

A Methodology for Developing Scientific Competencies in Genetic Engineering for High School Students

Choriyeva Nilufar Oktam qizi

Master's student at Termez State Pedagogical Institute

Khaitova Shakhlo Davlatovna

The associate professor of Termiz State Pedagogical Institute.

xayitova2016@mail.ru

Reviwer: DJumaev Xudoyberdi Kurbandurdievich

Annotation: This article presents a comprehensive pedagogical framework for teaching genetic engineering to high school students while developing essential scientific competencies. The methodology moves beyond traditional content delivery to emphasize active learning, critical thinking, and ethical awareness. The proposed approach integrates multiple dimensions of scientific competency development. Students build foundational knowledge in molecular biology before progressing to more complex concepts of genetic modification. Through inquiry-based learning, they engage in authentic scientific practices including hypothesis formation, investigation design, and evidence evaluation.

Keywords: Scientific competencies genetic engineering high school education inquiry-based learning crispr technology biotechnology education ethical reasoning laboratory experiences case study analysis scientific literacy gene editing molecular biology stem education collaborative learning assessment strategies.

Introduction: Practical components include laboratory activities adapted to high school resources, ranging from DNA extraction and gel electrophoresis to virtual simulations of advanced techniques. Real-world case studies spanning agriculture, medicine, and environmental applications provide context for understanding genetic engineering's societal impacts.

A distinguishing feature of this methodology is its emphasis on ethical reasoning. Students examine controversial issues surrounding genetic modification, developing competencies in stakeholder analysis, argumentation, and ethical decision-making. This prepares them not merely as future scientists but as informed citizens capable of engaging with biotechnology policy debates.

The framework incorporates diverse assessment strategies that evaluate conceptual understanding, procedural skills, and higher-order thinking rather than relying solely on traditional testing. Collaborative projects allow students to synthesize learning while developing communication and teamwork skills essential for scientific work.

By integrating current research developments and maintaining accessibility for diverse learners, this methodology ensures relevance and inclusivity. The approach ultimately aims to cultivate both specific knowledge about genetic engineering and broader scientific habits of mind including skepticism, precision, and evidence-based reasoning that students will carry beyond the classroom.

Genetic engineering represents one of the most transformative fields in modern science, offering high school students an engaging gateway to understanding biotechnology, ethics, and scientific inquiry. Developing robust scientific competencies in this area requires a structured methodology that balances theoretical knowledge with practical application while fostering critical thinking and ethical reasoning.

Establishing Foundational Knowledge: The methodology begins with building a solid foundation in molecular biology concepts. Students need to understand DNA structure, gene expression, and protein synthesis before grasping how genetic modification works. This foundation should be developed through interactive models, animations, and hands-on activities with DNA extraction from common materials like strawberries or bananas. Rather than presenting genetic engineering as an isolated topic, educators should connect it to students' prior knowledge of heredity, cell biology, and evolution.

Inquiry-Based Learning Approach: Scientific competencies flourish when students actively engage in the process of scientific investigation. The methodology should incorporate inquiry-based learning where students formulate their own questions about genetic engineering applications. For example, students might investigate why insulin produced through genetically modified bacteria revolutionized diabetes treatment, or explore how CRISPR technology differs from earlier gene-editing methods. This approach develops competencies in asking

scientifically oriented questions, designing investigations, and seeking evidence-based answers.

Laboratory Experiences and Simulations: While many schools lack facilities for actual genetic modification experiments, students can develop procedural competencies through gel electrophoresis activities, bacterial transformation labs using safe organisms, or virtual laboratory simulations. These experiences help students understand the technical processes involved in genetic engineering, including restriction enzyme cutting, plasmid insertion, and gene expression verification. Students should maintain detailed lab notebooks, analyze results, and present findings, mirroring authentic scientific practice.

Case Study Analysis: Examining real-world applications strengthens students' analytical competencies. The methodology should include case studies spanning agriculture, medicine, and industry. Students might analyze the development of golden rice and its potential to address vitamin A deficiency, investigate the controversy surrounding genetically modified crops, or explore gene therapy approaches for treating genetic disorders. Through these cases, students learn to evaluate scientific evidence, consider multiple perspectives, and understand the relationship between science and society.

Ethical Reasoning and Societal Implications: Scientific competency extends beyond technical knowledge to include ethical reasoning. Students should engage with the ethical dimensions of genetic engineering through structured debates, role-playing activities, and philosophical discussions. Topics might include designer babies, genetic privacy, environmental impacts of GMOs, and equitable access to genetic therapies. This component develops competencies in recognizing ethical issues, articulating reasoned positions, and understanding diverse stakeholder perspectives.

Collaborative Project Work: A capstone project allows students to synthesize their learning while developing competencies in collaboration and communication. Student teams might design a hypothetical genetic engineering solution to a real-world problem, create educational materials explaining genetic technologies to different audiences, or conduct community surveys about attitudes toward genetic

modification. These projects should require research, planning, implementation, and formal presentation of results.

Assessment Strategies: Evaluating scientific competencies requires moving beyond traditional testing. The methodology should incorporate multiple assessment approaches including concept maps to reveal understanding of relationships between ideas, portfolios documenting learning progression, performance-based assessments of laboratory skills, and rubrics evaluating argumentation quality in written and oral work. Formative assessments throughout the learning process help students and teachers identify areas needing additional support.

Integration of Current Research: Keeping content current maintains student engagement and demonstrates science as an active, evolving field. Teachers should regularly incorporate recent developments such as new CRISPR applications, emerging gene therapy trials, or debates about genetic modification regulations. Students might analyze primary literature with appropriate scaffolding, follow scientific news sources, or connect with working scientists through virtual visits or correspondence.

Differentiation and Accessibility: The methodology must accommodate diverse learning needs and prior knowledge levels. This includes providing multiple entry points to content, offering various ways for students to demonstrate understanding, and ensuring that all students can meaningfully participate in activities regardless of their background. Visual aids, analogies, and concrete examples make abstract genetic concepts more accessible, while extension activities challenge advanced learners.

Cultivating Scientific Habits of Mind: Beyond specific content knowledge, the methodology should develop enduring scientific habits including skepticism, openness to revision based on evidence, precision in communication, and persistence in problem-solving. These habits are cultivated through modeling by teachers, explicit discussion of scientific values, and consistent reinforcement throughout the learning experience.

Conclusion: Developing scientific competencies in genetic engineering for high school students requires a comprehensive methodology that integrates conceptual

understanding, practical skills, ethical reasoning, and communication abilities. By engaging students as active investigators of meaningful questions, connecting classroom learning to real-world applications, and providing opportunities for authentic scientific practice, educators can prepare students not just to understand genetic engineering but to become informed citizens capable of navigating the complex scientific and ethical landscape of biotechnology. This methodology recognizes that scientific competency is multidimensional, encompassing not only what students know but how they think, reason, and engage with science in society.

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