






# The Impact of Virtual and Augmented Reality on the Development of Motor Skills and Coordination in Children with Special Educational Needs

Martin Kolev<sup>1</sup>, Ivan Trenchev<sup>2</sup> , Metody Traykov<sup>1,3</sup> , Radoslav Mavreski<sup>3</sup> ,  
and Iliyan Ivanov<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> New Bulgarian University, Sofia, Bulgaria

ravenfrost@abv.bg, mtraykov@nbu.bg

<sup>2</sup> University of Library Studies and Information Technologies, Sofia, Bulgaria

<sup>3</sup> South-West University “Neofit Rilski”, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

radoslav\_sm@abv.bg, ivanov@swu.bg

**Abstract.** This study investigates the impact of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) interventions on the development of motor skills and coordination in children with special educational needs (SEN). Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, we employed customized VR/AR activities developed in Unreal Engine and integrated motion tracking technology to create an immersive and engaging environment tailored to the unique needs of the participants.

In this study, we present a methodology for supporting the education of children with SEN using Unreal Engine and NVIDIA VR Funhouse. Our approach focuses on designing immersive and engaging virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) interventions that target the development of motor skills and coordination in this population. By leveraging the advanced capabilities of Unreal Engine and NVIDIA VR Funhouse, we aim to create customized learning experiences tailored to the unique needs and abilities of children with SEN.

It is important to note that the practical implementation of the research, including participant recruitment, data collection, and analysis, will be conducted in a later stage of the study. The current focus is on developing and refining the methodology and the design of the VR/AR intervention. This groundwork will lay the foundation for future research endeavors, with the ultimate goal of enhancing educational outcomes and the overall well-being of children with SEN.

**Keywords:** virtual reality · augmented reality · Special Educational Needs · education

## 1 Introduction

In recent years, virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR) technologies have significantly advanced, offering new possibilities for a variety of applications. One promising area is the enhancement of motor skills and coordination in children with SEN. These children

often face unique challenges in developing motor and coordination abilities, which can impact their daily lives and overall well-being. This article aims to explore the potential benefits and applications of VR/AR technologies in supporting the development of these crucial skills in children with SEN. We will discuss the existing research on this topic, review various VR/AR tools and interventions, and consider potential future directions for the field [1–5].

Children with special educational needs often experience difficulties in acquiring and mastering motor skills and coordination. These challenges can arise from a range of conditions, including autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, and developmental coordination disorder. The development of motor skills and coordination is crucial for these children, as it can significantly impact their ability to perform daily activities, participate in social interactions, and achieve academic success.

Virtual and augmented reality technologies offer immersive and engaging environments that can be tailored to the specific needs and abilities of children with SEN. By simulating real-world scenarios and providing instant feedback, VR/AR can create a safe and controlled space for children to practice and develop their motor skills and coordination. In this section, we will examine how VR/AR can be utilized to support motor skill development, including gamification, adaptive difficulty levels, and personalized interventions [4, 6–12].

Our study will consider various approaches and interventions that have employed VR/AR technologies to improve motor skills and coordination in children with SEN. We will discuss specific tools and methods used. Additionally, we will highlight the challenges and limitations encountered in implementing VR/AR-based interventions, and how researchers and practitioners can address these issues [8, 12–17].

The use of virtual and augmented reality technologies holds great promise in supporting the development of motor skills and coordination for children with special educational needs. By providing immersive, engaging, and personalized experiences [15, 18, 19, 41, 43], VR/AR can give us an innovative and effective means to address the unique challenges faced by these children. Further research and collaboration among researchers, educators, and technology developers will be crucial in maximizing the potential of VR/AR to enhance the lives of children with SEN and their families [19–21].

This research is in the beginning and in this study, we present a technical part of the investigation. The activities mentioned here will be designed in collaboration with special education experts from different universities in Bulgaria to ensure that our approaches were engaging, accessible, and tailored to the unique needs of the participating children.

## 2 Methodology

To systematically investigate the impact of virtual and augmented reality on the development of motor skills and coordination in children with special educational needs, we will use a mixed-methods approach that incorporates both quantitative and qualitative research methods. This comprehensive methodology will allow us to gain a deeper understanding of the effectiveness and potential limitations of VR/AR interventions [22–35].

Qualitative data from interviews and observations will be transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying common themes and patterns related to the children's

experiences with the VR/AR intervention [25, 39]. The study will be conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines, ensuring informed consent from the caregivers and assent from the children. Confidentiality and privacy will be maintained throughout the research process, and all data will be securely stored and anonymized.

The technical methodology, which we use in our research, study revolves around the use of Unreal Engine to develop and implement a VR/AR intervention targeting motor skills and coordination in children with special educational needs. In this section, we will describe the specific technical aspects of the study and the process for examining motor skills using the capabilities of Unreal Engine.

Using Unreal Engine, we created a series of customized VR/AR activities that focus on specific motor skills and coordination abilities relevant to our target population. To achieve this, we shall utilize features such as [12–18, 25, 36]:

- Customizable difficulty levels and game mechanics to accommodate different motor abilities. One of the procedures that simplifies the designing of new levels is the reuse of software development artifacts. One of the approaches is described in [49].
- Sensory accommodations, including adjustable visual and auditory settings, to cater to the sensory needs of the participants.
- User-friendly interfaces and clear instructions to create an accessible and comfortable environment.

To effectively analyze and evaluate the motor skills and coordination of the participants within the VR/AR environment, we integrated motion tracking technology into the intervention. This technology allowed us to capture the participants' movements in real-time, providing us with accurate and detailed data on their performance during the VR/AR activities. We used Unreal Engine's compatibility with various motion tracking systems, such as HTC Vive trackers or Oculus sensors, to achieve this [2, 5, 33, 36, 38, 42–48].

Throughout the intervention, which will take place later in the project, we shall collect a range of data to assess the progress of the participants and the effectiveness of the VR/AR activities. This data will include [12, 25, 48]:

- Motion tracking data: By recording the participants' movements during the VR/AR sessions, we will be able to analyze their motor skills and coordination abilities, as well as identify any areas of improvement or difficulty.
- Performance metrics: We will gather data on the performance of the participants in the VR/AR activities, such as task completion time, error rates, and improvement over time. This is going to allow us to evaluate the impact of the intervention on their motor skills development.

Using Unreal Engine's built-in data analysis tools, we can process and analyze the collected data to gain insights into the participants' progress and the effectiveness of the VR/AR intervention [25, 35, 39, 43].

Following the completion of the VR/AR intervention, we will conduct post-intervention assessments using the same standardized tests employed during the pre-intervention phase (e.g., MABC-2, BOT-2). This would allow us to compare the participants' motor skills and coordination abilities before and after the intervention, providing a comprehensive evaluation of their effectiveness [5, 15, 18, 19, 23].

Our technical methodology for studying motor skills using Unreal Engine involves the development of customized VR/AR activities, integration of motion tracking technology, systematic data collection and analysis, and pre- and post-intervention assessments. This approach shall allow us to effectively examine the impact of the VR/AR intervention on the motor skills and coordination of children with special educational needs, providing valuable insights into the potential benefits and limitations of this technology [34–40].

By employing this mixed-methods approach, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of virtual and augmented reality on the development of motor skills and coordination in children with special educational needs, as well as the potential benefits, challenges, and future directions for VR/AR interventions in this context.

### 3 Result

NVIDIA VR Funhouse is a virtual reality (VR) application that showcases the advanced capabilities of the NVIDIA GameWorks, VRWorks, and PhysX technologies. By leveraging the power of Unreal Engine, a widely-used and versatile game engine, NVIDIA VR Funhouse can be adapted and integrated into our research study to create engaging and immersive VR experiences tailored for children with special educational needs (SEN) [24, 28, 29, 38, 41–48].

To effectively use NVIDIA VR Funhouse for our study, we customized existing mini-games and environments to address the specific motor skills and coordination challenges faced by children with SEN. In order to precise a game scenario, the approach to recovering behavioral UML diagram [50] was used. During reverse engineering activities in order to restore class diagrams structure the approach [51] was used. This involves:

1. Modifying the difficulty levels and game mechanics to accommodate varying levels of motor abilities.
2. Incorporating sensory accommodations, such as customizable visual and auditory settings, to cater to the unique sensory needs of the participants (see Fig. 1).
3. Ensuring that the game environment is accessible, safe, and comfortable for children with SEN, by designing user-friendly interfaces and providing clear instructions.

The customized NVIDIA VR Funhouse mini-games were incorporated into the VR/AR intervention as engaging and interactive activities that target specific motor skills and coordination abilities. For example:

1. A modified version of the “Clown Painter” mini-game is used to practice fine motor skills, such as grasping and controlling a virtual spray paint can, while also working on hand-eye coordination [4, 28, 48].
2. The “Balloon Knight” mini-game is adapted to focus on gross motor skills, like swinging a virtual sword to pop balloons, which could help improve arm movement and spatial awareness (see Fig. 2) [4, 33, 41–44].

During the intervention, participants join these customized VR Fun-house mini-games, with their performance and progress tracked and recorded for subsequent analysis. Using NVIDIA VR Funhouse and Unreal Engine give us several advantages:



Fig. 1. Created a virtual circus world for children's education in NVIDIA VR Funhouse.



Fig. 2. A child playing in a virtual reality system in NVIDIA VR Funhouse.

1. High-quality graphics and realistic physics simulations create an immersive and engaging environment that can motivate children with SEN to participate in the intervention.
2. The customizable nature of the mini-games allows for personalized experiences tailored to each participant's unique needs and abilities of each participant.
3. Integration with Unreal Engine enables researchers to leverage a vast array of tools and resources, streamlining the development process and facilitating collaboration among developers and researchers.

Using NVIDIA VR Funhouse for Unreal Engine we can harness the power of VR technology to create immersive and engaging experiences that support the development of motor skills and coordination in children with special educational needs (see Fig. 3).



**Fig. 3.** Management of assets in a virtual reality system

To enhance the effectiveness of the VR/AR intervention, we created a multi-player experience using Unreal Engine's Blueprint system. This allows the child and the therapist (e.g., speech therapist, psychologist) to participate in the same virtual environment simultaneously. By doing this, the therapist can actively guide, support, and assess the child's progress in real-time, promoting a more interactive and collaborative learning experience.

Blueprint is a visual scripting system in Unreal Engine that allows developers to create game logic, interactions, and functionality without the need for traditional programming. To create a multiplayer experience with Blueprint, the following steps will be taken [12, 15, 32–37, 46]:

1. Establish a networked game: We set up a client-server architecture, enabling multiple devices to connect and interact in the same virtual environment. This involves configuring appropriate network settings and replication properties within Blue-print.
2. Create player characters: We designed unique player characters for the child and the therapist, incorporating different avatars, abilities, and interactions to suit their respective roles. These characters can be controlled using the respective input devices (e.g., VR controllers, keyboard/mouse) [1, 15, 19, 48].
3. Develop shared game mechanics: To facilitate meaningful interactions between the child and the therapist, we designed multiplayer game mechanics and activities that promote collaboration and communication. This can include tasks that require teamwork to complete or scenarios where the therapist provides guidance and feedback to the child [15, 18, 23, 33, 36, 48].
4. Implement real-time communication tools: To support effective communication between the child and the therapist, we integrated voice chat or other in-game

communication tools, allowing them to converse and collaborate within the virtual environment.

Integrating a multiplayer experience using Blueprint offers several advantages for our VR/AR intervention:

1. **Enhanced engagement:** By allowing the child and the therapist to interact in the same virtual environment, the intervention becomes more engaging and motivating, promoting active participation and learning.
2. **Real-time guidance and support:** The therapist can provide immediate feedback, encouragement, and adjustments to the child's performance, ensuring that the intervention is tailored to the child's needs and progress.
3. **Improved assessment and evaluation:** The therapist can closely monitor the child's development and engagement in the virtual environment, gaining valuable insights into the effectiveness of the intervention and the child's progress over time.

By incorporating a multiplayer experience using Unreal Engine's Blueprint system, we can create an interactive and collaborative VR/AR intervention that fosters a supportive learning environment for children with special educational needs while providing valuable real-time feedback and guidance from therapists.

## 4 Conclusion

In conclusion, our research on using virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) for the development of motor skills and coordination in children with special educational needs (SEN) highlights the potential benefits and challenges of integrating these technologies into educational interventions. By leveraging the advanced capabilities of Unreal Engine and NVIDIA VR Funhouse, we were able to create immersive, engaging, and customizable learning experiences tailored to the unique needs of children with SEN [4, 15, 38].

The preliminary results of our study indicate improvements in motor skills and coordination, as well as high levels of engagement and positive feedback from both participants and their caregivers. This suggests that VR and AR interventions can be effective tools for supporting the education of children with SEN, particularly in the context of motor skills and coordination development.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that this is an emerging field, and further research is needed to fully understand the long-term effects, optimal implementation strategies, and potential limitations of VR and AR interventions in special education. Future studies should consider larger and more diverse samples, as well as explore additional outcome measures and potential applications of these technologies in other areas of education and skill development for children with SEN.

In summary, our research contributes to the growing body of literature on the use of VR and AR in special education, offering valuable insights into the effectiveness and practical considerations of these interventions. As technology continues to advance, it is vital for educators, researchers, and practitioners to stay informed and harness the potential of VR and AR to enhance the educational experiences and outcomes for children with special educational needs.

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