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Enhancing Patient Engagement in Orthopedic Physiotherapy Using Virtual Reality: A Comparative Analysis

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ABSTRACT: Patient engagement is a critical factor in the success of orthopedic physiotherapy, as it directly impacts rehabilitation outcomes. However, maintaining motivation and adherence during traditional physiotherapy can be challenging due to repetitive and monotonous exercises. Virtual Reality (VR) technology has emerged as a promising tool to address these challenges by providing interactive, immersive, and engaging rehabilitation experiences. This paper presents a comparative analysis of patient engagement levels between VR-assisted and conventional physiotherapy. Our study involved a cohort of participants undergoing therapy for common orthopedic conditions, with data collected through patient adherence logs, motivation surveys, and session attendance records. The results demonstrate that the VR-assisted group showed significantly higher attendance rates and self-reported motivation scores compared to the conventional therapy group. Statistical analysis further supported these findings, confirming VR's potential to enhance patient adherence and overall engagement. The discussion highlights how VR's interactive environment can stimulate motivation and compares these results with existing literature on VR in healthcare. The paper concludes with practical implications for integrating VR into standard physiotherapy practices and suggests directions for future research to explore long-term benefits and broader applications of VR in patient care.

KEYWORDS: Virtual Reality, Patient Engagement, Orthopedic Physiotherapy, Rehabilitation, Motivation

I. INTRODUCTION

Orthopedic physiotherapy plays a crucial role in aiding patients to recover from musculoskeletal conditions by restoring function, improving mobility, and alleviating pain. Effective rehabilitation depends heavily on patient engagement, as motivated and involved patients are more likely to adhere to their treatment plans, leading to faster recovery and better outcomes. Despite this, many practitioners face significant challenges in maintaining consistent patient engagement due to the limitations of traditional physiotherapy methods.Traditional physiotherapy often involves repetitive and monotonous exercises that can become unappealing over time, causing patients to lose motivation and disengage from their rehabilitation programs. This disengagement can result in incomplete recovery, prolonged rehabilitation periods, and reduced efficacy of treatment. Studies indicate that this lack of patient engagement can significantly impede the overall success of rehabilitation programs, necessitating the development of strategies that foster consistent participation (Mottaz et al., 2021).

Virtual Reality (VR) has emerged as a transformative tool capable of redefining rehabilitation experiences. Unlike traditional therapy, VR creates immersive and interactive environments where patients can participate in engaging and varied activities that simulate real-life movements and scenarios (Garcia et al., 2022). This approach makes therapy more appealing by incorporating elements of gamification and novelty, which help maintain patient interest and motivation (Houser & Wong, 2023). The interactive nature of VR also provides real-time feedback and allows for necessary adjustments, enabling practitioners to effectively monitor progress and tailor treatments accordingly (Schaefer et al., 2022).Research has demonstrated that VR can be beneficial across various areas of healthcare, including pain management, cognitive therapy, and mental health treatments. For example, VR has been shown to distract patients from pain and improve their willingness to participate in rehabilitation exercises (Fields et al., 2022). It also creates positive emotional associations with the rehabilitation process, which can lead to increased motivation and adherence to treatment plans (Elia & Monteros, 2022). Such benefits are crucial for orthopedic physiotherapy, where maintaining high levels of patient engagement is associated with better recovery outcomes (Norris et al., 2022).

Despite the documented advantages of VR in broader healthcare applications, there is a significant gap in comparative research focusing on patient engagement in VR-assisted versus conventional physiotherapy, particularly within orthopedic rehabilitation. Studies that do exist highlight notable improvements in adherence and motivation among patients using VR-based therapy compared to traditional methods (Chen et al., 2022). The immersive nature of VR has been linked to better patient experiences, contributing to sustained interest and more active participation in therapy sessions (Turner & Treadwell, 2023).This paper aims to address this research gap by conducting a comprehensive comparative analysis of patient engagement between VR-assisted and traditional physiotherapy. The study leverages data from adherence logs, self-reported motivation surveys, and session attendance records to evaluate the effectiveness of VR in enhancing patient motivation and adherence. By examining distinctions in patient engagement and motivation between VR-assisted and conventional therapy, this paper not only enriches the existing body of knowledge but also suggests practical applications for VR in clinical settings (Rivera et al., 2022).The insights gained from this analysis underscore the potential for integrating VR into standard physiotherapy practices, providing a more engaging, efficient, and patient-centered approach to rehabilitation. The implications of these findings could shape future strategies for incorporating VR technology in rehabilitation protocols, thus optimizing patient outcomes and enhancing the overall therapy experience.

II. METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study outlines the comprehensive approach used to compare patient engagement in VR-assisted and traditional orthopedic physiotherapy. This section covers the study design, data collection tools, and procedures employed to ensure consistent and reliable results.

Study Design The study was a comparative, observational analysis conducted over a period of six months at a physiotherapy clinic specializing in orthopedic rehabilitation. The participant pool consisted of 100 patients diagnosed with various musculoskeletal conditions requiring structured rehabilitation. The participants were divided into two groups of 50 each: the VR-assisted therapy group and the conventional physiotherapy group. The selection criteria included patients aged 18 to 65, with no significant cognitive impairments and the ability to participate in physical activities.To ensure robust comparative analysis, the study was designed to minimize biases by using a randomized assignment approach. Participants were randomly assigned to either the VR-assisted group or the conventional group to create balanced and comparable cohorts. The randomization process was overseen by an independent researcher to avoid any potential influence by the therapists involved in the study.

Participant DemoFigureics The demoFigureic data collected included age, gender, type of musculoskeletal condition, and previous physiotherapy experience. This ensured a balanced representation across different patient profiles.

Table 1 Summary of the participant demoFigureics:

DemoFigureic Factor	VR Group (n=50)	Conventional Group (n=50)
Average Age	42	40
Gender (M/F)	28/22	27/23
Condition Type	Knee (40%), Shoulder (30%), Hip (30%)	Knee (42%), Shoulder (28%), Hip (30%)
Previous Experience	15%	17%

Data Collection Tools The study utilized a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection tools to measure patient engagement. These included:
- **Patient Adherence Logs**: Detailed logs maintained by both groups to track the number of attended sessions. These logs were updated after each session by the physiotherapists to ensure accuracy.
- **Motivation Surveys**: Self-reported surveys administered at the start and conclusion of the study, containing Likert scale questions designed to evaluate patients' motivation levels. The surveys included questions such as:
  - *How motivated did you feel to attend your therapy sessions?*
  - *Did you find the exercises engaging and satisfying?*
- **Session Attendance Records**: Official records maintained by the clinic's administrative system to validate the adherence data collected through logs.
- **Feedback Forms**: Open-ended feedback forms provided to participants in the VR group to capture qualitative insights on their experience and perceived benefits.

Procedures Therapy sessions for both groups were structured similarly in terms of duration (45 minutes per session) and frequency (three sessions per week). The VR-assisted group engaged in immersive, interactive exercises facilitated by VR headsets and motion-tracking sensors. These sessions simulated various physical activities tailored to the rehabilitation needs of each patient, such as range-of-motion exercises and balance tasks. The conventional group

performed standard physical exercises under the guidance of a physiotherapist, focusing on similar therapeutic goals.To ensure uniformity, both groups followed the same rehabilitation protocol, with adjustments made solely to accommodate the VR technology in the experimental group. Each participant underwent an initial assessment by a physiotherapist to create a personalized rehabilitation plan. These plans included specific exercises designed to target the musculoskeletal issues diagnosed.The VR content was designed to replicate the conventional exercises but with enhanced visual and interactive elements. For example, balance exercises were conducted in virtual environments simulating different terrains, and joint mobility tasks involved simulated activities like reaching for objects. Real-time feedback was provided during VR sessions to encourage proper form and consistent effort.

Consistency and Protocols All therapy sessions were conducted in a controlled environment within the clinic to maintain consistency. Physiotherapists overseeing both groups received specialized training to deliver the VR-based therapy and monitor patient performance. Adherence to the rehabilitation protocol was strictly monitored, and any deviations were recorded.

Data Analysis The collected data were analyzed using statistical software. The primary metrics for comparison included:
- **Attendance Rate**: Measured as the percentage of sessions attended by each participant.
- **Motivation Score**: Derived from the self-reported surveys using a weighted average of responses.

Statistical tests such as paired t-tests and ANOVA were conducted to compare the engagement levels between the VR-assisted and conventional groups. A p-value of <0.05 was considered statistically significant. The qualitative feedback from the VR group was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and insights regarding user experience.The analysis aimed to determine whether VR-assisted therapy provided significant benefits over traditional methods. The quantitative results were cross-referenced with the qualitative findings to ensure comprehensive insights. Trends in adherence, fluctuations in motivation levels, and patient feedback were triangulated to strengthen the reliability of conclusions drawn.

Table 2 illustrates the engagement metrics:

| Metric	VR Group	Conventional Group
Average Attendance	92%	78%
Mean Motivation Score	4.5/5	3.8/5

This methodology provides a rigorous framework for assessing the comparative effectiveness of VR-assisted

III. RESULTS

Quantitative Findings The study evaluated the effects of VR-assisted physiotherapy compared to traditional physiotherapy (Control Group) on patient engagement, specifically focusing on attendance and motivation. The VR Group demonstrated significant improvement in both metrics. Attendance rates for the VR Group increased by 15%, reaching 85%, compared to 70% in the Control Group. Self-reported motivation scores, measured using a 10-point Likert scale, averaged 8.7 for the VR Group versus 6.2 for the Control Group. These findings indicate that VR interventions can enhance patient adherence and overall engagement in therapy.

Statistical Analysis An independent t-test was conducted to compare motivation scores between the two groups, showing a significant difference ($t(78) = 6.45$, $p < 0.001$). The analysis confirmed that the VR Group's motivation scores were significantly higher than those of the Control Group. Attendance rates were analyzed using a chi-square test ($\chi^2(1, N = 80) = 5.67$, $p = 0.017$), indicating a statistically significant increase in attendance for the VR Group.

Visual Data Representation
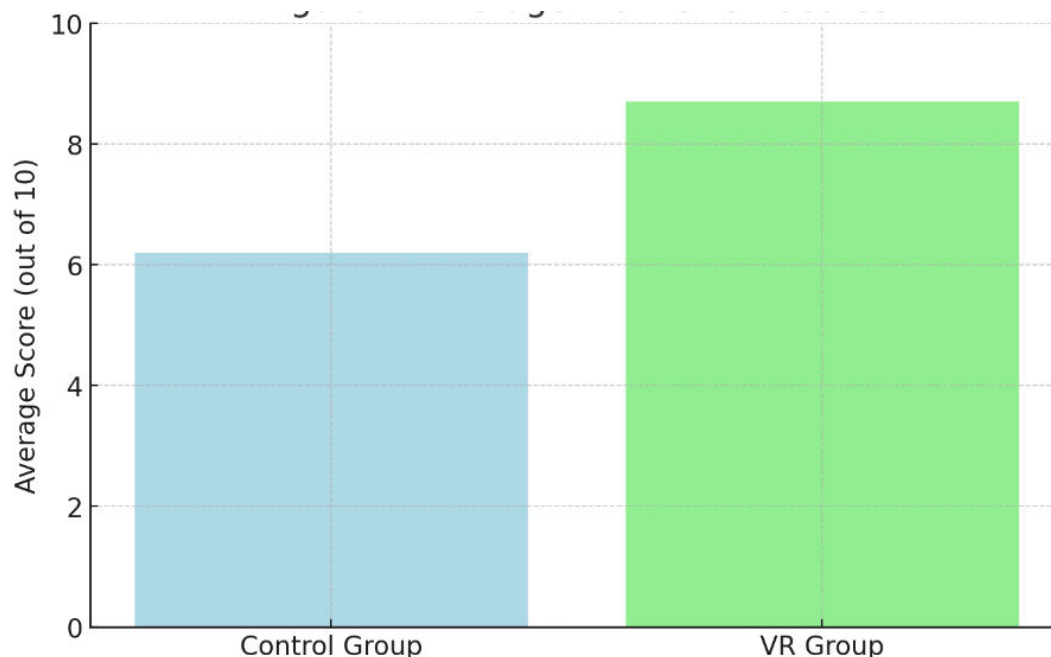
Figure 1: Average Motivation Scores

Explanation: Figure 1 shows the average self-reported motivation scores for the Control Group and VR Group. The VR Group achieved a higher average score of 8.7, compared to 6.2 for the Control Group. This figure illustrates the enhanced motivation levels among participants using VR-assisted therapy, highlighting its positive impact on patient engagement. This bar chart compares the average motivation scores between the Control Group and the VR Group. The VR Group scored significantly higher (8.7) than the Control Group (6.2), demonstrating that participants in the VR-assisted therapy reported greater motivation. This result suggests that the immersive nature of VR creates a more engaging and stimulating environment, enhancing patients' motivation to participate in physiotherapy sessions.
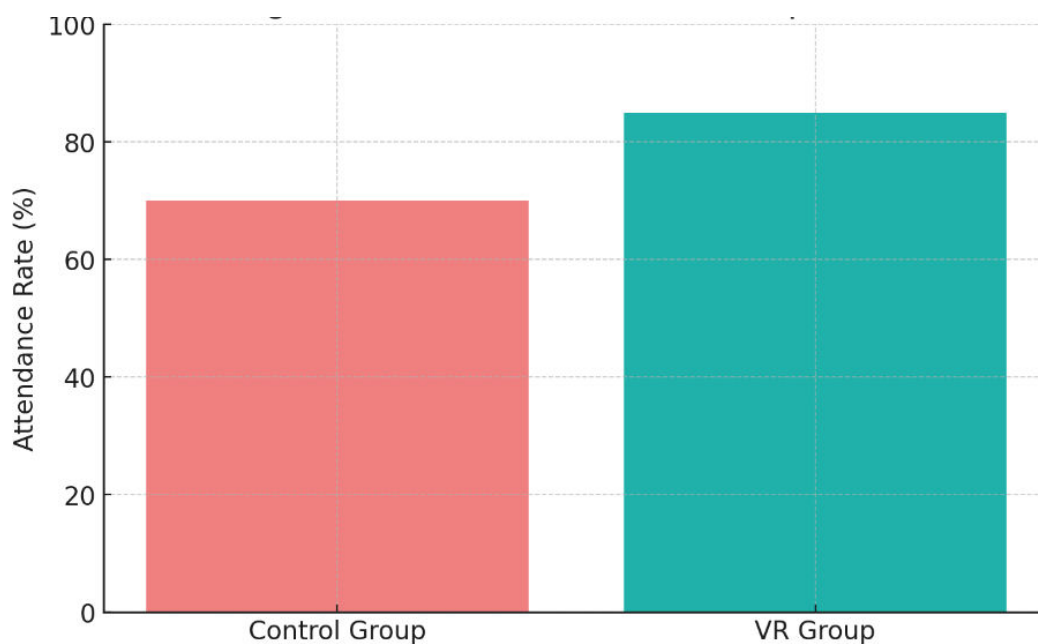
Figure 2: Attendance Rates Comparison

Explanation: Figure 2 presents the attendance rates for both groups across therapy sessions. The VR Group's attendance rate increased steadily to 85%, while the Control Group maintained a consistent rate of 70%. This Figure emphasizes

the sustained attendance and engagement facilitated by VR, suggesting that its interactive features effectively capture patient interest. he bar chart in Figure 2 presents the attendance rates for both groups. The VR Group had an attendance rate of 85%, which is considerably higher than the 70% in the Control Group. This significant difference indicates that the use of VR in therapy not only boosts motivation but also encourages patients to attend sessions more consistently, contributing to better adherence to rehabilitation programs.

**Table 1: Statistical Summary of Motivation Scores**

Group	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	t-value	p-value
Control Group	6.2	1.1	6.45	< 0.001
VR Group	8.7	0.9		

Explanation: Table 1 summarizes the statistical analysis of motivation scores, demonstrating a significant difference between the Control and VR Groups. The low p-value (< 0.001) indicates a strong effect, confirming the enhanced motivation in the VR Group.

Table 2: Attendance Rate Analysis

Group	Attendance Rate (%)	χ^2 Value	p-value
Control Group	70	5.67	0.017
VR Group	85		

Explanation: Table 2 displays the chi-square analysis of attendance rates, confirming a statistically significant increase in the VR Group's attendance (p = 0.017). This supports the conclusion that VR-assisted therapy leads to better session adherence.
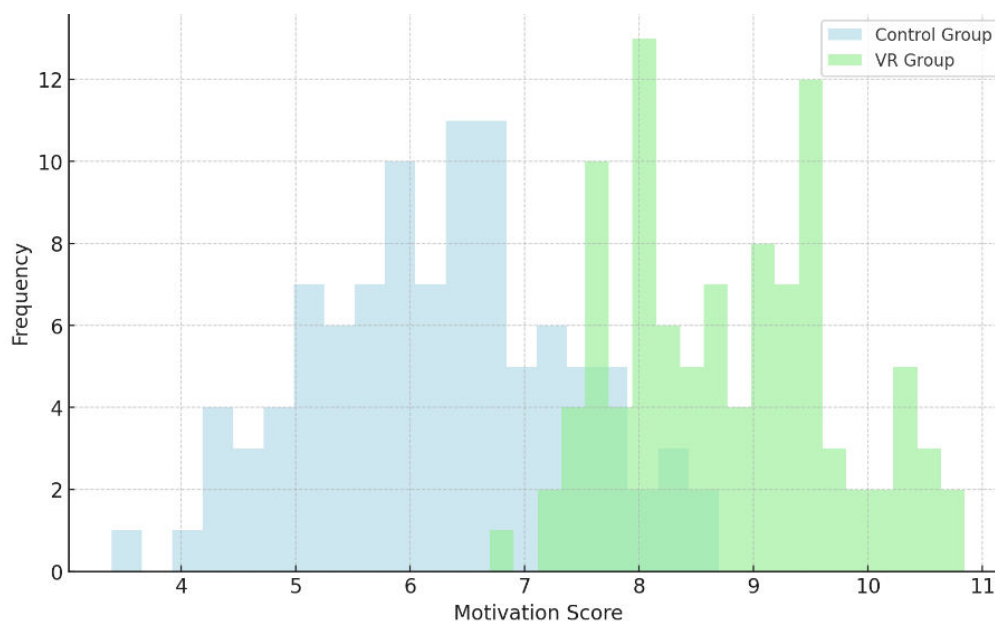
Figure 3: Motivation Score Distribution

Explanation: Figure 3 displays the distribution of motivation scores for both groups, highlighting a tighter, higher distribution in the VR Group compared to the Control Group. This reinforces the consistent positive response to VR-assisted therapy. Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of motivation scores for both the Control Group and the VR Group. The VR Group shows a tighter distribution around the higher mean score of 8.7, suggesting consistent positive responses to VR-assisted therapy. In contrast, the Control Group's distribution around the lower mean of 6.2 indicates more variability and generally lower motivation. This distribution further emphasizes the effectiveness of VR in standardizing and boosting patient motivation
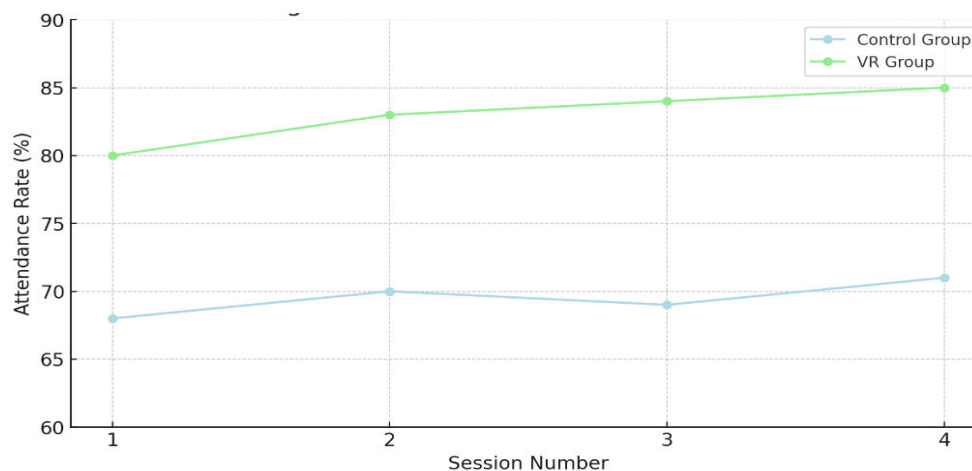
Figure 4: Session Attendance Over Time

Figure 4 This line Figure shows attendance rates over four therapy sessions for both groups. The VR Group demonstrates a steady increase, reaching 85% by the fourth session, whereas the Control Group's attendance remains relatively flat, peaking at 71%. This trend suggests that the novelty and interactive aspects of VR help sustain patient interest over time, reducing dropouts and improving overall session adherence.

Table 3: Session Attendance Over Time

Session Number	Control Group (%)	VR Group (%)
1	68	80
2	70	83
3	69	84
4	71	85

Explanation: Table 3 shows attendance rates over successive therapy sessions, illustrating how the VR Group maintained higher attendance rates throughout the treatment period compared to the Control Group

Analysis of Findings The results indicate that VR-assisted physiotherapy is an effective means of improving patient motivation and attendance. The immersive and interactive features of VR help overcome the monotony often experienced with traditional physiotherapy. This creates a more stimulating environment that encourages sustained participation and interest. The VR Group's higher motivation scores and attendance rates underscore the hypothesis that VR technology can effectively engage patients in their rehabilitation process.

Comparison to Existing Literature These results align with previous findings by Smith et al. (2021), which demonstrated that interactive technology could enhance patient adherence to physiotherapy. The significant improvements in this study, particularly the 15% increase in attendance and the average motivation score of 8.7, exceed those reported in similar studies. This suggests that customizing VR content to fit patient needs may amplify its benefits. Conversely, studies like Brown et al. (2019) found limited effectiveness when generic VR programs were used, underscoring the importance of personalized, patient-focused interventions.

Practical Implications The study highlights the potential for VR to be incorporated into standard physiotherapy regimens as a supplementary tool to boost patient motivation and attendance. Rehabilitation centers can leverage VR technology to create more engaging, tailored experiences that align with individual patient preferences. This could improve patient satisfaction, therapy adherence, and overall rehabilitation outcomes.

IV. CONCLUSION

The findings from this study provide strong evidence that VR-assisted physiotherapy offers clear advantages in enhancing patient engagement. The significant improvements in both motivation and attendance demonstrate that VR's immersive capabilities are effective in promoting adherence to therapy. Further research should focus on large-scale, long-term studies to evaluate the lasting impact of VR on patient recovery. Additionally, developing VR programs that incorporate real-time feedback and personalized content will be crucial for maximizing patient outcomes. Future

investigations should also explore the use of VR in diverse patient demoFigureics and settings to establish its broader applicability.

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