Enhancing Geographical Learning Through GeoVR: Immersive Exploration and Topographic Analysis Educational Application

Sam Sabah [1], Alexander Tillmann [2], David Weiß [2] und Hendrik Drachsler [3]

Abstract: GeoVR, a Virtual Reality immersive educational application, facilitates pedagogical approaches in geographical education, enabling students and educators to explore and analyze landscape features. This research examines the benefits of this educational environment, enabling students to seamlessly transition between macro and micro perspectives of terrain, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of surface structures. GeoVR aims to improve learning experiences, while simultaneously enhancing the user's understanding of topographical features and spatial relationships through scalable observation and interactive analysis tools. The application notably extends the scope of actions available to learners and educators in fields such as geography, geology, environmental studies, urban planning, and education. The precision of the representation, the interactive capabilities, the infinitely adjustable scales and the contribution to a realistic and immersive learning environment for geoinformation and processes can lead to a better understanding of the systems under investigation. Despite potential challenges, GeoVR seeks to bridge the gap between virtual and physical environments, changing how people learn and explore landscapes digitally.

Keywords: Virtual Reality, Geography, Geomorphologie, Field trip, Educational Applications

1 Motivation and Background

The implementation of GeoVR (a Virtual Reality immersive educational application) involves a comprehensive approach to integrating advanced technologies, pedagogical principles, and interactive functionalities. This section outlines the key components and strategies employed in the development and deployment of GeoVR. The use of VR technology in educational settings, particularly in the exploration and analysis of landscape features and processes, has been shown to enhance teaching and learning experiences. VR is able to create immersive and interactive environments, allowing students to explore and analyze landscapes that may not be locally accessible [Su21]. The Technology can potentially open up interesting geographical and geographical sites to students, academics and others who may not have had the opportunity to visit such sites previously. Recent

1 Goethe University of Frankfurt, studiumdigitale and Faculty of Computer Sciencee, Robert-Mayer-Str. 11-15 , 60325 Frankfurt am Main, Germany, sabah@sd.uni-frankfurt.de, https://orcid.org/0009-0009-5111-3068
2 Goethe University of Frankfurt, studiumdigitale, Eschersheimer Landstraße 155-157 , 60323 Frankfurt am Main, Germany, tillmann@sd.uni-frankfurt.de, https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7230-7042; weiss@sd.uni-frankfurt.de, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7689-7833
3 Goethe University of Frankfurt, studiumdigitale and Faculty of Computer Sciencee and, DIPF | Leibniz Institute for Research and Information in Education , Rostocker Str. 6, 60323 Frankfurt am Main , h.drachsler@dipf.de, https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8407-5314

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studies suggest that VR can serve as a potential alternative to traditional textbook-style learning, resulting in comparable performance levels and increased mood and engagement among learners[AM18].

This research aims to explicate the functionality and potential of GeoVR in augmenting spatial cognition and geographical comprehension, highlighting the importance of its educational applications. GeoVR combines immersive environments, precise 3D terrain models, and compatibility with various spatial data sources to create interactive learning experiences. The application significantly extends the scope of actions available to learners and educators in fields such as geography, geology, environmental studies, urban planning, and education.

Virtual Reality technologies have the capability to present abstract information in a concrete manner, thereby enhancing education through the integration of visual and auditory modalities, making VR-based experiments more immersive and engaging compared to traditional systems, furthermore educators need to worry less about ever complex and realistic models, and invest more into positive prior experiences of using technology [Sa02; Wr23].

Through scalable observation and interactive analysis tools, GeoVR encourages active involvement in topographic analysis and deepens comprehension. This research will discuss the methodology and principles of GeoVR and provide examples of its practical applications in different disciplines. We will also address advantages, challenges, and potential future directions for this innovative Virtual Reality application in geographical education and beyond.

2 Implementation

The implementation of GeoVR, as an immersive educational application, involves a comprehensive approach towards integrating advanced technologies, pedagogical principles, and interactive functionalities. This section outlines the key components and strategies employed in the development and deployment of GeoVR.

2.1 Development Framework and Technologies

GeoVR is built using the Unity game engine, leveraging its capabilities in rendering immersive 3D environments and supporting various VR hardware platforms. The use of Unity enables seamless integration of diverse visualization techniques, interactive elements, and analytical tools, ensuring a rich and engaging user experience. The application relies on real-world geolocation height maps to generate accurate 3D terrain models, enhancing spatial cognition and geographical comprehension. By incorporating high-resolution spatial data sources, GeoVR achieves precision in representing landscape structures and topographic features, contributing to a realistic and immersive learning environment.

2.2 User Interface and Interaction Design

The user interface of GeoVR is designed to be intuitive and user-friendly, catering to both novice users and experienced professionals in geospatial sciences. The application offers two distinct view modes – micro view and macro view (sandbox/open world) –, accommodating different learning preferences and objectives. Additionally, GeoVR provides multiple user movement methods, including short-distance teleportation and efficient navigation within the virtual environment, enhancing exploration and comparison of terrain features.

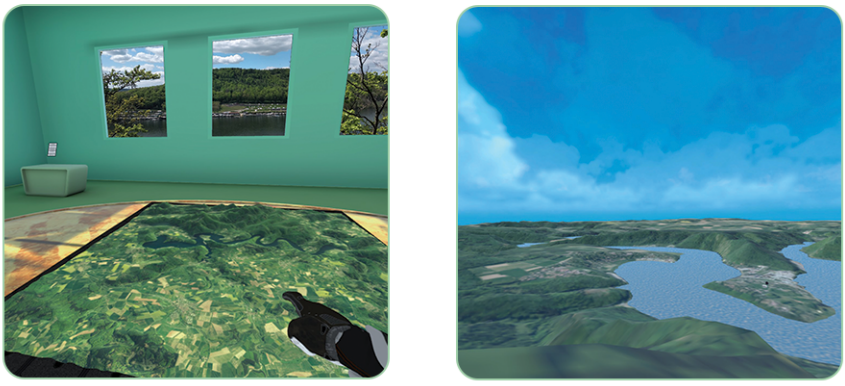

Abb. 1: micro and macro view of GeoVR

Interactive tools such as height indicators, compasses for orientation, and elevation tools empower users to conduct varied analytical tasks seamlessly using VR headset controllers. These tools facilitate activities such as identifying elevations, comparing heights, and monitoring changes in terrain over time, enriching the learning experience and promoting active engagement with geospatial data.

2.3 Scalability and Collaboration

GeoVR is designed to be scalable and adaptable to various learning scenarios and environments. The application accommodates multi-user collaboration, allowing students and professionals to interact and collaborate in real-time within the virtual landscape. This feature promotes collaborative learning experiences and facilitates knowledge sharing among users, enhancing the effectiveness and practicality of geospatial education.

3 Conclusions and Future Work

The future development of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) should prioritize the creation of educational experiences tailored to various levels of education [Gi24].

GeoVR demonstrates a novel approach in immersive educational technology, offering an engaging solution for geospatial learning through Virtual Reality. The development and implementation of GeoVR showcase its potential in enhancing spatial cognition, geographical comprehension, and observational skills among students and professionals in geography, geology, environmental studies, and urban planning. Through the integration of advanced technologies, pedagogical principles, and interactive functionalities, GeoVR provides a comprehensive platform for immersive exploration and topographic analysis. The application's user-friendly interface, diverse visualization techniques, and interactive tools contribute to a rich and engaging learning experience, bridging the gap between virtual and physical field trips. Regarding future work, GeoVR could explore further refinements and expansions of its functionalities, such as incorporating advanced analytical tools, enhancing realism in terrain representation, and integrating adaptive learning algorithms. Additionally, research efforts may consider evaluating GeoVR in diverse educational settings and populations, investigating its impact on learning outcomes, engagement, and retention over time.

GeoVR presents an intriguing new direction for geospatial education, providing students and professionals with an immersive and interactive platform to explore, analyze, and understand the complexities of our dynamic landscapes. As Virtual Reality technology continues to evolve, GeoVR aims to contribute to innovative pedagogical approaches, shaping the future of geographical learning and exploration.

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