Virtual Reality:

Por Jermaine S. McDougald, director ELT Business Development.

It has always been a challenge to learn a second or foreign language, especially when attempting to create an environment conducive and realistic to promote the teaching and learning of English. Nevertheless, EdTech or Educational Technology, which is a subset of all existing technologies, has afforded educators with resources and technological tools to help ensure learning objectives are met! Virtual Reality (VR) is EdTech that gives learners opportunities to experience and experiment in real, augmented environments right from the classrooms, without ever having to venture out.

EdTech plays a significant role in the classroom for other teachers and students. For starters, it allows teachers to support hybrid learning scenarios, bringing learners together regardless of their geographical location, thereby catering to inclusion. The software that can be used, gives learners access to content, increased flexibility in learning, and numerous tools that make the learning process more efficient, increasing autonomy, and giving learners responsibility over their learning process (Benson, 2011, 2013) As far as teachers, EdTech also provides a sense of organization, especially when multi-tasking is at play. An array of digital teaching resources, access to digital platforms as well as sharing content across multiple platforms for hybrid and face-to-face encounters. Everything from video conferencing apps to online classrooms or gaming platforms and interactive assessment measures to individualized learning or whole class experiences.

As a reminder, EdTech for foreign language teaching can be categorized based on the diverse goals they set out to achieve in educational settings as seen in the examples below:

Category

- *A teacher that presents information*
- *Support for student exploration*
- *A creativity and production tool*
- *A communication tool*

Description

- *Drill and practice software, instructional videos*
- *E-Encyclopedias, simulations, and hyper-media-based data presentations that students can control*
- *Word process, video recording*
- *Email, electronic discussion forums, Social Networking Sites, Smart Phones*

There are other ways in which technologies could be described, or even categorized, but the main takeaway here is that technologies change, along with their use and how they are characterized. Not to mention that technology in itself cannot accomplish anything alone, which is why it is essential to what people can do with it and what it (EdTech) does for people. It comes as no surprise that learners are continuously engaged when EdTech is incorporated into the learning process, increasing their motivation, excitement, and overall achievement, which in turn motivates classroom practitioners to use and incorporate EdTech in their teaching practice.

The impact of immersive technologies in the classroom

According to Strivr (2022), Immersive learning is considered an experiential training methodology that uses Virtual Reality (VR) to simulate real-world scenarios and train employees in a safe and engaging immersive training environment. Decades of neuroscience research (Kavanagh et al., 2017; Yeh & Tseng, 2020), have been conducted where results have indicated that the brain treats VR experiences just like it would treat real life. Therefore, if VR this were applied to a classroom setting, we could say that learners have an opportunity to explore and use the foreign or second language in real-life scenarios, which in turn is a realistic indicator of how they would perform in a real environment.

VR alone builds confidence, strengthens language use, lowers affective filters, and gets learners one step closer to accomplishing their goals. Now, let´s take that same learner, but only now, he/she is studying medicine and needs to practice interacting with patients to get their medical history to complete a diagnosis. VR allows medical students to put into practice medical training all the while communicating in a foreign language and practicing as much as needed until the medical student is comfortable, thereby increasing performance in the real world once that time arrives. These are only two examples of how VR and Augmented reality can be effective in the classroom and in-field performance.

VR gives learners new ways to learn

Virtual Reality has demonstrated that learners are engaged by using this device (VR Headsets) or technology to help them see learning from a distinct perspective. Some of the learners that have engaged and interacted with the VR provided testimonies as to how they were able to acquire and learn new knowledge, all the while getting away from the traditional teacher-led seminars and classes:

- A. "It was a very enriching activity, firstly, because the software contained very interesting content about my profession and the topics we are studying in class. Regarding the VR headset, I think that it is a good tool to learn, it´s a different tool." (Medical Student).

Read more ▶