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Review of Contextual Language Learning: Real Language Learning on the Continuum from Virtuality to Reality



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The COVID-19 pandemic challenged virtually all aspects of our lives including education and more specifically language learning. While online classes had demotivated the learners and made them feel unvalued (Ryan, 2021), some novel approaches like augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) helped education departments face this challenge. These technological advancements, according to Tseng and Geng (2021), could positively affect learners' motivation. A central question, however, is, to what extent do they help education departments? To answer this issue, *Contextual Language Learning: Real Language Learning on the Continuum from Virtuality to Reality* sheds light on this area. Editors Yu-Ju Lan and Scott Grant are outstanding scholars who already have a proven track record in this area, and their book.

The nine chapters of the book highlight the importance of authentic contextualized learning and describe a range of research on VR and AR as well as the pedagogical approaches facilitated by these technologies. Beginning with the definition and features of VR and its supporting theories, Chapter 1 gives the readers an overview of VR technology, and discusses its integration into foreign language learning both theoretically and empirically. In Chapter 2, the effect of implementing VR technology on writing skills of Chinese high school students is explored. Chapter 3 presents the process of designing a VR-based language learning model through distributed language perspective across learning Chinese. In Chapter 4, various immersion levels such as 360° Video, Mixed Reality, etc. are introduced and their implementation in learning a language across different language skills and subskills is discussed. Reading this chapter enables material developers and teachers to apply the most appropriate technological tools based on learning objectives. It also introduces a new line of research to researchers, which is a strength of the book.

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Besides the viewpoints of teachers and practitioners, the book also involves content from learners' perspectives, which is another strength of the book that can be seen in the next chapter. Chapter 5 is a mixed-methods study on American students across a proficiency range of elementary to intermediate who are learning Chinese as a foreign language. It explores the participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of VR-based learning as well as their motivation and engagement, and therefore gives the readers a complete overview. Searching for the learners' viewpoints in Chapter 5 is followed by investigating their beliefs about the effect of integrating these new technologies on their outside-class autonomous activities while learning Chinese in Chapter 6. Another strength of the book lies in meeting the needs of a wide range of stakeholders, including teachers, learners, researchers, and policymakers.

As mentioned earlier, the book covered VR and AR technologies, not only theoretically but also practically. This is another strength of this book that can be clearly seen in Chapter 7; the chapter explores the practicality of implementing these new technologies in the Chinese educational system through some case studies across various ages and learning objectives to find out the challenges that teachers may experience. The observations and discussions that are presented in this chapter help educators, teachers, and policymakers consider the benefits and challenges of implementing these technologies in developing learning materials. Furthermore, this chapter provides researchers with some gaps to carry out further research in this area.

Following on from the previous chapters, a systematic review in Chapter 8 explores some studies in the area of AR and summarizes the theories in this regard. This chapter also presents various AR-supported activities, which in turn sheds light on the various aspects of this technology that can be beneficial for practitioners and curriculum designers. Furthermore, this chapter provides the teachers with some ideas to design AR-based lessons. Finally, the last chapter (Chapter 9) investigates the implementation of VR technology in the speaking skills of a German learner who had already studied 11 languages, and explores the effectiveness of using this technology in their ongoing language learning.

Each chapter of the book begins with giving the readers an overview and ends with a conclusion of the main content of the chapter with the main theme of integrating VR/AR in education. The sixth strength point of the book is of particular relevance for researchers and practitioners, where the editors present experimental studies and explore the challenges, solutions, and gaps that are necessary for further research, giving the book greater value in terms of practicality.

Although some books have investigated AR/VR technology in different fields of education, such as *New Perspectives on Virtual and Augmented Reality: Finding New Ways to Teach in a Transformed Learning Environment* edited by Daniela, the only book on the integration of VR/AR in language learning is *Virtual and Augmented Reality in English Language Arts Education* edited by Moran and Rice, which mostly presents the teachers' perspectives on using AR/VR technologies in their classes.

The last but not the least strength of the current book that distinguishes it from other publications is that it includes studies conducted with a wide range of participants in age and language proficiency which increases its generalizability. The text is easily readable and the main themes and definitions presented in Chapter 1 make it accessible not only to educators, but also for almost anyone who is interested in learning more about VR/AR technologies. Furthermore, it is particularly important that all the research presented in the book was carried out in authentic contexts rather than in controlled situations that accordingly result in having more reliable findings.

As mentioned previously, most of the studies in the book focus on Chinese contexts and examine the implementation of VR/AR technology in the CFL (Chinese as a foreign language) contexts, so future editions of the book may need a revision to include more studies on these technologies in the teach-

ing and learning of other languages in varied contexts. Furthermore, the books focuses mostly on the impact of integrating VR/AR for the development of writing skills, and it might have been nice to see some studies looking at other language skills as well. Despite these recommendations, the current book is a precious reference for the readers, and I would highly recommend it to anyone who would like to further their understanding of the theory and practice of using VR/AR in language teaching and learning.

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