Journal of Education and Learning Technology (JELT)
ISSN 2720-7730
Volume 6 Issue 8 2025 pp 592 - 606
Available online at: https://noyam.org/journals/jelt/
DOI: https://doi.org/10.38159/jelt.2025686

Augmented Reality Intersecting Digital Content into Real-Life Environments: A Case of A Rurally Located Institution of Higher Learning, Eastern Cape Province

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ABSTRACT

This paper explored the incorporation of Augmented Reality (AR) within the educational framework in a rurally located university in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The study investigated how digital content within real-lived experiences is augmented by AR technology since the identified research site has embarked on blended teaching and learning modalities to foster an innovative learning landscape within rural communities. As data informants, six students, level 4s and postgraduates, emanating from a rurally located university, were nominated through a purposive sampling technique. The study deemed these participants to be the relevant cohort, as they had already been enrolled before the blended approach existed. This paper considers a pre-and post-course evaluation to extract perceptions of their experiences with technology-infused education. The educational benefits of AR were identified through the administration of qualitative research approaches, as well as some underlying challenges. When administering the thematic analysis, the study identified themes that were discussed in the study findings. These included (i) enhanced learning outcomes identified by the assessment scores, (ii) technological limitations, and (iii) barriers to student and staff training are barriers to the functional implementation of AR integration. The study concluded that the insufficiency of technological infrastructure affected the effective application of AR. The study recommends upgrading technological resources through investments in technological infrastructure. Finally, this paper contributed to scholarship by providing context-specific insights into the challenges and benefits of integrating Augmented Reality (AR) in a rural South African university, highlighting the critical role of technological infrastructure in its effective implementation.

Keywords: Augmented Reality, Blended Learning, Learner-Centredness, Integration of Technology, Active Learning, Hybrid Learning Environments.

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Publication History
Received:
7th April, 2025
Accepted:
2nd July, 2025.
Published:
22nd August, 2025.

To Cite this Article:
Makena, Bulelwa, Ntando Elliot Mpahla, and Manitshana Mveleli. "Augmented Reality Intersecting Digital Content into Real-Life Environments: A Case of A Rurally Located Institution of Higher Learning, Eastern Cape Province." *Journal of Education and Learning Technology* 6, no. 8 (2025): 592 - 606. https://doi.org/10.38159/jelt.2025686.

INTRODUCTION

The education system, currently, has undergone a drastic change due to the advent of Augmented Reality (AR). The infusion of technology into the teaching and learning pedagogies has reimagined the school environment periphery from the previous traditional engagements to the overruling

approaches that prioritize the use of online learning collaborations.[1] Due to this background, it becomes imperative to unpack the variables contained in the title of this paper. Mills, Kathy, and Brown declare that AR is computer-generated perceptual information aimed at enhancing the real world with interactive experiences, and yet imparts on real-life environments and objects by overlaying the digital content.[2] As these two equivalent terms intersect with one another, at the helm of being disadvantaged are the so-called rurally situated institutions of higher learning.[3]

With the overlay of digital information, physical environments, especially those located in rural contexts, are not understood due to rurality and the nature of the background. On the other hand, Cakir and Korkmaz argue that hybrid experiences that cater to interactive digital content are at an advantage in interacting with digital content.[4] For rural communities to be held with constraints of resource limitations, as opined by Murrah-Hanson, Lee & Bloch.[5] AR does not enrich such learning experiences. For this reason, the purpose of this study is to identify how significant AR is towards improving educational outcomes for rurally located higher learning. Thechallenges faced by institutions located in rural areas mostly include limited access to advanced educational tools normally retarding student engagement. Therefore, AR has become a crucial tool to bridge technology gaps.[6]

This research study identifies some gaps. Although previous studies have been conducted with regard to integrated AR in the education system, we identify a gap in both pedagogical and technological imperatives. There seems to be a disconnect in how AR technology is applied to the prescribed curriculum. In addition to that, for institutions of higher learning to experience inadequate technological infrastructure challenges is worth nothing and is likely to detour the spread of AR applications into the teaching and learning processes. In support of these identified gaps, Jang et al. opine that when there are gaps in how curriculum guidelines are structured with regard to infusing technology learning, the possibility is a non-function AR innovation.[7] Hence, this paper had two research questions to answer:

- How is student engagement in a rural higher education context influenced by AR?
- How can the perceived barriers be addressed for enhanced learning outcomes and professional development?

Studies conducted by Koc Altun and Yuksel declare that for an enriched learning experience, there is a need for the combination of AR technology with data that is computer-generated to suit the real-world environment.[8] The functionality of this integration becomes evident when students have attained skills allowing for interacting with complex concepts with specific consideration of sliding from the so-called traditionally oriented pedagogies that solely depend on inert teaching and learning resources.[9] This, therefore, means that closely considering rural schooling contexts with limited access to resources, such as substantial gaps in imparting quality education, can be bridged by fostering AR

[1] Jack Pottle, "Virtual Reality and the Transformation of Medical Education," *Future Healthcare Journal* 6, no. 3 (October 2019): 181–85, https://doi.org/10.7861/fhj.2019-0036.

[2] Kathy A. Mills and Alinta Brown, "Immersive Virtual Reality (VR) for Digital Media Making: Transmediation Is Key," *Learning, Media and Technology* 47, no. 2 (April 3, 2022): 179–200, https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2021.1952428.

[3] Mustafa Sat, Fatih Ilhan, and Erman Yukselturk, "Comparison and Evaluation of Augmented Reality Technologies for Designing Interactive Materials," *Education and Information Technologies* 28, no. 9 (September 21, 2023): 11545–67, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-023-11646-3.

[4] Recep Cakir and Ozgen Korkmaz, "The Effectiveness of Augmented Reality Environments on Individuals with Special Education Needs," *Education and Information Technologies* 24, no. 2 (March 15, 2019): 1631–59, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-018-9848-6.

[5] Laurie Murrah-Hanson, Brittani Lee, and Pamela Bloch, "Connecting Diverse Communities through a 4-H Urban-Rural Experience," *Journal of Extension* 60, no. 4 (December 19, 2022), https://doi.org/10.34068/joe.60.04.08.

[6] Hakan Çetin and Azmi Türkan, "The Effect of Augmented Reality Based Applications on Achievement and Attitude towards Science Course in Distance Education Process," *Education and Information Technologies* 27, no. 2 (March 14, 2022): 1397–1415, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-021-10625-w.

[7] Jaehong Jang et al., "Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality for Learning: An Examination Using an Extended Technology Acceptance Model," *IEEE Access* 9 (2021): 6798–6809, https://doi.org/10.1109/ACCESS.2020.3048708.

[8] Özge Koç, Emin Altun, and H. Gülru Yüksel, "Writing an Expository Text Using Augmented Reality: Students' Performance and Perceptions," *Education and Information Technologies* 27, no. 1 (January 14, 2022): 845–66, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-021-10438-x.

[9] Ignacio Martinez-Alpiste et al., "Smartphone-Based Real-Time Object Recognition Architecture for Portable and Constrained Systems," *Journal of Real-Time Image Processing* 19, no.1 (February 1,2022): 103–15, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11554-021-01164-1.

to promote student engagement.[10] Looking at the momentum gained in educational settings due to the disposition of AR, there seems to be an urgent need to tighten its applicability across programmes offered by various disciplines in the prescribed curriculum.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The integration of AR into educational contexts, particularly within STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields, shows a growing consensus on its effectiveness. This technology significantly improves student engagement and interactivity, fostering creativity and critical thinking skills essential for the 21st-century workforce. Aniskin et al emphasize AR's potential to transform pedagogical practices by offering personalized learning experiences, while Triplett highlights its ability to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application.[11]

AR plays a crucial role in fostering student motivation and intrinsic interest. Cerero et al. argue for the inclusion of technological tools like AR in higher education to cater to diverse learner needs, emphasizing accessibility and engagement.[12] This is supported by Buele et al. who observed a marked increase in student engagement and motivation through effective AR implementation, leading to self-driven learning behaviors.[13] The synergy between educational content and AR applications also enhances teaching efficacy.[14] Andujar and Nadif further corroborate the positive effects of AR on intrinsic and extrinsic student motivation.[15] Studies show that AR can make learning comprehensible by concretizing abstract concepts, improve spatial thinking skills, and offer opportunities for collaborative learning.[16]

AR also facilitates experiential learning opportunities, which are particularly vital for students in under-resourced rural educational settings where traditional methods may fall short.[17] In such environments, AR can expose students to critical thinking as they engage with limited digital content in a shared physical space.[18] However, many rural schools struggle with inadequate infrastructure, poor access to electricity, and limited internet connectivity, limiting the full potential of AR. The high development and implementation costs, limited device availability, and technical complexity of content creation further pose significant barriers to widespread AR adoption in these regions.[19]

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[10] Saman Ebadi and Fateme Ashrafabadi, "An Exploration into the Impact of Augmented Reality on EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension," *Education and Information Technologies* 27, no. 7 (August 5, 2022): 9745–65, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-022-11021-8.

[11] Vladimir Nikolaevich Aniskin et al., "Teaching Potential of Integrated Learning Technologies Smart, Stem and Steam," *Revista de La Universidad Del Zulia* 11, no. 29 (February 8, 2020): 328–36, https://doi.org/10.46925//rdluz.29.21; William J. Triplett, "Impact of Technology Integration in STEM Education," *Cybersecurity and Innovative Technology Journal* 1, no. 1 (September 11, 2023): 16–22, https://doi.org/10.53889/citj.v1i1.295.

[12] José Fernández-Cerero, Julio Cabero-Almenara, and Marta Montenegro-Rueda, "Technological Tools in Higher Education: A Qualitative Analysis from the Perspective of Students with Disabilities," *Education Sciences* 14, no. 3 (March 14, 2024): 310, https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14030310.

[13] Jorge Buele et al., "Augmented Reality Application with Multimedia Content to Support Primary Education," in *ICAETT 2022. LNNS* (Springer Cham, 2023), 299–310, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-25942-5_24.

[14] Tong Zhang et al., "Applied Model of E-Learning in the Framework of Education for Sustainable Development," *Sustainability* 12, no. 16 (August 10, 2020): 6420, https://doi.org/10.3390/su12166420.

[15] Alberto Andujar and Fátima Zahra Nadif, "Evaluating an Inclusive Blended Learning Environment in EFL: A Flipped Approach," *Computer Assisted Language Learning* 35, no. 5–6 (July 4, 2022): 1138–67, https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2020.1774613.

[16] Seftika Anggraini et al., "How to Improve Critical Thinking Skills and Spatial Reasoning with Augmented Reality in Mathematics Learning?," *Journal of Physics: Conference Series* 1581, no. 1 (July 1, 2020): 012066, https://doi.org/10.1088/1742-6596/1581/1/012066; Ju Young Oh, Ji Hyung Park, and Jung-Min Park, "Virtual Object Manipulation by Combining Touch and Head Interactions for Mobile Augmented Reality," *Applied Sciences* 9, no. 14 (July 22, 2019): 2933, https://doi.org/10.3390/app9142933; Daili Chen, Chuanjun Liu, and Edgar Emmanuel Nolasco, "Intergenerational Transmission of Moral Decision-making Inclinations," *Family Relations* 73, no. 5 (2024): 3250–68.

[17] Mohd Sufi Amin bin Salmee and Faizah Abd Majid, "A Study On English Teachers' Perceptions Towards The Use Of Augmented Reality (AR) In Secondary School ESL Classroom," *Asian Journal of University Education* 18, no. 2 (April 30, 2022): 499–509, https://doi.org/10.24191/ajue.v18i2.18065; Aniskin et al., "Teaching Potential of Integrated Learning Technologies Smart, Stem and Steam."

[18] Christina Pasalidou and Nikolaos Fachantidis, "Teachers' Perceptions Towards the Use of Mobile Augmented Reality," in *Internet of Things, Infrastructures and Mobile Applications. IMCL*, ed. M.E. Auer and T. Tsiatsos (Springer, 2021), 1039–50, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-49932-7_97.

[19] Toqeer Ali Syed et al., "In-Depth Review of Augmented Reality: Tracking Technologies, Development Tools, AR Displays, Collaborative AR, and Security Concerns," *Sensors* 23, no. 1 (December 23, 2022): 146, https://doi.org/10.3390/s23010146.

To maximize AR's efficacy in higher learning institutions located in rural areas, it is critical to address these identified gaps and challenges. Investing in technological infrastructure and promoting pedagogical integration are crucial steps to leverage AR for transformative learning experiences. Including addressing the digital divide through initiatives that provide free data and Wi-Fi services, basic digital skills training, and affordable, robust devices to rural communities.[20] Furthermore, tailored professional development for educators is essential to ensure that they can effectively integrate AR into their teaching practices and develop relevant content.[21]

Beyond engagement, AR significantly contributes to student cognitive development. It helps to reduce cognitive load by scaffolding information and lesson content, thus enhancing cognitive thinking processes.[22] Research indicates that students who use AR applications demonstrate higher cognitive and psychomotor learning outcomes compared to those who use traditional methods.[23] AR's ability to make learning more active, effective, and meaningful, through immersive and realistic experiences, also improves memory and concentration, and cultivates problem-solving skills.[24]This is particularly beneficial for concretizing abstract concepts, allowing students to interact with virtual objects in a real-world context and achieve learning goals more quickly.[25]

In South Africa, the importance of STEM education for economic growth and societal advancement is widely recognized. However, persistent challenges, especially in townships and rural areas, include inadequate infrastructure, limited resources, and disparities in access to quality STEM education.[26] Despite legislative and policy efforts, historically disadvantaged groups still face significant barriers to STEM careers.[27] AR, therefore, presents a promising avenue to overcome some of these long-standing issues by providing accessible and engaging learning resources, even in resource-constrained environments.[28] foster critical skills development in diverse communities in South Africa.

Therefore, it becomes critical to note that there is an urgent need for the identified gaps and challenges to be addressed as a means to maximize the efficacy of AR in education within higher learning institutions demarcated as located in rural backgrounds. For institutions of learning to invest in technological infrastructure and pedagogical integration, the possibility of AR for renovated learning experiences can be used.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Constructivist Learning Theory by Vygotsky underpins this investigation. This theory speculates on the essence of constructing information through interactions made by members of one's environment.[29] This learning theory proposes that AR, when efficiently implemented, can lead to augmented learning established within the significance of a particular context. AR is perceived by the

[20] Dina Moloja, "Exploring the Impact of Augmented Reality Applications on Student Engagement in Higher Education in South Africa: A Review," in *ITNG 2024: 21st International Conference on Information Technology-New Generations*, 2024, 255–61, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-56599-1_34.

[21] Mathukhwana Masutane Modjadji, *Bridging Divides: Tackling Technological Change, Inequality, and Digital Illiteracy in a Fragmented South Africa* (European University Institute, 2025).

[22] Ah-Fur Lai, Chih-Hung Chen, and Gon-Yi Lee, "An Augmented Reality-based Learning Approach to Enhancing Students' Science Reading Performances from the Perspective of the Cognitive Load Theory," *British Journal of Educational Technology* 50, no. 1 (January 19, 2019): 232–47, https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.12716.

[23] I Gusti Putu Asto Buditjahjanto and Juki Irfansyah, "Augmented Reality on Students' Academic Achievement Viewed from the Creative Thinking Level," *Journal of Technology and Science Education* 13, no. 3 (June 12, 2023): 597–612, https://doi.org/10.3926/jotse.1813.

[24] Everod Davis, Melva Robertson, and Stacey Reynolds, "Human Capital Strategies to Foster Employee Engagement Within Post Pandemic Layoffs," *Compensation & Benefits Review* 56, no. 3 (2024): 177–89.

[25] Jeandri Robertson et al., "Message on a Bottle: The Use of Augmented Reality as a Form of Disruptive Rhetoric in Wine Marketing," *Journal of Wine Research* 35, no. 2 (April 2, 2024): 119–38, https://doi.org/10.1080/09571264.2024.2310292.

[26] Moloja, "Exploring the Impact of Augmented Reality Applications on Student Engagement in Higher Education in South Africa: A Review."

[27] Moloja, "Exploring the Impact of Augmented Reality Applications on Student Engagement in Higher Education in South Africa: A Review."

[28] Salmee and Majid, "A Study On English Teachers' Perceptions Towards The Use Of Augmented Reality (AR) In Secondary School ESL Classroom."

[29] Lev Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

Constructivist Learning Theory to expand the already existing understanding of the teaching and learning resource material because AR motivates students to actively engage when teaching processes are administered.[30]

Social interactions are noted by this theory to be role players in shaping a person to have a clearer understanding of the world around them. Voon et al. concur that learning cannot be regarded as a passive reception of information; rather, through exploration and research, a person learns better and is in a good shape to reflect and self-introspect.[31]

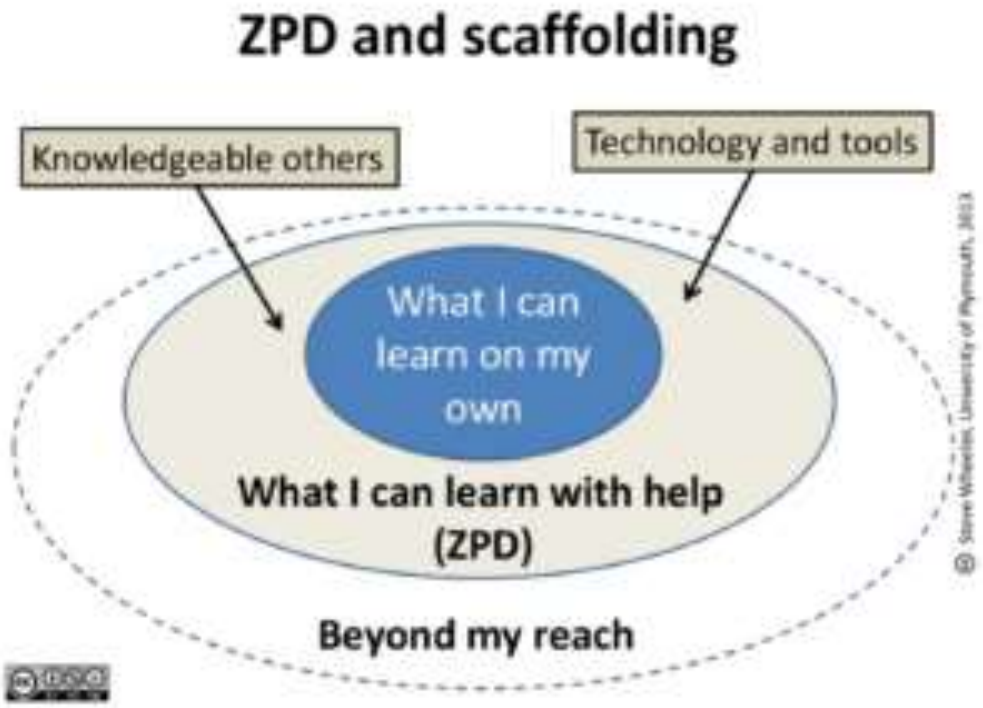

Figure 1: Model of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development

With the philosophical nature of the educational implications**,** the Constructivist Learning Theory is embedded in principles that entail and support technologically infused education, as this paradigm is noted for its underlying characteristic to augment learning experiences.[32] The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is referred to by Vygotsky as that space that allows guidance and collaboration for learners to attain potential through social interactions and as they gradually become better space to interrogate digital learning devices on their own, which is referred to as scaffolding.[33] Therefore, transitioning from the previous normal face-to-face engagement strategies to the currently practised blended learning modes of teaching and learning is equated to transformed independent learner capabilities as information excavation is now interactive.[34]

This, therefore, serves as a wake-up call for institutions of learning to ensure availability and improve the already existing digital resources, as these are interactive tools considered to be providers of exploration and collaboration prospects.[35] When teacher-learner collaborations have reached such

[30] Roya Jafari Amineh and Hanieh Davatgari Asl, "Review of Constructivism and Social Constructivism," *Journal of Social Sciences, Literature and Languages* 1, no. 1 (2015): 9–16.
[31] Xin Pei Voon et al., "Developing Computational Thinking Competencies through Constructivist Argumentation Learning: A Problem-Solving Perspective," *International Journal of Information and Education Technology* 12, no. 6 (2022): 529–39, https://doi.org/10.18178/ijiet.2022.12.6.1650.
[32] Najuah Sael Basheer et al., "Social Death of the Older Adult Population Reinforced in Pandemic Times," *Revista Bioética* 31 (2023), https://doi.org/10.1590/1983-803420233407en.
[33] Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*.
[34] Bram Bruggeman et al., "Experts Speaking: Crucial Teacher Attributes for Implementing Blended Learning in Higher Education," *The Internet and Higher Education* 48 (January 2021): 100772, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2020.100772.
[35] Victor Marrahi Gomez and Jose Belda-Medina, "The Integration of Augmented Reality (AR) in Education," *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal* 9, no. 12 (January 5, 2023): 475–87, https://doi.org/10.14738/assrj.912.13689.

a stage, they are considered to have planted that sense of effectiveness and functionality, leading to enhanced learning outcomes and an improved throughput rate.[36] In addition to that, to demonstrate a paradigm shift when educational practices are administered, active learning is promoted, as articulated by Baran and Maskan.[37] Also, for learning experiences to efficiently cultivate critical thinking among students, this awards them better chances to tackle complex problems collaboratively, not solely for the classroom environment, but for real-world challenges.[38]

METHODOLOGY

The research used a qualitative methodology to thoroughly analyse the impact of various educational interventions on student outcomes, aligning with contemporary educational research practices.[39] The qualitative approach facilitated the interpretation of qualitative data, allowing for a vigorous analysis of the research question.

Research Design

The study adopted interpretative research design that allowed for an in-depth exploration of individuals in a methodological approach tailored to specific research objectives. Emphasis was placed on a pre-specified research framework that articulates the qualitative component to adequately address the research question.[40] This design is supported by existing literature that highlights the need to align research methods with specific scientific inquiries.[41]

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was carried out using a qualitative approach. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with students. The approach was vigorous in capturing the contextual nuances and insights that quantitative data could provide.[42] The qualitative method approach also provided a richer dataset for subsequent analysis and interpretation.[43]

Sample Selection

A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants from diverse educational backgrounds within the chosen educational settings. The intent was to ensure that a comprehensive range of experiences and perspectives informed the qualitative insights.[44]

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[36] Mandaar Pande and S. Vijayakumar Bharathi, "Theoretical Foundations of Design Thinking – A Constructivism Learning Approach to Design Thinking," *Thinking Skills and Creativity* 36 (June 2020): 100637, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2020.100637.

[37] María Graciela Badilla-Quintana, Eileen Sepulveda-Valenzuela, and Margarita Salazar Arias, "Augmented Reality as a Sustainable Technology to Improve Academic Achievement in Students with and without Special Educational Needs," *Sustainability* 12, no. 19 (October 1, 2020): 8116, https://doi.org/10.3390/su12198116.

[38] Joohi Lee, Candace Joswick, and Kathryn Pole, "Classroom Play and Activities to Support Computational Thinking Development in Early Childhood," *Early Childhood Education Journal* 51, no. 3 (March 4, 2023): 457–68, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-022-01319-0.

[39] Antoine Regnault, Tom Willgoss, and Skye Barbic, "Towards the Use of Mixed Methods Inquiry as Best Practice in Health Outcomes Research," *Journal of Patient-Reported Outcomes* 2, no. 1 (December 11, 2018): 19, https://doi.org/10.1186/s41687-018-0043-8; Emina Smajic et al., "Mixed Methodology of Scientific Research in Healthcare," *Acta Informatica Medica* 30, no. 1 (2022): 57–60, https://doi.org/10.5455/aim.2022.30.57-60.

[40] Emma Clarke and John Visser, "Pragmatic Research Methodology in Education: Possibilities and Pitfalls," *International Journal of Research & Method in Education* 42, no. 5 (October 20, 2019): 455–69, https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2018.1524866; Smajic et al., "Mixed Methodology of Scientific Research in Healthcare."

[41] Regnault, Willgoss, and Barbic, "Towards the Use of Mixed Methods Inquiry as Best Practice in Health Outcomes Research"; Guido Fare Olivares Gavino et al., "Improving The Scientific Research Methodology's Component Parts for Language Teaching," *World Journal of English Language* 13, no. 6 (June 5, 2023): 303, https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v13n6p303.

[42] Regnault, Willgoss, and Barbic, "Towards the Use of Mixed Methods Inquiry as Best Practice in Health Outcomes Research"; Olivares Gavino et al., "Improving The Scientific Research Methodology's Component Parts for Language Teaching."

[43] Regnault, Willgoss, and Barbic, "Towards the Use of Mixed Methods Inquiry as Best Practice in Health Outcomes Research"; Smajic et al., "Mixed Methodology of Scientific Research in Healthcare."

[44] Yasna Belén Anabalón Anabalón and Emmanuel Abraham Vega Roman, "Tutoring in the University. A Bibliometric and Thematic Analysis to the Scientific Production of the Web of Science," *Russian Law Journal* 11, no. 3 (April 7, 2023): 1633–45, https://doi.org/10.52783/rlj.v11i3.1819.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis, where transcripts from interviews were coded and categorized based on recurring themes and patterns. The qualitative analysis facilitated an understanding of participant experiences and perceptions concerning educational practices.[45]

Validity and Reliability

To enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, triangulation of data sources was practised. This involved corroborating quantitative results with qualitative insights to ensure the robustness of conclusions drawn.[46] Additionally, member checking was applied in qualitative research, allowing participants to review and validate the findings, ensuring that their perspectives were accurately represented.[47]

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board before data collection. Informed consent was secured from all participants, ensuring the they fully understood the nature of the study, the use of their data, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.[48] The confidentiality of the participant information was maintained throughout the research process.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The findings concerning students' experiences with Augmented Reality (AR) in the context of a rural institution of higher learning in the Eastern Cape Province reflect a transformative shift in educational engagement and efficacy. These findings indicated that the adoption of augmented reality (AR) in educational settings, particularly in rural institutions of higher education, has generated significant interest due to its potential to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. In this study, students articulated several impactful insights regarding their interaction with AR technology, highlighting its potential to enhance learning and engagement in pedagogical practices. When interviewing participants, students revealed their experiences and perceptions, where several themes emerged, demonstrating the multifaceted benefits and challenges associated with integrating AR into the curriculum.

For instance, participants argued that the use AR in educational settings has proven to bridge the gap between traditional learning paradigms and interactive experiences. This view was mentioned by Student 2, who noted that: *"Augmented Reality (AR) is one type of learning process that can be applied through mobile learning known as mobile augmented reality,"* which results *in "an innovative learning space through active interaction"* with educational content. Once again, participants echoed sentiments reflecting how AR facilitated a more immersive learning environment. In this instance, Student 4 asserted, *"The use of AR made concepts that were previously difficult for me to understand suddenly clear and tangible*," indicating a marked improvement in comprehension and retention.

Students expressed enthusiasm for the interactive nature of AR experiences. In this regard, AR's capacity to enrich the educational experience is underscored in student feedback on connection with content. This notion is understandable as Student 1 proclaimed, *"The ability to see virtual objects overlaying real-world scenarios made learning feel more relevant and engaging,"* substantiating claims that AR not only enhances engagement but also contextualizes learning in a practical framework. The integration of AR technology has fostered an increase in motivation and enthusiasm for learning among students, as another participant, Student 3 expressed that: "I found myself actively looking forward to classes because of the AR components; it's like learning but in a video game,"

[45] Clarke and Visser, "Pragmatic Research Methodology in Education: Possibilities and Pitfalls"; Olivares Gavino et al., "Improving The Scientific Research Methodology's Component Parts for Language Teaching."

[46] Clarke and Visser, "Pragmatic Research Methodology in Education: Possibilities and Pitfalls"; Smajic et al., "Mixed Methodology of Scientific Research in Healthcare."

[47] Regnault, Willgoss, and Barbic, "Towards the Use of Mixed Methods Inquiry as Best Practice in Health Outcomes Research."

[48] Smajic et al., "Mixed Methodology of Scientific Research in Healthcare"; Pitchai Balakumar, Mohammed Naseeruddin Inamdar, and Gowraganahalli Jagadeesh, "The Critical Steps for Successful Research: The Research Proposal and Scientific Writing," *Journal of Pharmacology and Pharmacotherapeutics* 4, no. 2 (June 1, 2013): 130–38, https://doi.org/10.4103/0976-500X.110895.

which encapsulates a transformative perception toward the learning process. In addition, Student 1 mentioned that: *"Using AR helped me to visualize complex concepts that I struggled with before."*

This response highlights how AR facilitates a deeper understanding of challenging material through immersive experiences. On the very same question, Student 4 stated that: *"The ability to interact with digital content in real-time makes learning more engaging and fun."* This view underscores the effective engagement AR technologies can offer compared to traditional educational methods.[49] Moreover, this sentiment aligns with findings suggesting that AR can invigorate learning environments, significantly improving student motivation and comprehension.[50]

The findings also revealed that the students found AR to be a valuable tool for improving their independent learning skills. On that note, Student 6 highlighted that: *"AR allowed me to explore topics at my own pace; I felt like I had the freedom to dive deeper into subjects that interested me."* This view suggests that AR not only enhances comprehension but also promotes autonomy in learning, which is critical in higher education settings. This aspect is particularly relevant given that contemporary educational paradigms increasingly value independent and self-directed learning strategies as essential for student success.[51]

However, the findings also indicated challenges in the implementation of AR technologies. Although the participants recognised the benefits, some expressed concerns about accessibility issues, as Student 3 pointed out: *"Not all of us have access to the devices needed for AR, which sometimes makes it hard to fully participate in classes."* These insights reflect the need to address infrastructure disparities to ensure that all students can benefit from AR innovations equally. The lack of readiness among faculty to adopt AR-based tools also presents a barrier, as identified by students who reported varied teaching approaches that did not consistently incorporate AR features.[52]

In terms of pedagogical strategies, students indicated a desire for a more comprehensive integration of AR into their learning experiences. Student 5 argued that: *"I wish our instructors would use more AR tools in our lessons; it would make the content more relatable and less abstract."* This response suggests that while participants appreciate the value of AR, they also see room for improvement in how these technologies are used within the curriculum.[53] Additionally, the perspective is that, AR could enhance not only content delivery but also collaborative learning experiences (The Future of Higher Education: Implementation of Virtual and Augmented Reality in the Educational Process, 2023).

Additionally, insights from the data collected emphasize AR's role in promoting collaboration and teamwork. Student 2 shared her experience, saying that: *"Working on projects with AR really brought my group together; we were able to share ideas in real-time right in front of the simulations,"* revealing how AR not only supports individual learning but enhances collaborative efforts among peers. This collaborative engagement aligns with the understanding that AR applications can significantly improve team processes and outcomes in educational contexts.

The versatility of AR's applications enables it to be used across various educational fields, further consolidating its scope of effectiveness. This view was mentioned as Student 1 pointed out that: *"We were able to use AR in subjects that I never thought could be interactive, such as life sciences and physics. It was eye-opening,"* witnessed by both improved academic outcomes and increased student interest. This adaptability is critical, particularly in rural educational settings, where resource limitations may otherwise hinder experiential learning opportunities.

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[49] Anuja Phapale and Aditya Shiledar, "A Decade of Research on the Effectiveness of Augmented Reality on Students with Special Disability in Higher Education," *International Journal of Applied and Advanced Multidisciplinary Research* 2, no. 1 (January 30, 2024): 79–86, https://doi.org/10.59890/ijaamr.v2i1.709.

[50] Mohammed Amin Almaiah et al., "Factors Affecting the Adoption of Digital Information Technologies in Higher Education: An Empirical Study," *Electronics* 11, no. 21 (November 1, 2022): 3572, https://doi.org/10.3390/electronics11213572.

[51] Anthony Anggrawan, Dian Syafitri C. S., and Christofer Satria, "Developing Augmented Reality Learning and Measuring Its Effect on Independent Learning Compared to Traditional Learning," *TEM Journal*, May 29, 2023, 975–87, https://doi.org/10.18421/TEM122-44.

[52] Mohammad Archi Maulyda, Sugiman Sugiman, and Wuri Wuryandani, "Integration of Augmented Reality Technology for Learning: An Qualitative Meta-Analysis Study," *Progres Pendidikan* 5, no. 3 (September 30, 2024): 260–73, https://doi.org/10.29303/prospek.v5i3.1269.

[53] Kyungeun Lim, "Expanding Multimodal Artistic Expression and Appreciation Methods through Integrating Augmented Reality," *International Journal of Art & Design Education* 41, no. 4 (November 19, 2022): 562–76, https://doi.org/10.1111/jade.12434.

Thus, the findings indicate that augmented reality holds tremendous potential to enhance educational experiences in rural higher education contexts by improving engagement, fostering independent learning, and facilitating collaborative opportunities. The students' insights showcase AR as a robust pedagogical tool that has the potential to redefine educational experiences in rural contexts. Nonetheless, these benefits are tempered by infrastructural challenges and faculty preparedness, suggesting a need for strategic planning in effectively integrating AR into academic programs.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study reveal substantial implications for educational reform and innovation. The insights gained from students participating in the study provided data on AR's effectiveness in enhancing educational experiences. Students perceived AR as a transformative educational tool that enriched learning engagement by bringing lessons to life and could visualize concepts rather than just read about them.[54] This sentiment resonates with existing literature that supports the notion that AR fosters an engaging learning environment by creating immersive experiences that promote deeper understanding and retention of information. In this study, students highlighted the shift from passive learning, a traditional mode in rural contexts, to active learning facilitated by AR technologies, iterating that the interactive nature of AR allowed students to be active participants in their education.[55]

Moreover, AR applications demonstrated notable advantages in enhancing collaborative learning. Participants perceived that working together on AR projects helped them communicate better and share ideas in ways they had never before in a traditional classroom.[56] This observation aligns with studies suggesting that technology-enhanced collaboration fosters improved communication skills and teamwork among students.[57] Notably, while students frequently acknowledged the benefits of interaction facilitated by AR, some remarks indicated a nuanced understanding of its limitations, as technology would sometimes fail mid-lesson, interrupting the flow of the lesson. This perspective underscores the importance of reliable technological infrastructure to maximise the potential benefits of AR in educational contexts.[58]

The effectiveness of AR was not only seen in interpersonal dynamics but also reflected in academic performance. Students noted improvements in specific subjects where they translated complex theories into visual elements that make sense to students.[59] This aligns with findings in the academic community asserting the positive impact AR has on student performance, particularly in STEM disciplines, where visualization of concepts is crucial.[60] Such examples suggest that AR can be pivotal in bridging the knowledge gaps that are often challenging to grasp through traditional instructional methods.

Furthermore, students' reflections revealed a shift in their motivation and attitudes toward learning due to AR implementations.[61] This intrinsic motivation appears linked to the engaging nature of AR, which has been documented to enhance student interest and enthusiasm for learning.[62] This

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[54] Orazbayeva Elmira et al., "The Effect of Augmented Reality Technology on the Performance of University Students," *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (IJET)* 17, no. 19 (October 14, 2022): 33–45, https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v17i19.32179.

[55] Mireles Medina, Carrillo García, and Montes Olguín, "Planning and Allocation of Digital Learning Objects with Augmented Reality to Higher Education Students According to the VARK Model," *International Journal of Interactive Multimedia and Artificial Intelligence* 5, no. 2 (2018): 53–57, https://doi.org/10.9781/ijimai.2018.02.005.

[56] Susanna Hartikainen et al., "The Concept of Active Learning and the Measurement of Learning Outcomes: A Review of Research in Engineering Higher Education," *Education Sciences* 9, no. 4 (November 19, 2019): 276, https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci9040276.

[57] Kirana Aureola Arzak and Binar Kurnia Prahani, "Practicality of Augmented Reality Books in Physics Learning: A Literature Review," *JPPS (Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Sains)* 12, no. 2 (May 23, 2023): 138–54, https://doi.org/10.26740/jpps.v12n2.p138-154.

[58] Elmira et al., "The Effect of Augmented Reality Technology on the Performance of University Students."

[59] Finsa Nurpandi and Agung Gumelar, "Augmented Reality Chemical Reaction with User-Centered Design," *MATEC Web of Conferences* 218 (October 26, 2018): 04012, https://doi.org/10.1051/matecconf/201821804012.

[60] Nurpandi and Gumelar, "Augmented Reality Chemical Reaction with User-Centered Design."

[61] Sk Rezwan Shihab, Nahida Sultana, and Abdul Samad, "Pedagogy Designing With Augmented Reality: A Paradigm Shift in Educational Approaches," *Interdiciplinary Journal and Hummanity (INJURITY)* 2, no. 11 (November 17, 2023): 878–92, https://doi.org/10.58631/injurity.v2i11.136.

[62] Rabia Meryem Yilmaz, Fatma Burcu Topu, and Ayşegül Takkaç Tulgar, "An Examination of Vocabulary Learning and Retention Levels of Pre-School Children Using Augmented Reality Technology in English Language Learning," *Education and Information Technologies* 27, no. 5 (June 1, 2022): 6989–7017, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-022-10916-w.

position emphasizes the role of AR in fostering a positive learning environment that encourages students to take ownership of their educational journeys.

Finally, the implications of integrating augmented reality into the educational practices at a rural institution highlight its multifaceted benefits. Students experienced significant improvements in comprehension, collaboration, and motivation, making a compelling case for the adoption of AR technologies in educational settings. These findings align with ongoing research advocating for the practical use of AR in enhancing learning experiences, particularly in contexts where traditional methods may fall short. The figure below indicates the intersected skills attained through AR implementation:

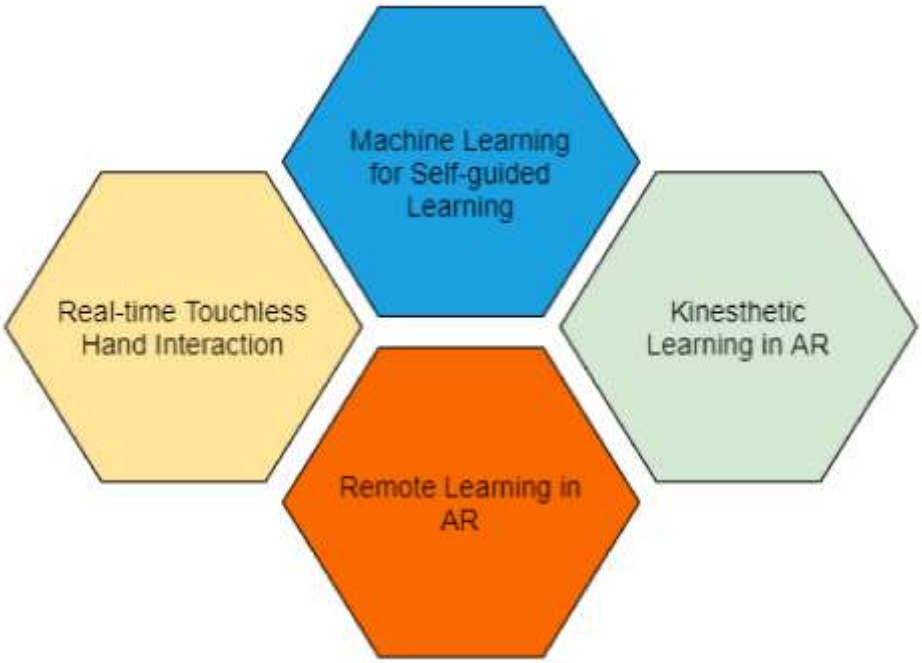

Figure 2: Intersected skills attained through AR

The figure above juxtaposes how AR, when functionally applied to teaching and learning pedagogies, can make one attain interesting life-long skills, ultimately leading to kinesthetic human beings capable of self-guiding themselves. Lastly, the adoption of augmented reality in the educational landscape of rural higher education institutions proves to be a transformative tool, enriching the learning environment and fostering critical skills necessary for students. Its ability to overlay digital content onto real-world scenarios allows for an unprecedented level of interactivity and engagement, thus addressing the intellectual and professional demands of modern educational endeavours.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the findings from the study, the following recommendations were suggested, aiming at enhancing the implementation of AR technologies and improving the educational experience for students in rural contexts.

Infrastructure Development: A pressing recommendation is to address the infrastructure limitations that affect the accessibility of AR technologies.

Comprehensive Faculty Training: Another critical recommendation is the need for ongoing professional development and training for faculty on the pedagogical use of AR.

Enhanced AR Curriculum Integration: There should be more effective integration of AR in diverse subjects across students' learning experiences.

Promotion of Collaborative Learning: Enhancing opportunities for collaborative learning experiences using AR technologies is also recommended.

Awareness Campaigns for AR Benefits: Lastly, increasing awareness among both students and faculty about the advantages of using AR in education is essential.

By addressing these recommendations, the institution can enhance the educational landscape for its students, ensuring that augmented reality integration is not only effective but also sustainable and inclusive for all learners.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recognizing the inherent constraints of the present investigation, this segment delineates potential avenues for further scholarly exploration. This approach is instrumental in fostering the incremental development of knowledge within the relevant academic domain. Future studies could address these limitations by expanding the research to include a more extensive and diverse sample of students from various universities, potentially including institutions in different geographical locations and with varying levels of technological infrastructure. Longitudinal studies could be conducted to track the long-term impact of AR integration on student learning and engagement. Additionally, research could explore the perspectives of students who specifically chose technology-enhanced learning environments. Future work should also investigate effective strategies for addressing technological infrastructure challenges in rural settings and for developing robust and scalable training programs for both students and educators to facilitate the successful adoption of AR in education. Comparative studies could also be carried out to contrast the experiences of universities with different approaches to AR implementation and differing levels of technological resources.

CONCLUSION

The integration of AR in the educational context of a rural institution of higher learning has elicited promising responses from students, showcasing the potential benefits and challenges that accompany this innovative technology. The findings indicate that AR not only enhances the learning experience by fostering engagement but also facilitates a deeper comprehension of complex concepts.

What is noted by the participants is that AR technology cultivates an environment conducive to independent learning. This is where participants indicated AR allowed them to explore topics at their own pace, giving them the freedom to dive deeper into subjects that interested them. Out of this understanding, autonomy has been recognized as essential, particularly in higher education, where self-directed learning is crucial for academic success.[63]

However, accessibility challenges emerged as a common theme in students' experiences. Some students revealed that not all peers had equal access to the necessary devices, which limited their ability to participate fully. This concern highlighted the need for equitable access to technology in educational environments to ensure that all students can benefit from the advantages offered by AR.[64] Moreover, while students recognized the engaging potential of AR, they expressed a desire for its more comprehensive implementation in the curriculum.

The implications of these findings suggest that while AR presents an exciting frontier for enhancing education in rural settings, educational institutions must address technological disparities, ensure faculty preparedness, and develop robust pedagogical strategies that harness AR's full potential. By doing so, institutions can better equip students with the skills and knowledge necessary for success in an increasingly digital world.

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[63] Badilla-Quintana, Sepulveda-Valenzuela, and Salazar Arias, "Augmented Reality as a Sustainable Technology to Improve Academic Achievement in Students with and without Special Educational Needs."

[64] José María Fernández-Batanero, Marta Montenegro-Rueda, and José Fernández-Cerero, "Use of Augmented Reality for Students with Educational Needs: A Systematic Review (2016–2021)," *Societies* 12, no. 2 (February 25, 2022): 36, https://doi.org/10.3390/soc12020036.

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