CONFERENCE ARTICLE

The Impact Of Visualizing Physics Experiments Within A Steam Framework On Scientific Literacy

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes how the visualization of physics experiments, purposefully embedded in a STEAM framework that combines science, technology, engineering, the arts, and mathematics, advances scientific literacy in secondary education. The argument positions visualization not as a decorative enhancement but as a mediating practice that links phenomena, measurement, modeling, and explanation. A design-oriented review synthesizes theory and practice to show that visualizing experiments through data acquisition, dynamic graphs, simulations, physical and digital prototyping, and artistic renderings strengthens conceptual stability, improves evidence-based reasoning, and broadens student participation. The methods outline how visualization tasks can be aligned with physics learning goals and assessed with performance-based rubrics that capture growth in modeling and argumentation. The thesis concludes that STEAM-aligned visualization, when planned around clear physics targets and supported by iterative critique, meaningfully develops the core capacities of scientific literacy: asking testable questions, constructing and revising models, using evidence to justify claims, and communicating ideas with precision to varied audiences.

Keywords: Physics education; STEAM; scientific literacy; visualization; data modeling; inquiry; multimodal representation; assessment.

INTRODUCTION

Efforts to cultivate scientific literacy frequently falter when students encounter physics concepts as abstract symbols unmoored from observable phenomena. Visualization addresses this gap by making relationships perceptible and negotiable. Within STEAM, visualization is expanded beyond plotting numbers on axes; it becomes a coordinated practice that integrates mathematical description, technological instrumentation, engineering iteration, and artistic rendering to externalize mental models and to test them against the behavior of real systems. When learners see forces traced as vector overlays, energy flows mapped as animated infographics, or field interactions represented through dynamic simulations that respond to parameter changes, they are confronted with the commitments of their models and the evidence that may confirm or challenge them. Scientific literacy is thereby reframed as fluency across representations and the disciplined movement between theory, observation, and communication.

The study adopts an analytic, design-based approach drawing on research in visualization, physics education, and STEAM integration. Source materials include standards documents detailing scientific and engineering practices, empirical studies of representational competence, and practitioner reports describing classroom implementations of sensing, simulation, and design. The method identifies recurring mechanisms relevant to literacy: the stabilization of concepts through coordinated representations, the improvement of evidence use via instrumented experiments, and the development of communicative clarity through aesthetically guided artifacts. From these, a practical alignment is proposed in which physics targets are first specified, then mapped to visual tasks that require prediction, measurement, and explanation.

The synthesis indicates that visualization in a STEAM context advances scientific literacy through several reinforcing pathways. The first concerns conceptual stabilization. Students often memorize formulae without internalizing the invariants they express. When an experiment is instrumented so that kinematic quantities update on a live graph while a simultaneous animation reflects calculated trajectories, the student's attention is drawn to the structural relations among position, velocity, and acceleration rather than to discrete numeric answers. The act of reconciling discrepant traces, for example when friction or backlash perturbs an idealized motion, invites refinement of assumptions and improves understanding of system boundaries and modeling choices. Visualization thus supports the shift from answer-getting to model-building, which is central to literacy.

A second pathway involves evidence-based reasoning. Visualized data streams and analysis dashboards expose patterns, variability, and error in ways that raw tables cannot. When learners apply sensor calibration, propagate uncertainty, and annotate plots with fitted models, they begin to treat evidence as graded rather than absolute. This fosters argumentation in which claims are explicitly qualified by assumptions and measurement limits. The presence of engineering constraints, such as mass budgets or power limits in a design prototype, further compels the use of visual diagnostics to justify trade-offs. The capacity to anchor explanations in visual evidence translates beyond physics, equipping students to critique claims in public discourse where graphs and infographics often stand in for argument.

A third pathway is the cultivation of metarepresentational competence. Scientific literacy requires not only interpreting given representations but choosing or designing them appropriately. STEAM visualization tasks demand representational design decisions: how to depict energy transformations without misleading reification, how to visualize superposition without obscuring phase relations, or which color scales and glyphs make uncertainty legible rather than

decorative. When students justify these choices and revise them after critique, they acquire a reflexive stance toward representations themselves. This stance supports transfer because it encodes when and why a representation is suitable, not merely how to read it.

Motivation and inclusion form a fourth pathway. Artistic processes embedded in visualization—storyboarding an explanatory animation, composing soundscapes that sonify waveforms, or designing a poster that narrates the evolution of a model—open multiple points of entry into physics practice. Students who may hesitate in purely symbolic contexts can contribute through visual composition and narrative structuring, while still being held to standards of mechanistic accuracy. Public exhibitions and digital portfolios that feature visualizations give learners authentic audiences and reinforce a sense of belonging in scientific discourse communities. Far from diluting rigor, aesthetics heighten it by forcing precision about mechanism and audience needs.

These advantages presuppose principled design. Visualization must be anchored to explicit physics targets and to predictions that can be tested. The temptation to prioritize visual polish over explanatory power is mitigated when tasks require the articulation of model assumptions, the display of residuals or error bars, and the reconciliation of simulation with measured behavior. Cognitive load poses a genuine risk when multiple representations are presented without guidance; carefully sequenced scaffolds that begin with coarse-grained views and progressively add detail help learners coordinate rather than fragment their attention. Teacher facilitation is decisive in pressing for warrants that connect visual features to causal accounts, in normalizing iteration, and in cultivating a discourse of critique that is respectful and exacting.

Assessment practices should mirror the literacy aims. Performance rubrics can specify criteria for model adequacy, evidentiary relevance, and representational clarity, so grades reflect reasoning quality rather than only final aesthetics. Design journals that include screenshots of intermediate plots, notes on calibration, and reflections on revisions make growth visible and support metacognition. Traditional concept inventories remain useful if complemented by transfer tasks that require constructing a representation for a novel situation. Over time, a portfolio of visualizations provides cumulative evidence of a student's scientific literacy, documenting their ability to coordinate theory, measurement, and communication.

The STEAM frame also enables resource pragmatics. High-impact visualization does not depend on expensive equipment when tasks are oriented to core ideas. Open-source simulations, low-cost microcontrollers, and everyday materials can produce richly analyzable data if questions are sharp and evaluation criteria are explicit. Partnerships with arts educators and technologists increase fidelity, helping classes avoid representational pitfalls and exploit affordances of media that scientists routinely use. Cross-disciplinary co-teaching models can collapse redundant instructional time by treating writing, mathematical modeling, and visual design as integral to physics rather than as add-ons.

Visualizing physics experiments within a STEAM framework strengthens scientific literacy by binding abstract concepts to observable patterns, by cultivating disciplined use of evidence, and by developing representational judgment and communicative clarity. These gains arise when visualization is designed around explicit physics targets, instrumented to generate interpretable data, critiqued to improve explanatory quality, and assessed with tools that value modeling and argumentation. The approach does not merely enhance engagement; it reconfigures classroom epistemology so students learn to think with and through representations as practicing scientists and engineers do. Implemented with careful sequencing and collaborative support, STEAM-aligned visualization equips learners with durable competencies to model phenomena, evaluate claims, and communicate mechanisms across audiences—capabilities that define scientific literacy in contemporary society.

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