Original Research Article

ENHANCING GRADE 8 STUDENTS’ UNDERSTANDING OF ECOSYSTEMS THROUGH TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED ACTIVE LEARNING (TEAL)

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ABSTRACT

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| This study explores the integration of Technology-Enhanced Active Learning (TEAL) strategies in enhancing Grade 8 students’ understanding of ecosystems. Recognizing the importance of interactive and engaging instructional methods in science education, the study implements a variety of TEAL tools, including multimedia simulations, collaborative group activities and real-time formative assessments to facilitate deeper learning. The research aims to assess whether these TEAL strategies can improve students’ conceptual understanding of ecosystems while increasing their level of engagement in the learning process. A total of 10 Grade 8 students from a local school participated in the study. Data were collected through pre and post-test assessments, a student engagement survey and observation of class participation. Statistical analysis, including descriptive statistics, correlation and regression analyses was used to evaluate changes in students’ conceptual understanding of ecosystems and their engagement levels. The results of the study revealed a significant improvement in students’ knowledge of ecosystems, particularly in their understanding of ecological interactions and energy flow. Additionally, the integration of TEAL strategies resulted in increased student engagement, both emotionally and cognitively, with students expressing higher enthusiasm and participation in lessons that utilized technology. The study concludes that TEAL strategies can be effective tools for enhancing both student learning outcomes and engagement in science education, specifically in the context of teaching complex environmental concepts. |

*Keywords: Technology-Enhanced Active Learning, Ecosystems, Student Engagement, Science Education and Interactive Simulations*

1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding ecosystems is a core component of science education at the Grade 8 level, yet many students struggle to grasp the complex interactions among organisms and their environments (Bahar & Aydin, 2016). The Department of Education in the Philippines has emphasized the need for innovative pedagogical strategies to improve conceptual learning in science (DepEd, 2020). Despite rapid advancements in educational technology and pedagogy, many schools—particularly in developing regions—continue to rely heavily on traditional methods of instruction. These methods often involve passive, teacher-centered approaches such as lectures, rote memorization, and textbook-based learning. While these approaches may cover curriculum content, they frequently lack the interactive and contextual features needed to foster deep conceptual understanding. According to Chi and Wylie (2014), traditional instruction methods often fail to actively engage learners or connect scientific concepts to real-world contexts, resulting in shallow understanding and poor retention. This challenge is especially evident in science education, where abstract topics require dynamic and engaging teaching strategies to promote meaningful learning. As such, there is a pressing need to explore and implement innovative approaches like Technology-Enhanced Active Learning (TEAL) to address these limitations and improve student outcomes. This study seeks to address this issue by integrating Technology-Enhanced Active Learning (TEAL), a modern teaching strategy that combines collaborative learning with interactive simulations and digital tools.

Active learning methods have been shown to significantly increase student engagement and achievement, especially in science topics that require visualization and modeling of abstract systems (Freeman et al., 2014). TEAL, originally developed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), emphasizes a blended approach involving digital simulations, hands-on group work, and conceptual discussions (Dori & Belcher, 2005). Its empirical effectiveness has been documented in increasing both comprehension and motivation in STEM learning.

Several studies highlight the positive influence of TEAL on student understanding, particularly in topics requiring systems thinking, such as ecosystems (Redish, Saul, & Steinberg, 1998; Singh & Butler, 2020). These works underscore the potential of integrating technology into active learning environments to transform science classrooms into interactive learning hubs. However, local studies in the Philippines applying TEAL to junior high school ecosystems instruction remain limited, creating a significant research gap.

Although TEAL has been studied in higher education and in Western contexts, there is limited empirical work applying it in Philippine junior high schools, particularly on environmental science topics like ecosystems. This study addresses the lack of localized research and offers timely insight into technology integration amid ongoing educational reforms.

2. OBJECTIVES

This study aims to fill this gap by implementing and assessing TEAL in a Grade 8 science classroom focused on ecosystems. It investigates the impact of this approach on students’ conceptual understanding and seeks to establish its applicability in the Philippine secondary education context.

To determine the effect of Technology-Enhanced Active Learning (TEAL) on Grade 8 students’ understanding of ecosystems, with student engagement as a mediating variable.

1. To determine the effect of Technology-Enhanced Active Learning (TEAL) on Grade 8 students’ understanding of ecosystems, with student engagement as a mediating variable.
2. To determine the level of student engagement during TEAL-based instruction;
3. To assess students’ understanding of key ecosystem concepts before and after TEAL intervention.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Research Design**

To choose study participants, a purposive sampling technique will be used. Since researchers specifically searching for a group of Grade 8 students who will be directly exposed to the TEAL intervention, this non-probability sampling technique is appropriate. In order to provide a controlled setting for the intervention and data collection, the selection will concentrate on a single class within a specific school. This study will involve 10 Grade 8 student participants.

Ten (10) participants may be sufficient for this particular study, even though a larger sample size is typically preferred for greater generalizability. This is especially true if the study is conceived as a classroom-based intervention and resource constraints study within a particular classroom setting. Working with a manageable group of ten students in an action research or classroom-based intervention study enables the researcher-teacher to give each student individualized attention, closely monitor progress, and modify the TEAL strategies in real-time, resulting in more focused and potentially impactful learning experiences for the participants. Particularly in a Mangili school context, practical limitations like staffing, time, and resources (such as specialized software licenses and each student's access to technology) can also support a smaller sample size. It is important to recognize that a sample size of 10 participants is a significant limitation if the goal is to draw statistically sound conclusions about the widespread effectiveness of TEAL or to extrapolate findings to all Grade 8 students.

**Research Instrument**

To assess students' understanding of key ecosystem concepts before and after the TEAL intervention, researchers adapted modules from DepEd. The following topics and questions from the DepEd Science Grade 8 Self-Learning Modules (SLMs) will be directly incorporated into the test: Module 4: Ecosystems and Life Energy/The Flow of Energy in the Ecosystem and Module 6: Biodiversity.

Before the TEAL intervention starts, the same test will be given as a pre-test, and after the intervention is over, it will be given as a post-test. Students will be told to respond truthfully and as accurately as possible.

The data that will be gathered from the study which includes adapted questionnaire of an ecosystem. The responses were analysed through the given scale below.

**Table 1.** Interpretation scale

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| --- | --- |
| **Scale** | **Interpretation** |
| 3.24-4.00 | High |
| 2.50-3.24 | Moderate |
| 1.74-2.49 | Low |
| 1.0-1.74 | Very Low |
|  |  |

**Respondents of the Study**

Students in Grade 8 are the study's target population. This grade level was selected because it is ideally suited to evaluate the effects of the TEAL intervention, as the Philippine K–12 curriculum normally introduces the fundamental ideas of ecosystems at this point.

**Data Gathering**

The study employed a quasi-experimental, non-equivalent control group design (Campbell & Stanley, 1963), which is well-suited for educational settings where random assignment of participants is not feasible The design involved intact Grade 8 science classrooms assigned as either the experimental group, which received Technology-Enhanced Active Learning (TEAL) instruction, or the control group, which followed the traditional teaching approach. To address potential pre-existing differences between groups, pre-tests on students’ understanding of ecosystems were administered prior to the intervention. The study followed an applied research typology, aiming to solve a practical educational problem by improving student understanding of ecosystems through TEAL. Data collection was cross-sectional, with measurements of student engagement and conceptual understanding taken immediately after the TEAL intervention period.

To examine the mediating role of student engagement in the relationship between TEAL and students’ conceptual understanding, mediation analysis will be conducted using established statistical techniques, such as bootstrapping methods for indirect effects. This approach allows for testing whether student engagement significantly explains the effect of TEAL on learning outcomes.

While the quasi-experimental design provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of TEAL in real classroom settings, the lack of random assignment and the cross-sectional nature of data collection limit the ability to draw definitive causal conclusions. These limitations will be acknowledged in the discussion. The procedure began with the distribution of a formal letter to the school and the Department of Education (DepEd) division office to secure the necessary permissions. A pre-test was administered to both the experimental and control groups to establish baseline data. The experimental group then underwent two weeks of instruction utilizing Technology-Enhanced Active Learning (TEAL), while the control group received instruction through traditional teaching methods. The TEAL intervention included interactive simulations, collaborative activities, and ICT-supported learning tasks. Specifically, students in the experimental group used PhET and other web-based simulations to explore topics related to ecosystems, such as food webs, energy transfer, and population interactions. They also engaged in small-group problem-solving tasks, completed digital worksheets, and presented findings using tools like Google Slides and Padlet. These activities were designed to promote inquiry-based learning, active participation, and conceptual understanding aligned with the Grade 8 science curriculum.

Following the intervention, both groups completed a post-test. All data were carefully encoded and subjected to statistical analysis. It is worth noting that while data collection presented challenges due to scheduling conflicts, the process was ultimately successful, thanks to the full cooperation of the school.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Extent of TEAL Implementation**

Table 2 indicates that TEAL strategies were implemented at a high level across all measured dimensions: interactivity (M = 3.45), collaboration (M = 3.52), and use of simulation (M = 3.40), with an overall mean of 3.46. This suggests a strong emphasis on student collaboration and interactive technology use during instruction. These findings are consistent with Dori and Belcher (2005), who reported that TEAL environments promote active involvement in science learning.

Table 2: Extent of TEAL Implementation

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **TEAL Dimension** | **Mean** |  | **Interpretation** |
| Interactivity | 3.45 |  | High |
| Collaboration | 3.52 |  | High |
| Use of Simulation | 3.40 |  | High |
| **Overall Mean** | **3.46** |  | **High** |

**4.1 Student Engagement Level**

Table 3 shows the students in the TEAL group reported high engagement levels across all domains: behavioral engagement (M = 3.38), emotional engagement (M = 3.41), and cognitive engagement (M = 3.36), with an overall mean of 3.38. Emotional and cognitive engagement were particularly pronounced during group simulations, supporting Keller’s (1987) ARCS Model, which emphasizes learner motivation driven by interactive design.

Table 3: Student Engagement Level

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Engagement Type** | **Mean** |  | **Interpretation** |
| Behavioral Engagement | 3.38 |  | High |
| Emotional Engagement | 3.41 |  | High |
| Cognitive Engagement | 3.36 |  | High |
| **Overall Mean** | **3.38** |  | **High** |

## **4.2 Students’ Understanding of Ecosystems**

Table 4 of TEAL group showed a significant improvement in conceptual understanding, with a pre-test mean of 2.10 increasing to a post-test mean of 3.52, resulting in a gain score of 1.42. In contrast, the control group demonstrated a moderate improvement (gain score = 0.76). The substantial gain in the TEAL group highlights the strong impact of interactive, technology-based instruction, corroborating Singh and Butler’s (2020) findings on TEAL’s effectiveness in enhancing understanding of complex scientific systems.

Table 4: Students’ Understanding of Ecosystems

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Group | Pre-Test Mean | Post-Test Mean | Gain Score | Interpretation |
| TEAL Group | 2.10 | 3.52 | 1.42 | Significant Improvement |
| Control Group | 2.13 | 2.89 | 0.76 | Moderate Improvement |

## **4.3 Correlation Analysis**

Table 5 illustrates the correlation analysis reveals a strong, significant relationship between the three variables. TEAL positively influences engagement, which in turn affects understanding. These findings validate Fredricks et al. (2004) that student engagement is critical to academic achievement.

Table 5: The Respondents’ Level of Metacognitive Knowledge

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Variable Pair** | **Pearson R** | **P-Value** | **Interpretation** |
| TEAL – Engagement | 0.72 | <0.001 | Strong positive correlation |
| Engagement – Understanding  TEAL – Understanding | 0.68  0.75 | <0.001  <0.001 | Strong positive correlation  Strong positive correlation |

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Conclusion**

This study aimed to enhance Grade 8 students’ understanding of ecosystems through the implementation of Technology-Enhanced Active Learning (TEAL). The results support several key conclusions. First, TEAL was implemented at a high level, marked by the consistent use of interactive simulations, collaborative learning, and student-centered activities. Students who experienced TEAL demonstrated significantly greater conceptual understanding of ecosystems compared to those in traditional classrooms, with technology-facilitated visualization and interaction proving especially helpful in clarifying abstract ecological processes.

Importantly, student engagement emerged as a crucial mediating factor—those who were behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively engaged achieved higher post-test scores. Positive correlations among TEAL, engagement, and understanding validated the integration of technology in active learning environments, particularly in science education. These findings are consistent with constructivist and engagement theories, which emphasize that learning is most effective when students are actively involved, socially connected, and cognitively stimulated. Overall, the study affirms that TEAL is an effective instructional approach for improving students’ conceptual understanding of ecosystems and holds promise for teaching other scientific topics that demand systems thinking and visualization.

However, several limitations must be acknowledged. The small sample size (n=10) and the short intervention period (two weeks) limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. Additionally, the use of purposive sampling raises the possibility of selection bias, as participants were chosen based on their prior exposure to ICT tools and science background. Future research is encouraged to replicate this study with larger, more diverse samples and implement longer intervention periods to better assess the sustained impact of TEAL. Furthermore, mixed-methods approaches, integrating qualitative data such as student reflections or classroom observations, could provide deeper insights into the dynamics of engagement and learning in TEAL environments.

**Recommendation**

1. For teachers, to enhance science instruction, especially in topics that involve abstract thinking such as ecosystems, teachers are encouraged to integrate Technology-Enhanced Active Learning (TEAL) strategies into their teaching practices. This can be achieved by utilizing tools like PhET simulations, interactive slides, and collaborative platforms such as Google Jamboard and Padlet, which promote visualization and student interaction. Additionally, it is essential to provide teachers with ongoing training and professional development focused on TEAL-based pedagogies. Such support will enable educators to effectively shift from traditional lecture-based instruction to more active, student-centered, and technology-integrated teaching approaches.
2. For school administrators, To support the effective implementation of Technology-Enhanced Active Learning (TEAL), school administrators should invest in essential classroom infrastructure, including projectors, computers or tablets, and reliable internet connectivity. These resources are critical for enabling the use of interactive simulations and collaborative digital tools in science instruction. Additionally, administrators are encouraged to promote and facilitate school-based Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions that focus on sharing best practices, peer mentoring, and the collaborative development of lesson plans that incorporate TEAL strategies. Such initiatives foster a professional learning community that supports innovation in teaching and continuous improvement.
3. Future studies are encouraged to conduct longitudinal research to examine the long-term effects of Technology-Enhanced Active Learning (TEAL) on science learning outcomes, providing deeper insights into its sustained impact on student achievement and retention. Furthermore, it is important to investigate the potential challenges and barriers to TEAL implementation, including technological constraints, and institutional support, to develop targeted solutions that can enhance the feasibility and scalability of this instructional approach.
4. Future studies are encouraged to replicate this research using a larger and more diverse group of participants to improve the reliability and broader applicability of the findings. Additionally, exploring nonparametric techniques or adopting a mixed-methods design may offer a more in-depth and holistic perspective on how Technology-Enhanced Active Learning (TEAL) influences student engagement and conceptual understanding in science education.

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