





## THREE THINGS WE LEARNED ABOUT VR

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15 February 2024 - In an attempt to investigate the living and breathing landscape of Virtual Reality (VR) technology, six academic members of the Centre for Modern Languages (CML), Universiti Malaysia Pahang Al-Sultan Abdullah embarked on a benchmarking session that led and transported them through the dynamic universe of VAR LIVE, an innovative virtual reality theme park and into the sophistication of Virtual Online Future Technology and Extended Reality (VORTEX XR) Lab at Taylor's University.

The one-day trip began at VAR LIVE, an avant-garde place set to change the entertainment industry through immersive VR experiences. Situated in MyTown Shopping Centre, Cheras, VAR LIVE is the very heart of innovation, a playground for technology lovers and adrenaline seekers through a set of imaginatively created spaces. Each space corresponds to the VR environment and experience, leading to adventurous heart-thumping escapades, making VAR LIVE, one of the finest voyages that bring the world of imagination to life. Every game offers a different experience, and each space enhances that immersive experience.

Upon arrival, the curious six did not know what to expect. So, lesson number 1 is to expect the unexpected. The first venue they entered was for a game called 'The Others'. Led into a dark room through dark narrow corridors already triggered the feeling of fainting horror and suspense. Upon wearing the VR headgear, the players were transported into the characters or avatars of the game in which they were chained to the table in this haunted house and

the goal was to come out alive. The only way to survive was to stare into the eyes of the ghost for 10 long seconds! However, only the newly departed could see the ghost and the task was to warn the living.

The next game called 'Viking Craft' was less horror-fying and more family-oriented. It was like being transported into one of those cartoony 80s game interfaces. Surrounded by trolls, spears, and crows from all angles, the aim was to shoot them all down and get to a new settlement. The third game was Zombie Jail and the players had to fend off zombie attacks. Imagine playing with a huge, heavy rifle with real-life zombies attacking non-stop. This is The Walking Dead at a new level. The final game attempted was 'Jurassic: New Era'. In an era where dinosaurs still roamed the earth, the aim remains to stay alive to live another day. The visuals were very real especially when carried away by a flying reptile, you really feel like you were lifted off the solid ground, and then as suddenly as you were taken away, the dinosaur drops to your death. Game over.

Lesson number 2 is VR actually needs very little space and requires minimal movement particularly if there are many players in a game. Once geared up in the VR device, players cannot see what is in front of them. So, if players were allowed to move about freely, they would certainly bump into each other and may cause injuries. Having traversed the other-worldly landscapes to the pulse-pounding zombie combat simulations, the curious six next set off to a place where VR magic is created, Taylor's University, to visit VORTEX XR Lab. At VORTEX, the aim is to drive immersive and innovative Extended Reality (XR) research and solutions which includes Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), and Mixed Reality (MR). Here, surrounded by many state-of-the-art devices and advanced simulation systems, the CML team of six received an essential understanding of the core mechanics of XR technology and an immersive extended reality learning experience.

Guided by reputable researchers and faculty members, the CML team explored different VR devices such as Pico, HTC Vive, and Meta Verse. Playing and immersing yourself in VR games is one thing but to create a VR environment is another reality! One needs to understand the subtleties of VR design and the complex procedures of creating realistic simulations and immersive environments. Starting from how VORTEX developed, to what it takes to sustain a VR lab, the CML team observed and learned by engaging in fruitful discussions with the movers and shakers of VORTEX, namely:

- Ts. John Hii Ing Kieng- the Director of Vortex
- Ts Dr Charles Sharma Naidu A/L Achu Naidu -the pioneer of Vortex
- Mr. Faisal Athar Mohd Fadzil- XR Specialist
- Ms. Laili, XR Developer
- Ms. Ariessa- Vortex's Trainee

As the day trip drew to a close, the team returned to UMPSA with the realization that VR possesses more power to change things. Thus, lesson number 3 is VR makes the impossible

possible as a tool to realise immersive experiences that transcend boundaries. It is no surprise there is increasing interest in the entertainment and education sectors to revolutionise how people engage in content and learning. The adventure through VAR LIVE to the wonders of Vortex not only improved the knowledge of virtual reality but ignited a fervent passion to discover its limitless potential.

One key takeaway from the benchmarking trip for us, from the education sector, particularly in the language field is that VR is fast gaining traction in education. As the path of search goes on, one thing is crystal clear – VR in language learning and teaching needs to be explored further. Although VR is not new, educators have to open their minds to the immense possibilities and opportunities VR offers. Only then, can the future of VR in language learning and teaching start here and now.

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