International Journal of Physical and Social Science
Vol. 7 Issue 6, June 2017
ISSN: 2249-5894 Impact Factor: 6.644
Journal Homepage: http://www.ijmra.us, Email: editorijmie@gmail.com
Double-Blind Peer Reviewed Refereed Open Access International Journal - Included in the International Serial Directories Indexed & Listed at: Ulrich's Periodicals Directory ©, U.S.A., Open J-Gage as well as in Cabell's Directories of Publishing Opportunities, U.S.A

THE EFFECT OF USING ICT FOR IMPROVING LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN SCIENCE TEACHING

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Abstract:

The focus of this paper is to examine the effect of using an ICT to both increase academic support to students, and to teaching skills. Science is one of the most fundamental natural subject which involve the study of universal law and the behaviors and relationship among a wide range of physical concepts and phenomena. Experiments are the hallmark of science. Scientific attitude and vision can be developed by allowing young minds to perform experiments in lab and observe and understand the scientific phenomena to happen. In present given scenario of ICT tools i.e. Virtual lab based method of teaching science is emerging as one of the most powerful method of teaching science.

The present study was conducted to see two common dimensions of change in learning environments that emerged across the country: changes in teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes; and changes in the use of ICT tools to promote students' learning. Both dimensions relate to shifts in pedagogical paradigms that appear to be prerequisites to effectively using ICT to support students' learning. Our findings indicate that these shifts must not just occur at the teacher level, but must take hold throughout the educational system and must accompany sustained investment in infrastructure, learning resources, curricular frameworks, and assessment.

Key Words:
ICT;
Virtual lab;
Science teaching;
Learning environment ;

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1. Introduction

In recent years, Inquiry-Based Science Education (IBSE) has proved its efficacy in education by expanding on "conventional" lessons and motivating students to actively participate in science . IBSE methods and digital technologies support necessary educational innovations and can be the catalyst for change in educational. Virtual laboratories are an essential ICT tool. Simulation and Virtual Lab has invaded the educational process and is providing us with many opportunities to exploit. An additional challenge faced by educators has been the integration of Inquiry Based Science Learning (IBSL) in teaching. While the use ICT has already penetrated in Inquiry Based Teaching, we have yet to create and implement STEM lesson plans that promote the development of methodological skills and competencies, investigation through experimentation, teamwork and communication among students through collaborative activities.
Physics is one of the most fundamental natural sciences which involve the study of universal law and the behaviors and relationship among a wide range of physical concepts and phenomena. Experiments are the hallmark of Physics. Scientific attitude and vision can be developed by allowing young minds to perform experiments in physics lab and observe and understand the scientific phenomena to happen. Learning through experiments encourages students to bring scientific thinking to the processes of strong, innovative and logical path between concept and phenomena. For physics learning, labs also plays very active and significant role as it is essential to develop concepts and principles because students are continuously required to identify the hidden concepts, define and explain underlying laws and theories using high level reasoning skills. Traditional laboratory has some limitation and problems in developing these concepts etc. Today's traditional labs and the experiences acquired there, because of certain limitations of their own , are not meaningful adequately for students and are not able to make a significant contribution to conceptual understanding of students (Yager , Engen and Snider ,1969). According to Hofstein (1988), students are performing experiments in the laboratory in a "cookbook" approach which focused on development of low level science skills. Zulkifli & Hassan(2009) studied problems during physics lab session. Results on problems encountered during the physical lab session are presented (Figure-1). 17% of the students admitted on lack of skills in performing the experiments. Others agreed on lack of preparation (16%), limited lab equipment (15%) and incompetent lab demonstrators (15%). These factors may hinder them from successfully grasping the key concepts and knowledge expected from the experiments

performed. In order to overcome these problems of traditional physics lab, search of a new philosophy in which learner are actively constructing their own knowledge is needed. (Jonget 1998). In present scenario virtual lab through computer simulation based method of teaching physics is an emerging powerful method of experimentation in lab. The experiments, traditionally conducted in physical labs, can now be performed on a computer through virtual lab.

There are various ways of defining virtual lab. It can be defined as a computer program that allows student to run simulated experiments via the web or as a stand-alone application. A virtual lab could be a set of simulations put together (Examples are applets, flash base demons, animations). This allows the students to perform the experiments remotely at any time. In addition, experimental-oriented problems can be conducted without the overheads incurred for maintaining a physical lab. A virtual lab is also particularly useful when some experiments may involve hazardous chemicals and risky equipment. Virtual Lab also, is used in the system aiming to replace physical machine with virtual machines on one host server. They eliminate the limitation of physical appearance so that students are able to complete security exercises on the local operating system utilizing the client/server architecture. The students could manipulate various parameters of the simulations and observed the result. In this approach there are certain advantage- It is very easy to learn how to use them, the leaning objectives is more clearly defined. Another approach to a virtual lab could be providing a virtual work place that obeys the laws of physics.

Virtual laboratory environments can be divided into following categories

Simulations- Simulations are imitations of operating systems through time, via computers. These represent a process on the basis of a model that is cheaper, faster, less risky and more affordable than the real process.

Network applets - The applets are experimental devices in small virtual laboratories and are quite popular in science subjects. They are small in size and easily transported and they can be used regardless of the operating system type.

Virtual labs- Virtual labs (virtual laboratories) simulate a virtual operating system, the computer screen, Science laboratories, exploiting the potential offered by modern media technology key feature technical interaction and direct and plausible manipulation of objects and parameters.

Virtual Reality Laboratories (VRL)- VRL workshops are computer based and highly interactive. The user becomes a participant in a "virtually real" world, in an artificial three-dimensional optical environment. These workshops are essentially an interface high level including real time three-dimensional simulations through different sensory channels.

1.1 litrature Review

Research studies have indicated that visualization of phenomena through computer simulations can contribute to student's understanding of physics concepts at the molecular level by attaching mental images to these concepts [10-11]. According to Escalada & Zollman (1997), computer simulations provide opportunities for students not only to develop their understanding and reinforcement of physics concepts, but also to develop their skills in scientific investigation and inquiry. Inquiry-based science experiences conducted in relevant, meaningful contexts have been shown to develop higher order thinking skill in students (Roth & Roychoudhury, 1993). This is further supported [12] study that found inquiry-based science teaching and learning, with the support of computer simulation and collaborative contexts help learners to develop critical thinking and inquiry skills. Lawson (1995) cites literature indicating that the Learning Cycle approach that consists of Exploration, Concept Introduction, and Concept Application phases is an inquiry-based teaching model which has proven effective at helping students construct concepts as well as develop more effective reasoning patterns. Interactive learning environment by using simulations base virtual lab for abstract topic, where students become active in their learning, provide opportunities for students to construct and understand difficult concepts more easily [12]. In this, content appropriate simulations and applications based on simulations generally increase learning speed by allowing students to express their real reactions easily [19]. Better designed virtual labs provide students opportunities to express their cognitive style and to choose from the computer screen. Such opportunities allow students to develop their own hypothesis about the topics and develop their own problem solving methods (Windschitl ve Andre, 1998). According to Isman et al (2002), complex information given to the students is

simplified by technology and provides them opportunities of learning by doing. Therefore, use of virtual laboratory overcomes some of the problems faced in traditional laboratory applications and make positive contributions in reaching the objectives of an educational system. But, [18] did not found a significant relationship between students' biology achievement and computer assisted education or traditional teaching methods. On the other hand, physics laboratory lessons are the most favorite and preferable for students in daily life, students' benefit from the laboratory applications. Besides, students who are taught with laboratory-assisted education are more successful than students who are taught with traditional methods and also the learning with laboratory practices parallel with its theoretical knowledge in physics course increases the achievement. The laboratory applications also increase the permanence of students' knowledge. Some researches [15, 20,21, & 22 revealed that computer simulation experiments are more effective than traditional experiments: but some researches [12,18] & [10-13] did not find any difference between their effectiveness. Therefore, no conclusions can be arrived at on the basis of previous researches hence some more researches are needed.

The present study was conducted with this aim in mind. The main purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of using ICT in enhancing learning environment in science teaching.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To identify and design virtual lab situations from the available resources (Java Appletsphet)
2. To Study the effectiveness of virtual lab as an ICT in enhancing learning environment in science teaching

2. Research Method

The present study employed pre- post experimental design. This experimental design enables the manipulations of the variables to be observed under the control of the researcher in order to investigate cause and effect relations. The variables under study are: • Dependent Variable: Achievement Gains on photoelectric effect • Independent Variable: Virtual and real laboratory Experiments on photoelectric effect • Intervening Variable: Previous achievement in Physics. Identification and significance of Topic Physics is full of concepts and principles. During studies, a student is supposed to learn number of concepts. Researchers suggested that developing conceptual understanding is only accomplished through learning that promotes

conceptual change. Use of laboratory inquiry-based experimentation and virtual experimentation provided through interactive computer-based simulations could be used as conceptual change learning environments. Photoelectric effect is one such concept crucial for understanding the particle nature of light, one of the foundations of quantum mechanics. The photoelectric effect is a significant concept which helps students builds an understanding of the photon model of light, and to probe their understanding of the concept of photon model. Experience of working with students during last so many years shows that they have serious difficulties in understanding even the most basic aspects of the photoelectric effect, such as the experimental set-up, experimental results, and implications about the nature of light. The virtual lab allows students to control inputs such as light intensity, wavelength, and voltage, and to receive immediate feedback on the results of changes to the experimental set-up. With proper guidance, students can use the virtual lab to construct a mental model of the experiment. b. Selection of Virtual Lab Experiment Development of Virtual Lab Experiment on the topic of Photoelectric Effect can be time consuming task. There are web sites , where developed virtual lab experiments on different topics of physics are available .One such site is PhET website .The researcher of the present study has gone through this website and found a virtual lab experiment on photo electric effect fitting in to the purpose of the study and therefore, decided to employ the same. This simulation allows students to control inputs such as light intensity, wavelength, and voltage, and it allows them to receive immediate feedback on the results of changes to the experimental set-up. With proper guidance, students can use the simulation to construct a mental model of the experiment. This simulation also allows students to interactively construct the graphs commonly found in textbooks, such as current vs. voltage, current vs. intensity, and electron energy vs. frequency. By seeing these graphs created in real time as they change the controls on the experiment, students are able to see the relationship between the graphs and the experiment more clearly than they see when viewing static images. The Photoelectric Effect simulation is downloaded from the PhET website.

Sample of the study- Looking in to the nature of the study, Purposive sample was selected. The participants of the study were 100 undergraduate students ranging in age from 19 to 23 and taking “Physics Laboratory” class at Department of Physics of a College in Bhopal during the fourth semester of 2015-16- academic year.

2.1 Tools employed

The present study employed following tools:

1. Virtual Lab Experiment on the topic of Photoelectric Effect
2. Pre and post achievement test on the topic of Photoelectric Effect
3. Achievement of students in previous semester
4. Statistical Analysis of Data

To study the effectiveness of virtual lab, the independent samples t- test, were used for testing the data obtained in the study. The SPSS 11.00 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) statistical program was used to evaluate all the data collected from pre-and post-tests.

3. Result and Analysis

Statistical results about the comparison of pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental and the control group students in the PAT are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparison of Achievement gain scores of students of the experimental group and control group

Group	N	X	SD	df	t	p
Experimental	50	1.5	2.02	98	2.32	0.01
Control	50	0.2	2.73			

In Table 1, the mean gain of the achievement in the experimental group and the control group was 0.2 and 1.5 respectively. Students in experimental group who learned the concept of photoelectric effect through virtual experiment gained more compared to control group, who learned the same through real experiment. Independent t-test was employed to investigate further whether this difference in achievement gains between two groups is really significant .Independent t-test results, clearly shows that there is a significant difference groups, scores of the achievement gain (t=2.32) is in favor of experimental group. Therefore, it can safely be concluded that student learned concepts of photoelectric effect through virtual lab in a better way compared to real lab.

4. Conclusion

The present study found that student learned concepts of photoelectric effect through virtual lab in a better way compared to real lab. The findings of the study corroborate with the findings of earlier studies such as Successful instructional strategies help students to process new contents effectively. It will activate students' motivation and meet their expectations. An examination of related studies points out that a proper blending of diverse instructional patterns would enhance the quality of learning. The responsibility of the teacher in the new millennium is to provide an appropriate learning environment for self-learning. Hence, teachers should master and use the diverse science teaching approaches to suit various learning situations and thereby empower the learners. The review of literature is one of the important steps of research. It enables the researcher to identify the research gap of the study, to conceptualize the variables, to formulate the hypothesis and to select the suitable methods and tools. The research studies conducted in India enabled the researcher to test the knowledge of the under graduates students about the units of the various quantities in science, mathematical background in Physics and how to attain success in making use of the teaching science.

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