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Navigating the Terrain:

Emerging Frontiers in Learning Spaces, Pedagogies, and Technologies

MAVR in the Metaverse: A community of practice for XR educators

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Extended reality (XR) technologies, which include virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and mixed reality (MR), are gaining significant attention from educators for their potential to transform teaching and learning in higher education. According to recent research, XR offers immersive and interactive experiences that enhance student engagement and provide unique opportunities for experiential learning (Merchant et al., 2014; Radianti et al., 2020). In response to this growing interest, various professional organizations have developed virtual communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) to support educators in integrating XR into their curricula.

One notable example is the Mixed, Augmented, and Virtual Realities in Learning Special Interest Group (MAVR SIG) of the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT). Founded in 2017, the MAVR SIG was created to support language educators interested in adopting XR technologies for language learning (Hawkinson, Mehran, & Alizadeh, 2017). The SIG provides a platform for educators to share their experiences, exchange ideas, and collaborate on research focused on XR in education. This community of practice is instrumental in advancing the integration of immersive technologies in language education, aligning with the broader global trends in educational technology (Ferdig et al., 2020).

The MAVR SIG facilitates knowledge sharing and professional development through a variety of events, including research presentations, workshops, symposia, and webinars. Recent workshops have highlighted the pedagogical applications of XR, such as immersive language learning environments, AR-enhanced vocabulary instruction, and the use of VR for cultural immersion. These events not only promote the use of XR in education but also encourage educators to critically assess the affordances and challenges of these technologies in teaching. The positive impact of this community of practice has been evidenced by a growing number of members outside of Japan including the Philippines and Turkiye . Based on interviews from international members, the lack of local groups that support research and collaboration related to immersive technologies for teaching and learning encouraged them to join the Japan-based group.

A particularly noteworthy initiative by the SIG is its regular series of events hosted on the Metaverse platform, Frame (https://framevr.io/). Frame offers an immersive and customizable virtual environment where members can meet, interact, and collaborate in real time. The platform's features, such as virtual rooms, collaboration tools, and generative AI functions, enable educators to experiment with new teaching approaches and test platform capabilities. By leveraging these tools, educators can enhance their teaching practices, receive feedback, and refine their approaches to using XR in language learning.

Looking ahead, the MAVR SIG is poised to expand its impact by increasing the number of events, deepening collaborations with educational institutions and professional organizations in Japan and globally and exploring novel applications of XR in both language and interdisciplinary education. As the community continues to support educators and drive innovation, the MAVR SIG is well-positioned to lead the integration of XR technologies into teaching and learning practices worldwide.

Keywords: XR, virtual community of practice, Metaverse, professional development

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