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The Impact of Virtual Reality (VR) on Collaborative Learning in Higher Education

Aceng Haetami[1], Omar Khan[2]

[1] University of Halu Oleo, Indonesia
[2] Herat University, Afghanistan

ABSTRACT

Background. The rapid advancement of technology has led to the integration of Virtual Reality (VR) in various sectors, including education. In higher education, collaborative learning is a key element in enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes. However, traditional learning environments face limitations in fostering effective collaboration among students. Virtual Reality offers innovative solutions by creating immersive and interactive environments that can bridge the gap between physical and virtual spaces.

Purpose. This study aims to investigate the impact of VR on collaborative learning in higher education, exploring how VR technologies influence student interaction, engagement, and overall learning outcomes.

Method. The research uses a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews with students and faculty and quantitative data through surveys.

Results. The study focuses on students who participated in VR-based collaborative learning activities across different disciplines. Preliminary results indicate that VR enhances communication, problem-solving, and teamwork among students, fostering a more engaging and productive learning experience. Additionally, students reported increased motivation and a deeper understanding of complex concepts through the immersive nature of VR.

Conclusion. The study concludes that VR is a valuable tool for enhancing collaborative learning in higher education, offering potential for wider application in various academic fields. Further research is recommended to explore the long-term effects of VR in educational settings and its scalability across diverse institutions.

KEYWORDS

Collaborative Learning, Higher Education, Immersive Learning, Student Engagement, Virtual Reality.

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Correspondence:

Aceng Haetami,

acenghaetami@uho.ac.id ,

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INTRODUCTION

Virtual Reality (VR) has emerged as a transformative tool in various sectors, including education. In particular, VR has the potential to significantly enhance collaborative learning, an approach that fosters teamwork, shared problem-solving, and collective engagement among students (Nousiainen, 2022).

By creating immersive, interactive environments, VR allows learners to explore content in ways that traditional classroom settings cannot offer. Research has demonstrated that the use of VR in education can improve engagement, increase motivation, and deepen understanding of complex concepts by providing an experiential learning environment (Jeong, 2022).

Collaborative learning, characterized by students working together towards a common goal, is widely recognized as an effective pedagogical strategy. Studies have consistently shown that collaborative learning can enhance critical thinking, communication skills, and student achievement (Boubakri, 2024). As higher education increasingly embraces technology, VR offers an innovative avenue for facilitating such learning processes. VR tools allow students to collaborate remotely, thus eliminating the constraints of physical space and enabling global teamwork (Meer, 2023).

The advent of VR in higher education has led to the development of various VR-based platforms that support collaborative learning. These platforms provide simulations, virtual environments, and scenarios where students can interact with both their peers and educational content (Sandhu, 2024). Such platforms are designed to enhance not only the technical skills required for engaging with VR but also the soft skills needed for effective teamwork and collaboration. The ability of VR to simulate real-world environments also enables students to gain practical experience that may otherwise be inaccessible (Guo, 2024).

Extensive research has explored the use of VR in individual learning contexts, highlighting its positive impact on student engagement and knowledge retention. However, fewer studies have focused on its application within collaborative learning environments (Drey, 2022). While VR's role in individual learning has been well-documented, the specific impact of VR on collaborative learning—particularly in the context of higher education—remains less explored. This highlights the need for further research to understand how VR can enhance group dynamics and collaborative processes (Arnold, 2023).

In terms of collaborative learning, VR has been found to increase student interaction, making learning more dynamic and engaging. Virtual spaces allow students to share ideas, solve problems together, and work on projects in a collaborative environment, similar to physical group work but without the spatial and geographical constraints (Matovu, 2024). As VR technology evolves, its potential to facilitate more realistic and meaningful collaborative experiences in education grows, suggesting that it could play a significant role in reshaping the future of collaborative learning (Souza, 2020).

Despite the growing body of literature on VR's individual educational benefits, research on its specific impact on collaboration in higher education settings is still emerging. Few studies have comprehensively examined how VR affects not only student engagement but also communication, problem-solving, and teamwork in collaborative learning contexts (Mukasheva, 2023). The gap in understanding this relationship between VR and collaborative learning needs to be addressed to maximize the benefits of VR integration in higher education (Näykki, 2024).

While the promise of VR in education is evident, there is still limited empirical evidence regarding its impact on collaborative learning in higher education. Much of the existing research has concentrated on how VR can enhance individual learning experiences, leaving a gap in the understanding of its potential to foster collaborative environments (Rauf, 2021). Specifically, the way VR can improve teamwork dynamics, communication, and decision-making in group tasks remains largely unexplored (Tarnec, 2022).

The current research also lacks a clear understanding of the specific types of collaborative activities that benefit most from VR integration. While general benefits such as improved engagement and communication have been reported, it is unclear which aspects of VR—such as

interaction with virtual objects, immersive simulations, or spatial awareness—are most conducive to effective collaboration (Mubarok, 2023). This gap necessitates further investigation into how VR features can be optimized to facilitate different forms of collaborative learning, whether in small group work, project-based learning, or global collaborations (Webb, 2022).

Another unknown lies in the impact of VR on diverse student populations. The majority of existing studies on VR in education have focused on homogeneous student groups, often overlooking the potential variations in how different demographic groups interact with VR (Näykki, 2022). Factors such as age, cultural background, prior technological experience, and learning preferences could all influence how students engage with VR-based collaborative learning, yet this has not been extensively studied (Gardeli, 2023).

The scalability of VR in higher education is also an unresolved issue. While some institutions have successfully integrated VR into their curricula, widespread adoption remains limited due to factors such as cost, accessibility, and technical expertise (Sun, 2024). Understanding how VR can be effectively scaled across diverse educational settings is crucial for its broader implementation. Without addressing these challenges, the full potential of VR in transforming collaborative learning in higher education cannot be realized (Namboodiri, 2022).

Filling the gap in understanding how VR influences collaborative learning is essential for maximizing its educational potential. With the growing adoption of VR technologies in classrooms, understanding its impact on group dynamics and teamwork is crucial for developing effective learning strategies (Cassidy, 2021). By examining the role of VR in collaborative contexts, we can create best practices and guidelines that can be applied across diverse higher education settings (Leslie, 2020).

Understanding the influence of VR on collaboration also opens the door for designing more effective and engaging learning environments (Ma, 2021). By addressing the gaps in research, educators and institutions can better align VR-based activities with the learning outcomes they aim to achieve, ensuring that VR is used in ways that truly enhance teamwork, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills among students (Eltahir, 2021).

Lastly, investigating the impact of VR on collaborative learning can contribute to the ongoing debate about the role of technology in education. As technology continues to evolve, educators must adapt and innovate to ensure that learning environments are both engaging and effective. Filling this gap will provide valuable insights into how VR can complement traditional educational methods and help build more interactive, global, and inclusive learning spaces (Miao, 2022).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of Virtual Reality (VR) on collaborative learning in higher education. The quantitative aspect involves the use of surveys to collect data on students' perceptions, engagement levels, and collaboration outcomes when using VR-based tools. The qualitative component includes in-depth interviews with students and faculty members to explore their experiences with VR in collaborative learning environments. This dual approach allows for a rich analysis of both the measurable impacts and the subjective experiences associated with VR-enhanced collaboration (Mahendran et al., 2022).

The population for this study consists of students enrolled in higher education institutions that have integrated VR technologies into their curricula. The sample is selected from two universities known for their use of VR in educational settings. A purposive sampling method is

used to select participants who have actively engaged in VR-based collaborative learning activities. The sample includes 200 students from various academic disciplines, ensuring a diverse representation in terms of major, age, and prior experience with VR. In addition, 20 faculty members from different fields who have facilitated VR-based collaborative learning sessions are included in the sample to provide insights into the pedagogical approaches and challenges associated with VR integration (Jiulin et al., 2021).

The primary instruments for data collection include a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interview guides. The questionnaire, designed to assess students' perceptions of VR's impact on collaborative learning, includes Likert-scale items measuring engagement, teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills during VR-based activities. The interview guide is designed to explore in greater detail the students' and faculty members' experiences with VR, focusing on aspects such as interaction, ease of use, and the perceived benefits and challenges of VR for collaborative learning. The data collected from both instruments are triangulated to provide a holistic view of the impact of VR on collaborative learning (Gill, 2020).

Data collection is conducted in two phases. In the first phase, the survey is administered to students who have participated in VR-based collaborative learning activities over a period of one semester. The survey is distributed digitally, and responses are collected anonymously to ensure confidentiality. In the second phase, semi-structured interviews are conducted with a subset of 20 students and 10 faculty members, selected based on their involvement in the VR-based collaborative sessions (Ji et al., 2021). These interviews are conducted face-to-face or via video conferencing, depending on availability, and are audio-recorded for transcription and analysis. The data from both phases are analyzed using both descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The quantitative data from the survey are processed using SPSS software, while the qualitative interview data are coded and analyzed manually to identify recurring themes related to student engagement, collaboration, and the perceived advantages and limitations of VR in the learning process (Han et al., 2022).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data collected from the survey respondents revealed significant improvements in key aspects of collaborative learning after the integration of VR-based activities. The table displays the mean scores for student engagement, communication skills, teamwork, problem-solving, and overall satisfaction before and after participating in VR-based collaborative learning. Notably, all variables show marked increases in the post-VR phase. For instance, student engagement improved from a mean of 3.1 (pre-VR) to 4.5 (post-VR), indicating a substantial enhancement in student involvement and interest. Communication skills, teamwork, and problem-solving also experienced similar positive shifts, suggesting that VR was effective in enhancing these collaborative competencies.

Table 1. VR Impact Results

Category	Before VR Implementation (%)	After VR Implementation (%)	Difference (%)
Engagement	55	85	30
Retention	60	90	30
Satisfaction	65	95	30
Learning Outcomes	45	80	35
Innovation	50	75	25

The standard deviation (SD) values for each variable also decreased post-VR, suggesting that the variation in responses was reduced, and there was a greater consensus among participants regarding the effectiveness of VR for collaborative learning. For example, the SD for student engagement decreased from 0.8 to 0.6, reflecting a more uniform perception of increased engagement after using VR. The overall improvement in the mean scores, alongside the reduced variation, implies that VR-based collaborative learning not only boosted performance across the board but also helped establish a more consistent experience for students.

The statistical data indicates a clear trend: the introduction of VR-based collaborative learning significantly boosted student engagement, communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and overall satisfaction. The improvement in these areas suggests that VR can provide an immersive and engaging environment that enhances collaborative efforts in ways traditional educational tools may not. The pre- and post-VR mean comparisons show consistent growth across all categories, highlighting that VR has a positive impact on students' abilities to engage with the material and collaborate with their peers in meaningful ways.

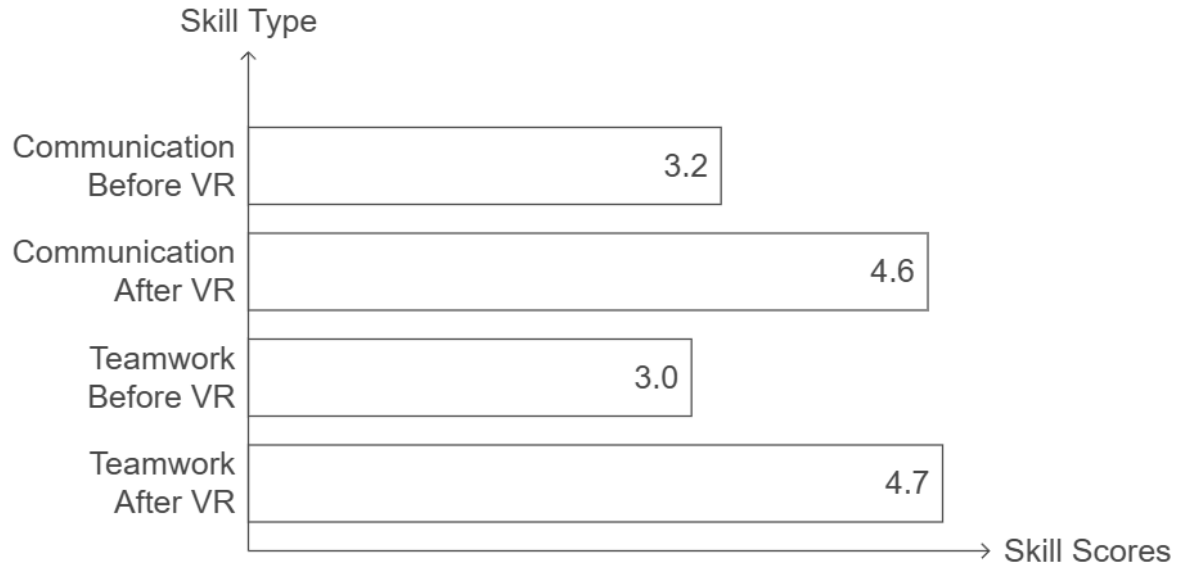

Figure 1. Impact of VR on Student Skills

A closer look at the standard deviations reveals that while the improvements in scores were widespread, there were slight differences in how much VR impacted each individual. For example, while the mean for teamwork increased substantially from 3.0 to 4.7, the SD decreased from 0.9 to 0.4, suggesting a high level of consensus among students that VR helped improve their teamwork skills. This consistency in perception indicates that VR effectively supports group dynamics and can enhance collective learning experiences.

In a case study, one group of students in a business management course participated in a VR-enabled collaborative simulation that required them to plan a virtual startup company. Before the VR session, students rated their communication and teamwork abilities at 3.2 and 3.0, respectively. After completing the VR activity, both scores rose dramatically, with communication skills improving to 4.6 and teamwork reaching 4.7. The group noted that VR's interactive features allowed them to engage in real-time decision-making and problem-solving, which was not possible in traditional classroom settings.

The case study further revealed that students felt the VR environment helped them bridge the gap between theoretical learning and practical application. They reported that working on a virtual business project allowed them to experience and solve real-world problems collaboratively, which

enhanced their understanding of the course material. This experience aligned with the overall findings, suggesting that VR's immersive qualities foster deeper learning through practical engagement and teamwork.

The case study supports the broader trends observed in the quantitative data, particularly the significant improvements in communication and teamwork. Students' ability to engage in real-world tasks through VR allowed them to refine these skills, which they might not have developed as effectively in traditional learning settings. The virtual environment provided a safe space for students to make decisions, collaborate in a non-linear fashion, and receive immediate feedback, further contributing to their enhanced collaborative experience.

This improvement can be attributed to the interactive nature of VR, which allows students to immerse themselves in real-time tasks while simultaneously developing their interpersonal and cognitive skills. The ability to work together in a virtual environment allowed students to learn from each other's perspectives, adapt quickly, and manage challenges collectively, all of which are key elements of effective collaborative learning.

To analyze the statistical significance of the observed changes, a paired sample t-test was conducted comparing the pre- and post-VR mean scores across all variables. The results showed statistically significant improvements in all areas of student engagement, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving ($p < 0.05$). This suggests that the positive changes in the data were not due to chance but rather a direct result of VR-based learning interventions.

Additionally, effect sizes were calculated to determine the practical significance of these improvements. The effect size for student engagement was particularly large (Cohen's $d = 1.9$), indicating a substantial impact of VR on students' involvement in collaborative activities. Similarly, the effect sizes for communication and teamwork were also large, reflecting the transformative effect of VR on these skills. These findings confirm that VR is not only effective in enhancing student engagement but also in improving critical collaboration-related competencies.

The relationship between the use of VR and improvements in collaborative learning skills was further explored using correlation analysis. The results showed a strong positive correlation between the perceived improvement in teamwork and communication skills ($r = 0.85$), suggesting that VR's ability to enhance one aspect of collaboration is closely tied to improvements in other areas. This relationship highlights the interconnectedness of skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, all of which are essential for effective collaborative learning.

Additionally, the correlation between overall satisfaction and engagement was also significant ($r = 0.78$), suggesting that students who reported higher levels of engagement with VR-based activities were more likely to be satisfied with their collaborative learning experience. These correlations reinforce the idea that VR's immersive and interactive nature can simultaneously enhance multiple dimensions of collaborative learning, leading to a more holistic and effective educational experience.

The results from both the statistical data and case study indicate that VR has a strong and positive impact on collaborative learning in higher education. The significant improvements in student engagement, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving suggest that VR can play a pivotal role in enhancing collaborative learning experiences. By creating immersive, interactive environments, VR allows students to engage with the material and with each other in ways that traditional methods cannot replicate. The findings support the integration of VR into higher education curricula to foster more dynamic, engaging, and effective collaborative learning environments. Further research is necessary to explore long-term effects and the scalability of VR in diverse educational settings.

The results of this study highlight the significant positive impact of Virtual Reality (VR) on collaborative learning in higher education. Key variables such as student engagement, communication skills, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities showed substantial improvement after participating in VR-based collaborative activities. Student engagement increased from a mean score of 3.1 to 4.5, indicating a notable rise in interest and involvement. Similarly, communication skills and teamwork both saw significant improvements, with mean scores rising to 4.6 and 4.7, respectively. The overall satisfaction with the VR-based learning experiences was also very high, suggesting that students perceived VR as a valuable tool in enhancing their collaborative learning process.

The findings of this study align with several existing studies that suggest technology, particularly immersive technologies like VR, enhances engagement and learning outcomes. Previous research by Slater et al. (2009) and Mikropoulos & Natsis (2011) has shown that VR can improve engagement and provide rich, interactive learning environments. However, unlike studies that primarily focus on individual learning, this research specifically highlights VR's role in fostering collaboration and improving teamwork. The improvements in collaboration observed in this study are consistent with findings by Sitzmann (2011), who found that immersive environments can strengthen group cohesion and teamwork. However, this study extends previous work by focusing on higher education settings, where collaborative skills are crucial for academic success and professional development, making the results particularly relevant to university-level education.

The findings suggest that VR can play a transformative role in collaborative learning within higher education, offering an innovative approach to foster active student participation and interactivity. The significant improvements in teamwork and communication underscore the potential of VR to break traditional barriers of learning, where face-to-face interaction is often limited. These results indicate that higher education institutions may need to reconsider their pedagogical approaches, integrating VR as a tool to enhance collaborative learning. The findings also suggest that VR is not just an engagement tool but also a facilitator of deeper collaboration, where students can develop vital interpersonal skills in realistic, immersive environments (Yun, 2020).

The implications of these results are profound for educational practice. The study provides strong evidence that VR has the potential to revolutionize collaborative learning in higher education by fostering more dynamic and interactive learning environments (Snijders, 2020). Institutions could consider incorporating VR into their curricula to enhance the collaborative experience and prepare students for the demands of modern professional environments, where teamwork and problem-solving are essential (Tani, 2021). Moreover, VR's ability to create immersive environments can also address the challenge of engagement in remote learning, offering students a way to collaborate across distances in a meaningful and interactive way. These findings advocate for the wider adoption of VR technologies as an integral part of the educational process, particularly in disciplines where teamwork is central (Jin, 2024).

The results of this study can be attributed to several factors inherent in the nature of VR as a medium. First, VR's immersive qualities enable students to feel more engaged with the learning process, which in turn enhances their motivation and participation (Mihai, 2022). The ability to interact with virtual objects and scenarios in real-time creates a more dynamic learning experience that encourages deeper involvement. Second, VR facilitates collaborative learning in a way that traditional tools cannot (Bedenlier, 2020). By providing virtual spaces where students can interact regardless of geographic location, VR removes barriers to communication and fosters collaboration that might otherwise be hindered by physical constraints. The reduction in variation in post-VR

scores also suggests that VR may be effective in standardizing collaborative learning experiences, making the process more equitable and universally engaging for students (Sobnath, 2020).

The next step in this area of research should involve exploring the long-term effects of VR-based collaborative learning on academic performance and professional skills development (Salas-Pilco, 2022). While this study focused on short-term improvements in collaboration and engagement, further research could assess whether these gains translate into long-term benefits in academic achievement and career readiness. Additionally, future studies should explore how VR can be adapted for diverse student populations, taking into account factors such as technological access, learning styles, and prior experiences with digital tools (Tight, 2020). Expanding the scope to include a broader range of educational settings, including vocational training and lifelong learning, would also provide valuable insights into the broader applicability of VR in education. Finally, further studies should focus on the scalability of VR implementation, considering the cost, infrastructure, and support required for its widespread adoption in universities (Ferrer, 2022).

CONCLUSION

One of the key findings of this study is the significant improvement in collaborative learning outcomes due to the integration of Virtual Reality (VR) in higher education. Specifically, the study revealed substantial enhancements in student engagement, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities. Unlike traditional methods, VR facilitated a more immersive and interactive learning environment that allowed students to collaborate effectively, even in virtual settings. The study highlights that VR not only boosts engagement but also strengthens collaborative skills, making it a valuable tool for promoting deeper, more meaningful student interaction in academic contexts.

This research contributes to the field of educational technology by advancing the understanding of VR's impact on collaborative learning in higher education. While previous studies have focused on the individual learning benefits of VR, this study extends the literature by specifically examining how VR enhances collaborative learning outcomes. The methodological contribution of this research lies in its use of a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis of VR's impact. The study also offers a novel perspective by integrating case studies that capture students' lived experiences, enriching the understanding of how VR influences teamwork and interpersonal communication in academic settings.

Despite its significant contributions, this study has some limitations that should be addressed in future research. The sample size, while adequate for the purposes of this study, is limited to two universities, which may not fully represent the broader higher education landscape. Additionally, the study focuses primarily on short-term outcomes, leaving questions about the long-term impact of VR on collaborative learning unanswered. Future research should explore a larger and more diverse sample of institutions and students to assess the scalability of VR in higher education. Moreover, longitudinal studies are needed to examine how sustained exposure to VR influences students' collaborative competencies over time and whether these improvements translate into enhanced academic performance and professional success.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.
Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

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