Check for updates

Healthcare Simulation

PROTOCOL

What effect do extended reality-based educational interventions have on microsurgical skills training of healthcare professionals and students compared to other educational interventions? Protocol for a systematic review

Joanna Miles¹, Michael Shimelash¹, Hannah Maple^{1,2}, Ranjev Kainth¹

¹Simulation and Interactive Learning Centre, Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, London, United Kingdom

²Department of Transplantation, Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, London, **United Kingdom**

Corresponding author: Joanna Miles, joanna.miles3@nhs.net

https://johs.org.uk/article/doi/10.54531/YTBX9217

ABSTRACT

Introduction

Microsurgical training is a specialist area of surgical skill with multiple existing simulation models previously proposed to facilitate its acquisition, such as live animal models and bench models. Extended reality-based training methods are a rapidly growing area within surgical education, including microsurgery. However, there is a notable gap in the current literature examining the impact of these novel modalities in comparison to more established models and other educational interventions.

Research aim

This systematic review aims to examine the following question: what effect do extended reality-based educational interventions have on microsurgical skills training of healthcare professionals and students compared to other educational interventions?

Methods

A systematic search of five literature databases will be undertaken using a clearly defined search strategy. Studies utilizing extended reality simulation methods to teach microsurgical skills to healthcare professionals undertaking this form of surgery will be included. Studies considering any quantitative or qualitative educational outcome assessment will be accepted for inclusion. Two authors will independently screen, select, extract and appraise the resultant literature based upon agreed data extraction templates, overseen by a senior author. The systematic approach includes the use of established frameworks and will be reported in accordance with best practice guidelines.

Conclusions

A comprehensive protocol for a systematic review examining the impact of extended reality training modalities compared to existing simulation methods is needed to assess and synthesize the current knowledge status of this field. The subsequent report will be a pivotal step in understanding the role and effectiveness of extended reality-based education within microsurgical training.

Submission Date: 07 January 2025 Accepted Date: 07 January 2025 Published Date: 12 May 2025

Introduction/Rationale

With growing pressure placed on both surgical educators and learners due to the restriction of working hours [1], increasing number of undergraduate medical school places [2] and ever-increasing demands within healthcare services globally [3], trainee in vivo operative experience is decreasing [4]. This, combined with an evolution from the traditional apprenticeship model of surgical training towards a more objective, competency-based programme [5], has resulted in a growing emphasis on the role of simulation training for skill acquisition. The rationale for the use of simulation in surgical training is well established due to its positive impact on patient safety [6] in addition to gaining psychomotor skills [7]. The use of simulation training prior to intraoperative skill application results in a reduced rate of intra-operative and postoperative complications as well as a shorter duration of hospital stay [8], whilst trainees completing laparoscopic simulation training demonstrate greater speed, efficiency and security of surgical knot tying [9].

Despite this, surgical trainees in the United Kingdom have reported low levels of access to surgical skills simulation facilities especially outside of working hours or when free of clinical commitments [10]. This is a trend mirrored internationally; half of surveyed European urology trainees reported no current access to simulation facilities [11] and 85% of Canadian surgical residents reported less than monthly access to simulation training opportunities [12]. In addition, equitable access to simulation is not achieved across subspecialties, with UK trainees in plastic surgery, neurosurgery, and oral and maxillofacial surgery reporting lower levels of simulation training availability compared to peers in urology and paediatric surgery [10]. This is likely due to simulation training being a compulsory aspect of the curriculum for some surgical specialities [13]. Where simulation is not a required element, the variable geographic provision of simulation facilities negatively impacts access for trainees, despite many expressing a clear desire to undertake regular simulation training [14]. Subsequently, there is increasing focus on more accessible models of simulation which do not require the use of large and immobile equipment (for example, robotic consoles or operating microscopes) thereby removing additional barriers to learner usage. Tablet-based simulation models, which utilize a tablet in lieu of laparoscopic screens for instance, are well accepted by trainees due to their ease of use and ability to utilize technological equipment which they already own [15]. By allowing trainees to continue to develop surgical skills outside of clinical working hours through self-directed learning, practice occurs in a more distributed way and at each trainee's own pace; as trainees are not constrained by time pressures, learning can occur in a more outcome-based way [16] improving skill acquisition and consolidation [17].

Issues in microsurgical training

Microsurgery utilizes high-power magnification to perform intricate surgical procedures such as vessel and nerve repair [18]. Microsurgical training is particularly affected by the high-stress conditions and low margin of error associated with its application, leading to the suggestion that all initial microsurgical skill acquisition should occur within a simulated setting [19]. Similar to other surgical modalities [20], acquired microsurgical skills also experience decay during periods of disuse [21], adding further support to the need for microsurgical simulation training.

The current gold-standard simulation model for microsurgical anastomosis training is live animal models due to their similar physiology to human tissue [18] thus increasing the fidelity of the simulation experience through replication of events such as thrombogenesis, blood flow and inflammatory processes [22]. However, the ethical and financial implications of using live animals, including cost of care and facilities during rearing, intra-procedural anaesthesia and subsequent requirement for terminal euthanasia [23] mean that substitutes are required. Multiple alternative models currently exist, such as chicken thigh models [24], silastic tubing [25] and Japanese noodles [26], with varying strengths in differing aspects of validity (for example, content, construct, predictive) [27, 28]. Increasing accessibility to virtual, augmented and mixed reality technologies means that the use of extended reality simulation is a rapidly increasing subfield of interest.

New opportunities in microsurgical training

Key definitions for augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR) and mixed reality (MR) are given in Table 1. Extended reality (XR) encompasses these three modalities as a continuum [29].

Previous literature has considered the role of XR modalities in both clinical contexts and for educational interventions within several fields of microsurgery, including plastic surgery, ophthalmology, neurosurgery and endodontic dentistry (Table 1). A preliminary literature

Table 1: Key definitions and examples associated with AR, VR and MR

| Term | Definition | Example use |
|--------------------|--|--|
| Augmented reality | Use of technology to superimpose digital elements onto a view of the real-world environment [30]. | Clinical: Identification of feeding vessels in arteriovenous malformation clipping [31]. Educational: Intra-ocular microsurgical instrument manipulation [32]. |
| Virtual reality | An interactive three-dimensional reality exclusively within a computer simulated environment [30]. | Educational: Dental endodontic resections [33]. |
| Mixed reality | The merger of real and virtual worlds, allowing physical and digital objects to co-exist and interact [34]. | Clinical: Identification of free flap vessel perforators intra-operatively [35]. Educational: Learning curve assessment of intracranial aneurysm clipping [36]. |

search has identified the existence of narrative reviews assessing the current scope of XR modalities specifically within microsurgical education [37] alongside focused systematic reviews within a single ophthalmological procedure [38]. This initial exploration also highlighted that there is a breadth of robust existing primary research allowing for the evaluation of a variety of training techniques and research methodologies in isolation; however, there appears to be a paucity of any broader comparison of the effectiveness of XR educational methods against other methods of education. Completion of a systematic review with this as its main objective will allow for the identification of all relevant literature within this field, and greater assessment of XR microsurgical simulation training in comparison to other educational interventions across all surgical specialities.

Review aim and question

The aim of this systematic review is to undertake a methodical search and appraisal of the existing literature to explore the use of XR in microsurgery training. This is to answer the following question: What effect do extended reality-based educational interventions have on microsurgical skills training of healthcare professionals and students compared to other educational interventions?

Methodology

The protocol for this review has been submitted for registration on PROSPERO (registration number CRD42024527704) and has been reported in accordance with PRISMA-P recommendations for Systematic Review Protocols [39]. The proposed methodology is based on the Cochrane Handbook recommendations for conducting a systematic review [40]. This combination of positivist and constructivist approaches not only evaluates the effectiveness of the intervention against other educational interventions but also allows for further exploration of any findings, resulting in a greater understanding of the research question than can be achieved using solely a quantitative or qualitative strategy [41]. An overview of the systematic review process is given in Figure 1.

Inclusion criteria

The criteria for inclusion within the systematic review is based on the PICO framework as advocated by the Cochrane Handbook recommendations [40]. This structure is widely used in the construct of systematic reviews within the simulation community [42, 43].

Given that the research examining the use of XR methods to train and develop clinical skills is emerging and evolving, a broad search strategy was created to capture the likely diversity of published literature currently in existence [40].

Participants

Studies including any medical professional from undergraduate medical student to consultant/attending will be further reviewed for inclusion.

Initial learning curves for microsurgical skill acquisition show rapid improvement before flattening off as greater proficiency is reached [44]. Previous literature has identified that those deemed proficient, most commonly senior trainees and consultant/attending surgeons, demonstrate a clustering of skill rating scores at a high level; however, few surgeons are able to demonstrate perfect expert performances [45]. This suggests that the potential for skill acquisition and refinement continues throughout all surgical grades and may be affected by novel training modalities.

Additionally, studies evaluating learning in allied health professionals (for example, physician associates or surgical care practitioners) will also be considered for inclusion if the individual's job role means they may be expected to assist with microsurgical techniques. Overlap exists between the skills required of the primary surgeon and assistant during a microsurgical procedure. Assistants can be expected to cut sutures and stabilize anatomic structures [46] so are required to demonstrate proficiency when manipulating surgical instruments under microscopic magnification [47].

Intervention

In this systematic review, studies utilizing XR interventions (comprising of AR, VR or MR) to teach microsurgical skills will be reviewed. Key definitions for AR, VR and MR are included in Table 1. Microsurgical skills are defined as: part of or whole operative procedure completed under magnification with specialized instruments and equipment [48].

Several microsurgical skills courses currently exist catering for participants from differing surgical specialities [49] as the basic microsurgical skills acquired during simulation such as instrument manipulation and tremor control are applicable across many speciality fields [50]. Therefore, interventions based on any speciality undertaking microsurgical procedures will be considered. Ophthalmology, for example, has established several methods of microsurgical skills education [51], however, undertakes a separate training pathway to other surgical specialities [52].

Comparator

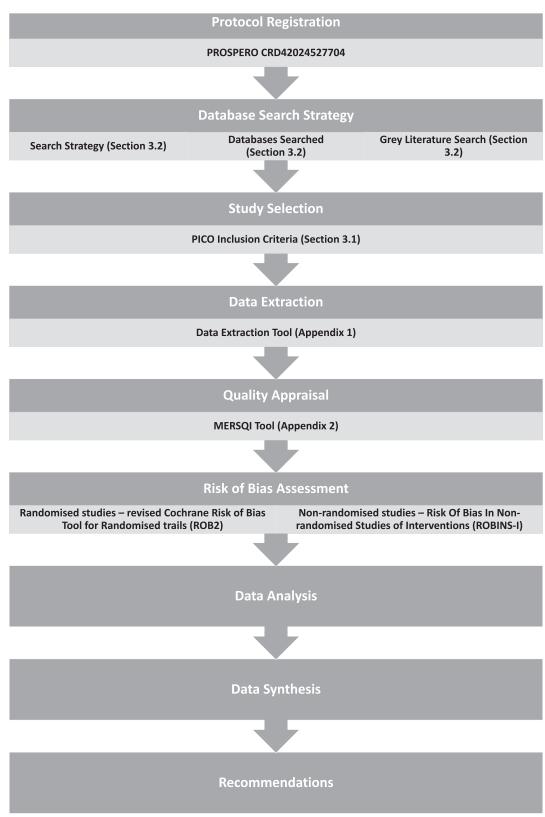
Only studies where a comparison group exists and has been exposed to an educational intervention will be considered for inclusion. This is because the educational community accepts that any educational intervention is likely to influence participant learning and related outcome measures [53].

Studies utilizing an institution's previous educational practice as a comparison group will be reviewed for suitability providing this consists of active educational involvement. Several educational models currently exist for microsurgical skills acquisition and training, including bench models, human cadaveric tissue and live animals [18, 54]. The lack of a clear optimum training modality to compare novel models necessitates that all simulation models currently used in current educational practice be considered as a comparison.

Outcome

Studies will only be considered for inclusion where evidence of an assessment of the educational outcome exists. Manuscripts presenting proof of concept or validity evidence of a novel model without demonstration of learner development will be excluded.

Figure 1: Systematic review method



Both objective measures such as error scores and subjective results, for example, confidence ratings will be accepted as outcomes for quantitatively designed studies. Despite attempts of global working groups, there is no consensus as to the best assessment tool for microsurgical skills acquisition [55]. Several methods of evaluation have been proposed, including objective measures such as global rating scales and task checklists

[56], and self-appraisal instruments [57]. Deliberating the merits and limitations of different forms of surgical skill assessments is not within the scope of this protocol, however, will be considered in the final review when evaluating the conclusions drawn by individual studies. However, of note, previous microsurgical research concluded that self-evaluated confidence scores reflect objective scores of skill competency such as time to task

completion and test scores [57] and therefore will be accepted for inclusion in this review.

Any qualitative data evaluating learner outcomes using XR simulation modalities will also be accepted. Again, self-and externally assessed measures of learner outcomes will be included in the analysis. Use of qualitative data reflects both numerical scoring when evaluating the performance of post-graduate medical trainees and shows greater sensitivity for reflecting vital non-technical skills, such as professional behaviours [58].

Information sources and search strategy

The search terms, including wildcard and explosive phrases, are included in Table 2. Search terms were created from the initial PICO inclusion criteria and the initial pilot search of Embase and Medline databases; titles, key words and MeSH headings from identified articles were reviewed and collated to create the proposed search strategy. Initial pilot searches highlighted that the use of 'microsurgery' based terms only did not identify notable ophthalmological studies within this field, however, were retrieved by using ophthalmological procedure terms (search lines 9–11).

Terms-related comparison groups or outcome measures have not been included in the search strategy. References to the study outcomes are not often well detailed within study titles or abstracts, and as they have low retrieval potential, are suggested to not be included within the strategy search terms [59]. Given that educational research within XR is a rapidly growing and developing field, utilizing a more

Table 2: Template search terms

| 1 | (Augmented reality OR AR OR augmented virtual reality OR augmented reali* OR exp augmented reality).af |
|----|--|
| 2 | (Virtual reality OR VR OR virtual reali* OR exp virtual reality).af |
| 3 | (Mixed reality OR MR OR mixed reali* OR exp mixed reality).af |
| 4 | (Extended reality OR XR OR extended reali* OR exp extended reality).af |
| 5 | Exp education/ OR exp teaching/ OR exp training/ OR exp learning/ OR exp simulation/ OR exp curriculum/ OR exp competency |
| 6 | Exp microsurgery/ OR micromanipulation |
| 7 | (Microsurg* OR micromanipulat* OR microvasc* OR microneurosurg* OR microneurovasc* OR supermicrosurg* OR microscope assisted surg*).af |
| 8 | (Free tissue flap* OR free tissue transfer* OR free flap* OR replant* OR revasc* OR anastomos* OR neurovasc*).af |
| 9 | (Vitreo-retin* OR vitreoretin*).af |
| 10 | Exp cataract |
| 11 | Cataract OR Phacoemulsif*.af |
| 12 | 1 OR 2 OR 3 OR 4 |
| 13 | 6 OR 7 OR 8 OR 9 OR 10 OR 11 |
| 14 | 5 AND 12 AND 13 |

comprehensive strategy allows for maximization of the potential number of relevant identified studies.

The search will be undertaken utilizing Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), Cochrane Library of Reviews, Embase, Medline (Ovid), and Web of Science databases. Where a major journal related to health professionals' education or simulation training is not indexed within a database, a specific search of their published literature will be undertaken. Examples of such journals include the *International Journal of Healthcare Simulation* and *MedEdPublish*. No limitation on published date or language will be set.

Reviewing and inclusion of relevant grey literature is advantageous in reducing the risk of publication bias within systematic reviews [40]. Grey literature will be searched for in Google Scholar, ProQuest Dissertations, and Theses Global and Open Access Theses and Dissertations. Grey literature, in full-text format such as a report or doctoral thesis, will be included. Where only an abstract is available for grey literature, the corresponding full-text record will be sought from the authors. Abstracts themselves will not be included as conference abstracts are often noted to poorly report research findings, making quality assessment challenging, and so have little effect on the overall conclusions of a review [60].

Both randomized trials and cohort studies will be considered for review, as non-randomized research such as cohort studies, is advised to be evaluated for inclusion when insufficient randomized research exists to thoroughly address the initial investigative question [40]. Literature that does not assess a learning outcome such as editorials or commentaries will be excluded. All literature reviews identified by the search terms and studies selected for inclusion will have reference lists examined to ensure any additional studies are identified.

Study selection

All search results will be imported into Mendeley (Elsevier, Amsterdam, NED) reference management software for assessment. Duplicate results will be removed prior to review.

Two independent reviewers will screen all results initially based on the title and abstract. Once this has been completed or where compliance with the inclusion criteria is unclear from the abstract, full-text review of the article will be undertaken to evaluate the appropriateness of its selection. Each reviewer will be blinded to the study inclusion decision of the other members of the review team during the screening process. Disagreements will be discussed with the senior author to achieve consensus.

The process of searching, retrieving, reviewing and appraising will be recorded and reported in the systematic review report in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) statement in the recommended flowchart form [61].

Data extraction

A study detail extraction form was created within Microsoft Excel (Microsoft, Washington, DC) based on the

stated inclusion criteria (Appendix 1). Data points include publication information, aims and methods, results, and conclusions. As part of the data extraction process, studies will also be assessed for the relevant modified Kirkpatrick level [62] based on the measured outcome. Although the use of the Kirkpatrick levels is advantageous when appraising rapidly measurable training outcomes, it is more limited in its use when assessing longer-term complex outcomes [63]. Therefore, a low modified Kirkpatrick level will not be utilized as a study exclusion tool.

The data extraction instrument will be piloted by the two independent reviewers, evaluating five randomly selected articles for inclusion. This will act as a form of training exercise for reviewers to ensure familiarity with the extraction tool and allow for any required revisions to be identified prior to the formal data extraction process. This step is in accordance with the Cochrane recommendations for conducting systematic reviews [40].

Data extraction will be undertaken independently by two authors, as this reduces error in comparison to single-author extraction followed by verification by a second author [64]. The results will be verified by reviewing all retrieved data from both authors to ensure consensus. Where disagreements occur, a senior author will review the relevant literature to establish the overall outcome. Missing data or any aspects requiring clarification will be sought from the original study authors.

Quality appraisal

A second tool appraising the quality of included studies has been generated using the Medical Education Research Study Quality Instrument (MERSQI) (Appendix 2) [65]. The data input process is hosted within Google Forms (Google, Mountain View, CA), to be exported into Microsoft Excel once complete. The MERSQI tool has been proven to be a reliable method of appraising methodological quality within medical educational studies, with high levels of interrater reliability and between-instrument correlation [66]. Neither the MERSQI score nor the previously mentioned Kirkpatrick level will be used as an exclusion tool; instead, their use will allow for additional context and comparisons of the conclusions drawn from individual studies.

Quality of the included studies (as assessed through MERSQI) will be presented in tabular form, with further narrative expansion of notable limitations or strengths that may impact the interpretation of the results.

Risk-of-bias assessment

Two risk-of-bias tools will be utilized. The revised Cochrane risk of bias tool for randomized trials (ROB2) [67] and Risk Of Bias In Non-randomized Studies of Interventions (ROBINS-I) tool [68] for non-randomized studies. In keeping with Cochrane recommendations [31], non-randomized studies deemed at a high risk of bias will be excluded. No exclusion criteria will be set for randomized studies; however, any risk of bias will be considered in the data synthesis stage.

Data analysis

Data analysis will be undertaken in three phases: narrative description of study data, quantitative analysis with

meta-analysis if possible; qualitative analysis and overall data synthesis.

It is highly likely, due to the broad inclusion criteria, that differing study designs will be retrieved. Should sufficient numbers of studies be retrieved to allow for subgroup analysis, coherent group themes will be sought to minimize one facet of this heterogeneity, for example, comparing research by extended reality modality or population subtype. Cochrane acknowledges that true pre-specification of sub-groups may not be achievable, and allows for post hoc analyses provided these are clearly identified [40].

Quantitative analysis

Publication details of included studies will be summarized and tabularized. Quantitative data relevant to the investigative question such as measures of central tendency will be presented in tables or figures depending on the nature of the results. As noted previously, it is unlikely that sufficient numbers of homogenous studies will be retrieved to allow for a meta-analysis to be conducted. This possibility is reduced further as it is recommended to undertake separate meta-analyses for randomized and non-randomized study designs [40].

However, should studies have sufficient commonalities in their methodology to allow for pooling and comparison of data, statistical analysis will be run via SPSS Statistics (IBM, New York, NY). Due to the many potential study outcomes measured, the proposal of the specific statistical tests to be undertaken is not possible within the protocol. The absence of committing to a specific statistical proposal allows for the undertaking of a robust review of the literature, as the adaptation of the study protocol in a contemporaneous manner ensures an optimal analysis of the current evidence retrieved. Details of the analysis appropriate for the studies retrieved will be stated in the final systematic review.

Should a meta-analysis be undertaken, a funnel plot for each intervention modality (AR/VR/MR) will be created (comparing study effect estimates against standard error, as recommended by Cochrane [40]) and discussed.

Qualitative analysis

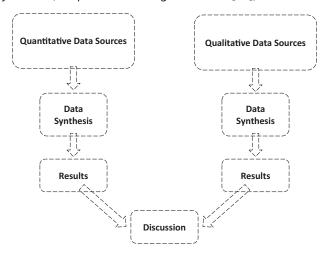
Qualitative data identified will be analysed in a textual narrative format due to its ability to consider evidence across differing study types (including quantitative and qualitative designs) whilst maintaining an ability to evaluate and appraise the quality of included research [69]. A narrative approach is also advantageous when considering the effects of an intervention amongst many heterogenous studies, by discerning what study design characteristics may be responsible for the final result [70].

In addition, as one of the core applications of this form of synthesis is to create output directly applicable to the design, and therefore, evaluation of interventions [71], it holds particular relevance to the aims of this protocol.

Overall data synthesis

After separate analysis of quantitative and qualitative study designs, a convergent integrative synthesis will be undertaken in a parallel-results approach (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Convergent integrative approach to data synthesis (Adapted from Hong et al. 2017 [73])



This allows for a gradual and constant refinement of the interpretation of the study results [72].

Report completion

In addition to the sections previously outlined, the final report will also include a discussion of:

- · strength of the cumulative evidence presented;
- limitations related to the synthesis of included study results;
- strengths and limitations associated with the undertaking of the systematic review process itself;
- · overall implications for microsurgical education, training and practice.

The Cochrane pre-submission checklist [40] will be completed prior to finalization of the study report to ensure a thorough and complete representation of the review's findings.

Modifications

Any amendments to the agreed protocol will be discussed amongst the review team to fully evaluate the need for and suitability of the proposed modifications. The PROSPERO record will be amended contemporaneously should any protocol changes be required. Details of any changes to the proposed protocol will be reported in the final systematic review.

Conclusions

The use of XR as a simulation modality for surgical skill acquisition is a rapidly growing field and will continue to do so as increasing advances in innovation improve accessibility to this technology. Microsurgical training presents substantial challenges that may be alleviated using this new method of simulation. The impact of its use when compared to existing surgical education interventions requires careful evaluation, however. This systematic review aims to begin the process of addressing this as well as identifying research gaps requiring further exploration as this discipline develops.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge Camila Garces-Bovett, Senior Information Specialist, Royal College of Surgeons of England Library and Archives Team, for creating our pilot literature search.

Declarations

Authors' contributions

JM proposed the primary research concept and wrote the initial manuscript. RK provided senior support and support in manuscript refinement. All authors developed and refined the methodology and contributed to the editing and approval of the final manuscript.

Funding

The authors declare no sources of funding related to the preparation of this manuscript.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest. No author has previously published work related to extended reality in microsurgery. No author is affiliated with a commercial entity related to the field of extended reality education provision or development.

References

- 1 Bates T, Cecil E, Greene I. The effect of the EWTD on training in general surgery: an analysis of logbook records. Bulletin of the Royal College of Surgeons of England. 2007;89:106–109. doi: 10.1308/147363507X177045
- 2 Ferreira T. Beyond government accountability: the role of medical schools in addressing the NHS workforce crisis.

 Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine. 2023;116(11): 395–398. doi: 10.1177/01410768231209021
- 3 Sholl S, Ajjawi R, Allbutt J, et al. Balancing health care education and patient care in the UK workplace: a realist synthesis. Medical Education. 2017;51(8):787–801. doi: 10.1111/medu.13290
- 4 Parsons BA, Blencowe NS, Hollowood AD, Grant JR. Surgical training: the impact of changes in curriculum and experience. Journal of Surgical Education. 2011;68(1):44–51. doi: 10.1016/j. jsurg.2010.08.004
- 5 Hurreiz H. The evolution of surgical training in the UK. Advances in Medical Education and Practice. 2019;10: 163–168. doi: 10.2147/amep.S189298
- 6 Marshall SD, Nataraja RM. Patient safety and surgical education. In: Dalrymple K, Paige J, Aggarwal R, editors. Advancing surgical education. Innovation and change in professional education (vol 17). Singapore: Springer. 2019.
- 7 Seymour NE, Gallagher AG, Roman SA et al. Virtual reality training improves operating room performance: results of a randomized, double-blinded study. Annals of Surgery. 2002;236(4):458–464. doi: 10.1097/00000658-200210000-00008

- 8 Zendejas B, Cook DA, Bingener J et al. Simulation-based mastery learning improves patient outcomes in laparoscopic inguinal hernia repair: a randomised controlled trial. Annals of Surgery. 2011;254(3):502–511. doi: 10.1097/SLA.0b013e31822c6994
- 9 Al-Kadi AS, Donnon T. Using simulation to improve the cognitive and psychomotor skills of novice students in advanced laparoscopic surgery: a metaanalysis. Medical Teacher. 2013;35(S1):S47–S55. doi: 10.3109/0142159X.2013.765549
- 10 Milburn JA, Khera G, Hornby ST, Malone PSC, Fitzgerald JEF. Introduction, availability and role of simulation in surgical education and training: review of current evidence and recommendations from Association of Surgeons in Training. International Journal of Surgery. 2012;10(8):393–398. doi: 10.1016/j.ijsu.2012.05.005
- 11 Checcucci E, Puliatti S, Pecoraro A et al. ESRU-ESU-YAU_UROTECH survey on urology residents surgical training: are we ready for simulation and a standardized program? European Urology Open Science. 2024;61:18–28. doi: 10.1016/j. euros.2023.12.008
- 12 Lobo AM, Doucette S, Lantz Powers AG. Stakeholder perspectives and status of surgical simulation and skills training in Canadian urology residency program. Canadian Urological Association Journal Journal de l'Association des urologues du Canada. 2020;14(10):322–327. doi: 10.5489/cuaj.6286
- 13 Young M, Kailavasan M, Taylor J et al. The success and evolution of a urological "boot camp" for newly appointed UK urology registrars: incorporating simulation, nontechnical skills and assessment. Journal of Surgical Education. 2019;76(5):1425–1432. doi: 10.1016/j.jsurg.2019.04.005
- 14 Nicholas R, Humm G, MacLeod KE et al. Simulation in surgical training: prospective cohort study of access, attitudes and experiences of surgical trainees in the UK and Ireland. International Journal of Surgery. 2019;67:94–100. doi: 10.1016/j.ijsu.2019.04.004
- 15 Bahsoun AN, Malik MM, Ahmed K, El-Hage O, Jaye P, Dasgupta P. Tablet based simulation provides a new solution to accessing laparoscopic skills training. Journal of Surgical Education. 2013;70(1):161–163. doi: 10.1016/j.jsurg.2012.08.008
- 16 Barnes J, Burns J, Nesbitt C, Hawkins H, Horgan A. Home virtual reality simulation training: the effect on trainee ability and confidence with laparoscopic surgery. Journal of Surgical Simulation. 2015;2:53–59. doi: 10.1102/2051-7726.2015.0012
- 17 Brinkman W, Buzink S, Alevizos L, de Hingh I, Jakimowicz J. Criterion-based laparoscopic training reduces total training time. Surgical Endoscopy. 2012;26:1095–1101. doi: 10.1007/s00464-011-2005-6
- 18 Javid P, Aydin A, Mohanna P-N, Dasgupta P, Ahmed K. Current status of simulation and training models in microsurgery: a systematic review. Microsurgery. 2019;39(7):655–668. doi: 10.1002/micr.30513
- 19 Fuertes Bielsa V. Virtual reality simulation in plastic surgery training. Literature review. Journal of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgery. 2001;74(9):2372–2378. doi: 10.1016/j. bjps.2021.03.066
- 20 Cecilio-Fernandes D, Cnossen F, Jaarsma DADC, Tio RA.
 Avoiding surgical skill decay: a systematic review on the
 spacing of training sessions. Journal of Surgical Education.
 2018;75(2):471–480. doi: 10.1016/j.jsurg.2017.08.002

- 21 Carolan D, Milling R, Quinlan C et al. Are plastic surgery trainees accurate assessors of their own microsurgical skill? JPRAS Open. 2023;37:24–33. doi: 10.1016/j.jpra.2023.04.004
- 22 Gasteratos K, Paladino JR, Akelina Y, Mayer HF. Superiority of living animal models in microsurgical training: beyond technical expertise. European Journal of Plastic Surgery. 2021;44(2):167–176. doi: 10.1007/s00238-021-01798-1
- 23 Bergmeister KD, Aman M, Kramer A, et al. Simulating surgical skills in animals: systematic review, costs & acceptance analyses. Frontiers in Veterinary Science. 2020;7:570852. doi: 10.3389/fvets.2020.570852
- 24 Creighton FX, Feng AL, Goyal N, Emerick K, Deschler D. Chicken thigh microvascular training model improves resident surgical skills. Laryngoscope Investigative Otolaryngology. 2017;2(6):471–474. doi: 10.1002/lio2.94
- 25 Brosious JP, Kleban SR, Goldman JJ, et al. Ahead of the curve: tracking progress in novice microsurgeons. Journal of Reconstructive Microsurgery. 2019;35(3):216–220. doi: 10.1055/s-0038-1670652
- 26 Prunières GJ, Taleb C, Hendriks S, et al. Use of the Konnyaku Shirataki noodle as a low fidelity simulation training model for microvascular surgery in the operating theatre. Chirurgie de la Main. 2014;33(2):106–111. doi: 10.1016/j.main.2013.12.003
- 27 Chan W-Y, Matteucci P, Southern SJ. Validation of microsurgical models in microsurgery training and competence: a review. Microsurgery. 2007;27(5):494–499. DOI: 10.1002/micr.20393
- 28 Dumestre D, Yeung JK, Temple-Oberle C. Evidence-based microsurgical skill acquisition series part 1: validated microsurgical models a systematic review. Journal of Surgical Education. 2014;71(3):329–338. doi: 10.1016/j. jsurg.2013.09.008
- 29 Woodall WJ, Chang EH, Toy S, et al. Does extended reality simulation improve surgical/procedural learning and patient outcomes when compared with standard training methods? A systematic review. Simulation in Healthcare. 2024;19(1S):S98–111. doi: 10.1097/SIH.000000000000000767
- 30 Kovoor JG, Gupta AK, Gladmann MA. Validity and effectiveness of augmented reality in surgical education: a systematic review. Surgery. 2021;170(1):88–98. doi: 10.1016/j. surg.2021.01.051
- 31 Cabrilo I, Bijlenga P, Schaller K. Augmented reality in the surgery of cerebral arteriovenous malformations: technique assessment and considerations. Acta Neurochir (Wein). 2014;156(9):1769–1774. doi: 10.1007/s00701-014-2183-9
- 32 Ropelato S, Menozzi M, Michel D, Siegrist M. Augmented reality microsurgery: a tool for training micromanipulations in ophthalmic surgery using augmented reality.

 Simulation in Healthcare. 2020;15(2):122–127. doi: 10.1097/SIH.0000000000000013
- 33 Carpegna G, Scotti N, Alovisi M, Comba A, Berruti E, Pasqualini D. Endodontic microsurgery virtual reality simulation and digital workflow process in a teaching environment. European Journal of Dental Education. 2023;00:1–7. doi: 10.1111/eje.12946
- 34 Kumar RP, Pelanis E, Bugge R, et al. Use of mixed reality for surgery planning: assessment and development workflow. Journal of Biomedical Informatics. 2020;112(S):100077. doi: 10.1016/j.yjbinx.2020.100077
- 35 Lee GK, Moshrefi S, Fuertes V, Veeravagu L, Nazerali R, Lin SJ. What is your reality? Virtual, augmented, and mixed reality in plastic surgery training. Plastic and

- Reconstructive Surgery. 2021;147(2):505–511. doi: 10.1097/PRS.00000000000007595
- 36 Cuba M, Vanluchene H, Murek M, et al. Training performance assessment for intracranial aneurysm clipping surgery using a patient-specific mixed-reality simulator: A learning curve Study. Operative Neurosurgery. 2024;26(6):727–736. doi: 10.1227/ons.000000000000001041
- 37 Sayadi LR, Naides, Eng M, et al. The new frontier: a review of augmented reality and virtual reality in plastic surgery. Aesthetic Surgery Journal. 2019;39(9):1007–1016. doi: 10.1093/asj/sjz043
- 38 Lin JC, Yu Z, Scott IU, Greenberg PB. Virtual reality training for cataract surgery operating performance in ophthalmology trainees. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews. 2021;12(12):CD014953. doi: 10.1002/14651858. CD014953.pub2
- 39 Shamseer L, Moher D, Clarke M, et al. Preferred reporting items for systematic review and meta-analysis protocols (PRISMA-P) 2015: elaboration and explanation. BMJ. 2015;350:g7647. doi: 10.1136/bmj.g7647
- 40 Higgins JPT, Thomas J, Chandler J, et al. (editors). Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions Version 6.4 (updated August 2023) [Internet]. Cochrane, 2023. [Cited 2024 March 24]. Available from: www.training.cochrane.org/handbook
- 41 Stern C, Lizarondo, L Carrier J, et al. Methodological guidance for the conduct of mixed methods systematic reviews. JBI Evidence Synthesis. 2020;18(10):2108–2118. doi: 10.11124/ JBISRIR-D-19-00169
- 42 Stephan JC, Kanbar A, Saleh N, Alinier G. The effect of deception in simulation-based education in healthcare: a systematic review and meta-analysis. International Journal of Healthcare Simulation. 2023;00:1–14. doi: 10.54531/HWXI.4351
- 43 Cantrell AN, Franklin A, Leighton K, Carlson A. The evidence in simulation-based learning experiences in nursing education and practice: an umbrella review. Clinical Simulation in Nursing. 2017;13(12):634–667. doi: 10.1016/j. ecns.2017.08.004
- 44 Lascar I, Totir D, Cinca A, et al. Training program and learning curve in experimental microsurgery during the residency in plastic surgery. Microsurgery. 2007;27(4):263–267. doi: 10.1002/micr.20352
- 45 Selber JC, Chang EI, Liu J, et al. Tracking the learning curve in microsurgical skill acquisition. Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery. 2012;130(4):550e-557e. doi: 10.1097/PRS.0b013e318262f14a
- 46 Villavisanis DF, Zhang D, Shay PL, Taub PJ, Venkatramani H, Melamad E. Assisting in microsurgery: operative and technical considerations. Journal of Hand Surgery Global Online. 2023;5(3):358–362. doi: 10.1016/j.jhsg.2023.01.011
- 47 Satkunanantham M, Sechachalam S. A hands-on microsurgery course for nurses. Archives of Plastic Surgery. 2021;48(3):305–309. doi:10.5999/aps.2020.01893
- 48 Wei F, LinTay SK, Al Deek NF. Principles and techniques of microvascular surgery. In: Gurtner G and Neligan P, editors. Plastic surgery. Volume 1: principles. Amsterdam: Elsevier. 2023. p. 414–415.
- 49 Shurey S, Akelina Y, Legagneux J, Malzone G, Jiga L, Mahmoud Ghanem A. The rat model in microsurgery education: classical exercises and new horizons. Archives

- of Plastic Surgery. 2014;41(3):201–208. doi: 10.5999/aps.2014.41.3.201
- 50 Deuchlet S, Scholtz J, Ackermann H, Seitz B, Koch F. Implementation of microsurgery simulation in an ophthalmology clerkship in Germany: a prospective, exploratory study. BMC Medical Education. 2022;22(1):599. doi: 10.1186/s12909-022-03634-x
- 51 Nguyen G, Palmer J, Ludeman E, Levin MR, Swamy R, Alexander J. Evaluating the efficacy of microsurgical training methods in ophthalmology education: a systematic review and meta-analysis. Journal of Academic Ophthalmology. 2017;13(2):e216–227.
- 52 Harries RL, Rashid M, Smitham P, et al. What shape do UK trainees want their training to be? Results of a cross-sectional study. BMJ Open. 2016;6(1):e010461. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2015-010461
- 53 Cook DA, Beckman TJ. Reflections on experimental research in medical education. Advances in Health Science Education. 2010;15:455–464. doi: 10.1007/s10459-008-9117-3
- 54 Ghanem AM, Hachach-Haram N, Leung CC, Myers SR. A systematic review of evidence for education and training interventions in microsurgery. Archives of Plastic Surgery. 2013;40(4):312–319. doi:10.5999/aps.2013.40.4.312
- 55 Ghanem A, Kearns M, Ballestín A, et al. International Microsurgery Simulation Society (IMSS) consensus statement on the minimum standards for a basic microsurgery course, requirements for a microsurgical anastomosis global rating scale and minimum thresholds for training. Injury. 2020;51(S4):S126–130. doi: 10.1016/j.injury.2020.02.004
- 56 Tolba RH, Czigány Z, Osorio Lujan S, et al. Defining standards in experimental microsurgery training: recommendations for the European Society for Surgical Research (ESSR) and the International Society for Experimental Microsurgery (ISEM). European Surgical Research. 2017;58(5–6):246–262. doi: 10.1159/000479005
- 57 Satterwhite T, Son J, Carey J, et al. Microsurgery education in residency training: validating an online curriculum.

 Annals of Plastic Surgery. 2012;68(4):410–414. doi: 10.1097/
 SAP.0b013e31823b6a1a
- 58 Durning SJ, Hanson J, Gilliland W, McManigle JM, Waechter D, Pangaro LN. Using qualitative data from a programme director's evaluation form as an outcome measurement for medical school. Military Medicine. 2010;175(6):448–452. doi: 10.7205/milmed-d-09-00044
- 59 Frandsen TF, Bruun Nielsen MF, Lindhardt CL, Eriksen MB. Using the full PICO model as a search tool for systematic reviews resulted in lower recall for some PICO elements. Journal of Clinical Epidemiology. 2020;127: 69-75. doi: 10.1016/j.jclinepi.2020.07.005
- 60 Hackenbroich S, Kranke P, Meybohm P, Weibel S. Include or not to include conference abstracts in systematic reviews?

 Lessons learned from a large Cochrane network meta-analysis including 585 trials. Systematic Reviews. 2022;11:178. doi: 10.1186/s13643-022-02048-6
- 61 Page MJ, McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, et al. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. BMJ. 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71
- 62 Hammick M, Dornan T, Steinert Y. Conducting a best evidence systematic review. Part 1: from idea to data coding. BEME Guide No. 13. Medical Teacher. 2010;32(1):3–15. doi: 10.3109/01421590903414245

- 63 Yardley S, Dornan T. Kirkpatrick's levels and education 'evidence'. Medical Education. 2012;46(1):97–106. doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2923.2011.04076.x
- 64 Buscemi N, Hartling L, Vandermeer B, Tjosvold L, Klassen TP. Single data extraction generated more errors than double data extraction in systematic reviews. Journal of Clinical Epidemiology. 2006;59(7):697–703. doi: 10.1016/j. jclinepi.2005.11.010
- 65 Reed DA, Cook DA, Beckman TJ, Levine RB, Kern DE, Wright SM. Association between funding and quality of published medical education research. JAMA. 2007;298(9):1002–1009. doi: 10.1001/jama.298.9.1002
- 66 Cook DA, Reed DA. Appraising the quality of medical education research methods: the Medical Education Research Study Quality Instrument and the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale-Education. Academic Medicine. 2015;90(8):1067–1076. doi: 10.1097/ACM.000000000000000786
- 67 Sterne JAC, Savović J, Page MJ, et al. RoB 2: a revised tool for assessing risk of bias in randomised trials. BMJ. 2019;366:14898. doi: 10.1136/bmj.14898

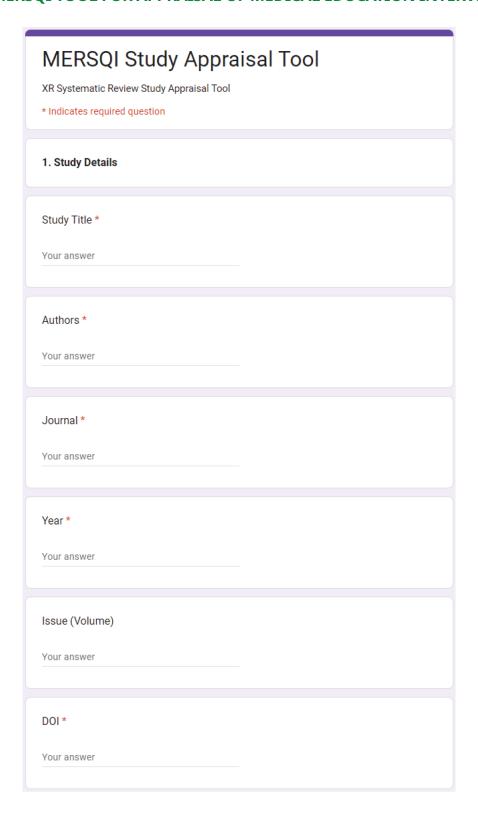
- 68 Sterne JAC, Hernán MA, Reeves BC, et al. ROBINS-I: a tool for assessing risk of bias in non-randomized studies of interventions. BMJ. 2016;355:i4919. doi: 10.1136/bmj.i4919
- 69 Lucas PJ, Baird J, Arai L, Law C, Roberts HM. Worked examples of alternative methods for the synthesis of qualitative and quantitative research in systematic reviews. BMC Medical Research Methodology. 2007;7: 4. doi: 10.1186/1471-2288-7-4
- 70 Ryan R. Cochrane consumers and communication review group: data synthesis and analysis. Available from: https://cccrg.cochrane.org/sites/cccrg.cochrane.org/files/uploads/Analysis.pdf (Accessed 01 August 2024).
- 71 Barnett-Page E, Thomas K. Methods for the synthesis of qualitative research: a critical review. BMC Medical Research Methodology. 2009;9:59. doi: 10.1186/1471-2288-9-59
- 72 Langley A, Mintzberg H, Pitcher P, Posada E, Saint-Macary J. Opening up decision making: the view from the black stool. Organ Science. 1995;6(3):260–279. doi: 10.1287/orsc.6.3.260
- 73 Hong QN, Pluye P, Bujold M, Wassef M. Convergent and sequential synthesis designs: implications for conducting and reporting systematic reviews of qualitative and quantitative evidence.

 Systematic Reviews. 2017;6(1):61. doi: 10.1186/s13643-017-0454-2

APPENDIX 1: STUDY DATA EXTRACTION TOOL

| Study Publication Details | | |
|---|---|--|
| Title | | |
| Authors | | |
| Journal | | |
| Year | | |
| Issue (Volume) | | |
| DOI | | |
| Aims and Methods | | |
| Stated Aim | | |
| Study Design | Randomised controlled trial [] Cohort study [] Case control study [] | |
| Population | | |
| Intervention | AR[] VR[] | |
| Intervention delivery details | Duration Number of events Self-practice or facilitated Feedback methods Other details | |
| Randomisation details (if applicable) | | |
| Comparison Group Intervention Details | | |
| Outcome Measures | | |
| Statistical analysis | | |
| Study | | |
| Primary outcome results | | |
| Secondary outcome results (if applicable) | | |
| Limitations | | |
| Any other notes | | |

APPENDIX 2: MERSQI TOOL FOR APPRAISAL OF MEDICAL EDUCATION INTERVENTIONS [65]



| MERSQI Study Appraisal Tool *Indicates required question | | |
|--|--|--|
| 2. Study Method | | |
| Study design * | | |
| Single-group cross-sectional (1pt) | | |
| Single-group post-test (1pt) | | |
| Single-group pre-test and post-test (1.5pt) | | |
| Non-randomised, 2 group (2pt) | | |
| Randomised controlled trial (3pt) | | |
| Sampling: Institutions * Single institution (0.5pt) 2 institutions (1pt) 3 or more institutions (1.5pt) | | |
| Sampling: Response rate * | | |
| O Not Applicable - use only if response rate truly does not apply eg data obtained from a database | | |
| Not reported (0.5pt) | | |
| <50% (0.5pt) | | |
| O 50 - 74% (1pt) | | |
| 75% or more (1.5pt) | | |

| Type of data * | |
|--|-----------|
| Assessment by study participant (1pt) | |
| Objective (including observer ratings) (3pt) | |
| Validity evidence for evaluation instrument scores * | |
| O Not applicable | |
| Content (1pt) | |
| Internal structure (1pt) | |
| Relationships to other variables (1pt) | |
| Data analysis: Sophistication * | |
| O Descriptive analysis only (1pt) | |
| Beyond descriptive analysis (2pt) - includes any type of statistical inference | |
| Data analysis: Appropriate for study design and type of data * | |
| Yes (1pt) | |
| O No (0pt) | |
| Outcome * | |
| O Satisfaction, attitudes, perceptions, opinions, general facts (1pt) - general fact includes demographic data | ts |
| Mnowledge, skills (1.5pt) | |
| O Behaviours (2pt) | |
| Patient/healthcare outcomes (3pt) | |
| Back | Clear for |