ASSESSING THE ROLE OF AUGMENTED REALITY (AR) IN ENHANCING CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING AMONG EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNERS IN OYO METROPOLIS

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Abstract
This study assesses the impact of Augmented Reality (AR) on the conceptual knowledge of early childhood pupils in Oyo Metropolis, Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey research design, 400 pupils from 10 public schools were randomly selected. The study assessed conceptual knowledge using a validated questionnaire (r = 0.75), *and were analyzed using one-way ANOVA. Results indicated a significant association between AR use and conceptual understanding (F = 5.42, p = 0.003), with frequent AR users demonstrating higher understanding of abstract concepts (F = 4.12, p = 0.002). Challenges encountered were the scarcity of available AR tools and frequency of use. The study concludes that AR significantly improves learning outcomes by making abstract concepts tangible and engaging. Based on these findings, the researcher recommends that teachers integrate AR software into their teaching practice and that stakeholders provide adequate training and resources to support this technological shift.*

Keywords: Augmented Reality, Conceptual Understanding, Early Childhood Education Public Schools.

Introduction

Augmented Reality (AR) is a state-of-the-art technology that superimposes digital information—such as images, sounds, or videos—onto the physical world in real time to generate interactive and immersive experiences for users. AR is distinct from Virtual Reality (VR) since VR immerses the user in a completely synthetic environment, whereas AR enhances the real world by putting digital content on top of it (Arena et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2017). As noted by Adekunle and Ogunleye (2023), AR is transforming the manner in which individuals interact with their surroundings through the merging of the physical and virtual worlds to offer new opportunities across various industries such as healthcare, education, entertainment, and retail.

Its foundation is the Reality-Virtuality Continuum developed by Milgram and Kishino, which describes environments from real to virtual: Real Environment (RE), Augmented Reality (AR), Augmented Virtuality (AV), and Virtual Reality (VR) (Milgram & Kishino, 1994 as cited in Arena et al., 2022). AR is in the middle, where physical and digital objects can be manipulated at the same time using smartphones, tablets, or AR glasses. Its technological advancement—from Sutherland's (1968) head-mounted display to today's AR apps—has enabled it to shift from experiments in laboratories to real-world solutions (Kim et al., 2017).

There are two types of AR technologies: those that use markers and those that don't. Marker-based AR uses visual markers like QR codes, while markerless AR uses GPS and sensors to add digital information to real-world places (Arena et al., 2022). The games Pokémon Go and Mario Kart Home Circuit show how AR may add elements of the game to the real world. Google Glass and Microsoft HoloLens are two examples of technologies that let you use data without using your hands, get instructions from afar, and get directions at work. AR also comprises software platforms like Metaio, Vuforia, and ARToolKit that let you use interactive apps (Kim et al., 2017).

Learning institutions have AR supporting interactive, visual, and experiential learning. It makes abstract concepts like molecular forms or historical events visible through 3D modeling (Jo & Kim, 2019). Oyelere and Agboola (2022) confirm that AR apps utilized by Nigerian institutions of higher learning have increased conceptual understanding and memory retention in pupils. AR also creates interactive environments for toddlers to interact with virtual objects, hence rendering abstract concepts tangible (Mansour et al., 2025). As pointed out by Okeke and Nwankwo (2022), AR is also inclusive of various learning styles and therefore can be a handy teaching aid in Nigerian classrooms.

Conceptual knowledge is the ability to comprehend relations and principles and not just recite them parrot fashion. Adelabu and Ogunyemi (2019) have explained that such an understanding is required during early childhood when mental development is optimized. Techniques such as interactive learning (Akindele & Ojo, 2020), experiential learning (Oluwagbohunmi & Adeyemi, 2021), and multisensory interaction help make abstractions explicit to children. Visual and haptic representations, i.e., AR-based models, provide instant feedback, active engagement being triggered (Adepoju & Oladimeji, 2025).

AR aligns with constructivist and embodied approaches to learning, which demand hands-on operations and bodily engagement (Georgiou & Ioannou, 2019; Johnson-Glenberg et al., 2014). Galactic Explorer and other educational technologies let Pupils interact with scientific models, which shows that they can work together, think critically, and remember things (Mansour et al., 2025). AR-supported lessons help the teacher by providing visual scaffolding and encouraging student-centered learning (Kosmas et al., 2019). Pupils have also reported higher comprehension and engagement when using AR, based on Yildirim and Seckin-Kapucu (2021).

Barring education, AR is developing in Nigerian healthcare, entertainment, and retail. In healthcare, AR technologies help in diagnosis and training, especially for remote communities (Okeke & Nwachukwu, 2024). In leisure, Nigerian film makers and advertisers have used AR to make it more immersive (Adegoke & Olawale, 2021). AR is also used in retail for virtual product trials and customer navigation,

enhancing satisfaction and loyalty (Adewumi, Ojo & Alabi, 2020). AR has a significant potential in Nigeria, however, challenges remain. These factors encompass expenses, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient awareness, and a deficit of information (Mekni & Lemieux, 2014; Babalola & Okoro, 2025). AR gadgets cost a lot of money, and not many schools have the money or power to make digital integration happen. Moreover, the absence of AR implementation and ethics guidelines hinders mass deployment. Systemic issues call for collective efforts by stakeholders to address them.

Oyo Metropolis is climbing the ranks to be a pacesetter in education reform. Local authorities and institutions are also investing in electronic technologies like interactive whiteboards and tablets, as evidenced by Adepoju and Oladimeji (2025). Rural-urban disparities and unstable electricity supply are still a challenge (Akindele & Ojo, 2020). For AR to be effective, there must be equitable allocation of digital resources, ongoing teacher development, and parent sensitization of enhancing conceptual knowledge for early childhood education Pupils via interactive, multisensory, and immersive learning experiences. Studies have revealed that AR increases involvement, memory recall, and motivation (Kumar, 2016; Birchler & Michaelowa, 2016).

With Nigerian education institutions, particularly Oyo Metropolis, gaining traction in the adoption of digital technologies, AR can potentially be the foundation of learning in the future. Its success will, however, be dependent on being able to overcome infrastructural constraints as well as ensuring inclusive access. This study therefore seeks to assess the contribution of AR in fostering conceptual understanding among early learners in Oyo Metropolis and to provide data to inform policy and practice in the future.

Statement of the Problem

Numerous researches have examined the advantages of augmented reality (AR) in education; however, there is a lack of literature regarding its specific impact on improving conceptual understanding among early childhood learners in Oyo Metropolis. This lack of information means that this gap necessitates further research to optimize the use of AR in early childhood education and enhance learning outcomes."in early childhood education and improve learning results.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to assess the role of Augmented Reality (AR) in enhancing conceptual understanding among early childhood learners in Oyo Metropolis. Specifically, the study aims to:

i. Determine the relationship between AR usage and conceptual understanding among early childhood learners among early childhood learners; and
ii. investigate the influence of the frequency of AR usage on learners' ability to grasp abstract concepts.

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between the use of AR and enhanced conceptual understanding among early childhood learners.

H_{02}: The frequency of AR usage has no significant influence on learners' ability to grasp abstract concepts.

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised all early childhood learners in public schools within Oyo Metropolis, with a random sample of 400 learners selected from 10 schools. A 20-item, 4-point Likert-type scale, the Role of AR in Conceptual Understanding Questionnaire (RARCUQ), was developed by the researchers. Content validity of the questionnaire was ascertained by two experts of early childhood education, and test-retest method was used to ascertain its reliability, and the reliability coefficient was 0.75. The data were analyzed using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) at a significance level of 0.05.

Results

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between the use of AR and enhanced conceptual understanding among early childhood learners.

Table 1: One-Way ANOVA on the relationship between AR usage and conceptual understanding.

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	28743201.50	3	9581067.17	5.42	0.003
Within Groups	74321689.00	396	1876785.30		
Total	103064890.50	399			

The hypothesis one results indicate an F-ratio value of 5.42 and a p-value of 0.003, which is significant at the 0.05 level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, suggesting a significant relationship between AR usage and enhanced conceptual understanding.

H_{02}: The frequency of AR usage has no significant influence on learners' ability to grasp abstract concepts.

Table 2: One-Way ANOVA on the influence of AR usage frequency on conceptual understanding.

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	31208572.30	4	7802143.08	4.12	0.002
Within Groups	71946318.20	395	1821425.77		
Total	103154890.50	399			

$P < 0.002$

Hypothesis two shows that the calculated F-value of 4.12 and p-value of 0.002 are significant at the 0.05 level. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that the frequency of AR usage significantly influences learners' ability to grasp abstract concepts.

Discussion of Findings

The results show that using Augmented Reality (AR) greatly improves early childhood learners' grasp of concepts. This suggests that there is a strong link between using AR and better learning outcomes. This is in line with Kumar's (2016) findings, which said that AR promotes deeper engagement and understanding by giving pupils dynamic and immersive learning experiences. Birchler and Michaelowa (2016) have pointed out that AR's ability to show things visually helps pupils connect abstract ideas with real-life experiences, which makes difficult ideas easier to understand and more meaningful. These observations highlight the revolutionary potential of AR in early childhood education, since it not only facilitates cognitive development but also fosters a more engaging and effective learning environment. The study also shows how often people use AR affects the results. Pupils who frequently used AR tools demonstrated higher conceptual understanding than those with infrequent usage."This conclusion supports the work of Birchler and Michaelowa (2016), which stresses the need for constant use of technology in education to get the most out of it.

The results show that how often pupils use augmented reality (AR) has a big effect on how well they can understand abstract ideas. This means that the null hypothesis is wrong. This result corresponds with Kumar's (2016) assertion that the continual incorporation of technology in education enhances learner engagement and understanding. Birchler and Michaelowa (2016) also said that using new tools like AR often makes learning more relevant by helping pupils integrate what they learn in class with real-world situations. These results emphasise the significance of consistent AR integration in early childhood education to enhance its efficacy on conceptual comprehension.

Conclusion

The results clearly show that AR greatly improves the conceptual comprehension of young children in Oyo Metropolis. Integrating AR technologies into lessons and increasing their use can enhance pupils' comprehension of abstract concepts. These changes will not only help pupils do better in school, but they will also make them more interested in learning and more curious.

Recommendations

1. Teachers should integrate AR tools into their teaching practices to create interactive and engaging learning experiences for early childhood learners.
2. Government and stakeholders should provide adequate resources, including AR-enabled devices and training programs, to support teachers in adopting this technology.
3. Continuous professional development programs should be organized for teachers to equip them with strategies for effectively using AR in early childhood education.

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