Learning Through Virtual Reality in International Tourism Management: Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract

The education sector has evolved over time, and digital technology has transformed the way students learn in the classroom in the last few decades. Virtual reality (VR) technologies are now being integrated into learning in different fields. Virtual Reality (VR) "involves total immersion in the digital world" (Guttentag, 2010, cited in Navarro-Meneses, 2023, p. 224). VR is changing the way educational content is delivered. In the digital age, students have the opportunity to use technology to improve their learning. Learning strategies have evolved over the past few years in higher education. New technologies like virtual reality and augmented reality (AR) have come along with this shift in learning methodologies. These technologies used together in teaching have facilitated a deeper level of immersion, which improved teaching and learning (Bermejo et al., 2023). Fundamentally, 21st-century education focuses on providing students with the skills and digital integration needed to develop learning, literacy, and life skills. Learning through VR is experiential and hands-on. Bermejo et al. (2023) found that using AR/VR enhances learning immersion, particularly in the fields of science, health, and hospitality. However, there are drawbacks to employing these technologies as well, like mental and visual tiredness (ibid.). VR can help students gain interest and motivation while still effectively facilitating the transfer of knowledge because the learning process can be set within an experiential context. However, the potential of virtual reality in education has yet to be fully realised. Education faces challenges in incorporating virtual reality technology into its curriculum and delivery. VR has the potential to improve learning and make digital models easier to access (Pajaziti et al., 2021). It is also important to note that, while the benefits are enormous, the disempowering consequences of VR should not be overlooked. As a result, this paper investigates the benefits and drawbacks of using VR in the higher education classroom. The study adopts the quantitative research approach. It utilised structured questionnaire to collect data among Level 4 International Tourism Management students of Liverpool John Moores University in the 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 academic year. A total of 24 questionnaire was obtained from the 2022/2023 cohort and a total of 18 was obtained from the 2023/2024 cohort. The questionnaire explored the integration of VR into the Level 4 curriculum, the perceptions of students on the efficacy of the use of VR for learning, and the challenges confronted in its implementation. It is expected that the outcome of the research will benefit practices in the use of VR for teaching and learning activities.

Keywords: Learning, Tourism, Management, Virtual Learning