Digital tools in teaching physics at university level – challenges and lessons learned

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Pro > Software & Services

ChatGPT threatens education at all levels here's how it can be stopped

Features By Lewis Maddison published February 11, 2023

If students can cheat using ChatGPT, then what can deter them from using it?

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FEATURE TECH How ChatGPT and similar AI will disrupt education Teachers are concerned about cheating and inaccurate information

Is ChatGPT a threat to education?

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Iqbal Pittalwala, UC Riverside

Credit: iStock/baona

Chance or a threat?

Let's go to a short journy to the past…

Calculator

- In the 1970s calculators slowly began to enter the classroom
- Fears: students' computational abilities would be ruined, students would become too reliant upon machines, students wouldn't learn how to estimate, they wouldn't learn from their errors…
- In some states their use has been prohibited until 1990s

Computers, www, Smartphones, Tablets,

…

- Some of the hope and some of the panic about calculators have shifted to other computing devices
- "Students will not be able to read."
- "Smartphones are distraction for students in a classroom."
- "Students will use these devices to cheat."

How effective are digital media in the classroom?

- It depends...
- The effects of digital media in the classroom can only be discussed in the context. (Herzig 2014)
- There is sufficient empirical evidence for aspects of the use of digital media in schools that are beneficial to learning, but **it is not possible to generalize these results**. No general statements can be made about the effectiveness of specific devices nor about individual media offerings, specific groups of students, or subject cultures.
- Metastudies: only a marginally positive effect (if at all) in terms of students' learning performance compared to analog approaches

Effects of digital media in the classroom - influencing factors

Then why are we talking about it?

A few thoughts from me

- 1. Training media competence (BITKOM 2011; Reinmann und Häuptle 2006)
- 2. Training self-regulation (Schulz-Zander 2005)
- 3. Time and location independent
- 4. Possibility of giving equal opportunities
- 5. Authenticity of context, interest, motivation…
- 6. Possibility for more interaction and communication
- 7. An incredible number of possibilities are available
- 8. …
- 9. "Who does not shape will be shaped."

"Who does not shape will be shaped."

- In addition to a technical point of view, to make decisions, stakeholders need to move from shortterm reacting back to active, sustainable shaping/decision making.
- But how can decision-makers act sustainably without a basis for their decisions that will last for the coming years?
- In addition to a technical understanding of the opportunities and risks, a sound basis for decisionmaking also requires an understanding of the sustainable consequences of all our actions and inactions.
- Our actions/inactions need to be based on the research.

Possibilities and challenges in physics courses at university level

- Before COVID-19
- During COVID-19
- After COVID-19
- Possible future developements

Before COVID-19

- Lecture capture recording of live lectures:
	- Connection with student end of course performance is not clear (Lindsay, 2021)
	- In some studies: smaller attendance rate of lectures that were recorded (Morris 2019)
	- In flipped classroom setting students preferred to attend live lectures while in non-flipped classroom settings they found that lecture captures were helpful (Wood 2018)
- Factors predicting students' online learning achievement: two factors are positive predictors of learning achievement measured through the course grade and these are "selfdirection" and "beliefs," where self-direction stands for good self-organization skills and beliefs stands for "general beliefs about online learning" (Bernard et al., 2004)
- E-learning in physics: The students in online course at MIT had a normalized gain slightly higher than typical values for a traditional course, but significantly lower than typical values for courses using interactive engagement pedagogy. (Colvin, 2014)
- Remote labs, online quizzes and homework, simulations (Finkelstein 2005)
- Smartphones and smartphone sensors (Staacks PhyPhox, 2018)

Research on synchronous and asynchronous e-learning

Cognitive and personal dimensions of E-learning (Hrastinski, 2008)

Asynchronous e-learning Synchronous e-learning

Cognitive Participation

Increased reflection and ability to process information

Content-related communication

is supported

More time to comprehend message, immediate answer is not expected

Personal Participation

Increased arousal, motivation and convergence on meaning Other types of communication are supported: planning of tasks and social support Receiver's reaction to a message is monitored, which motivates receiver to read and answer the message

During COVID-19

Sudden shift to e-learning at schools and universities worldwide in March 2020 due to COVID-19 pandemic

New situation for most of instructors and students

Lot of decisions about the lesson formats and digital tools

Implications for the future physics courses?

Participating universities and researchers

- TU Dresden: Dr. M.-A. Geyer
- Universität Göttingen: M. N. Dahlkemper, Prof. Dr. Pascal Klein
- TU Kaiserslautern: Dr. S. Küchemann
- Universität Wien: Jun. Prof. Dr. L. Ivanjek
- Universität Zagreb: Prof. Dr. A. Susac, Dr. K. Jelicic

Research questions

- What is the relationship between perceived learning effectiveness during the COVID-19 summer term and the various behavioral aspects that are important in digital teaching?
- Which course formats during unexpected e-learning situation did students prefer and why?
- What formats were used to establish online problem-solving sessions, and how have they been rated by the students in terms of effectiveness?
- What are students' experiences with the online laboratory courses for prospective physics teachers during the COVID-19 lockdown?
- Which activities do students found helpful for their learning?
- What are the implications for the future what can we learn from this situation and which online formats do students want to preserve even after COVID-19 Pandemic?

Research methods

18 semi-structured interviews

Questionnaire with 246 technical data fields which were divided into 13 subtopics

Interviews

- \cdot 33 94 minutes
- **Personal situation of students**; accessibility of technical equipment and internet connection and quite learning environment: Please describe how you cope with online teaching in the current situation.
- **Advantages and disadvantages of different course formats**: What advantages and disadvantages do you see with the different forms and formats of online teaching (synchronous, asynchronous)?
- **Preferences for synchronous and asynchronous courses and the reasons**: Which course formats (synchronous or asynchronous) do you prefer? Would you rather prefer more or less offers from one of the course formats? Explain.
- **Implications for the future courses after COVID-19 pandemic**: Which course elements from the online courses would you like to keep even when the courses at university are possible?
- **Lab for prospective physics teachers:** Describe briefly how the lab took/takes place. Do you feel you can prepare the school experiments well from home? Compare your performance of experiments from home (experiments with everyday materials, simulations, smartphones…) and at the university. What advantages and disadvantages do you see for your teaching career?

Questionnaire development

- Based on the common literature for evaluating online teaching and learning, we identified several aspects that were considered relevant for physics student learning during COVID-19 pandemic:
	- evaluation of synchronous and asynchronous activities
	- students' attitudes toward online learning
	- communication abilities
	- expected learning achievement
	- technical and social aspects
	- self-organization abilities
	- implication for the future physics courses
	- organization of recitations
	- organization of labs for future physics teachers
- All items were assessed using a 4-point Likert-type scale

Data collection and sample

Interview sample

Data analysis

Interviews

All interviews were transcribed and analysed in their original language

Questionnaire

Psychometric validation of instrument structure using a confirmatory factor analysis

Qualitative content analysis, Kuckartz; using software for qualitative data analysis MAXQDA

The internal consistency of a component is measured by the reliability coefficient Cronbach's α

Based on the interview questions, deductive categories were first generated and then refined by creating inductive categories

Cronbach's α indicates how well the items build the same construct (Cronbach's α can range from 0 to 1 - values above 0.7 are considered reliable for group measurements)

Description of the scales that were used for all students

Selected results

Perceived learning effectiveness and various behavioral aspects

Students' perceived learning success is positively correlated with high abilities of self-organization in general, with self-organization in this specific situation, with access to a studyfriendly environment, students' attitudes toward online learning and the ability to communicate with peers

TABLE III. Correlation analysis. Only significant correlations (Pearson's r ; $p < 0.003$) are presented.

and lecturers. *P. Klein, L. Ivanjek, M.N. Dahlkemper, K. Jeličić, M.-A. Geyer, S. Küchemann, A. Susac, Studying physics during the COVID-19 pandemic: Student assessments of learning achievement, perceived effectiveness of online recitations, and online laboratories, Phys. Rev. Phys. Educ. Res. 17 (2021).*

Different course formats

Synchronous and asynchronous course formats

Reccomendation from PhysPort platfrom

- *"Recognize that not all your students will be able to attend synchronous online classes due internet access, connectivity, scheduling, health, and family situations. Some platforms allow participants to call in via phone, which allow them to hear and participate in audio conversations, but not see slides, screenshare, or video. Find ways for students who can't connect in real time to still participate (e.g., by making recordings available after class), or consider not running synchronous classes at all: asynchronous learning can be much more equitable for students with different levels of access, health and privilege. These are also good things to keep in mind when you are teaching in-person classes".*
- www.physport.org

Synchronous and asynchronous course formats

- Results based on interviews:
- Eight interviewed students preferred synchronous formats, two students preferred completely asynchronous formats and eight students think that the mixture of the both is the best solution
- Five students said explicitly that they would like to have more synchronous formats
- Eleven of interviewed students attended synchronous formats regularly. The main reasons: requirement from the instructor, regular day structure, not to skip something, easier to learn, to ask questions and hear questions from others, because instructors apply lot of effort.
- Five of interviewed students work through all asynchronous tasks and materials. The motivation: interest in the topic and the desire not to waist the semester and to be prepared for the exams at the end.

Advantages of synchronous physics courses

Advantages of asynchronous physics courses

Disadvantages of asynchronous physics courses

Seminars and problem solving sessions

Online problemsolving sessions

- 401 datasets from students who attended recitations, 287 of which were related to introductory physics courses with large audiences (>30 students)
- Based on the student interviews, different online formats of the recitations were identified that could be assessed in terms of the following aspects (true or false):
- **submission:** The students' solutions were submitted, corrected by the tutor, and discussed in an online meeting
- **reconstruction:** The solutions were reconstructed during a live online session in real time
- **live:** Exercise sheets were solved live online and discussed in groups
- **handouts:** The solutions to the exercise sheets were handed out to the students as text or as a video (workedout solutions)
- **forum**: Forums were used to discuss exercise sheets without time constraints.

Formats of the online recitations that students experienced term and judgments about optimal recitation

0 20 40 60 80 asynchronous discussion in forum Handouts Presentation of solutions Submission of solutions reconstruction/students reconstruction/instructor Live discussion TU Dresden, N = 92

 \Box Optimal format \Box Actual format

Labs for future physics teachers

positive aspects seen by students

free time management

fun while conducting experiments amazed that simple equipment worked well working with a partner fair evaluation

advantages for being a teacher later:

- new options
- creativity
- more flexible
- connection to everyday life

negative aspects seen by students

more time invested

no suitable equipment

less precise measurements

fewer (less interesting) experimental options

fewer/no discussions with fellows and/or instructor no understanding

disadvantages for being a teacher later:

- less experimental practice
- no gains for being a teacher later

Positive and negative aspects reported by the interviewed students who were attending the adapted lab courses

K. Jelicic, M.-A. Geyer, L. Ivanjek, P. Klein, S. Küchemann, M. N. Dahlkemper, and A. Susac, *Lab courses for prospective physics teachers: What could [we learn from the first COVID-19 lockdown?](http://dx.doi.org/10.1088/1361-6404/ac6ea1)*, Eur. J. Phys. **43**[, 055701 \(2022\)](http://dx.doi.org/10.1088/1361-6404/ac6ea1).

Student quotes

- *"One becomes more creative anyway, perhaps. So, one sees what would be possible and what one would never have thought of because* **[at university]** *one walks straight to the cupboard and takes out the great equipment. And the connection with the everyday live is promoted even a bit more. So, no child has a physics experiment cabinet at home, no average child. But a kitchen sponge or whatever, everybody knows that. And you start thinking about that much more immediately and then you can transfer that. There, I see already a large advantage, too."* [UV03]
- *"And other than that, yes, the disadvantage is that you don't really handle the equipment there. I'm just dealing with household objects now."* [TUD03]
- *"…in some experiment that I have to do at home, we're not always sure what we need to get. I mean, when we were doing optics experiments, those holes in aluminium foil, I really didn't know in advance what I need to see. And, I was getting different patterns with lamps from different mobile phones and didn't really know what I had to get and that was complicated. If we were in the real lab…I don't know…I would call you or the assistant and then he would explain this to me. Now, I had to struggle myself. That is complicated for me when I find myself in such a situation. "* (UZ03)

Creativity

Conducting experiments from home increased my creativity.

Online consultations with the instructor BEFORE conducting experiments were helpful.

What course elements students find helpful?

Implications for future

Implications for future physics courses

Course elements that students want to preserve in future – results from interviews

Implications for future physics courses

Course elements that students want to preserve in future

L. Ivanjek, P. Klein, M.-A. Geyer, S. Küchemann, K. Jeličić, M. N. Dahlkemper, and A. Susac, Studying physics during the COVID-19 pandemic: Student perceptions on synchronous and asynchronous course formats and implications for the future Phys. Rev. Phys. Educ. Res. **18**.

Personal experience and tools used

- Synchronous meetings: Zoom
- Whiteboards: Padlet, Miro Board, Mural
- Quizzies: Mentimeter, Socrative
- Producing learning videos/lecture capture: OBS
- Simulations: Phet Colorado
- Interactive screen experiments: FU Berlin
- Smartphone experiments: PhyPhox, Vernier Video Physics, Sony Motion Shot

Conclusion

- The most common reported advantages of synchronous course elements were the possibility to immediately ask questions, feeling of community and interaction with other students, and defined daily structure
- The most common advantages of asynchronous course elements were flexible time management and the possibility to watch videos at their own pace
- Different people/target groups also have different preferences also with regard to online vs. face-to-face classes

Recommendations for the future online and inperson physics courses:

- Formulate assignments and learning goals for the course as clear as possible.
- Use synchronous course formats (online or in classroom) to cognitively activate students and engage them in discussions using quizzes, group problem solving sessions, group discussions, tutorials, and group projects. Digital boards can be used to collect group results and monitor group progress.
- Provide collaboration tools for students to exchange their ideas or ask questions.
- Use asynchronous course formats to expose students to more complex content. Upload relevant information to learning platforms to make them available for all students and to provide them with the same opportunities for learning. In order to increase student engagement with asynchronous course formats consider giving incentives for completing asynchronous tasks
- Ensure a good balance between synchronous and asynchronous course activities. Supplement live lectures with the lecture recordings to make them available to students after the lectures or even before if you are using flipped classroom methods.

Post-COVID times

Hybrid physics courses at universities

The primary factors for successful and equitable elearning

(1) Professional training is crucial and has been shown to improve teachers' acceptance of technology for physics instruction.

(2) Real-time tech support is essential to successful instruction.

(4) Mechanisms to directly combat high dropout rates for e-learners must be developed, including communication with lower-achieving students.

(5) Inequalities should be considered when implementing e-learning, especially their effect on access to technology.

Daniel J. O'Brien, *A Guide for Incorporating E-Teaching of Physics in a Post-COVID World*. Am. J. Phys. 89 (4), April 2021

-Provide feedback to schools

Fig. 1. (Color online) A graphical representation of support mechanisms for improving e-teaching and e-learning of physics at the university level.

Hybrid physics courses - Why?

Corona circumstances – illness

Giving equal opportunities Individualisation

Important prerequisites for interactivity

- Exercises and seminars with lower numbers of participants (N=16)
- Students on site bring their own computer or tablet (in case of emergency it is also possible to use a cell phone) and they switch on in the Zoom meeting (without sound!!!)
- An online whiteboard is used to collect the results two groups of participants "communicate" via this whiteboard.
- Students on site work in small groups and students online in breakout rooms/or students on site build a group with students at home
- All important links and surveys are communicated either in chat or with QR code

Implementation of group work

• Padlet, Miro Board oder Mural Board – make , live' tracking of group work in break-out rooms and make the synthesis easier

Difficulties

Activation of students in online meeting you have to address them directly so that they say something in plenary session

A lot of multitasking: there is a risk of forgetting something (projector, screen sharing, chat, sharing links, breakout rooms...) - co-teaching could help

Time effort

Chances

- We have started to listen to what students' needs are equal opportunities, differentiation in teaching
- Potential to increase quality: not because of use of media in elearning context, but through concrete situation in e-learning and students' feedback/complaints
- Recognition that different groups of students have different and clear preferences for digital space or presence
- Possibility to reach young people who were not interested before/possibility to reach deprivileged students

Risks

- Seeing digital media as a goal I'll do this online and then it will work well, or - I'll use modern media, then young people will have more interest and will learn better.
- Forgetting about one of "two worlds": part od our target group clearly prefers digital space and the other clearly prefers presence – finding good mix.

Possible future developements

• Chat GPT

Research papers

- Gregorcic,Pendrill, ChatGPT and the frustrated Socrates, Phys. Educ. 58 (2023) 035021
- Kortemeyer, Could an Artificial-Intelligence agent pass an introductory physics course?
- West, AI and the FCI: Can ChatGPT project an understanding of introductory physics?, arXiv:2303.01067v2
- West, Advances in apparent conceptual physics reasoning in GPT-4, arXiv:2303.17012v3
- Küchemann et al., Physics task development of prospective physics teachers using ChatGPT, arXiv:2304.10014v1

Results FCI

- ChatGPT 3.5 scored 18 out of 30 points on this concept inventory, i,e., 60%.
- This score corresponds to the suggested entry threshold for Newtonian physics; in other words, ChatGPT performs as well as a beginning learner who had just grasped the basic concepts of classical mechanics.

High Score: 100.0% Low Score: 10.0% Median: 56.7% Mean: 56.3%

ChatGPT and the frustrated Socrates

• *A teddy bear is thrown into the air. What is its acceleration in the highest point?* ChatGPT:

(1) *At the highest point of its trajectory, the teddy bear's acceleration would be equal to the acceleration due to gravity, which is 9.8m/s2 downward.*

(2) This is because at this point, the teddy bear would be experiencing no net force, so its acceleration would be solely determined by the force of gravity.

(3) *When an object is thrown into the air, it initially accelerates upward due to the force of the throw, but once it reaches the highest point of its trajectory, it begins to slow down and eventually start accelerating downward due to the force of gravity.*

(4) *The teddy bear's acceleration at the highest point of its trajectory would be 9.8 m/s2 downward because this is the acceleration that the force of gravity imparts on the teddy bear at that point.*

Dialog

…

- '*Is gravity not part of the net force?*'
- *Gravity is a force that acts on all objects with mass, and it is always present. However, when considering the net force acting on an object, gravity is only one of the forces that must be taken into account. The net force is the total force acting on an object, and it is the result of all the individual forces acting on the object being combined.*
- *For example, if an object is resting on a table, the forces acting on it include the force of gravity pulling it downward and the force of the table pushing upward on the object. The net force on the object in this case* would be the force of the table minus the force of gravity, which would be equal to zero. This means that the *object is not accelerating, because the net force acting on it is zero.*
- *"But at the highest point, only gravity acts. Why would the net force be zero?"*
- At the highest point of its trajectory, the teddy bear is experiencing no net force because the forces acting on it *are balanced. At this point, the only force acting on the teddy bear is gravity, which is pulling it downward. However, the teddy bear is also experiencing an upward force due to its inertia, which is the tendency of an object to resist changes in its state of motion. This inertia-induced force balances the force of gravity, resulting in a net force of zero.*

Unlocking the Power of Generative AI Models and Systems such as GPT-4 and ChatGPT for Higher Education A Guide for Students and Lecturers

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Recommend ations for students

Figure 4. Summary of recommendations for students

Boost learning with ChatGPT

Table 4. How to boost learning with ChatGPT

"If you think about what a human being is, we exist because of brains, soul, heart. What we can replicate in a robot is the brain. But you never will replicate the heart, which is passion, compassion. And the soul, which enables us to believe. The robot will never have the ability to believe in something."

Klaus Schwab, Time Magazine, 14 January, 2016

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