

ДОПОВІДІ ПЛЕНАРНОГО ЗАСІДАННЯ

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SOCIAL VIRTUAL REALITY AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN ENGLISH TEACHER TRAINING

This paper explores how Social Virtual Reality (SVR) can enhance Global Citizenship Education (GCE) in the training of English teachers and in teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). In an increasingly interconnected world, the study examines how SVR can promote intercultural awareness, empathy and global skills among future English teachers. The research forms part of the *CoTeach – Connected Teacher Education* project, which bridges foreign language education and human-computer interaction to develop innovative and sustainable teacher training models.

The conceptual framework builds on the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4, which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all. The UN Agenda 2030 emphasizes that, by 2030, all learners should acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote a culture of peace, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity [5]. In teaching English in Germany, intercultural and transcultural learning have evolved toward a broader focus on global citizenship and anti-racist language education. Intercultural learning rests on Byram's triad of knowledge, skills, and attitudes [2], while transcultural learning highlights culture's fluidity. GCE extends these concepts by integrating cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioral domains [4], encouraging learners to apply their competences in real-world contexts and act as responsible global citizens.

Immersive technologies such as VR offer new opportunities to foster these competencies. The presented research employs fully immersive VR headsets and the social VR platform *ViLeArn*, developed at the University of Würzburg. In this environment, participants interact as avatars, communicate verbally, move within the virtual space and manipulate virtual objects. Tasks focus on communication, collaboration and problem-solving in multicultural settings. This controlled yet authentic environment allows learners to explore diverse perspectives and identities without fear of social repercussions.

A key principle of the project is that learning experiences in VR must be transferable to real-life contexts to meet sustainability criteria. SVR environments support authentic encounters that promote openness, empathy and reflection, which are essential competences of global citizenship. Learners engage in perspective-taking, critical thinking and ethical reasoning, fostering intercultural sensitivity and awareness of social justice. The study identifies three pedagogical dimensions through which SVR supports GCE: virtual objects, avatars and simulations.

Virtual objects enable learners to discuss local and global issues through tangible representations of cultural meaning. By analyzing or co-creating virtual exhibits, students uncover biases and explore multiple perspectives. Avatars allow learners to assume different identities, promoting empathy and reducing prejudice – particularly relevant in anti-racist education, where learners experience marginalized viewpoints and reflect on privilege. Simulations create realistic, interactive scenarios in which learners apply cognitive and socio-emotional skills to authentic tasks, strengthening engagement, presence and transfer to real-world contexts.

A three-phase seminar framework integrated these ideas into English teacher training. After a theoretical introduction to intercultural and global citizenship education, students explored modular learning units with readings from Byram [2], Eisenmann [3] and Braselmann [1]. In the final phase, they designed SVR-based lesson concepts to foster GCE. Examples include *Changing Bodies*, *Changing Minds*, which used avatar modification to reflect on stereotypes, and *Gallery Walk of Identities*, which employed virtual exhibits to promote collaboration and cognitive learning.

Overall, the project demonstrates how SVR can expand the possibilities of global citizenship education in EFL contexts. By merging immersive technology with critical pedagogy, English teacher education can provide innovative strategies for addressing global issues, diversity, and sustainability. The findings highlight that combining VR-based immersion, reflection, and collaboration aligns closely with the goals of GCE – preparing teachers and learners to engage ethically and responsibly in a globalized, digital society.

References

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