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PEDAGOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE INTEGRATION OF THEORETICAL KNOWLEDGE AND RESEARCH ACTIVITIES IN THE TEACHING OF CHEMISTRY IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Bakhromjon Dumanov Mukhtarovich
Associate Professor, PhD in Pedagogical Sciences, Andijan State Pedagogical Institute
Sevarakhon Mamatiminova Saidjon kizi
Teacher at the Andijan State Pedagogical Institute
E-mail: alex223095@gmail.com
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Abstract. This article examines the pedagogical foundations, methodological approaches, and educational mechanisms for integrating theoretical knowledge with scientific research activities in chemistry education at higher educational institutions. Particular attention is devoted to the development of students' scientific thinking, research competencies, experimental skills, and ability to apply theoretical concepts to practical scientific problems. The study explores the educational potential of inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, research-oriented instruction, and interdisciplinary approaches in establishing meaningful connections between theoretical chemistry and experimental investigations. Drawing upon constructivist learning theory, experiential learning, and contemporary research on chemistry education, the article proposes a conceptual pedagogical model integrating theoretical instruction, laboratory experimentation, independent research, and reflective assessment. The proposed model emphasizes the importance of student-centered learning environments, scientific inquiry, digital technologies, and competency-based assessment. The analysis suggests that systematic integration of theoretical and research activities can strengthen students' conceptual understanding, scientific reasoning, methodological competence, and readiness for professional scientific activities. The article also identifies institutional, methodological, and technological conditions necessary for implementing an integrated chemistry education system in higher educational institutions.

Key words: chemistry education, theoretical knowledge, scientific research activities, pedagogical integration, inquiry-based learning, research competencies, higher education, experimental learning, constructivism, scientific thinking, innovative teaching methods.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of science, technology, and industrial innovation has significantly transformed the requirements imposed on higher education systems. Contemporary universities are expected not only to provide students with fundamental theoretical knowledge but also to develop their ability to conduct scientific investigations, critically analyze experimental data, formulate hypotheses, and solve complex professional problems. Within this context, chemistry education occupies a particularly important position because chemistry is an experimental science that requires the continuous interaction of theoretical explanations, laboratory observations, and scientific reasoning. Traditional approaches to chemistry instruction have frequently emphasized the transmission of established scientific knowledge through lectures, textbooks, and standardized laboratory exercises.

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Although such methods remain essential for introducing fundamental chemical concepts, they may provide insufficient opportunities for students to independently investigate chemical phenomena and develop advanced research competencies. The separation between theoretical instruction and scientific research activities represents a significant pedagogical challenge. Students may successfully reproduce chemical equations, explain reaction mechanisms, and describe thermodynamic principles while experiencing difficulties in applying these concepts to experimental investigations or unfamiliar scientific problems. Consequently, the integration of theoretical knowledge and research activities has become an important direction in the modernization of chemistry education. Research-oriented chemistry instruction creates opportunities for students to transform theoretical concepts into experimentally verifiable hypotheses, design investigations, interpret scientific evidence, and construct reasoned conclusions. Such integration also corresponds to the broader transition from knowledge-centered education toward competency-based and student-centered educational paradigms. According to the constructivist approach, learning is an active process through which individuals develop understanding by connecting new information with previous knowledge and experiences. In chemistry education, this principle supports the organization of instructional activities that encourage students to investigate chemical processes rather than merely memorize their descriptions. Experiential learning theory further emphasizes the importance of connecting concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. The application of these theoretical perspectives to chemistry instruction creates a methodological foundation for combining classroom learning, laboratory experiments, independent investigations, and scientific communication.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the pedagogical foundations of integrating theoretical knowledge and research activities in chemistry education and to develop a conceptual model for improving the effectiveness of this integration in higher educational institutions.

The following research objectives are established: To identify the theoretical and pedagogical principles underlying the integration of chemistry instruction and scientific research. To analyze contemporary teaching methods that facilitate the connection between chemical theory and experimental investigation. To determine the pedagogical conditions necessary for developing students' scientific research competencies. To propose an integrated instructional model combining theoretical learning, laboratory experimentation, and independent research. To establish criteria and indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of integrated chemistry education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The integration of theoretical knowledge and research activities has been examined within several major educational theories, including constructivism, experiential learning, inquiry-based education, and research-based learning.

Constructivist foundations of chemistry education. Constructivist learning theory emphasizes that students actively construct knowledge through interaction with their educational environment. Piaget's theory of cognitive development highlights the importance of cognitive structures and their transformation through learning experiences. From this perspective, chemistry education should encourage students to reorganize existing conceptual knowledge when confronted with new experimental evidence. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes the role of social interaction, collaboration, and instructional guidance in cognitive development. In chemistry classrooms, collaborative laboratory investigations and research discussions provide opportunities for students to develop scientific understanding through communication and shared problem-solving.

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Johnstone (1991) introduced an influential framework explaining the complexity of chemistry learning through three interconnected levels of chemical representation: The macroscopic level, involving observable chemical phenomena. The submicroscopic level, involving atoms, molecules, ions, and their interactions. The symbolic level, involving chemical equations, formulas, graphs, and mathematical expressions. The integration of these levels is particularly important in research-oriented chemistry education. For example, students investigating acid-base reactions should be able to connect observable changes in pH with molecular-level processes and corresponding chemical equations. Gilbert and Treagust (2009) further explored the importance of multiple representations in chemistry education, demonstrating the educational significance of connecting observable phenomena with conceptual and symbolic explanations.

Inquiry-based and research-oriented learning. Inquiry-based learning is based on the principle that students develop scientific knowledge through questioning, investigation, evidence evaluation, and explanation. Pedaste et al. (2015) synthesized inquiry-based learning into interconnected phases, including orientation, conceptualization, investigation, conclusion, and discussion. These phases provide a useful methodological structure for research-oriented chemistry instruction. Similarly, problem-based learning encourages students to investigate authentic scientific problems requiring the application of theoretical knowledge. For example, students may be asked to determine the most effective method for removing heavy metal ions from contaminated water. Solving this problem requires knowledge of analytical chemistry, chemical equilibrium, adsorption processes, environmental chemistry, and experimental methodology. Research-based learning therefore creates interdisciplinary connections while strengthening students' scientific reasoning. Freeman et al. (2014), through a meta-analysis of undergraduate science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education, demonstrated the educational benefits of active learning compared with traditional lecturing across the studies examined. Although these findings do not establish the effectiveness of every specific chemistry research-integration model, they provide important support for instructional approaches emphasizing active student participation.

Research competencies in higher chemistry education. Research competence represents an integrated system of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and methodological abilities necessary for conducting scientific investigations. In chemistry education, this competence includes identifying scientific problems, reviewing relevant literature, formulating hypotheses, selecting appropriate experimental methods, collecting reliable data, analyzing results, and communicating scientific conclusions. Brew (2006) examined relationships between teaching and research in universities, emphasizing the importance of developing educational environments in which students participate in knowledge creation. Healey and Jenkins (2009) likewise discussed undergraduate research and inquiry as important elements of university education. These perspectives suggest that research should not be restricted to postgraduate education or specialized scientific laboratories. Instead, appropriately structured research activities can become an integral component of undergraduate chemistry curricula.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pedagogical principles of integrating theory and research. The theoretical analysis identifies six pedagogical principles that should guide the integration of chemistry instruction and scientific research activities. Scientific validity. Educational content and laboratory investigations should reflect scientifically accepted theories, reliable experimental methods, and appropriate research ethics. Continuity and systematic progression. Research competencies should develop progressively,

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beginning with guided investigations and advancing toward independent scientific projects. Integration of theory and practice. Every major theoretical concept should, where feasible, be connected to experimental evidence, practical applications, or authentic scientific problems. Student-centered learning. Students should participate actively in identifying research questions, designing experiments, analyzing data, and presenting scientific conclusions. Interdisciplinary interaction. Chemistry research should establish connections with physics, biology, mathematics, environmental science, engineering, and digital technologies.

Reflective assessment. Evaluation should consider not only final experimental results but also the scientific reasoning, methodological decisions, and reflective processes underlying students' investigations.

These principles form the conceptual foundation of an integrated chemistry education system.

Integration of theoretical chemistry and laboratory research. The effectiveness of integrated chemistry instruction depends significantly on the relationship between classroom explanations and laboratory activities. Traditional laboratory instruction often involves predetermined procedures in which students follow established instructions to obtain expected results. Although such activities can support basic technical skills, their contribution to independent scientific reasoning may be limited when students have little opportunity to make investigative decisions. Research-oriented laboratory instruction introduces greater intellectual independence. Students may be required to select experimental variables, compare alternative procedures, evaluate measurement uncertainty, and interpret unexpected results. The following table presents examples of integrating theoretical topics with research-oriented activities.

Table 1. Integration of theoretical chemistry topics with scientific research activities

Theoretical topic	Research activity	Expected competencies
Chemical kinetics	Investigating the effects of temperature and concentration on reaction rates	Experimental design, kinetic analysis
Chemical equilibrium	Studying equilibrium shifts under different conditions	Hypothesis testing, conceptual reasoning
Acid-base chemistry	Comparing the buffering capacities of selected solutions	Titration, quantitative analysis
Electrochemistry	Investigating the influence of electrolyte concentration on cell potential	Measurement, electrochemical interpretation
Analytical chemistry	Determining metal-ion concentrations using suitable analytical methods	Calibration, data analysis
Environmental chemistry	Evaluating methods for removing contaminants from water	Applied research, problem-solving
Organic chemistry	Comparing reaction conditions in a selected synthesis	Reaction monitoring, yield analysis

Source: Author-developed instructional examples.

These activities illustrate how theoretical chemistry can be transformed into meaningful scientific investigations. For instance, the study of chemical kinetics can be organized around the relationship between reaction rate and temperature.

According to the Arrhenius equation:

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$$k = Ae^{-E_a/(RT)}$$

where:

- **k** is the reaction rate constant;
- **A** is the pre-exponential factor;
- E_a is the activation energy;
- **R** is the universal gas constant;
- **T** is the absolute temperature.

Students can experimentally determine reaction rate constants at different temperatures and analyze the relationship using the linearized form:

$$\ln k = \ln A - \frac{E_a}{RT}$$

By plotting $\ln k$ against $1/T$ students can estimate activation energy from the slope, provided the Arrhenius model is appropriate for the investigated reaction. This activity integrates theoretical knowledge, laboratory measurement, mathematical modeling, graphical analysis, and scientific interpretation.

Development of students' research competencies. The integration of theoretical and research activities should contribute to the development of a multidimensional system of scientific competencies. These competencies can be classified into five interconnected categories. Cognitive competencies include understanding chemical theories, explaining scientific phenomena, and applying conceptual knowledge to unfamiliar problems. Methodological competencies involve identifying research problems, formulating hypotheses, designing experiments, and selecting suitable analytical procedures. Experimental competencies include operating laboratory equipment, preparing solutions, conducting measurements, following safety procedures, and maintaining reliable experimental records. Analytical competencies involve processing experimental data, evaluating measurement uncertainty, interpreting scientific evidence, and comparing results with theoretical predictions. Communicative competencies include preparing scientific reports, presenting research findings, participating in academic discussions, and defending evidence-based conclusions. The development of these competencies requires continuous assessment throughout the educational process.

Table 2. Proposed criteria and indicators for evaluating research competencies

Assessment criterion	Main indicators	Suggested assessment methods
Theoretical understanding	Accuracy of concepts and explanations	Concept tests, oral examinations
Research planning	Quality of hypotheses and experimental design	Research proposals, planning rubrics
Experimental performance	Accuracy, safety, methodological consistency	Laboratory observation, practical assessment
Data interpretation	Analytical reasoning, uncertainty evaluation	Research reports, data-analysis tasks
Scientific communication	Clarity, argumentation, evidence-based conclusions	Presentations, written reports
Research independence	Initiative, decision-making, critical reflection	Portfolios, independent projects

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The proposed assessment system emphasizes the importance of evaluating both the process and outcomes of scientific investigations. A student who obtains an unexpected experimental result but demonstrates sound scientific reasoning and appropriate methodological reflection should receive recognition for these competencies.

The role of digital technologies in integrated chemistry education. Digital technologies provide additional opportunities for connecting theoretical knowledge with research activities. Molecular visualization software enables students to examine chemical structures, molecular geometry, and reaction mechanisms that cannot be directly observed at the macroscopic level. Virtual laboratories can support preliminary experimentation, especially when physical equipment is expensive, access is limited, or experimental conditions involve substantial risks. Digital data acquisition systems allow students to record measurements, analyze chemical processes, and compare experimental observations with theoretical models. Computational chemistry tools can support investigations involving molecular properties, reaction energetics, and chemical interactions. Furthermore, artificial intelligence technologies may assist students in searching scientific literature, organizing experimental data, generating visual representations, and identifying patterns in complex datasets. However, digital tools should complement rather than replace essential laboratory experiences. Students must also develop the ability to critically evaluate computational results, verify scientific information, and understand the limitations of digital models. The use of artificial intelligence in chemistry research education should therefore be accompanied by clear academic integrity policies, transparent documentation, and human verification of scientific conclusions.

Discussion of expected educational outcomes. The proposed model is expected to support several important educational outcomes. First, the integration of theory and research may improve conceptual understanding by enabling students to connect abstract chemical principles with observable experimental phenomena. Second, research-oriented instruction may strengthen scientific reasoning because students are required to formulate hypotheses, evaluate evidence, and justify conclusions. Third, independent experimental investigations may contribute to the development of professional competencies relevant to chemical laboratories, industrial enterprises, environmental monitoring organizations, and scientific research institutions. Fourth, collaborative research projects can create opportunities for developing communication, teamwork, and academic responsibility. Fifth, digital technologies can expand access to chemical visualization, computational modeling, and quantitative data analysis. However, these outcomes should be interpreted as theoretically grounded expectations rather than empirically verified findings of the present study. Their actual magnitude depends on instructional quality, student preparation, laboratory resources, assessment practices, and institutional conditions. A future empirical investigation could compare student groups receiving conventional instruction with groups participating in the proposed integrated model. Such a study should employ validated assessment instruments, comparable instructional conditions, and appropriate statistical analysis to determine whether the model produces measurable improvements.

CONCLUSION

The integration of theoretical knowledge and scientific research activities represents an important pedagogical direction for improving chemistry education in higher educational institutions. The theoretical analysis demonstrates that constructivist learning, experiential education, inquiry-based instruction, and research-oriented learning provide complementary foundations for organizing integrated chemistry instruction. The proposed five-stage pedagogical model establishes a systematic

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relationship among theoretical preparation, research problem formulation, experimental investigation, data interpretation, and scientific communication. The study identifies scientific validity, systematic progression, theory-practice integration, student-centered learning, interdisciplinarity, and reflective assessment as fundamental principles of this educational approach. Furthermore, the conceptual framework emphasizes that the development of scientific competence requires coordinated attention to cognitive, methodological, experimental, analytical, and communicative abilities. Digital technologies, virtual laboratories, molecular visualization tools, and computational methods can provide additional support for integrating theoretical and experimental learning, provided that they are used responsibly and combined with appropriate practical experience. The successful implementation of this approach requires curriculum coordination, qualified academic staff, laboratory resources, research opportunities, and competency-based assessment systems. Overall, the proposed framework offers a theoretical and methodological basis for strengthening the relationship between chemistry education and scientific research in universities. Future empirical studies should evaluate its effectiveness through classroom interventions, validated competency assessments, and longitudinal investigations of students' scientific development.

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