

Using Virtual Reality (VR) to Teach Social Studies Curriculum: A Case Study in Teacher Education

James Oigara

The State University of New York College at Geneseo (SUNY Geneseo), United States

Abstract:

The continuous advancement of educational technology provides higher education institutions with new opportunities to enhance student learning experiences. Among these innovations, immersive virtual reality (VR) has generated considerable interest due to its potential to create engaging, experiential, and inquiry-driven learning environments. As VR technologies continue to evolve, they offer new possibilities for transforming teaching and learning across disciplines.

This qualitative case study examines how pre-service teachers integrate immersive virtual reality technologies into social studies instruction. Seventy-five pre-service teachers participated in a semester-long instructional program focused on experiential and inquiry-based learning.

Throughout the instructional program, participants explored social studies content through immersive VR environments, designed VR-integrated lesson plans, and reflected on their pedagogical experiences through structured written narratives.

Thematic analysis of participants' reflection papers revealed that immersive VR enhanced experiential learning, increased student engagement, and supported deeper connections to social studies content. Participants also reported that VR facilitated instructional creativity and interdisciplinary lesson design. However, findings identified challenges related to technological limitations, accessibility, classroom implementation, and instructional feasibility.

This study contributes to the growing body of research on immersive learning technologies by demonstrating how VR can support pedagogical reasoning, instructional planning, and content engagement in social studies education. Implications for teacher preparation programs and the effective integration of immersive technologies into K–12 curricula are discussed.