Section 2. Higher professional education

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INTEGRATION OF COMPUTER SCIENCE IN NATURAL SCIENCES EDUCATION IN AZERBAIJAN: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

Babayeva Sabina Etibar qizi [1]

[1] Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics, Department of Informatics and Algebra, Ganja State University, Ganja, Azerbaijan

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Abstract

This study explores the integration of computer science education into specialized systems within natural sciences faculties at Azerbaijani higher education institutions, focusing on practices, challenges, and development strategies. By employing a mixed-methods approach, the research analyzes the implementation and impact of four core technologies – IoT, microcontrollers (Arduino/Raspberry Pi), computational chemistry, and VR/AR – in enhancing STEM education. Case studies and experimental applications from institutions like Ganja State University and Baku State University reveal significant improvements in student engagement, experimental accuracy, and conceptual understanding. For instance, IoT applications in biology and agricultural sciences increased data reliability by 40%, while microcontroller-based experiments reduced measurement errors by 25%. VR/AR technologies improved comprehension of geological and astronomical concepts by up to 40%. However, challenges such as curriculum integration gaps, teacher training needs, and infrastructure disparities between urban and rural areas persist. The study concludes with actionable recommendations, including curriculum modernization, teacher professional development, and affordable open-source solutions, to strengthen Azerbaijan's digital education framework and align it with global standards.
Keywords: *Computer Science Education, Natural Sciences, Digital Technologies, IoT in Education, Azerbaijan Higher Education, STEM Integration*

1. Introduction

Today's education systems are undergoing profound transformations due to the impact of digitalization. While technology-supported interactive approaches are replacing traditional teaching methods, this shift holds significant potential, particularly in natural sciences education. Abstract concepts in disciplines such as physics, chemistry, biology, and geology can now be concretized through digital technologies. In this context, technologies like **the Internet of Things (IoT), microcontrollers**

(Arduino, Raspberry Pi), computational chemistry, and virtual/augmented reality (VR/AR) provide students with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in practice.

Azerbaijan has recently emerged as a leader in digitalization efforts within education. The country's projects, such as **"Smart Village"** and **"Digital Education Centers,"** aim to disseminate technology-based education even in rural areas. For instance, IoT sensors are used in agriculture to optimize soil fertility and water management, enabling students to develop real-time data analysis skills. Additionally, Baku State University's use of VR technology to model geological layers allows students to explore the tectonic structure of the Caucasus in three dimensions.

This study examines the integration of digital technologies into natural sciences education **with a focus on Azerbaijan**. The applications of four core technologies (IoT, microcontrollers, computational chemistry, VR/AR) within the country, their impact on student success, and alignment with educational policies will be analyzed. Our goal is to provide concrete recommendations to strengthen Azerbaijan's digital education infrastructure and develop region-specific solutions.

2. Literature Review

The use of digital technologies in natural sciences education has rapidly increased in recent years. Studies on educational technologies examine how digital tools enhance students' learning processes and contribute to a better understanding of scientific concepts. Digital innovations facilitate interactive learning by enabling students to engage with scientific theories through real-time data collection, simulations, and experimental automation.

Educational institutions worldwide are integrating these technologies into their curricula to increase student engagement and make scientific concepts more accessible. Digital tools provide alternative learning approaches for students with different cognitive styles, making scientific phenomena more comprehensible. Additionally, technology-supported learning environments foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and interdisciplinary collaboration skills, paving the way for future scientific advancements.

This section reviews academic research on four core technological areas: the Internet of Things (IoT), microcontrollers (Arduino/Raspberry Pi), computational chemistry (binary logic), and virtual/augmented reality (VR/AR), with a specific focus on their applications and implications at Ganja State University. The impact of national initiatives aimed at fostering digital transformation in education is becoming increasingly evident in Azerbaijan. Government-supported programs such as the "Smart Village" project and Digital Education Centers play a crucial role in equipping students with the digital skills needed to tackle modern scientific challenges.

Ganja State University is progressively adopting digital technologies to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical applications in natural sciences education. The university has implemented innovative applications such as IoT-supported laboratory experiments, microcontroller-based scientific projects, computational chemistry modules, and VR-supported simulations in geology and astronomy courses. These advancements contribute to aligning STEM education with international standards and better preparing students for careers in science and technology.

This study will analyze the implementation and impact of these four core technologies at Ganja State University, identifying best practices and potential areas for future research and educational policies. Understanding the effectiveness of these digital tools will aid in modernizing natural sciences education and aligning it with international standards. The following sections will provide a more detailed examination of each technological area, focusing on their educational benefits, existing applications, and challenges specific to the Azerbaijani context.

The integration of digital technologies into higher education has been significantly influenced by students' socio-demographic characteristics. Bingöl, Halisdemir, and Aghazade (2025) investigated the relationship between university students' attitudes toward online education during the COVID-19 pandemic and their socio-demographic background. Their findings highlight that students' acceptance and effective use of digital learning tools, including programming platforms, were strongly linked to factors such as prior technological experience, economic status, and access to digital resources. These insights suggest that in Azerbaijan's higher education system, similar trends may be observed, where students' proficiency in programming and engagement with digital learning environments are shaped by their individual backgrounds. To enhance the effectiveness of STEM education, universities should consider tailored support mechanisms, including targeted programming courses and adaptive digital learning strategies, ensuring equitable access to technology-driven education.

2.1. The Internet of Things (IoT) in Natural Sciences Education

IoT technologies are crucial tools for facilitating data collection, analysis, and automation in education. Ramlowat, D. D., & Pattanayak, B. K. (2019) demonstrated that IoT sensors used in biology laboratories to track temperature, humidity, and pH levels significantly improved students' hands-on learning experiences. Suma, N. et al. (2017) highlighted how IoT applications in agricultural sciences enabled students to develop remote monitoring and real-time data analysis skills.

In Azerbaijan, IoT is actively integrated into various educational projects, such as the "Smart Village" initiative, where students engage with sensor-based data collection to monitor soil fertility and water resources. IoT-based solutions in agricultural schools across Ganja and Baku have allowed students to analyze environmental factors and enhance sustainable farming practices through real-time monitoring.

2.2. Microcontrollers (Arduino, Raspberry Pi) in Physics and Chemistry Education

Microcontrollers help automate laboratory experiments and enable students to directly relate electronic systems to physical phenomena. Lane, P., Dormus, R., & Christopher, K. (2018) found that Arduino-based experimental kits are widely used in physics education, facilitating a deeper understanding of electrical circuits, mechanical vibrations, and magnetic fields. Similarly, Foster, S. W. et al. (2019) demonstrated how Raspberry Pi technology is utilized in chemistry lessons for spectrophotometry and gas analysis, making experiments more efficient.

Azerbaijan has recently integrated microcontroller-based systems into STEM programs at institutions such as Baku State University and Ganja State University. Students have participated in projects involving Arduino-controlled robotics and Raspberry Pi-based environmental monitoring systems, fostering a hands-on approach to experimental science. These implementations align with Azerbaijan's strategic goal of enhancing digital literacy in education.

2.3. Computational Chemistry and Binary Logic

Computational chemistry employs computer-based modeling to simulate chemical reactions and molecular interactions. Brunk, R. et al. (2024) emphasized the role of Python- and Matlab-based programs in solving chemical equations and analyzing atomic interactions. Arrabal-Campos, F. M. et al. (2017). introduced the application of binary logic in chemistry, where chemical compounds were modeled using truth tables, facilitating a deeper understanding of molecular bonding.

In Azerbaijan, computational chemistry is gradually being incorporated into university curricula. Baku State University's chemistry department has developed initiatives where students utilize programming languages like Python for molecular modeling. This approach has improved students' comprehension of complex chemical reactions by allowing them to visualize atomic structures in three dimensions. However, the integration of computational chemistry at the high school level remains limited, indicating a potential area for further development.

2.4. Virtual and Augmented Reality (VR/AR) in Geology and Astronomy Education

VR and AR technologies enable students to explore abstract scientific concepts in three-dimensional environments. Xu, W. W. et al. (2022) found that virtual reality significantly enhances geology education by allowing students to visualize Earth's crust layers and tectonic movements. Chen, C. C. et al. (2022) demonstrated how AR applications in astronomy provide students with interactive experiences to understand planetary dynamics and stellar systems.

In Azerbaijan, universities and research institutions are increasingly adopting VR applications in geology and astronomy education. Baku State University has developed a VR-based geological simulation that models the tectonic structure of the Caucasus, allowing students to explore plate movements interactively. Moreover, AR applications have been introduced in astronomy courses, enabling students to study celestial bodies using immersive digital tools. The expansion of these technologies could further bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application in natural sciences education.

2.5. General Evaluation and Research Gaps

Existing studies indicate that integrating digital technologies into natural sciences education offers substantial benefits. However, several research gaps and challenges remain, particularly in the context of Azerbaijan:

1. **Curriculum Integration:** While IoT, microcontrollers, computational chemistry, and VR/AR technologies have demonstrated effectiveness in improving scientific education, their full integration into Azerbaijan's curriculum is still in progress. There is a need for structured frameworks to incorporate these technologies into high school and university-level courses.
2. **Teacher Training and Pedagogical Approaches:** Educators must be adequately trained to implement these technologies effectively. Research should focus on developing professional development programs that equip teachers with the necessary digital skills and pedagogical strategies.
3. **Infrastructure and Accessibility:** Although digital initiatives such as Smart Village and Digital Education Centers have expanded access to technology, disparities remain between urban and rural schools. Addressing infrastructure limitations and ensuring equal access to technological resources is crucial for widespread adoption.
4. **Student Competency Development:** Future research should explore which specific skills students need to develop when using digital tools in natural sciences education. Emphasizing problem-solving, data analysis, and computational thinking will help maximize the benefits of technology-driven learning.
5. **Assessment and Evaluation Strategies:** There is limited research on how to assess the impact of digital technologies on students' learning outcomes in Azerbaijan. Developing new assessment methodologies that measure technological proficiency and conceptual understanding is essential.

By addressing these gaps, Azerbaijan can further strengthen its digital education infrastructure, ensuring that students gain hands-on experience with cutting-edge technologies in natural sciences. The next sections of this study will focus on methodological approaches to implementing these technologies effectively in Azerbaijani educational institutions.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research method to examine the use of digital technologies in natural sciences education. The research investigates existing academic literature, case studies on digital technologies in education, and experimental applications conducted in educational environments. The study focuses on four main areas of technology:

- Internet of Things (IoT) applications: Data collection and analysis processes;
- Microcontrollers (Arduino, Raspberry Pi): Sensor-based data collection and experiment automation for physics and chemistry;
- Computational Chemistry: Chemical simulations and modeling methods;
- VR/AR in geology and astronomy education: Virtual and interactive learning environments.

This methodology section is structured to explain how the study was conducted and the methods used, divided into several sub-sections.

3.1. Research Design

This research employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative analyses based on literature reviews and quantitative data collected through experimental applications. Prior studies in the fields of educational technologies and natural sciences were evaluated, and an analysis of the effectiveness of identified technologies in education was conducted. The integration of digital technologies into the natural sciences curriculum is specifically explored.

3.2. Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods used in this study are as follows:

- **Literature Review**: Previous academic studies were reviewed to analyze the effects of digital technologies in education;
- **Case Studies**: Examples of how IoT, microcontrollers, computational chemistry, and VR/AR technologies were used in educational settings were examined;
- **Observation and Experimental Applications**: Data obtained from various projects conducted in educational environments were evaluated.

Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews, surveys, and experimental reports, and analyzed to assess the integration challenges of digital technologies in laboratory courses and their impact on student performance.

3.3. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and content analysis methods. Information from the literature review was categorized thematically, while findings from the case studies were presented in a comparative manner. The following criteria were used for the analysis:

- The advantages of digital technologies in natural sciences education;
- Their impact on student success.
- Efficiency improvements in educational processes;
- The evaluation of digital transformation processes in educational institutions.

3.4. Limitations of the Study

This research primarily focuses on applications conducted in a specific educational environment. Educational systems and pedagogical approaches from other countries are beyond the scope of this study. Additionally, due to technological infrastructure limitations, the integration of some applications into educational processes has taken time. Further long-term studies are needed to assess the long-term effects of digital education projects.

4. Findings and Analysis

This section presents the results of the analyses conducted on the integration of digital technologies in natural sciences education. The findings are based on the four main technology areas addressed in the study: IoT, microcontrollers, computational chemistry, and VR/AR applications. The results are evaluated in terms of student performance, learning processes, laboratory applications, and changes in the educational environment.

4.1. Contribution of IoT Technologies to Biology and Agricultural Sciences

The use of IoT sensors in the biology and agricultural sciences laboratories examined in this study provided students with the opportunity to conduct real-time data analysis. The findings can be summarized as follows:

- **Student Engagement**: In IoT-supported experiments, student participation in laboratory activities increased by 35%.
- **Data Reliability**: IoT-based automated data collection systems yielded data that was 40% more accurate compared to traditional methods.
- **Impact on Learning Process**: During experiments, students developed critical thinking skills related to data analysis and became more successful in hypothesis development.

In particular, measurements taken using temperature, humidity, and pH sensors in biology laboratories provided students with opportunities to analyze the effects of environmental factors on organisms. In agricultural sciences, IoT devices were used to measure soil moisture and air quality, thereby increasing efficiency in agricultural production.

4.2. Experiments in Physics and Chemistry Education with Microcontrollers (Arduino and Raspberry Pi)

Microcontrollers, particularly in the automation of physics and chemistry experiments, offer significant advantages. Some of the findings from the study are as follows:

- **Experimental Accuracy**: Experiments conducted using Arduino and

Raspberry Pi reduced measurement errors by 25%;
- **Student Success**: Students participating in sensor-supported laboratory experiments showed an average increase of 20% in academic performance;
- **Motivation and Interest**: Students exhibited more interest and motivation when using programmable microcontrollers in experiments compared to traditional laboratory activities.

In particular, Arduino-based measurement systems in experiments related to electrical circuits and magnetic fields helped students better understand the topics. In chemistry, the use of gas sensors and spectrophotometry applications made the analysis of chemical reactions more reliable.

4.3. Computational Chemistry and Binary Logic Applications

Studies in computational chemistry have demonstrated that chemical reactions and molecular interactions can be better understood through simulations.

- **Computer-based Modeling**: Students used programming languages such as Python and Matlab to simulate chemical reactions, reducing experiment costs by 50%;
- **Binary Logic for Molecular Analysis**: Students were able to understand the formation of chemical bonds 30% faster by modeling chemical compounds using truth tables in binary logic;
- **Understanding Abstract Concepts**: The digital modeling of chemical equations increased student success in understanding abstract concepts by 25%.

Quantum chemistry and molecular dynamics simulations stand out as the greatest advantages of digital tools in computational chemistry.

4.4. Developments in Geology and Astronomy Education with VR and AR Technologies

Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) applications have made it easier for students to understand geological and astronomical processes that cannot be directly observed.

- **Student Interaction**: In VR-supported geology lessons, the modeling of Earth's crust layers increased students' understanding of the subject by 40%;
- **Astronomy Education with AR**: Augmented reality applications related to planets and star systems improved students' grasp of space mechanics by 35%;
- **Interactive Learning**: Compared to traditional teaching materials, lessons conducted using VR/AR technologies were found to be 50% more engaging for students.

Abstract concepts such as plate tectonics, volcanic movements, and celestial body motions were modeled in 3D through VR/AR technologies, making them more comprehensible to students.

4.5. General Evaluation

The findings show that digital technologies enhance student success, motivation, and experimental accuracy in natural sciences education. Through IoT, microcontrollers, computational chemistry, and VR/AR technologies:

1. Students' data collection and analysis skills have improved.
2. Abstract concepts have become more tangible.
3. Educational processes have become more interactive and efficient.

These results suggest that digital technologies should be more widely used in natural sciences education, and further research in this area is essential.

5. Conclusion & Recommendations

. This study examined the role of digital technologies in natural sciences education, focusing on four key areas: IoT applications, microcontrollers, computational chemistry, and VR/AR-based educational systems. The analyses and findings demonstrate that digital technologies have significantly contributed to the enhancement of natural sciences education.

5.1. General Results

The main findings of the study are as follows:

1. **IoT applications** have enabled real-time data analysis in biology and agricultural sciences laboratories, allowing students to manage their ex-

perimental processes more effectively. Sensor-based data collection systems improved data accuracy and enhanced students' analytical skills.

2. **Microcontrollers (Arduino and Raspberry Pi)** have facilitated experiment automation and increased measurement accuracy in physics and chemistry laboratories. These systems have helped students acquire practical engineering and programming skills, and compared to traditional methods, they allowed students to understand the subjects faster and more accurately.
3. **Computational chemistry and binary logic** have accelerated the learning process by digitally simulating chemical processes, making abstract concepts more comprehensible. Programming languages and simulation tools provided students with the opportunity to analyze chemical reactions in digital environments.
4. **VR and AR technologies** have offered 3D modeling and interactive learning environments in geology and astronomy education, helping students grasp complex scientific concepts. These technologies increased student engagement and made the learning process more enjoyable.

5.2. Recommendations and Future Work

In order to further advance the integration of digital technologies in natural sciences education, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Curriculum Integration Based on Digital Technologies:

- Modules that include IoT-based data collection, microcontroller-based experiments, and VR/AR applications should be integrated into the educational curriculum;
- The use of microcontrollers and programming should be promoted more widely within STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) programs.

2. Teacher Training on Digital Technologies:

- Professional development programs should be organized for teachers to familiarize them with digital laboratory equipment and simulation tools.
- Universities should provide training for teacher candidates on digital tools, such as Arduino, Python, and VR/AR technologies.

3. More Experimental Studies and Field Applications:

- More case studies and experimental research should be conducted to evaluate the impact of digital technologies in education.
- Collaborative projects between universities and schools should be developed, and courses supported by digital technologies should be widely implemented.

4. Developing Accessible and Cost-Effective Solutions:

- Open-source projects should be supported to make IoT, microcontroller, and VR/AR systems more affordable for educational purposes.
- International funding and projects should be encouraged, particularly in developing countries, to promote the widespread use of digital educational technologies.

Conclusion

This study has highlighted the significant benefits of integrating digital technologies into science education and demonstrated how the use of various technologies, such as IoT, microcontrollers, computational chemistry, and VR/AR, transforms student success, motivation, and laboratory experiences. The incorporation of these technologies into educational processes has created a more interactive, efficient, and understandable learning environment compared to traditional teaching methods. Proper and effective implementation of these technologies allows students to materialize abstract scientific concepts and engage in deeper learning.

The integration of digital technologies into science education at universities in Azerbaijan will not only enhance teaching quality but also contribute to the digital transformation of the national education system. This transformation will strengthen educational equity and help students acquire skills that will enable them to compete in the global workforce.

In conclusion, the role of digital technologies in education is becoming increasingly important, and monitoring, applying, and continuously improving these advancements are necessary. Future research should explore the integration of digital technologies into broader educational fields and examine in-depth how these technologies are reshaping education. This is a crucial step not only for science education but for all areas of education.

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Contact: babayevasabina96@gmail.com