It's all about absorption: Learning by teaching in immersive virtual reality

S. Chiquet, C. Martarelli, D. Weibel & F. W. Mast

Objective

- Learning by teaching is an effective way to improve learning outcome [1, 2].
- The physical presence of another person is not mandatory because explaining learned material to fictitious students is effective [3, 4].
- By means of head-mounted displays immersive virtual reality (IVR) enables immersion in computer generated three-dimensional environments.
- We investigate whether learning by teaching in IVR improves learning.
- We compared the educational outcome of teaching an avatar in IVR with a less immersive desktop condition and a control condition (writing a summary).
- IVR has the potential to make its way into education.

Methods

- Sample: 68 participants (mean age: 22.34 ± 3.9 yrs)
- 1st appointment: Baseline, study-phase, intervention (IVR, desktop, control), test (16 MC and open questions), presence questionnaires
- 2nd appointment: Follow-up-test (16 MC and open questions), immersive tendency questionnaire
- Participants were instructed to explain a technical topic; randomly assigned to the conditions IVR, desktop or control.
- Besides the learning outcome, presence and immersive tendency (absorption and emotional involvement) were assessed.
- Bayesian Generalized Linear Mixed Models predicting the probability to answer the test-questions correctly.

Results

- Learning Outcome: There was no overall difference in the learning outcome in the IVR condition compared to the other conditions.
- Absorption: We found at time-point 2 an interaction between condition and absorption. Higher absorption scores increased the probability to correctly answer the test questions in the IVR condition when compared to the control condition ($t = 0.81$, SE = 0.36, L-95% CI = 0.12, U-95% CI = 1.52) (see Figure 2).
- Presence: Participants in the IVR condition reported higher presence compared to the desktop condition ($t = 1.20$, SE = 0.05, L-95% CI = 1.11, U-95% CI = 1.30). Presence did not predict learning outcome.

Summary

- Learning by teaching in IVR improves learning, depending on individuals’ tendency of absorption by media content.
- In contrast, absorption had no influence on learning outcome while teaching on a computer screen or writing a summary.
- Presence was higher in participants who were assigned to the IVR than in participants explaining in front of a computer. However, presence did not influence the learning outcome.
- The results highlight the importance of considering personality traits when applying IVR technologies and making use of their potential benefits.

Acknowledgements: This study was funded by the Swiss Distance University

References: