

## SCIENCE EDUCATION AND THE USE OF LABORATORIES FOR QUALITY EDUCATION

*by:*

**Ericka A. Susi**

*Teacher I, Hermosa National High School*

Science education plays an important role in equipping learners with critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and scientific literacy necessary for meaningful participation in a technology-driven society. Among the essential components for achieving quality science education is the effective use of laboratories. Laboratory-based learning bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world applications by allowing students to observe, experiment, and draw conclusions based on empirical data.

Laboratory activities in science education are instrumental in promoting inquiry-based learning, which encourages students to ask questions, develop hypotheses, and test them through experimentation. Structured laboratory experiences in higher education lead to the development of key research skills, enabling students to better understand scientific concepts and methodologies. These environments serve not only as venues for practice but also as spaces where theoretical content is contextualized through real-world experimentation. Hands-on experiments help demystify abstract concepts even web-based lab environments significantly enhance scientific competencies and student performance when physical resources are scarce. This is particularly relevant in regions where laboratory infrastructure is limited or underfunded.

One persistent challenge in achieving equitable science education is the disparity in access to laboratory resources. The lack of available laboratory tools and materials led to ineffective teaching practices and poor learning outcomes. The availability of functional laboratories is often linked to broader socio-economic inequalities, and students from underprivileged backgrounds are disproportionately affected.

Virtual and mobile laboratories offer a potential solution. The rapid development of digital tools has transformed laboratory instruction. Virtual labs, augmented reality (AR), and immersive simulations offer cost-effective and scalable alternatives to traditional labs. A well-designed digital laboratories are not merely substitutes but enhancements in their own right.

For laboratories to fulfill their educational potential, teachers must be adequately trained to design and facilitate experiments. Ongoing professional development is crucial for equipping science educators with the pedagogical and technical skills required to integrate labs into their teaching. Without such training, laboratories can become underutilized or misused, failing to yield their intended benefits. Furthermore, institutional support plays a central role. Schools must invest not only in infrastructure but also in maintenance, curriculum alignment, and instructional resources to ensure laboratory quality.

Laboratory experiences are vital for effective science education. They enable learners to apply theoretical concepts, develop scientific skills, and engage in meaningful inquiry.

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