

BRIEF 04 OF 07 · BEFORE YOU RENEW

Research & Scientific

The best evidence doesn't support immersive learning as a general proposition, but it does for clinical skills and safety training. Scope purchases to match.

180

primary studies in the April 2026 stratified meta-analysis

18,792

participants across 281 comparisons

12

randomized nursing-education trials showing gains in skills and retention

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If you read one thing here, require every immersive technology proposal to name a specific competency, program, and assessment, because that is where the evidence supports the investment and it is not where most proposals are scoped.

The challenge as members describe it

Members describe two constraints operating together. Laboratory and instructional equipment has become harder to fund from capital, and the most heavily marketed application in the category, immersive simulation, is difficult to evaluate before purchase. Institutions want to modernize clinical and technical training and are being asked to commit six figures against outcome claims they cannot independently verify.

Status quo belief and the more accurate insight

THE BELIEF

Immersive learning improves learning generally.

THE EVIDENCE

The evidence is strong for procedural and clinical skill acquisition and for safety training, and weak as a general proposition, and the scoping of a purchase should follow that distinction.

A stratified meta-analysis published in Educational Psychology Review in April 2026 examined 180 primary studies drawn from 26 earlier meta-analyses, comprising 281 comparisons and 18,792 participants, and sorted them by methodological risk of bias. Studies at low risk of bias did not produce a statistically significant effect, while studies carrying a higher risk of bias did.

The authors conclude that analyses based on the best available evidence do not yield consistent or robust support for a reliable learning advantage (Layadi et al., 2026). Discipline specific evidence is considerably stronger: a meta-analysis of twelve randomized trials in nursing education reported significant effects on knowledge, practical skills, and retention (Liu et al., 2023), and a review of 52 articles found virtual reality outperforming traditional instruction in safety training on both acquisition and retention (Scorgie et al., 2024).

Dynamics E&I is observing

Acquisition financing became materially easier during the quarter. Amendment 6 to E&I master agreement CNR01459, executed in August 2026, expressly expands scope to include leasing and financing options for capital equipment. Two provisions carry the commercial weight: equipment procured under such arrangements is deemed a purchase made pursuant to the agreement, and it qualifies for all applicable pricing, discounts, and incentives.

A third keeps an approved third party financier outside the agreement as an intermediary only, so warranties and service commitments remain enforceable against the supplier. That outcome is not automatic in a direct arrangement and frequently does not obtain.

Financing changes the cash profile rather than the obligation. Under Statement No. 87 of the Governmental Accounting Standards Board for public institutions, and under Accounting Standards Codification Topic 842 for private nonprofit institutions, equipment leases are recognized on the balance sheet. Institutions pursuing a lease structure to preserve liquidity are on solid ground; institutions pursuing one to manage reported leverage should consult the controller first.

Sourcing implications

- Require immersive technology proposals to name the program, the specific procedural or clinical skill, the assessment instrument, and the comparison condition. Proposals scoped to general instructional improvement cannot be evaluated and sit where the evidence is weakest.

- Prioritize safety training applications, which carry the clearest measured return in the published literature.
- Evaluate lower immersion alternatives seriously. The field has not settled whether higher immersion improves outcomes, and the cost difference is substantial.
- Verify in writing that financing arrangements preserve contracted pricing, discounts, and incentives, and that a third party financier acquires no rights under the supply agreement.
- Quote maintenance, calibration, software licensing, and consumables alongside acquisition cost. For instrumentation these frequently exceed purchase price across the asset life.

Want help acting on this?

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Sources

- Layadi, S., Huguet, P., Pavic, K., & Chevalere, J. (2026, April 17). Virtual reality in education: A stratified meta-analysis of experimental rigor and bias. *Educational Psychology Review*, 38, Article 50. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-026-10130-x>
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