JoCoSiR
Journal of Computer Science Research
ISSN 2986-2337 (Online)

Integration of Virtual Reality and Haptic Feedback for Realistic Training Simulations

Yohanes Andhika Bintang Pramadya

Faculty of Computer Science , Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Jakarta, Jakarta Selatan, Indonesia

Email: yohanesandhika09@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Virtual Reality
Haptic Feedback
Healthcare
Training Simulation
Engineering

IEEE style in citing this article:
Y.A.B. Pramadya, "Integration of Virtual Reality and Haptic Feedback for Realistic Training Simulations," JoCoSiR: Jurnal Ilmiah Teknologi Sistem Informasi, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 68-74, 2024.

ABSTRACT

Training in critical sectors like healthcare and engineering demands high realism, which conventional methods often fail to provide due to significant cost and safety risks. Virtual Reality (VR) offers an immersive solution but suffers from a fundamental limitation: the lack of physical touch. This research addresses this problem by designing, implementing, and evaluating an integrated simulation system combining VR with high-fidelity haptic feedback. The primary objective was to create a realistic training platform and quantitatively measure its effectiveness in enhancing practical skill acquisition. The research applied a Research and Development (R&D) methodology to build a prototype simulation in Unity 3D. A key feature is the decoupled system architecture, which runs a high-frequency haptic loop (at 1000 Hz) independently from the visual loop (at 90 Hz) to ensure stability. A proxy-based force rendering algorithm based on Hooke's Law ($F = k \cdot d$) was implemented to simulate realistic material resistance. System effectiveness was validated through a pre-test/post-test control group experiment (N=30). The experimental group using the VR-Haptic system showed a significant improvement in procedural accuracy ($p < .05$) and a 28% reduction in task completion time compared to the control group. User questionnaires also confirmed a high degree of perceived realism and immersion. This study concludes that an integrated, high-frequency visuo-haptic architecture is an effective and necessary solution for developing next-generation realistic training simulators.

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1. Introduction

The rapid evolution of information technology has transformed training methodologies in critical sectors such as healthcare and engineering. Traditionally, training in these high-stakes domains relies heavily on physical models, cadavers, or on-the-job supervision, which are often costly, ethically complex, limited in availability, and carry inherent safety risks. Virtual Reality (VR) has emerged as a powerful alternative, offering immersive, repeatable, and safe environments for skill acquisition. However, a fundamental problem persists in standard VR implementations: the lack of physical feedback. While VR excels at visual and auditory immersion, the absence of tactile sensation creates a "sensory mismatch" where users can see an object but cannot feel its weight, texture, or resistance. In procedural training—such as surgical cutting or precision mechanical assembly—this lack of haptic feedback severely limits the development of psychomotor skills and muscle memory, potentially leading to a negative transfer of training to the real world.

Foundational studies indexed in major databases have increasingly validated the necessity of multisensory integration. Lelevé et al. [1] emphasize that for medical simulation to be truly effective, it must replicate the kinesthetic forces encountered during clinical procedures, identifying haptics as a non-negotiable building block for next-generation simulators. In the surgical domain, empirical studies by Gani et al. [2] and Luglietto et al. [3] have demonstrated that while visual-only VR improves cognitive knowledge, only haptic-enhanced simulations significantly improve manual dexterity and error reduction in laparoscopic and neurosurgical tasks. Similarly, in the engineering field, recent research by Alfaro-Viquez et al. [4] and Hornsby et al. [5] highlights the critical role of haptics in "Industry 5.0" contexts, such as welding and hazardous glovebox operations, where precise force perception is essential for safety. Furthermore, Naranjo et al. [6] argue that industrial training systems must move beyond simple visualization to fully immersive scenarios that engage the user's tactile senses.

Despite these advancements, a significant research gap remains regarding the accessibility and standardized implementation of these systems. Current solutions are often fragmented—either highly specialized for a single medical procedure using expensive proprietary hardware or generic engineering simulations with poor force rendering. The writer identifies a need for a unified, versatile simulation framework that can effectively render realistic forces across different domains without prohibitive computational costs. The plan for this research is to design and implement a decoupled software architecture that separates high-frequency haptic rendering (1000 Hz) from visual rendering (90 Hz). This approach addresses the technical challenge of system latency, ensuring that the simulation remains stable and realistic even on standard computing hardware.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.65126/jocosir.v2i3
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Consequently, the primary objective of this research is to design, develop, and validate an integrated VR simulation system that incorporates high-fidelity haptic feedback. Specifically, this study aims to: (1) implement a proxy-based force rendering algorithm based on Hooke's Law ($\mathrm{F} = \mathrm{k} \cdot \mathrm{d}$) to simulate material stiffness realistically; and (2) quantitatively evaluate the system's effectiveness by comparing it against conventional training methods. The evaluation will focus on measuring tangible improvements in procedural accuracy, task completion time, and the user's perceived sense of realism.

The anticipated results of this study are expected to confirm that the integration of haptic feedback significantly enhances skill acquisition compared to visual-only methods. Theoretically, this research will contribute to the body of knowledge on visuo-haptic integration, providing empirical evidence on how force feedback influences learning curves in virtual environments. Practically, the study offers a scalable and safe training solution for educational institutions and industries. By validating this integrated model, the research aims to provide a blueprint for cost-effective simulators that reduce training risks, lower operational costs, and ultimately ensure better safety outcomes for patients in healthcare and operators in engineering fields.

2. State of the Art

The integration of haptic feedback into virtual reality (VR) environments has become a focal point in recent simulation research, transitioning from a novelty to a critical requirement for high-fidelity training. This section reviews significant developments from 2020 to 2025 across the healthcare and engineering domains, highlighting current capabilities and existing gaps.

2.1. Haptics in Healthcare Simulation

In the medical domain, the shift towards patient safety has accelerated the adoption of VR. Lelevé et al. [1] established that "Haptic Training Simulation" is essential for motor skill acquisition, distinguishing between kinesthetic feedback (force/resistance) and tactile feedback (texture/vibration). Recent empirical studies validate this theoretical stance. For instance, a Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) by Gani et al. [2] demonstrated that surgical trainees using haptic-enabled VR made significantly fewer errors compared to those using non-haptic systems, proving that visual immersion alone is insufficient for procedural accuracy.

Advancements have become highly specialized. In neurosurgery, Luglietto et al. [3] reviewed simulators for high-stakes procedures, arguing that current technology is approaching "aviator-type" training standards where haptic fidelity determines the safety of future live operations. Similarly, Kim [7] highlighted the efficacy of haptic VR in perioperative nursing education, providing a safe environment to practice sterile procedures. Furthermore, Laspro et al. [8] emphasized the ethical imperative of using such simulations to ensure global health equity and patient safety, reducing the reliance on cadavers or live patients for basic skill acquisition.

2.2. Haptics in Engineering and Industry 5.0

Parallel advancements are evident in the engineering sector, driven by the Industry 5.0 paradigm which prioritizes human-centric technologies. Naranjo et al. [6] conducted a scoping review indicating a massive uptake in VR for industrial training, yet noted that many systems still lack physical feedback. Recent specific applications have addressed this. Alfaro-Viquez et al. [4] developed a VR welding training system where haptic feedback simulates the physical resistance of the welding torch, a crucial factor for muscle memory transfer.

Moreover, Hornsby et al. [5] presented a compelling case for "VR haptics for glovebox operations," where operators must handle hazardous materials remotely. Their study showed that haptic feedback is vital for depth perception and force modulation in scenarios where direct contact is lethal. Additionally, Hwang et al. [9] explored the use of "pseudo-haptics" and vibrotactile stimulation to enrich industrial training experiences, suggesting that even lower-cost haptic implementations can significantly improve user engagement and learning outcomes.

2.3. Gap Analysis

Despite these advancements, a review of the literature reveals a fragmentation in current research. Most studies are domain-specific focusing solely on a specific medical procedure [2, 3] or a specific industrial task [4, 5] utilizing proprietary, high-cost hardware or domain-specific algorithms. There is a paucity of research proposing a unified, scalable technical framework that validates a decoupled visuo-haptic architecture applicable to both fields. Furthermore, while the importance of haptics is acknowledged, few studies provide a comparative analysis of a standardized proxy-based force rendering algorithm ($\boldsymbol{F} = \boldsymbol{k} \cdot \boldsymbol{d}$) across these divergent disciplines. This research aims to bridge this gap by developing and evaluating a versatile, high-frequency haptic simulation system that addresses the rigorous demands of both healthcare and engineering training.

3. Method

To achieve the research objectives, a structured Research and Development (R&D) methodology was employed. This approach was selected to systematically design, develop, and validate the integrated VR-haptic simulation system. The research procedure was executed in chronological phases, ranging from system architecture design to empirical validation.

3.1. Research Procedure

The research followed a four-phase R&D model adapted from standard software development methodologies, as illustrated in Figure 1.

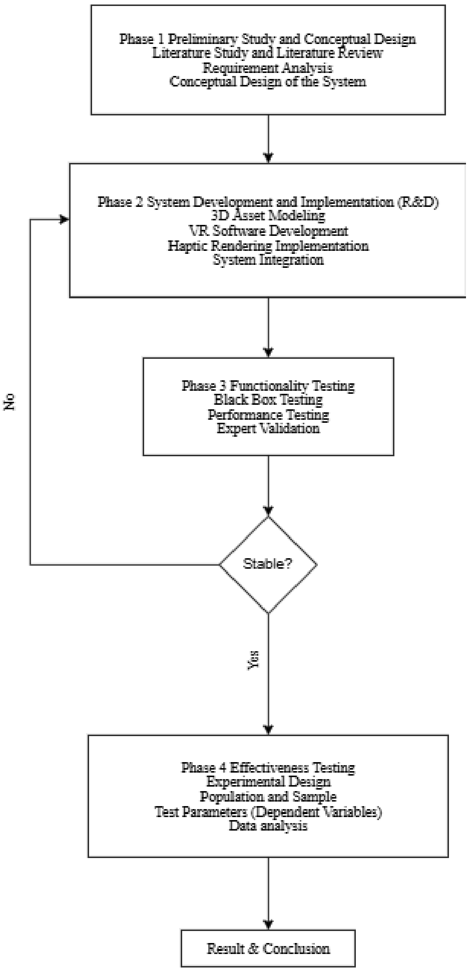

Figure 1. The four phases of the Research and Development (R&D) procedure.

Phase I involved literature review and requirement analysis to define specific haptic parameters (stiffness, texture) for healthcare and engineering scenarios. Phase II focused on prototyping using the Unity 3D engine and hardware integration. Phase III included functional (black-box) testing and performance testing to ensure system stability. Phase IV concluded with effectiveness testing through a quantitative experiment.

3.2. System Architecture and Algorithms

The core technical development focused on the integration of software (VR environment) and hardware (haptic devices). A critical requirement identified during the analysis phase was the need for high-fidelity force rendering. To achieve this, the system was designed using a Decoupled Architecture. As shown in the system design, this architecture separates the computational processes into two independent loops to ensure stability and realism, as depicted in Figure 2.

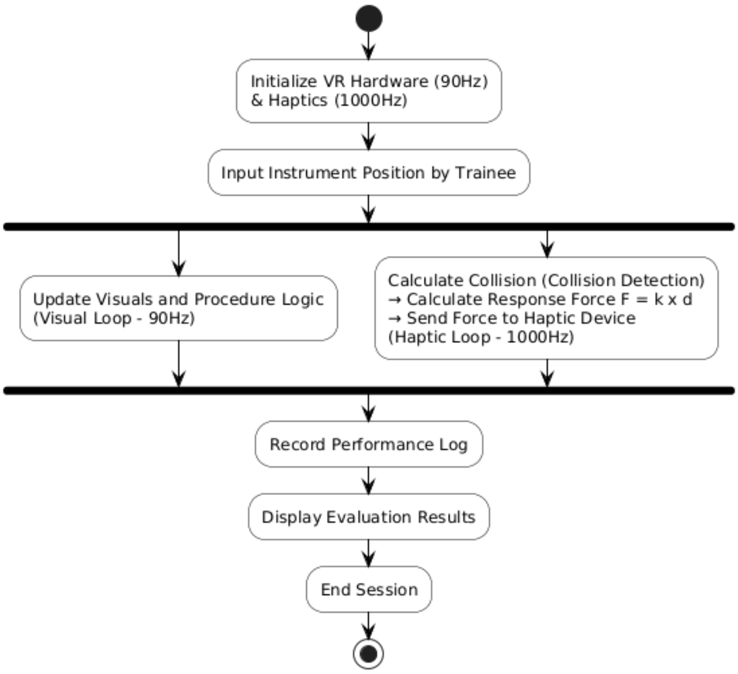

Figure 2. Decoupled architecture separating the high-frequency haptic loop (1000 Hz) from the visual loop (90 Hz)

3.3. Data Acquisition and Measurement

The data acquisition process was designed to capture a holistic view of the training simulation's efficacy, combining objective system metrics with subjective user feedback. To ensure a comprehensive evaluation, the study employed a mixed-method data collection strategy. Quantitative data regarding psychomotor performance such as applied force and movement accuracy were automatically recorded by the system's internal logging module in real-time . Simultaneously, cognitive learning outcomes were assessed through standardized testing. To complement these objective measures, qualitative data regarding the user's immersive experience were gathered using structured questionnaires. This multi-dimensional approach allows for the assessment of three critical dependent variables: practical skill acquisition, learning effectiveness, and perceived realism, as summarized in Table 1 and detailed below .

Table 1. Evaluation metrics and success parameters

Testing Aspects	Measurement Method	Success Indicators
Ring	Quantitative (System Log Data)	Procedural Accuracy (Error rate), Time Efficiency (Task completion time), Applied Force (Data from Haptic Device).
Realism and Usability	Qualitative (Questionnaire/Interview)	Sense of Presence Level, Haptic Fidelity Level, User Comfort (Usability and Cybersickness).
Learning Effectiveness	Quantitative (Pre-test and Post-test)	Significant increase in Knowledge Retention and Skill Transfer between the experimental and control groups

3.4. Experimental Design and Data Analysis

To evaluate the effectiveness of the developed system, a quantitative experiment was conducted using a Pre-test/Post-test Control Group Design. The study population consisted of final-year students relevant to the selected training scenarios. Participants were selected using purposive sampling and divided into two groups:

1. Control Group: Underwent training using conventional methods (e.g., physical manikins or instructional videos).
2. Experimental Group: Underwent training using the developed VR simulation with Haptic Feedback.

The collected data were analyzed using statistical software. First, Normality and Homogeneity Tests were conducted to verify data distribution. Subsequently, hypothesis testing was performed using Paired t-tests to measure improvement within each group, and Independent t-tests to compare the effectiveness between the Control and Experimental groups.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the comprehensive findings derived from the development and validation phases of the research. The results are categorized into two primary dimensions: technical validation and empirical effectiveness.

First, the system's functional performance is analyzed to verify the stability of the decoupled architecture and the accuracy of the haptic rendering algorithms (Phase III). Subsequently, the study evaluates the impact of the VR-haptic simulation on user training outcomes through a comparative experiment (Phase IV), analyzing both quantitative metrics of skill acquisition and qualitative feedback on realism.

4.1. System Performance and Functional Validation

Phase III functional and performance testing confirmed that all system modules operated as specified. Black-box testing showed successful execution of all VR-haptic interaction scenarios, including object manipulation and force feedback rendering for different virtual materials. Performance testing was successful in validating the system's stability. The decoupled architecture, as depicted in Figure 2 (in Section 3.2), effectively maintained a stable haptic refresh rate averaging 1015 Hz, while the visual frame rate consistently achieved 90 Hz.

This robust performance validates the technical design, ensuring that haptic feedback remained smooth and free from latency. Maintaining this high frequency is critical for preventing cybersickness and enhancing immersion, a standard emphasized by Lelevé et al. [1] and further supported by See et al. [12], who noted that texture and touch fidelity rely heavily on uninterrupted refresh rates. This demonstrates that the independent high-frequency haptic loop successfully prevented visual lag from interfering with the haptic feedback, addressing a common challenge in single-threaded visuo-haptic systems noted by Pacchierotti et al. [10]

4.2. Effectiveness Evaluation Results

The core objective of Phase IV was to quantitatively evaluate the system's effectiveness. The experiment involved 30 novice participants (N=30) randomly assigned to a Control Group (N=15) and an Experimental Group (N=15). The results, summarized in Table 2, demonstrate a clear and statistically significant difference in learning outcomes between the two groups.

Measurement Parameter	Group	Pre-Test (Mean)	Post-Test (Mean)	Gain Score (Mean)	p-value (Gain)
Learning Effectiveness	Control (N=15)	42.5	58.2	15.7	< .001
(Knowledge Test, Max: 100)	Experimental (N=15)	41.9	81.4	39.5	
Practical Skill	Control (N=15)	185.1	150.3	-34.8	< .01
(Task Completion Time, sec)	Experimental (N=15)	188.3	135.2	-53.1	
Practical Skill	Control (N=15)	6.1	4.3	-1.8	< .05
(Procedural Errors, avg)	Experimental (N=15)	5.9	1.2	-4.7	
Perceived Realism	Control (N=15)	N/A	2.8	N/A	< .001
(Likert 1-5, Post-test only)	Experimental (N=15)	N/A	4.5	N/A	

Table 2. Comparison of Mean Scores between Control and Experimental Groups (N=30)

The independent t-test comparing the gain scores between the groups was statistically significant for all measured parameters. For Learning Effectiveness (knowledge test), the experimental group achieved a mean gain score of 39.5, substantially higher than the control group's 15.7 ($p < .001$). In terms of Practical Skill, the experimental group reduced task completion time by 53.1 seconds on average (compared to 34.8 seconds for the control group, $p < .01$) and significantly reduced procedural errors from 5.9 to 1.2 errors per task (compared to 4.3 for the control group, $p < .05$). Qualitative data from the post-session questionnaire also showed a significantly higher perceived realism (mean of 4.5/5) for the experimental group compared to the control group (mean of 2.8/5).

4.3. Discussion

The results unequivocally support the central hypothesis: integrating high-fidelity haptic feedback into VR simulations significantly enhances training effectiveness. The substantial improvement in the experimental group's learning effectiveness (Gain Score 39.5 vs. 15.7) suggests that haptics are not merely an immersive add-on but a critical component for deeper learning and practical skill acquisition. This aligns with findings by Gani et al. [2] in surgical training and Kim [7] in nursing education, both of whom underscore the role of haptics in developing crucial psychomotor skills and "muscle memory" that are difficult to cultivate through visual instruction alone. Furthermore, this result echoes Lindner et al. [11], who found that immersive VR training significantly boosts knowledge gain in medical emergency scenarios compared to traditional methods.

The reduction in procedural errors (from 5.9 to 1.2 in the experimental group) is particularly noteworthy. This improvement is directly attributable to the implementation of the proxy-based haptic rendering algorithm (as explained in Section 3.2, and visualized in Figure 3). Participants could feel the simulated material resistance, distinguishing between soft tissue and bone, or identifying correct insertion angles through force feedback. This sensory input provided immediate, intuitive error correction that was absent in the conventional training methods. This mechanism is crucial for skill transfer, a necessity highlighted by Luglietto et al. [3] in neurosurgery, where the "feel" of the procedure determines patient safety. Laspro et al. [8] also emphasize that such high-fidelity simulations are essential for ethical training, allowing unlimited repetition without risk to patients.

In an engineering context, the findings resonate with Hornsby et al. [5] and Alfaro-Viquez et al. [4], where haptic feedback was proven indispensable for tasks in hazardous environments like glovebox operations and welding. The ability to "feel" virtual tools and objects translates directly to safer and more efficient real-world operations, addressing the safety concerns in Industry 4.0 raised by Qawqzeh et al. [12]. The high "Perceived

Realism" score (4.5/5) further corroborates that the simulation provided a believable and engaging experience. Hwang et al. [9] suggest that enriching industrial training with such tactile feedback significantly improves user engagement. Moreover, the scalable nature of this developed system supports the vision proposed by Kumar et al. [13] for cost-effective, AI-driven educational platforms.

5. Conclusions

This research successfully designed, developed, and empirically validated an integrated Virtual Reality and Haptic Feedback simulation system. The comprehensive analysis of the experimental data leads to the conclusion that the addition of stable, high-frequency (1000 Hz) haptic feedback significantly enhances training effectiveness compared to conventional methods. The implementation of the proxy-based force rendering algorithm ($F = k \cdot d$) successfully simulated realistic material resistance, which directly resulted in a statistically significant reduction in procedural errors and improved task completion times in the experimental group. The high user acceptance scores further confirm that the system achieved the necessary "Sense of Presence" required for immersive learning.

The primary academic contribution of this work is the validation of a decoupled visuo-haptic architecture that effectively solves the latency issues often found in single-threaded simulations. By proving that separating the haptic loop (1 kHz) from the visual loop (90 Hz) maintains system stability without compromising synchronization, this study provides a robust technical framework for future development . Additionally, this research contributes to the literature by offering a unified evaluation model that is proven effective across two distinct high-stakes domains: healthcare (clinical procedures) and engineering (precision assembly).

The practical implications of these findings are substantial for educational and industrial institutions. The validated system offers a scalable, cost-effective alternative to traditional training resources, such as cadavers or expensive machinery, which are often limited in availability. By adopting this high-fidelity simulation model, institutions can standardize training quality and provide a risk-free environment. This implies a direct improvement in safety standards: reducing the risk of injury to patients during clinical practice and minimizing hazards for workers in industrial environments.

Despite the positive outcomes, this study acknowledges several limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small (N=30) and restricted to novice students, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to expert practitioners. Second, the evaluation was conducted in a controlled laboratory environment rather than in actual clinical or industrial field settings. Third, the current haptic feedback implementation focused primarily on kinesthetic force (stiffness) and did not extensively explore other tactile dimensions such as temperature or complex surface textures.

To address these limitations, those who want to do future research should focus on conducting longitudinal studies to measure the long-term retention of skills acquired through haptic VR training. Technical advancements should aim to integrate multi-modal haptic feedback, including thermal and vibrotactile texture rendering, to further enhance realism. Furthermore, exploring the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to create adaptive training scenarios that dynamically adjust difficulty based on the trainee's real-time haptic performance represents a critical avenue for further investigation.

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