

Reimagining Early Learning: The Motivational Power of Augmented Reality

Augmented reality (AR) is rapidly emerging as a compelling tool for enhancing young children's motivation to learn, yet research in early childhood (EC) settings remains limited. This lightning talk shares insights from a recent literature review examining whether AR integration meaningfully influences motivation in EC learning environments. Drawing on studies of play-based learning, blended learning, and motivational theory—including Self-Determination Theory—the review highlights how AR's interactive, three-dimensional overlays can capture attention, spark curiosity, and support autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Across the literature, AR consistently enhances engagement, enjoyment, and conceptual understanding, particularly when compared with traditional instructional approaches. At the same time, challenges such as cognitive overload, novelty effects, and technical frustrations signal the need for thoughtful implementation. This talk positions AR not as a digital gimmick but as a pedagogical opportunity: a way to merge children's natural inclination for play with meaningful learning experiences.

By sharing key findings and provocations, this session invites educators and researchers to consider how AR might reshape EC motivation, what gaps remain, and why now is the moment to explore AR as a legitimate learning tool rather than a future possibility.