requires creating thorough rules and encouraging cooperation and professional growth. Additionally, promoting equality via cooperative stakeholder engagement and supporting legislation will increase the uptake of VR in education.

In the end, VR has the potential to significantly transform education, but its implementation has to be inclusive and deliberate. To fully comprehend the long-term impacts of virtual reality on learning outcomes and student wellbeing, more investigation and assessment are required. VR has the potential to democratize education by offering all students the chance to participate in engaging and productive learning experiences. However, this can only happen by addressing present restrictions and promoting an inclusive approach. The study emphasizes how crucial it is to integrate VR into a larger educational technology plan in order to maximize its advantages for all students and ensure that it works in tandem with other powerful teaching resources.

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