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METHODOLOGY FOR EXPLAINING SERIES AND PARALLEL CIRCUIT CONNECTIONS IN SCHOOLS USING THE PHET SIMULATION PROGRAM

Sayidov Namozjon Erkin o‘g‘li

ABSTRACT
This paper presents a methodology for teaching series and parallel circuit connections in schools using the PhET simulation program. The approach integrates interactive simulations to enhance students' conceptual understanding and problem-solving skills. By utilizing virtual experiments, students can visualize electrical current flow, resistance distribution, and voltage changes in real-time, making abstract concepts more tangible. The methodology also incorporates inquiry-based learning strategies, allowing students to explore, hypothesize, and verify their findings through guided activities. The effectiveness of this approach is discussed in terms of engagement, comprehension, and retention of circuit theory concepts.

Keywords: Series circuit, Parallel circuit, PhET simulation, Interactive learning, Electrical circuits, Inquiry-based learning, Virtual experiments.

Introduction

Teaching electrical circuits, especially series and parallel connections, can be challenging due to their abstract nature. Traditional teaching methods often rely on theoretical explanations and static diagrams, which may not fully engage students or help them grasp key concepts effectively. To address this challenge, integrating interactive digital tools such as the PhET simulation program provides an innovative and engaging approach to learning.

PhET simulations, developed by the University of Colorado Boulder, offer virtual, hands-on experiences that allow students to manipulate and observe circuit behavior in real-time. These simulations help visualize electric current flow, resistance interactions, and voltage distribution, making complex concepts more accessible and intuitive. By incorporating PhET into classroom instruction, educators can promote inquiry-based learning, where students actively explore and construct their understanding through experimentation and analysis.

MAIN BODY

This methodology aligns with modern pedagogical approaches that emphasize student-centered learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving. The use of PhET simulations in teaching series and parallel circuits enhances engagement, deepens conceptual understanding, and bridges the gap between theory and practical application.

This paper explores how the PhET simulation program can be effectively used in schools to teach electrical circuit connections and discusses its benefits in improving student comprehension and interest in physics.

Understanding Series and Parallel Circuits

Electric circuits are fundamental in physics and engineering, yet many students struggle to differentiate between **series and parallel circuits**. These two configurations significantly impact current flow, voltage distribution, and overall circuit behavior:

Series Circuit: Components are connected in a single path, so the same current flows through each component, but the voltage divides among them.

Parallel Circuit: Components are connected across the same voltage source, so each component gets the same voltage, but the current divides among them.

Traditional teaching methods, such as textbook explanations and circuit diagrams, often fail to engage students. However, using the **PhET Simulation "Circuit Construction Kit: DC"**, students can build, modify, and analyze circuits in real time, improving comprehension through interactive learning.

Integrating PhET Simulation into the Learning Process

PhET's **"Circuit Construction Kit: DC"** allows students to experiment with electrical circuits virtually. The interactive nature of the tool helps students visualize:

Current flow in series vs. parallel circuits

Voltage drop across resistors in different configurations

Effects of adding or removing components in a circuit

Power dissipation and resistance behavior

By using PhET simulations, students gain a **hands-on experience** without physical risks. Teachers can design structured activities that guide students through discovering circuit properties.

Best Examples of Using PhET for Teaching Circuits

Lesson Stage	Example Activity Using PhET Simulation	Expected Learning Outcome
1. Introduction to Circuits	Students create a **simple circuit** with a battery and a bulb to observe how current flows.	Understand the role of **power sources, wires, and loads** in a circuit.
2. Exploring Series Circuits	Students build a **series circuit** with two bulbs and measure **voltage drop** and **current flow**.	Learn that **voltage divides** among components, but **current remains the same**.
3. Exploring Parallel Circuits	Students construct a **parallel circuit** with two bulbs and	Observe that **voltage remains constant** while **current splits** among branches.

Lesson Stage	Example Activity Using PhET Simulation	Expected Learning Outcome
	measure **current through each path**.	
4. Comparing Series and Parallel	Students add more bulbs to both circuit types and compare brightness changes.	Understand that adding resistors in **series increases total resistance**, while in **parallel it decreases**.
5. Real-World Application	Students simulate **household wiring** to see why homes use parallel circuits.	Recognize that parallel circuits allow **independent operation** of appliances.

CONCLUSION

Enhancing Student Engagement with PhET Simulations

To deepen understanding, teachers can implement:

Guided Inquiry Activities: Pose questions like "What happens if you add another resistor in parallel?" and let students predict and test outcomes.

Problem-Solving Challenges: Assign real-world tasks such as "Design a circuit where one bulb is brighter than another."

Group Discussions: Encourage students to explain their observations and compare results.

Assessment with PhET Data: Have students take screenshots of their circuit configurations and explain their findings in reports.

Using **PhET Simulations** to teach series and parallel circuits **bridges the gap between theory and practice**, providing an engaging, risk-free environment where students can experiment and discover concepts on their own. This approach fosters **deeper conceptual understanding** and makes learning **interactive and fun**.

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