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Factors of Students' Pro-Environmental Behaviour towards Sustainable Development

Rizwan Anwar¹, Maha Jamil², Ansar Abbas³, Shehzad Kamboh⁴

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the impact of certain environmental factors on the pro-environmental behaviour of students in Higher Education. A plethora of literature already exists on this subject; however, there is a significant gap in such research in the context of Pakistan's Higher Education Institutions. Along with that, the combination of the variables chosen for the research had yet to be studied in detail, especially in the context of Educational Institutions in Pakistan. The study analyzed the impact of environmental consciousness, green lifestyle, and green self-efficacy on university students' pro-environmental behaviour, with the mediating role of environmental commitment. Data was collected using a standardized questionnaire on a 372-person sample of university students using convenience sampling via web interface. The sample of 372 students, from both private and public higher educational institutions, was chosen from whom to collect data, develop analysis, and draw results for our findings. Multiple statistical techniques were applied through SPSS Statistics 21 to analyze the data, and these included correlation analysis, regression analysis, and exploratory factor analysis. The hypotheses were tested through the simple mediation model, using the Hayes Process. Our findings fill a gap in the research by demonstrating that individuals can indulge in green self-efficacy, a green lifestyle, and be environmentally conscious, which promotes their pro-environmental behaviour, when they are committed to the environment. The study provides useful insight for researchers and higher education practitioners/policymakers to facilitate environmental consciousness among graduates.

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Introduction

The concept of sustainable development (SD) was first published by the World Conservation Strategy, and since then, it has been considered as an integral part of concepts including environment and development. The Brundtland Report defined SD as development that meets the needs of future generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs” (Emas, 2015). SD has been considered an ample part of various institutions of society for many years now.

Pro-environmental behaviour has been defined as the actions individuals tend to take consciously to promote the well-being of the environment and to further enhance its quality. According to Ramus and Kilmmer (2007), it has been termed as a type of pro-social behaviour, which primarily focuses on increasing the welfare of associated groups within a society.

As per the United Nations – Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UN DESD, 2014), universities and other higher institutions should ensure that they provide a space for learning and promoting sustainable development. Higher Education is considered one of the leading drivers in the development of the socio-economic system of a state (Dakhan, 2020). Therefore, in Pakistan, over the last few years, there has been ample collaboration in sustainable development in Higher Education institutions, including in research and education, assessments, and institutional frameworks (Naureen & Lodhi, 2015). This progress can further be demonstrated through examples like the importance of courses in corporate social responsibility (CSR), the development of e-learning courses focused on sustain-

ability, and significant stress being placed upon the teachings of Bloom’s Taxonomy, for application in education, that have now become an integral part of university courses in Pakistan (Lozano *et al.*, 2017).

The problem of climate change, pollution and global warming has been on a significant rise, and action needs to be taken (Fig. 1). According to an IPCC report (IPCC, 2021), the temperature of the Earth will likely rise by 1.5 degrees Celcius, or probably even more than that, over the next two decades, far, far above the pre-industrial level (Harvey *et al.*, 2021). This will certainly lead to extreme weather conditions and an immense amount of devastation. By studying and going through various institutions’ policy journals and websites, we discovered that individuals are not properly aware of the seriousness of this issue. The institutions are focusing more on the concept of proving the facts rather than taking any serious preventive action and implementing change.

Pakistan itself is facing a lot of environmental challenges, including pollution, rapid urbanization, deforestation, poverty, etc. The Higher Education Development Program (HEDP) is looking to promote excellence in various sectors of the state, among them in economic, social, and educational institutions. This will eventually promote sustainable development and increased social benefits. However, the aspect of quality assurance of the institutions is important, as it plays a significant role in the functioning and building of a flexible society (Batool & Qureshi, 2007).

With our research study in mind, we recognize that students need to gain awareness and knowledge about the ways through which they can act in a pro-environmental way and promote sustainable development

in society. The benefit of this study will be two-fold, and it will add to the existing body of knowledge, since no contribution from Pakistan has thus far been made. It also provides useful and impactful insight for practitioners, researchers, etc. The main aim of this study is to induce insights into how environmental factors impact pro-environmental behaviour and eventually lead to the sustainability of the environment.

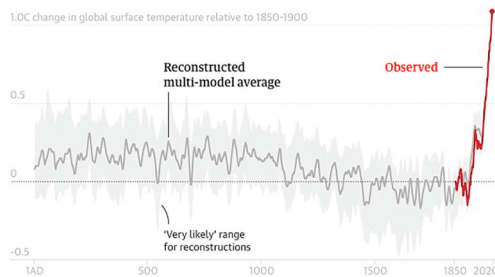


Fig. 1. Human Influence Has Warmed The Climate at a Rate Unprecedented In at Least the Past 2000 Years

Source: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

1. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

1.1. Green lifestyle and environmental commitment

It is a certain kind of behaviour that encapsulates the concepts of environmental activism, environmental knowledge, environmental concern, recycling, perceived consumer effectiveness, resource saving, and economic factors towards environmental claims. Consumers who are interested in the promotion of green products and intend to buy them have expressed a willingness to engage in any type of green activity in concern for environmental issues (Handoyo & Rufaidah, 2012).

The level of awareness and perception regarding green living among youth has been created by making use of advertising. Indeed, the concept of green thinking should be ingrained in a company's culture and principles. Businesses should strive to provide items that are both environmentally friendly and widely available. They support the idea of going green and following a green lifestyle, but there is no implementation. Many studies have been conducted in recent years that have linked green lifestyle with commitment (Tang *et al.*, 2016), demonstrating that green lifestyle and commitment are positively linked. According to the findings, being environmentally committed to nature is connected with a range of behaviours that are expressive of intrinsic aspiration, including relational feelings of love and caring, and making decisions in favor of the environment that are less selfish in areas of consumption (Tang *et al.*, 2016).

H1: Green lifestyle is positively associated with environmental commitment.

1.2. Green self-efficacy and environmental commitment

Green Self-Efficacy, according to Chen *et al.*, has been defined as the belief that human beings are able of possessing certain capabilities to help achieve actions that have a positive impact on accomplishing environmental goals (Chen *et al.*, 2014a). As per the research that was conducted by Bandura, individuals who have accumulated higher levels of self-efficacy tend to showcase higher performance levels and are generally more committed to their goals.

An individual with higher levels of green self-efficacy tends to better understand the importance of following a green lifestyle

and incorporating environment-friendly and green activities into their day-to-day activities. Consumers are now more interested in the concept of buying environmentally friendly products, due to which businesses have changed and improved their marketing and production strategies to promote environmental commitment (Kim, 2005).

Green self-efficacy promotes the concept of green mindfulness and green creativity. Individuals with high levels of self-efficacy tend to be highly motivated and conscious of the environment. Most of the people now share a green vision, because of which they are highly concerned about the role they play in the environment. This green vision has been implemented and practiced among various business organizations and institutions to increase green mindfulness and promote commitment to the environment (Chen *et al.*, 2014b).

H2: Green Self-Efficacy is positively associated with environmental commitment.

1.3. Environmental consciousness and environmental commitment

Environmental consciousness refers to people's behaviours, attitudes, and actions regarding the environment, and how they mold these personal characteristics to preserve a healthy relationship with their surroundings (Yaqub & Andrews, 2015).

The world is currently experiencing a severe environmental catastrophe. As a result, raising awareness among various organizations and individuals is critical to allow them to build a moral and ethical relationship with nature. When people grow more environmentally conscious, they develop a better understanding of the challenges and issues that

are created by human activity. When people spend more time in nature, they become better linked to it and more concerned about its long-term preservation. As a result, when people connect with nature, they logically behave in ways that contribute to nature's viability. It is emphasized that being conscious about nature requires a combination of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components, as well as the realization that humans, like all other creatures on Earth, are part of the natural environment (Yaqub & Eren, 2015).

H3: Environmental consciousness is positively associated with environmental commitment.

1.4. Green lifestyle and pro-environmental behaviour

Environmental knowledge and education are vital, because when individuals have knowledge of the environment, they can change their behaviour and opt for a certain lifestyle (Steg & Vlek, 2009).

Environmental concern is described as a general attitude indicating a consumer's level of worry about environmental risks. When people are conscious of the environment, it stimulates them to act in environmentally friendly ways and raises awareness of environmental issues. According to (Aziz *et al.*, 2021), the more knowledge a person has, the greater their concern for the environment, which drives people to change their daily routines and act in an environmentally responsible manner. It is argued by Aziz *et al.* (2021) that younger generations are more likely to participate in behavioural changes and lifestyle adaptations to adjust to the changing environment. When environmental concerns are high in an individual, it increases green buying behaviour (Mainieri *et al.*, 1997), and

they consider themselves as compassionate and socially responsible. Pro-environmental behaviour and social norms are shared understandings of what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behaviour (Schultz *et al.*, 2007).

H4: A green lifestyle is positively associated with pro-environmental behaviour.

1.5. Green self-efficacy and pro-environmental behaviour

For an individual's behaviour to be fostered, institutions such as schools, colleges and universities play an impactful role, thus for universities to promote pro-environmental behaviour, the students need to be constantly made conscious of their behaviour and encouraged to avoid any kind of negligence that could arise due to human conduct (Yusliza, 2020). According to Huang, through research conducted, it was determined that people in Taiwan tend to engage in pro-environmental behaviour especially when they have achieved green self-efficacy, as it is considered one of the major cognitive factors that allows a person to claim pro-environmental behaviour (Huang, 2016).

Self-efficacy has a symbiotic association with behaviour, in that it both motivates and is influenced by it (Silver *et al.*, 1995). On this premise, we hypothesize that when people believe they can readily commit themselves to pro-environmental behaviour, this may create a sense of self-efficacy in these domains.

This study also suggests hypothesizing that reminding people of their collective efficacy could help them improve subjective obstacles by improving their own self-efficacy beliefs.

H5: Green Self-Efficacy is positively associated with pro-environmental behaviour.

1.6. Environmental consciousness and pro-environmental behaviour

Human awareness is intrinsically tied to nature and the environment. A variety of external factors have an impact on an individual's conscious abilities. Gaining information and education leads to the development of environmental awareness and self-consciousness (Bonnett, 2016). One is more likely to engage in activities and behaviours that benefit the environment if they are connected to it and aware of it (Ozmen, 2006).

Furthermore, individuals agree that they are ready to take on more environmental action than they can, and, as a result, daily preventative measures advance to the next, more challenging, stage. Individuals' intentions to engage in ecologically responsible behaviour are influenced not just by their own beliefs, but also by others' actions and behaviours (Ozmen, 2006).

According to many researchers (Guo *et al.*, 2019), university strategies and initiatives, such as supplying disposable containers or presenting environmental-related issues, might encourage pro-environmental behaviour among students. As a result, when people try to change their habits and work for the environment, they become more environmentally conscious and their behaviours are predicted by their activities, in which they tend to behave ethically in the environment, contributing to pro-environmental behaviour.

H6: Environmental consciousness is positively associated with pro-environmental behaviour.

1.7. Environmental commitment and pro-environmental behaviour

In environmental commitment, a person makes a promise and commits to improving their behaviour. Environmental commitment changes behaviour by reducing cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 2012). Commitment has been researched primarily in one dimension in connection with environmental behaviour, which is a commitment to behaviour.

Pro-environmental behaviour incorporates reusing (e.g., reusing paper, plastic, glass, containers, etc.), monitoring water (e.g., restricting the utilization of water when washing hands), saving power (e.g., switching off lights when not required), utilizing public transportation, riding bicycles or walking, properly discarding non-recyclable waste, utilizing less paper when printing (e.g., two-sided printing), and purchasing and additionally consuming green products (Iyer *et al.*, 2016).

Pro-environmental behaviour might be affected by different viewpoints, for example, socioeconomics, sex, age or home/political viewpoint, qualities, and convictions about existence (Panno, 2018). Also, as Vicente-Molina *et. al.* Claimed, behaviour can be changed by open arena behaviour, e.g., public arrangements. Pro-ecological behaviour can be straightforwardly impacted by the private and open areas, with models including utilization of green products, utilization of public transportation, and reusing (Bittar, 2018).

H7: Environmental commitment is positively associated with pro-environmental behaviour.

1.8. Environmental commitment mediates the relationship between environmental consciousness and pro-environmental behaviour

Pro-environmental behaviour can be defined as any actions undertaken by individuals to ensure the preservation of the natural environment. In developing countries in particular, the concept of pro-environmental behaviour is still foreign, and thus the government and associated people in power are still focused on ensuring economic and social development, even though it may be causing considerable environmental damage. For instance, excessive fossil fuel consumption has led to emissions of sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide, which has a harmful impact on bodies of water and the overall global atmosphere (Zheng, 2009).

Public environmental consciousness is usually attained through interaction among people within a society, where people join civic movements and force the big corporations to willingly follow through with corporate social responsibility. For students, this can be achieved through education, so that, when they eventually start their careers and move on into the bigger picture of life, their environmental consciousness allows them to pursue pro-environmental behaviour (Zheng, 2009).

H8: Environmental commitment mediates the relationship between environmental consciousness and pro-environmental behaviour.

1.9. Environmental commitment mediates the relationship between a green lifestyle and pro-environmental behaviour

In this study, the term environmental commitment is basically defined as a mindset and a specific psychological state where individuals feel a sense of responsibility for the problems and concerns related to the environment. Various scholars and environment specialists have observed that there isn't much awareness related to the concept of being committed to your environment and being eager enough to find solutions and resolve problems.

A growing body of research has signified the integral importance of studying the relationship between human behaviour, attitude, and actions toward the environment. The objective is to create awareness regarding the minimization of harmful activities and promotion of environment sustainability and resource conservation so that people can adopt a green lifestyle by being committed to the environment, so provoking their pro-environmental behaviour (Ardoin *et al.*, 2013).

H9: Environmental commitment mediates the relationship between a green lifestyle and pro-environmental behaviour.

1.10. Environmental commitment mediates the relationship between green self-efficacy and pro-environmental behaviour

Self-efficacy can be described as the faith in a person's ability to demonstrate a particular behaviour or conduct and effectively carry out tasks to attain specific goals. Referring to

Chen *et al.*, the definition of green self-efficacy is the belief in individuals' capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to attain environmental goals. Individuals with a higher degree of self-efficacy are considered more effective, enthusiastic, and committed to their goals.

If an individual believes they are part of a group, for instance as an environmentalist, their course of action and behaviour is committed to following the pre-set norms of that specific group alone. Thus, in a university setting, if students are committed to acting positively toward the environment, their peers would follow suit with their behaviour (Jugert *et al.*, 2016). HEI's policies can mediate this relationship by creating an atmosphere of environmental commitment.

H10: The association between green self-efficacy and pro-environmental behaviour is influenced by environmental commitment.

Mediation Model

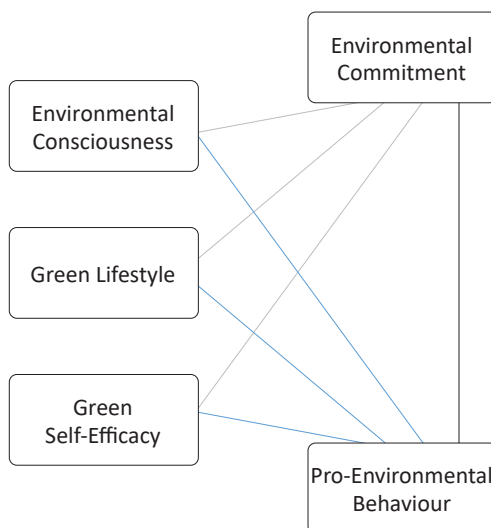


Fig. 2. Theoretical Framework

2. Methodology

2.1. Research design

Graduating students from both the public and private sectors were the subject of this study, because they can act as pressure groups for environmental reform, demanding changes by participating in debates or protests, and mobilizing support via social media. The research was inferential and cross-sectional in nature, as data was collected from different students in a specific period. Inferential statistics help us to draw conclusions and also help in the development of hypotheses; because our data is quantitative, it compensates for and clarifies the research project. The establishment of a correlation between the variables can also be used to identify the study (of the relationship between environmental commitment and pro-environmental behaviour), how they are linked with each other, and whether they have positive or negative relationships. The unit of analysis included graduating students from three public and three private universities in Lahore, Pakistan.

This research was cross-sectional in nature, which means data was collected from three different private universities and three public universities at the same time: Graduating students from six higher education institutions in Lahore, Pakistan, and graduating students from three public and three private higher education institutions in Lahore, Pakistan. The sample size consists of 372 graduating students from both private and public universities located in Lahore. This sample was chosen due to its feasibility and applicability for gathering data: the plan was to gather data from both public and private students and then analyze

the results. To estimate the sample size, the item response theory is a modeling approach that uses formalized statistical models to connect responses to test items with fundamental dormant variables (Lang, 2021). By this, we can calculate the sample size by multiplying the number of items by 15. Sampling of the size could be done in probability or non-probability sampling. In our study, non-probability sampling was used, which includes non-random sampling and collecting data as per convenience. Convenience sampling is used in the data collection and sampling size, as it is a readily accessible pool of survey participants and commonly used sampling technique, being extremely quick, simple, and inexpensive.

2.2. Instruments

To ensure the integrity of our work, we chose a standardized questionnaire for the purpose of our research, including our independent, dependent, and mediating variables. Our questionnaire was further divided into two parts, where the first part included respondents filling in information about themselves, including their name, the institution they attend, the semester they are enrolled in, etc. (demographics). The second part of our questionnaire was made up of questions about the variables of our study.

The respondents' information was completely protected for security reasons, and we ensured the language that we used (English), was written in basic terminology, excluding any jargon or difficult words which our respondents may have found difficult to comprehend. The responses regarding our variables were ranked on a 5 Likert scale, stating the following: 1: Strongly Disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neutral, 4:

Agree, and 5: Strongly Agree. The questions on demographics inquired about the university our respondents attended, amongst other things. There was a total of 31 questions, and none of the questions required our respondents to write anything in text form.

3. Descriptive Analysis and Testing of Hypothesis

3.1. Descriptive analysis

The research was conducted amongst undergraduate students within universities of Pakistan. The total number of student respondents who participated in our study was 372, of which 85 were male and 287 were female. Most of the participants were female, holding a percentage of 77.2%. We also questioned the age of our respondents and the semester in which they were studying. As demonstrated by Table 1, most of the participants resided in the age group between 21 to 23 years old, holding 64% of the entire data collected. Students over the age of 24 years held just 3.5% of the entire data. As depicted in the frequency analysis of the data in Table 1, the students varied in terms of the semesters they were studying in, where the highest percentage (25.8%) of students were in the 7th semester, and the lowest (3%) were studying in the second semester.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gender	372	1.00	2.00	1.7715	0.42043
Semester	372	1.00	8.00	5.0323	1.95751
Age of respondent	372	1.00	3.00	1.7097	0.52600

3.2. Hypothesis testing

Table 2. Green Lifestyle, Environmental Commitment, and Pro-Environmental Behaviour

Direct Effect Model			
Predictor	Outcome = M (environmental commitment)		
	B	T	P
X (green lifestyle)	0.3685	9.8389	0.0000
Constant	2.3685	15.1031	0.0000
Direct Effect Model			
Predictor	Outcome = Y (pro-environmental behaviour)		
	B	T	P
X (green lifestyle)	0.1734	2.8222	0.0050
M (environmental commitment)	0.3803	5.0087	0.0000
Constant	1.2797	4.3999	0.0000
Total Effect Model			
Predictor	Outcome = Y (pro-environmental behaviour)		
	B	T	P
X (green lifestyle)	0.3135	5.5540	0.0000
Constant	2.1794	9.2310	0.0000
Indirect Effect and Significance using the Normal Distribution			
	Value	Z	
Sobel	0.1401	4.4454	
Bootstrap results for indirect effect of green lifestyle on pro-environmental behaviour			
Effect	M	LL CL	UL CL 95%
	0.101	95%	0.2643
		0.0870	

Note: n = 372; Bootstrap sample size = 1000; β = Unstandardized Regression Coefficient; SE = Standard Error; LL= Lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit; CI = Confidence Interval

Table 3. Green Self-Efficacy, Environmental Commitment, and Pro-Environmental Behaviour

Direct Effect Model			
Predictor	Outcome = M (environmental commitment)		
	B	T	P
X (Green self efficacy)	0.5456	12.8081	0.0000
Constant	1.8171	11.1253	0.0000
Direct Effect Model			
Predictor	Outcome = Y (pro-environmental behaviour)		
	B	T	P
X (green self efficacy)	0.2510	3.1481	0.0018
M (Environmental commitment)	0.3365	4.1547	0.0000
Constant	1.2131	4.1266	0.0000
Total Effect Model			
Predictor	Outcome = Y (pro-environmental behaviour)		
	B	T	P
X (green self efficacy)	0.4346	6.4092	0.0000
Constant	1.8246	7.0176	0.0000
Indirect Effect and Significance using Normal Distribution			
Sobel	Value	Z	
	0.1836	3.9411	
Bootstrap results for the indirect effect of green lifestyle on pro-environmental behaviour			
Effect	M	LLCL 95%	ULCL 95%
	0.1836	0.0865	0.3038

Note: n = 372; Bootstrap sample size = 1000; β = Unstandardized Regression Coefficient; SE = Standard Error; LL= Lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit; CI = Confidence Interval

4. Discussion

The main objective of this study was to determine the influence of certain environmental factors, namely environmental consciousness, green lifestyle, and green self-efficacy, on students' pro-environmental behaviour. It also portrays the mediating role played by environmental commitment between the dependent and the independent variable. The output of the study shows that environment consciousness, green lifestyle, and green self-efficacy are positively related to students' pro-environmental behaviour. When a student is aware and highly conscious about the role they play in protecting the environment, supports a green lifestyle, and believes in the acceptance and implementation of a green lifestyle, they are better able to act in a more pro-environmental way. The data was collected from 372 students from private and public universities in Lahore, of which 85 were male and 287 were female. Our participants resided in the age group between 21 to 23, from which the highest percent of students were studying in the seventh semester.

Exploratory Factor Analysis was conducted amongst 23 Likert Scale Items, from which the value of KMO was 0.883, which is far higher than the recommended threshold of 0.60. The ranges for the communalities were between 0.467 to 0.776. We also conducted a reliability analysis, where the values of our Cronbach Alpha all came under the acceptable threshold range, from 0.767 to 0.877.

The independent variables also tend to have a positive relationship with the mediator. Environmental consciousness, green lifestyle, and green self-efficacy cause an individual to be considerate and fully committed to

their environment. Environmental commitment mediates the relationship between the three independent variables, environmental consciousness, green lifestyle, and green self-efficacy, and the dependent variable pro-environmental behaviour. Results generated by testing the hypothesis and performing an analysis supported the propositions of our theoretical framework. Hypothesis 1 stated that a "Green Lifestyle is positively associated with Environmental Commitment". The result was proven positive and significant (0.455**). Hypothesis 2 stated that "Green Self-Efficacy is positively associated with environmental commitment". The result was proven positive and significant (0.554**). Hypothesis 3 stated that "Environmental Consciousness is positively associated with environmental commitment". It was proven positive and significant (0.425**). Hypothesis 4 stated that a "Green lifestyle is positively associated with Pro-Environmental Behaviour". It was proven positive and significant (0.277**). Hypothesis 5 stated that "Green Self-Efficacy is positively associated with Pro-Environmental Behaviour". It was proven positive and significant (0.316**). Hypothesis 6 stated that "Environmental Consciousness is positively associated with Pro-Environmental Behaviour". It was proven positive and significant (0.247**). Hypothesis 7 stated that "Environmental Commitment is positively associated with Pro-Environmental Behaviour". It was proven positive and significant (0.342**). Hypothesis 8 stated that "Environmental commitment mediates the relationship between environmental consciousness and Pro-Environmental Behaviour". It was proven positive and significant (0.247**). Hypothesis 9 stated that "Environmental commitment mediates the relationship between

Green Lifestyle and Pro-Environmental Behaviour". It was proven positive and significant (0.277**). Hypothesis 10 stated that "Environmental Commitment mediates the relationship between Green Self-Efficacy and Pro-Environmental Behaviour". It was proven positive and significant (0.316**). Students who have a strong connection to nature are less likely to harm the environment, according to the theory, because the self is tied to nature, and harmful activities would harm the self (Mayer & Frantz, 2004).

Our hypothesized model further demonstrated that individuals who are committed to the environment have a positive and significant relationship with the environment, and this was proven through results established by our data analysis. As per our findings, students who indulge in a green lifestyle are more committed to their environment and thus pursue pro-environmental behaviour and prefer it to be a behaviour shared and encouraged by their educational institutions. Our results further enhanced a positive and significant relationship between green self-efficacy and environmental commitment. Students from reputable universities in Lahore, Pakistan, genuinely believed that they could conquer environmental problems through goals and environmental commitment, and stated they would like their universities to establish environmental policies and would religiously follow them.

It is critical to discuss the main concerns related to adaptation to the change in environment, and how the various institutions around the world, including higher educational institutions, can prepare themselves and manage their resources to overcome this challenge. With our research in mind, we see that students need to gain awareness and

knowledge about the ways through which they can act in a pro-environmental way and promote sustainable development in society. It is important to remember that personal motivation to protect the environment is crucial when it comes to environmental education and awareness. Internal elements that influence a person's behaviour toward the environment include personality qualities that influence environmental behaviour as well as a person's interaction with nature.

A person who has a stronger urge to connect with nature looks for opportunities to spend as much time as possible outside. Nature draws them in and entices them to explore the countryside. Researchers have investigated the utility of being connected to nature as a predictor of pro-environmental behaviour, and several studies have established a strong correlation. When a person is environmentally conscious, they are more likely to act ethically, which is good for the environment and has positive consequences. Since we are talking about students, they can help the environment by taking certain steps, such as by recycling paper or by making material from waste plastic- as our research findings have demonstrated, there is a positive and significant relationship between environmental consciousness and pro-environmental behaviour.

Education institutions can assist students by encouraging them to adopt a green lifestyle, and by informing them of the negative effects of bad environmental conditions. They can also help students to create a green attitude that will aid in the beneficial growth of the environment. There has been similar research done, especially in Malaysia, in a similar context, where students from 72 training

centers were studied. The findings were like ours: Students are willing to make sacrifices and be environmentally committed, which further contributes to their pro-environmental behaviour (Yusliza *et al.*, 2020); they are willing to take certain actions, and even support environmental sustainability within their institutions, to show their commitment and concern toward the environment. The fact student would choose to enroll in universities with environmental awareness further highlights their belief in pursuing pro-environmental behaviour.

Another study with similar objectives was conducted in Taiwan amongst students, focusing on marine life sustainability. Like our findings, they discovered that environmental awareness and environmental consciousness allow an individual to pursue behaviour that is beneficial to the environment (Chen & Tsai, 2016). Environmental consciousness is the key that allows people to connect with nature and their surroundings; thus, as students are aware of the unfortunate issues presented by climate change and global warming, they are more inclined to take on pro-environmental behaviour.

4.1. Theoretical contribution

In a variety of ways, our study contributes to the corpus of knowledge. Several studies on environmental variables have been undertaken, but there is a gap because no educational sector in Pakistan focuses solely on environmental aspects with a sustainable environment in mind. To fill this gap in the literature, our research contributes to understanding how organizations can assist in achieving a sustainable environment, as well as how they can engage students in

environmental commitment, and how they can be environmentally conscious.

Our work contributes to the advancement of prior work in a broader sense. Furthermore, the new research broadens the scope of pro-environmental behaviour research and provides a framework for examining how students and organizations can adopt a green lifestyle and contribute to the long-term sustainability of the environment. Aside from that, our research will contribute to a better understanding of how environmental elements (environmental consciousness, green lifestyle, and green self-efficacy) contribute to pro-environmental behaviour enhancement. Our study mainly focuses on students, as they are the ones who can protect the environment in the future through their activities.

4.2. Practical implications

These studies have several implications for institutions and students who desire to see environmental factors implemented in their institutions to achieve a sustainable environment.

Organizations should invest in human capital and raise awareness of how students can practice environmental factors in their institutions, and how these will be beneficial for the environment; there should be a clear understanding of the environmental factors that have an impact on the students' behaviour. Organizations should create policies that predict pro-environmental behaviour- organizations can invest and introduce courses or subjects that motivate students so that they can change their habits and act according to pro-environmental behaviour.

Our research was mainly carried out on top management and students, so there should be proper evaluation systems in-

stalled that analyze students' behaviour to achieve a sustainable environment. There should also be proper systems that clearly explain how students will be evaluated based on their behaviour, an assessment that could be done bi-annually to observe and understand changes in behaviour, and so that feedback can be taken from management or students to show if they are on the right track or not. Students must be assessed, to develop capable candidates who can help mitigate environmental challenges and take the required steps to reduce harmful environmental effects (Shafiei & Maleksaedi, 2020).

Limitations of the Study

There were a few limitations present in our study, as we only focused on the undergraduate students of Pakistan in higher education, rather than all the students studying in various categories within their universities.

We also conclude that the scope of our research was considerably limited, as we only targeted universities in Lahore, and it could have been more widespread so as to get results that would more extensively provide an image of the role of sustainable development in all universities of Pakistan. We limited ourselves to group data that could be collected by a plethora of university students.

Conclusion

The importance of research related to environmental health has become significantly important, as the pressing dangers of human actions have further amplified the impact of global warming. This research paper contributes a further widespread perspective

on the already present literature on pro-environmental behaviour. Further, this study is one of few to have explored the relationship between green efficacy, green lifestyle, environmental consciousness, environmental commitment, and pro-environmental behaviour. Our research participants were from incredibly reputable universities of Lahore, and thus this research will prove useful for Higher Educational Institutions, enabling them to generate policies that promote environmental commitment so students can regularly pursue pro-environmental behaviour.

Pro-environmental behaviour amongst students in universities is highly important, as a positive behavioural change among youth allows for the possibility to reverse the damaging impact that has been done by climate change on our environment. In conclusion, High Educational Institutions can act as an integral element towards sustainable development through their curriculum and policies.

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The Impact of Online Learning on Visual Learners in the HEIs for Sustainable Development and Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the impact of online learning on visual learners- individuals who prefer to learn using visual aids such as diagrams, images, videos, and interactive simulations. With the rise of online education, it is crucial to understand how this mode of learning affects different types of learners, including visual learners. The article provides a literature review of existing research on visual learning in online environments, and identifies the advantages and challenges associated with this approach. Additionally, the article highlights effective strategies for optimizing the online learning experience for visual learners, such as the use of multimedia resources and providing opportunities for social interaction. Ultimately, this article aims to provide insights into how online learning can be tailored to meet the needs of visual learners and promote their academic success.

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Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis created headwinds in the global economy, leading to business losses and layoffs. The challenging situation caused by the pandemic also led to serious disruption to educational opportunities all over the world. Governments and educational institutions worldwide attempted to suggest and establish alternative ways of providing education in the dramatic period of

social distancing. This was a period of serious changes in education, seeing a move from traditional classrooms to distance learning, which was not equally achievable or successful in every country and educational system. It is important to consider how online learning affects different types of learners, as every student has a unique way of processing and retaining information. Visual learners may have specific needs and preferences that should be taken into consideration so

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as to optimize their learning experience. Understanding the different learner types is crucial to enable educators to tailor their instructions and materials to the needs and strengths of their students.

Visual learning is a learning approach that emphasizes the use of visual aids, such as diagrams, images, videos and interactive simulations, to enhance the learning experience. With the rapid growth of online learning, there is a need to understand how this mode of learning affects visual learners. According to Artino and Jones's (2012) research, participants showed a positive attitude towards online courses and mentioned that enjoyment, a positive activating emotion, was an effective predictor of elaboration and metacognition.

Yet, while online learning offers the convenience of learning from anywhere and at any time, it may present unique advantages or challenges for visual learners. Based on Murphy *et al.* (2004) research results, students prefer visual learning at a higher percentage than other learning styles, because visual learners can gain more benefit from distance learning than others, as they remember better from highly visualized materials.

As a result of the pandemic, educators have had to adapt their teaching methodologies to suit the virtual learning environment. While online learning has several benefits for visual learners, it also poses challenges for them. Al-Rawi (2013) highlights that teaching becomes more effective at meeting the needs of the learner when blending various techniques to deliver knowledge and ideas becomes necessary. Visual learners rely heavily on visual aids, such as diagrams, images,

and videos, to understand complex concepts, memorize things better, and analyze various tasks independently. With traditional, face-to-face classroom instruction, visual learners were able to see their lecturer's facial expressions and body language, as well as observe their peers' work. Gurung (2021) investigated challenges faced by teachers in online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic and revealed that the biggest challenge was reaching students online with various learning styles. Teachers' teaching experience and qualifications are important in both offline and online teaching, because teachers run the whole process and thus should be ready to learn new technology and the necessary methodology of online teaching.

This article examines the impact of online learning on visual learners and suggests strategies for educators to address challenges that are faced while teaching visual learners online. By tailoring online teaching methods to meet the needs of visual learners, educators can help them thrive in a digital learning environment.

Actuality of the Research

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the shift toward online learning, forcing educators to adapt quickly to the new reality. While online learning has benefits, such as flexibility and accessibility, it also presents challenges for students who learn best through visual aids. With more students than ever before taking courses online, there is an urgent need to understand the impact of this mode of learning on visual learners. This has led to a growing body of research examining the effectiveness of online teaching methodologies for visual learners, as well as explor-

ing strategies for accommodating their needs in a digital environment. This research is particularly relevant now, as online learning is likely to continue even after the pandemic has subsided, and educators will need to develop effective strategies to cater to the needs of all learners.

Practical Value of the Research

With the increasing trend of online education, it has become imperative for educators to understand the learning needs and preferences of different types of learners, including visual learners. By identifying the challenges faced by visual learners in the online learning environment, and exploring effective strategies to support their learning, educators can design online courses and instructional materials that are more inclusive and engaging for all students.

Furthermore, the insights gained from this research can help educators to develop better teaching methodologies and tools to enhance the effectiveness of online learning for visual learners. This can lead to improved learning outcomes and increased retention rates, ultimately benefiting both the learners and the institutions providing the online courses.

Moreover, the practical implications of this research extend beyond the realm of education. The skills and competencies developed through online learning are increasingly valued in the modern workplace. By supporting visual learners in their online learning, educators can better prepare them for the demands of the current and future job market, ultimately contributing to their personal and professional growth.

Literature Review

In recent years, online learning has become an increasingly popular way for students to access educational content, offering a flexible and convenient way to learn from anywhere. However, it is unclear how online learning affects visual learners specifically. The learning process differs for different learners, as every student has their own way of learning, and everyone is unique in their learning interest, preferences, needs, etc. Understanding learner types is important for educators to enable them to tailor instructions and materials to the needs and strengths of their students (Siregar & Haswani, 2020). Universities constantly make contributions to improve students' performance and strengthen their learning ability.

Students' academic performance depends on many internal and external factors, and educators must pay attention to those factors (Espinoza-Poves *et al.*, 2019). According to Fleming and Baume (2006), learning style is a description of a learning process that encourages learners to define important steps toward understanding new materials. Fleming (2014) introduced the Visual, Aural, Read/Write, and Kinesthetic (VARK) model, which divides learners into four categories. Knowing and understanding learner types is important because it helps educators to process and retain information most effectively. As Gilakjani (2012) outlines, visual learners prefer to learn through images, graphs, and additional visual aids, while auditory learners prefer to listen to someone speaking or use songs in their learning process. Kinesthetic learners, on the other hand, learn through physical activities and experiences.

Santo (2006) investigated the relationships between learning styles and online learning because online learning was one of the main challenges faced during the pandemic period. Online learning can be particularly beneficial for visual learners as it provides a variety of multimedia resources that can help them process information effectively. Using videos, diagrams, images, and other visual aids helps visual learners to better understand concepts and retain information effectively. Bonk and Zhang (2006) say that visual representations of the content are highlighted with techniques during online learning, and online courses have to offer a wide range of visual aids to support visual learners. Further, online learning often allows for greater flexibility and control over the pace of learning, which can be particularly beneficial for visual learners who may need more time to process information presented in text or auditory formats. According to Elango, Gudep, and Selvam (2008), visual learners tend to have a positive perception of online learning because it supports their way of learning; it allows them to review material at their own pace and engage with the content in a way that is tailored to their unique learning style.

Advantages for Visual Learners during Online Learning

Axmedova and Kenjayeva (2021) claim that the pandemic brought with it a new term, the “new normal,” to education, seeing the increased use of technologies and online tools in the teaching/learning process. As online learning required professors to prepare presentations to deliver a lecture, visual learners had the possibility to retain

information better by looking at pictures, infographics, maps, diagrams, videos, etc. (Clarke III *et al.*, 2006). Visual learners are often more engaged when they can see and interact with visual elements. Online learning provides various interactive tools, such as quizzes, interactive whiteboards, mobile phones, and virtual labs, that can help learners stay focused and engaged throughout the learning process. Mobile phones can be integrated into the teaching/learning process of English as a Second Language because this opportunity allows visual learners to understand complex concepts more easily. They learn at their own pace and in their own preferred way (Ibrahim & Kadiri, 2018).

Based on the “Cognitive Load Theory”, extraneous cognitive load refers to the unnecessary mental processing required to understand instructional materials, which makes the learning process more easily digestible for visual learners. Intrinsic cognitive load refers to the inherent complexity of the learning materials, which simplifies complex concepts and makes them more accessible for visual learners (Cook, 2006). Online learning made the lecture preparation process easier for visual learners because lecturers were able to search for interesting visual materials in a variety of formats and offer them to the learners by sharing a screen. Well-organized presentations help learners enhance their creativity and strengthen their various abilities, something that can be leveraged in different settings (Russell, 2006). Visual learners tend to complete online learning more effectively than other types of learners because they benefit from a vast array of visual aids and the interactivity and flexibility used in the teaching/learning process (Drago & Wagner, 2004).

The online teaching/learning process provides interesting learning experience for different types of learners, and, as mentioned above, visual learners benefit from the online learning process more, as online education gives them the opportunity to learn from visually appealing presentations, incorporating videos and animation into the learning process, and allowing them to reinforce key concepts effectively.

Challenges Faced by Visual Learners during Online Learning

Visual learners may benefit from seeking out courses that provide ample visual aids, taking breaks to engage in visual activities such as drawing or using mind maps, and actively seeking out opportunities for hands-on learning. Not all courses provide visual materials during the learning process, which emphasizes the isolation of online learning for visual learners (Cantoni *et al.*, 2004). Wang, Mendori and Hoel (2018) revealed in their research that the motivation to learn of those with a stronger visual style preference and technology acceptance was improved during online learning, in comparison with those who were visual learners but not technology-friendly. During online learning, students need to have sharpened technical skills to overcome any difficulties they face during online studies, otherwise it can be difficult for them to benefit from online forums or video chats with instructors or peers.

Online education also requires teaching students with mixed abilities, and in this case visual learners can end up as early finishers, a challenge for teachers. Using real life examples to illustrate concepts and ideas is quite common for visual learners, and

teachers must be ready to face that kind of difficulty while teaching students with visual preferences (Annie *et al.*, 2015). According to Ibrahim and Kadiri (2018), using mobile phones during the teaching/learning process is recommended, especially for teaching English as a Second Language, because mobile phones provide a means of communication and collaboration between students and teachers, and helps to facilitate a more personalized and effective learning experience. On the negative side, however, mobile phones can be a distraction during lesson time, and can even decrease cognitive performance and learning outcomes. Morelle and Tabane (2019) revealed during their research that learners with visual impairment were physically integrated in classes but not truly included, because they were distracted by numerous factors. Students should be encouraged to use their mobile phones, online apps, forums, or other additional platforms for educational purposes only, and distractions should be minimized by turning off notifications and limiting access to non-educational apps.

To overcome such challenges, teachers can adopt new strategies and approaches to teach visual learners online, such as leveraging technology to engage them and promote collaboration, provide clear and consistent communication, and providing opportunities for personalized learning.

Methods

A private university was chosen to conduct the research in. The university was chosen for its diverse student population and its strong focus on innovative teaching methods.

A questionnaire (Likert Scale) was used as a research tool to check what kind of attitude participants had toward online learning (see Appendix 1). Before filling out the questionnaire, the participants completed a test (The VARK Questionnaire - How do you learn best, 2023) to find out if they were visual learners or not. Overall, 85 participants filled in the questionnaire, and 44 out of 85 appeared to be visual learners.

Using questionnaires is quite effective in conducting research, especially when one wants to reach many people in a short period of time. Questionnaires are also the fastest tool to collect data and give the researcher more time to analyze the received information (Prithwishkumar & Michael, 2014). Further, questionnaires provide standardized questions that can be administered to all participants in the same way. This ensures that all participants are asked the same questions, making it easier to compare and analyze their responses.

The questionnaire was prepared with a simple design so as not to confuse the respondents. Questions were clearly formulated to help respondents to analyze them in a better way, while instructions were short and simple.

The fact was taken into consideration that all researchers are dependent on the goodwill of the respondents, and if they do not want to answer anything, they just skip the question or circle the wrong answers. As such, the received data was analyzed precisely. Respondents did not write their names on the questionnaire, as it was confidential. Participants were informed that their answers would be used for this article and the questionnaire was given to them after their con-

firmation. They were also told that they were able to abandon the filling process any time if they did not feel comfortable.

Research Setting and Participants

The participants in the study were undergraduate students enrolled in a specific course who identified as visual learners. Participants were asked to express their interest in participating in the study.

The sample consisted of 44 students, with an equal number of males and females. The age range of the participants was between 18 and 22 years old. The researcher ensured that all participants provided informed consent before participating in the study. She also emphasized the voluntary nature of participation and the participants' right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Overall, the research setting, and participants were carefully selected to ensure the study's relevance and generalizability to other similar universities and populations.

Research Tool

The questionnaire included 10 questions and was assessed using the Likert Scale. Once the questionnaire was designed, to prove its reliability, it was tested twice. Ten participants were randomly chosen, ones who did not take part in the research after piloting this questionnaire. All of them filled in the questionnaire twice, with a 20-minute interval between, and showed homogenous answers (Appendix 2).

To check which questions in the questionnaire, measure the same underlying construct, Cronbach's Alpha was used to

assess the interval consistency of the scale questionnaire. Cronbach’s Alpha score was $0.947 > 0.8$, and the significance $p = < 0.001$, which means that there is a strong correlation between the two results, the result is statistically significant, and the questionnaire is reliable.

Table 1. Test-retest results, Cronbach Alpha

		Correlations	
		VAR00001	VAR00002
VAR00001	Pearson Correlation	1	.947**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	10	10
VAR00002	Pearson Correlation	.947**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	10	10

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Research Question

Online learning is a new step in education, and this topic needs further investigation, because, with time and more experience, educators have better knowledge of all those factors that need to be taken into consideration while learning online. There were several interesting questions related to the impact of online learning on visual learners, and the following question was chosen from among them:

Research question: Do visual learners benefit more from online learning than other types of learners?

Research Analysis

The results are presented in Table 2 below. More detailed results are presented in Appendix 3.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the survey

Question Statistics	Mean	Mode	Median	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
1	2.98	2	1.5	1.27	0.009	-0.099
2	3.2	3 and 4	2.5	1.00	0.003	-0.727
3	3.27	3	2	1.1	-0.581	0.056
4	3.45	4	2.5	1.066	-0.177	-0.750
5	3.5	3 and 5	2	1.210	-0.247	-0.970
6	3.5	4	2.5	1.067	-0.300	-0.714
7	3.8	5	3	1.13	-0.885	1.262
8	3.47	3	2	1.19	-0.160	-0.900
9	3.43	4	2	1.065	-0.600	0.107
10	3.38	4	2.5	1.08	-0.729	0.231

The findings drawn from the analysis of the data collected during this research revealed that, overall, online learning has an impact on visual learners’ learning process because of many factors. As the data show, for questions 5 (Mean – 3.5), 6 (Mean – 3.5), and 7 (Mean – 3.8) the mean is more than 3.5, for questions 2 (Mean – 3.2), 3 (Mean – 3.27), 4 (Mean – 3.45), 8 (Mean – 3.47), 9 (Mean – 3.43), 10 (Mean – 3.38), the mean is nearly 3.5, and for question 1, the mean is 2.98, which overall shows a positive result.

As for the Median and Mode, their results for all questions are very close to the mean

indicators, a fact that shows a normal distribution. The results themselves show that the data is well-balanced and can be analyzed. For Q1, the standard deviation is 1.00, and for questions, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q9, and Q10, the standard deviation is more than 1, which means that the answers are quite heterogeneous.

The results of Skewness and Kurtosis are between $-3 - 3$ for all the given questions, so the difference of opinions is not dramatic. But for Q4, Q5, Q6, and Q8, both Skewness and Kurtosis are negative, which means that the results are more often lower than the mean. Overall, the results do not constitute a normal curve and as such are reliable.

Discussion

The article "The Impact of Online Learning on Visual Learners" explores the effect of online learning on students who are identified as visual learners, who prefer to learn through visual aids such as diagrams, videos, and images. The research suggests that online learning can be particularly beneficial for visual learners, as it provides a variety of multimedia resources that can help them process information effectively. Additionally, the flexibility and control offered by online learning can be advantageous for visual learners, who may need more time to process information presented in text or auditory formats.

The article identifies several advantages of online learning for visual learners, such as the ability to review material at their own pace and engage with the content in a way that is tailored to their unique learning style. Online learning provides various interactive tools, such as quizzes, interactive

whiteboards, mobile phones, and virtual labs, that can help learners stay focused and engaged throughout the learning process. Furthermore, well-organized presentations and lectures that include visual materials can enhance visual learners' creativity and strengthen their various abilities that can be leveraged in various settings.

The article also discusses some of the challenges faced by visual learners during online learning, such as the lack of visual aids in some courses, which can emphasize the isolation of online learning for visual learners. Additionally, students with mixed abilities may have varying paces of learning, which can result in visual learners being early finishers in online courses.

Overall, the research suggests that online learning can be highly beneficial for visual learners if the courses provide proper visual aids, and if the students have adequate technical skills to overcome any difficulties they may face during online studies. This study highlights the importance of considering students' learning styles and needs when designing online courses and using appropriate teaching strategies and materials to accommodate visual learners.

Research Ethics

Research ethics is an important part of the research. Respondents were fully informed about the research purpose, procedures, potential benefits, and their rights as a participant, in advance. Participants were told that their personal information would not be shared or disclosed to any third parties without their explicit consent. All of them were ensured that their privacy would be protected. The respondents' data was

collected, stored, and analyzed in a manner that was secure.

The research was designed in such a way that was unlikely to cause harm or distress to participants. Their data was collected and analyzed in an objective and unbiased manner, by using valid and reliable methods.

Conclusion

In conclusion, online learning has a positive effect on visual learners, as evidenced by the findings of this research article. Visual learners who engage in online learning can benefit from various features and tools that enhance their learning experience, such as videos, images, and interactive simulations. Additionally, online learning provides a flexible and convenient environment that allows visual learners to control the pace of their learning and review materials as needed.

However, the effectiveness of online learning for visual learners may vary depending on several factors, such as the quality of the materials and the level of student engagement. Therefore, educators and instructional designers must ensure that online learning materials are visually appealing, interactive, and tailored to the needs of visual learners so as to optimize their learning outcomes.

Overall, online learning can provide a valuable educational experience for visual learners, and its potential should be further explored and harnessed.

Research Limitations

The research article: "The Impact of Online Learning on Visual Learners" had some limitations when interpreting the results of the study and considering them when designing future research studies in this area. One of the

limitations was self-report bias from the participants, in that they may not have provided an accurate reflection of their actual experiences. Additionally, the willingness of the participants to express their opinions and experiences can be influenced by various factors, such as their personality traits, cultural background, and prior experiences with research.

Further, the study represents a limited sample size, which may not be representative of the larger population of visual learners. This factor may limit the external validity of the study. The study is based on a single method (Questionnaire) of data collection or analysis, which can also limit the scope and depth of the findings. For wider research of this topic, researchers could consider a variety of methods of data collection, such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups, to capture a diverse range of perspectives and experiences. It is also important to acknowledge the potential limitations of the sample and to carefully interpret and generalize the findings accordingly.

Recommendations

Online learning is quite a new challenge for the education sector, it requires time and experience to sharpen its proper and effective usage. By implementing the recommendations below, instructors can ensure that visual learners have a positive and effective online learning experience:

- Use visual aids: Visual learners rely heavily on visual aids such as images, videos, and diagrams. Therefore, instructors should incorporate these aids into their online teaching to improve comprehension and engagement;
- Provide interactive content: Interactive content such as quizzes, games, and

simulations can help visual learners apply what they learned in a practical context. This can enhance their learning experience and help them to retain information better;

- Personalized learning: Visual learners have different learning styles and preferences. Instructors should use personalized approaches to ensure that each visual learner can access the content in a way that suits their learning style;
- Create an engaging learning environment: To keep visual learners engaged, instructors should create an interactive and social learning environment that encourages collaboration and communication between students;
- Assess student progress: Regular assessment and feedback can help visual learners to identify their strengths and weaknesses and make necessary adjustments to improve their learning outcomes;
- Use accessibility and user-friendly technology: The technology used for online learning should be accessible and user-friendly, with features that support visual learners, such as closed captions, transcripts, and high-quality images and videos.

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Appendix 1. The Impact of Online Learning on Visual Learners

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your willingness to take part in the research. We would like to ask you to complete a questionnaire using a Likert scale. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential and no personal information will be linked to your answers. Your participation is voluntary.

Please assess the statements in a 5- point Likert scale: 5-Completely agree, 4-agree, 3-neutral, 2-disagree, 1-completely disagree.

N	Statements	5	4	4	2	1
		Completely agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Completely Disagree
1	I found online learning effective as a visual learner					
2	Online learning hindered my ability to grasp visual content					
3	Online learning experience provided enough opportunities to engage with visual materials					
4	Online courses placed much emphasis on visual content					
5	I often supplemented my online learning with additional visual resources					
6	I relied on visual aids to understand and remember course materials					
7	My professors put much effort into making their online courses visually appealing and informative					
8	I often found myself disengaged from online lectures due to lack of visual stimulation					
9	Online learning experience helped me to cater my individual learning style as a visual learner					
10	As a visual learner, I was satisfied with the online learning experience					

Appendix 2. Questionnaire Results**Table 1A: First Questionnaire Results**

Item / Statistics	Mean
1	2.3
2	3.2
3	3.0
4	4.0
5	3.0
6	2.7
7	3.8
8	3.4
9	3.3
10	3.6

Table 1B: Second Questionnaire Results

Item / Statistics	Mean
1	2.4
2	3.4
3	3.4
4	4.1
5	3.0
6	2.7
7	3.8
8	3.5
9	3.2
10	3.4

Appendix 3. Survey Results

Questions Point	1	2	3	4	5
1	5	13	11	8	7
2	1	11	14	14	4
3	4	4	15	15	5
4	1	8	14	14	8
5	2	8	10	10	12
6	1	8	16	16	8
7	0	3	11	11	16
8	2	7	8	8	12
9	3	4	17	17	6
10	4	3	18	18	5

Descriptive Statistics

Question Statistics	Mean	Mode	Median	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
1	2.98	2	1.5	1.27	0.009	-0.099
2	3.2	3 and 4	2.5	1.00	0.003	-0.727
3	3.27	3	2	1.1	-0.581	0.056
4	3.45	4	2.5	1.066	-0.177	-0.750
5	3.5	3 and 5	2	1.210	-0.247	-0.970
6	3.5	4	2.5	1.067	-0.300	-0.714
7	3.8	5	3	1.13	-0.885	1.262
8	3.47	3	2	1.19	-0.160	-0.900
9	3.43	4	2	1.065	-0.600	0.107
10	3.38	4	2.5	1.08	-0.729	0.231



Case Law of the European Court of Human Rights in Decisions of the Constitutional Court of Georgia

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the problem of using the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) case law by the Constitutional Court of Georgia. For this purpose, the place of the international treaty in the hierarchy of the legal system of Georgia is first reviewed, whereby it is shown that this issue lies in a gray area. In addition, decisions of the Constitutional Court of Georgia are analyzed, where it is found that in their decisions, the ECtHR case law is rarely interpreted. It is also found that since 2012, the Constitutional Court of Georgia has not interpreted the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms or the ECtHR case law at all, even though in many cases at least one side used the ECtHR case law in its argument. In such cases, it seems the Constitutional Court of Georgia would simply state the position of the party but not indicate its own opinion - whether the court shared it or not, or why.

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Introduction

The Constitutional Court of Georgia (CCG) was created by the Constitution of Georgia of 1995. Other branches of the government, with greater or less restricted powers, were seen in the times of the USSR, but we cannot say this about the Constitutional Court: there was no such body in the Soviet system. Thus, the CCG, like the constitutional courts of post-soviet countries, is a new body.

On the one hand, it is very good to have a new body, especially for a post-Soviet country, because it is free from the burden of the country's "dark past". As Arnold said: "The creation of constitutional courts was the initial sign of the dawning of a new era in constitutional thinking, and not a continuation of the past" (Arnold, 2003). This is the reason that trust in the CCG is much higher than in ordinary courts of the country.

On the other hand, however, there are some issues with the CCG: it does not have

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the experience or tradition behind it that constitutional courts in Western European countries have, and that is why we can see inconsistent approaches to some issues in the decisions of the CCG. One such issue is the use of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR) and the Case Law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the practice of the CCG in this regard.

1. The Place of International Treaties among the Hierarchy of Normative Acts in Georgia

Georgian legislation recognizes international treaties as a part of Georgia's domestic law. Therefore, "a necessity of the establishment of norms with preceding legal validity comes from the international treaty and other normative acts existing throughout the country" (Korkelia, 1998).

Yet, the placement of international treaties among the hierarchy of normative acts in Georgia is unclear. According to Paragraph 5 of Article 4 of the Constitution of Georgia, "The legislation of Georgia shall comply with the universally recognized principles and norms of international law." This establishes that international treaties hold third place among the hierarchy of normative acts, after the Constitution of Georgia (including constitutional laws) and constitutional agreement.

The second sentence of Article 8 of the Constitution of Georgia is also unclear with regards placement in the hierarchy. According to it, "the relationship between the state of Georgia and the Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Georgia shall be de-

termined by a constitutional agreement¹, which shall be in full compliance with the universally recognized principles and norms of international law in the area of human rights and freedoms." So, the given norm says that even though the constitutional agreement is the highest after the Constitution of Georgia, it also means that it is above international treaty, and should comply with norms of international law in the field of human rights and freedoms. This is what makes it unclear: how should a superior norm comply with an inferior one? The principle of the hierarchy of norms means that an inferior norm should comply with a superior one, right?

It could be argued that it is not about international treaties, but only about "universally recognized principles and norms of international law in the area of human rights and freedoms". But we would disagree, as "it is impossible for internationally recognized fundamental rights and principles to stand separately: they should be placed under international legal acts" (Gegenava, 2018). So, the human rights principles recognized by international law are stated by, or come from, international treaties. It is confirmed also that, according to the Constitution of Georgia, constitutional agreements should comply not only with principles recognized by international law in the field of human rights and freedoms but also with the norms. A specific legal act includes a norm, in this case – an international treat-

¹ The Constitutional agreement is signed by the President of Georgia and the Patriarch of the Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Georgia. It determines the relationship between the State of Georgia and the Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Georgia. Other religions do not have such an agreement with the Georgian state.

ty. So, compliance with principles and norms recognized by international law means compliance with international treaties.

It could be assumed that in the given regulation (“the constitutional agreement shall be in full compliance with the universally recognized principles and norms of international law in the area of human rights and freedoms”), the regulation on human rights represents a specified legal act. This means that the constitutional agreement does not comply with each international agreement, but only with international treaties existing in human rights and freedoms. Even this cannot be taken as a relevant argument, because, first, it is difficult to find an international agreement that is not about human rights; secondly, Article 4 of the Constitution of Georgia simply defines that an international treaty should comply with the constitutional agreement. It means that all norms of each international treaty should comply with the constitutional agreement.

Accordingly, only one conclusion can be made: the second sentence of Article 8 of the Constitution of Georgia contradicts Paragraph 5 of Article 4. Therefore, it contradicts the principle of the hierarchy of norms.

At a glance, “the legal outcome of this collision is negligible. If the constitutional agreement ‘should totally comply with’ the universally recognized principles and norms of human rights and freedoms, if there is a compliance of norms with a constitutional agreement, then the universally recognized principles and norms of human rights and freedoms should get priority” (Korkelia, 2004) - though such an assertion is incorrect, because it contradicts Paragraph 5 of Article 4 of the Constitution of Georgia, which says that if there is non-compliance between the

constitutional agreement and an international treaty, the priority will go to the constitutional agreement (Korkelia, 2004). This, then, contradicts the legal state principle and has a negative effect on the Constitution, as the highest authority of law.

Despite the attitude toward international treaties and the constitutional agreement being unclear, according to the second sentence of Paragraph 5 of Article 4 of the Constitution of Georgia, an international treaty recognized in Georgia shall take precedence over domestic normative acts. Accordingly, each national law or normative act should comply with an international treaty.

2. The Practice of the Constitutional Court of Georgia

International treaties, including the ECHR, are part of the Georgian legislation. This means that the court should use them during court proceedings and case law. The Constitutional Court, along with the ECHR, should also interpret the case law of the ECHR to explain the regulations of the ECHR.

The ECHR is quite a “dry” document, but the case law of the ECtHR enriches this regulation, explains the legal interpretation of the ECHR, and establishes the possibility of its use in specific circumstances (Korkelia, 2002).

Georgia joined the ECHR on April 27, 1999, and the Parliament of Georgia ratified it on May 20, 1999, seeing it come into immediate effect (Chart of signatures and ratifications of Treaty 005). From this moment, it became applicable for the CCG to use the ECHR and the case law of the ECtHR. Interesting is the fact the Constitutional Court interpreted and established the ECHR in its decision in 1996, before

Georgia joined formally the ECHR: in the case of law “Aleksandre Danelia and Giorgi Tsomaia v. the Parliament of Georgia”, the Court cited the first protocol to the ECHR while making the decision (Judgment N1/2-14-19, December 30, 1996).

After joining the ECHR, the first decision made by the CCG, which mentioned the Precedent Law of the ECtHR, was a judgment made on January 25, 2000, in case law “Lela Instkirveli and Ekaterine Chachanidze v. the Parliament of Georgia” (Judgment N1/1/107, January 25, 2000). According to the decision, the complainants requested recognition of Paragraph 3 (v) of Article 8 of the Tax Code of Georgia as unconstitutional towards the first paragraph of Article 21 (the right to property and heritage) of the Constitution of Georgia (the version of that time). The applicants argued that the notary activities of a private individual belonged to non-commercial economic activity, and that is why considering it as an economic activity, and therefore justifying taxation of that notary for economic activity with the applied tax, contradicted the abovementioned norm of the Constitution. The complainants, to make their arguments steady, mentioned a decision made by the ECtHR on October 23, 1990: case law *Darby v. Sweden* (Application no. 11581/85). They also pointed to the first article of the first protocol to the ECHR, which defends the property right. The Court did not satisfy the complainants’ plea, though it never mentioned either the ECHR or the ECtHR in the motivation part of its decision.

In 2002, a growing interpretation of the ECHR by the CCG was noticeable, where the Constitutional Court interpreted the ECHR just twice before 2002, that year it used the

ECHR three times (Korkelia, 2007), but only one was interpreted in a decision (Judgment N1/2/178, April 26, 2002).

In 2003, the Constitutional Court pointed to the case law of the ECtHR in the motivation part of five decisions (Judgment N2/2/167-202; Judgment N2/3/182,185,191, January 29, 2003; Judgment N2/6/205,232, July 3, 2003; Judgment N2/7/219, November 7, 2003; Judgment N1/5/193, December 16, 2003). Of the five decisions made in 2003, the one delivered on case law “The Citizens of Georgia – Olga Sumbatashvili and Igor Khaprov v. the Parliament of Georgia” needs highlighting. In that case, the complainants requested that the Constitutional Court recognize Section 4 of Article 426 of the Civil Procedure Code of Georgia as unconstitutional, according to which “applying to renew the court proceedings is inadmissible after five years once the decision comes into force, due to the declaration of a court decision being invalid and new circumstances being apparent”. The Constitutional Court did not satisfy the mentioned lawsuit, although Judge Iakob Phutkaradze did not agree with the decision and presented a dissenting opinion. In his dissenting opinion, the motivation part is bigger in extension than the court decision; the judge states that, while making the decision, “Article 6, ‘the right to a fair trial’ of the ECHR, should have been considered”. This is what the judge says v. the argument of “case immortality” – it is possible “that the court won’t review the application if it decides that it is obviously baseless, or if applying to court is inappropriate - this is the way the European Court of Human Rights acts” (Judgment N1/3/161, April 30, 2003).

In 2004, the Constitutional Court used the ECHR, along with six decisions (Judgment N2/1/241, March 11, 2004; Judgment N 1/3/209,276, June 28, 2004; Judgment № 2/3/250-269, July 9, 2004; Judgment N1/4/212, August 3, 2004; Judgment N1/5/224, November 16, 2004; Judgment N 2/6/264, December 21, 2004) out of its twelve decisions, and pointed directly at the precedent case law of the ECHR in four decisions. One case should be highlighted – “Citizen of Georgia Anzor Tevzaia v. the Parliament of Georgia”. In this case law, a complainant requested recognition of the 2nd and 8th paragraphs of the resolution on Ratification First Protocol to the ECHR of the Parliament of Georgia, of 27th December 2001, unconstitutional towards Article 14 (the right of equality), the 1st paragraph of Article 21 (the right to property and heritage), Article 39 (“other rights”) and the 1st paragraph of Article 42 (the right to apply to the court) of the Constitution of Georgia (the version of that time). Disputable norms included a regulation that did not apply to internally displaced persons from the regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (currently occupied territories), and Georgia was not responsible for breaching the regulations of the First Protocol of the ECHR by self-declared, unauthorized entities on the above-mentioned territories². It should be noted that the judges’ votes were divided. The court reviewed widely precedent cases of the ECtHR, especially “Ilașcu and Others v. Moldova and Russia” (Application no. 48787/99, 08.07.2004), “Asanidze v. Geor-

gia” (Application no. 71503/01, 08.04.2004), and “Matthews v. the United Kingdom” (Application no. 24833/94, 18.02.1999).

In the following years, the practice of interpretation of the ECHR and the ECtHR case law in the total number of CCG decisions fluctuated between 25% and 80% throughout each calendar year.

The mentioned tendency has changed since 2012 when the Constitutional Court did not use the ECHR and case law of the ECtHR practice in the four decisions it made that year. The Constitutional Court only mentions once the ECHR in the motivation part of its decision (Judgment №3/1/512, Jun 26, 2012).

In 2018 and 2019, the Constitutional Court used neither the ECHR nor the case law of the ECtHR in any of its decisions (32 judgments and 79 rulings).

A pre-verdict of the pre-session is the only one of the Constitutional Court Acts of 2018 that did not make a case for consideration. While reviewing the pre-verdict, the Constitutional Court pointed at two decisions made by the ECtHR (“Kokkinakis v. Greece” (Application no. 14307/88, 25.05.1993) and “Sunday Times v. the UK” (Application no. 6538/74, 26.04.1979)). It also used the definitions of the decisions about crime regarding norm foresight and law accessibility (Ruling №1/6/1292, October 19, 2018).

According to most of the Constitutional Court’s decisions, the parties point to the practice of the ECtHR to strengthen their arguments, and this is also mentioned in the subsequent decisions. Yet the CCG, in not considering the above-mentioned pre-verdict, does not discuss the arguments of any parties in its decision, and, therefore, it never mentions the ECtHR.

² See the resolution of the Parliament of Georgia “on Ratification of the First Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms”, December 27, 2001.

Such an attitude, seeing a party using the case law of the ECtHR as an argument, and yet the court does not reply to it in any of its decisions, was noted for the first time in the case “Lela Intskirveli and Ekaterine Chachanidze v. the Parliament of Georgia” (Judgment N1/1/107, January 25, 2000), as already discussed. Such an incident has been seen not just once, though it has been actively settled since 2012.

It is also noteworthy that the CCG does not discuss the party’s argument even when it makes a decision against them. For example, in the judgment made on December 7, 2018 (Judgment №2/8/765, December 7, 2018), it is noted that the defendant party, in order to strengthen its argument, uses the practice of the ECtHR, among other practices. The court satisfied the lawsuit partially, though it never answered the defendant party’s argument regarding the practice of the ECtHR, even though the argument in the lawsuit was about fair trial and defending rights, in which the ECtHR has rich practice.

It is interesting that the Constitutional Court refrains from discussing the case law of the ECtHR even when the parties, the complainant and defendant, use the practice of the ECtHR to strengthen their arguments. A discussion was made on the case “NE(NC)LP³ “Phrema” v. the Parliament of Georgia” (Judgment №2/8/734, December 28, 2017) of December 28, 2017, which is the best example of this scenario. In this case, both parties (applicant and respondent) pointed to the relevant case law of the ECtHR to strengthen their position, but the court did not discuss said case law. However, it was no singular event, as we can find

the same approach in other cases: Judgment N1/5/1472, June 17, 2022; Judgment N1/8/926, November 4, 2022; Judgment N1/9/1673,1681, November 17, 2022; and Judgment N1/4/693,857, June 7, 2019.

From the case law of the Constitutional Court, declared in 2018, the case “LEPL⁴ Evangelical-Baptist Church of Georgia”, LEPL “Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Georgia”, “LEPL Supreme Religious Administration of Muslims of All Georgia”, LEPL “Redeemed Christian Church of God in Georgia” and LEPL “Pentecostal Church of Georgia” v. the Parliament of Georgia” should be mentioned (Judgment №1/1/811, July 3, 2018a). The Constitutional Court again did not use the practice of the ECHR in its decision, although Judge Eva Gotsiridze stated her dissenting opinion, and in so doing used the definitions of the ECtHR regarding discrimination. In her dissenting opinion, she stated: “It would be desirable for the court to establish well-settled principles or definitions in the field of discrimination, in practice; also to establish a logical chart of discrimination, [such as that] which has recently been used worldwide in the European Court of Human Rights” (Judgment №1/1/811, July 3, 2018b).

To more broadly understand Judge Gotsiridze’s expression: it would be better for the CCG to establish such a practice not only in the field of discrimination.

In 2020, there was one ruling where the CCG interpreted the ECHR, in particular Protocol 4, and one decision where the ECtHR was mentioned (Ruling N1/1/1404, June 4, 2020). In the ruling, one of the matters of argument was that Article 180 of the Criminal

³ NE(NC)LP – Non-Entrepreneurial (Non-Commercial) Legal Person.

⁴ LEPL – Legal Entities under Public Law.

Code of Georgia contradicted the first sentence of Article 31(9) of the Constitution of Georgia (“no one shall be held responsible for an action that did not constitute an offense at the time when it was committed”) and Article 1 Protocol No. 4 to the ECHR. In this ruling, the CCG indicated that it was empowered to assess the issue of the compliance of Georgian normative acts only with the Constitution of Georgia. With this in mind, the issue of assessing the compliance of the disputed norm with the ECHR is not a matter for the CCG (Ruling N1/4/1416, April 30, 2020).

In the second case, the plaintiffs argued that the electronic ID was contrary to their religious beliefs and demanded that it be optional. The court dismissed the claim, stating that it could not be considered as “interference” with freedom of belief/religion by the state. In the decision, the CCG cited one sentence from *Skugar and Others v. Russia* (no. 40010/04, ECHR, 3 December 2009) that “the convention organs have consistently held that general legislation which applies on a neutral basis without any link whatsoever with an applicant’s personal beliefs cannot in principle be regarded as an interference with his or her rights under Article 9 of the Convention” (Ruling N1/1/1404, June 4, 2020).

In the last two years (2021-2022), the CCG interpreted the ECtHR’s case law only once, in the case of the Public Defender of Georgia v. the Minister of Justice of Georgia (Judgment N1/10/1676, December 21, 2022). The case dealt with a prisoner who had been placed in solitary confinement for an extended period. The CCG took a broad interpretation of the ECtHR’s case law when deciding on the issue.

3. The Need to Interpret the ECHR

One should ask, what is the rank of necessity for the Constitutional Court to interpret the ECHR or use the case law of the ECtHR? According to Georgian legislation, the Constitution is a supreme law, and the Constitutional Court is a court of constitutional control. As such, the Constitutional Court should not go beyond the Constitution, as its field of jurisdiction is mainly within the confines of that Constitution.

Of course, applying the ECHR and the case law of the ECtHR is not a dogma. Generally, the rule of a national court taking into consideration the ECHR and its case law is important if the court decides it would be impossible to make a decision without using the ECHR. In other words, the legal effect of the use of the Convention is greater if the Court provides the protection of human rights by a higher standard than would be provided only based on a domestic normative act (Korkelia & Kurdadze, 2004).

It is important to apply the ECHR and the case law of the ECtHR when one of the parties highlights them during the court process. Scientists quite rightly point out that if a party uses the ECHR and the case law of the ECtHR to strengthen its position, the national court should analyze the case according to these arguments; it should not disregard them. The court, in its decision, might neglect the mentioned arguments, support them, or reject such definition of the norm of the ECHR used by the party according to the ECHR. Further, the point of view of the party of the explanation of the norms might be quite different from the court’s explanation. Yet, in its decision, the court should

express its position: is it possible to use the ECHR and the case law of the ECtHR in a specific dispute, and it should explain why it is applying or not these norms in its decision making (Maruste, 2000).

The above-mentioned refers to the courts of jurisdiction, as well as to constitutional courts. The constitutional court practice of European countries also confirms it. For example, the Federal Constitutional Court of Germany stated in one of its decisions that, while explaining the Federal Constitution, the plot of the ECHR and state of development should be considered. The court also stated that the case law of the ECtHR means the determination of the plot and burdens in the Constitution (Korkelia, 2007).

The constitutional courts of Italy have the same attitude. Since the constitutional reform of 2001, most of the decisions consist of notations about the ECHR (Nastić, 2015a), while the case law of the ECtHR influenced the court system of Spain and became the basis of more than five hundred Constitutional Court decisions in the country. The Constitutional Court of Spain often cites the ECHR, having noted numerous times that the ECHR usually plots constitutional rights, essential when defining those rights (Nastić, 2015b).

The Constitutional Court (Arbitrage) of Belgium, as well as the Council of State, explains the regulations of its constitution according to the ECHR. Moreover, while making interpretations of constitutional rights, the Council of State usually refers to the Precedent Law of the ECtHR (Gerards & Fleuren, 2014).

The development of the practice of the CCG itself, or the fact that the judge is limited

only by the constitution, are no arguments for the CCG's lack of practice in interpreting the ECtHR's case law.

At this point, it is an inconceivable tendency that the CCG does not use the ECHR and the case law of the ECHR in its decisions. Such an attitude cannot be justified when the party explains its request based on the norms of the ECHR and its case law- the law directly requires it. That is, according to Paragraph 1⁴ (c) of Article 43 of the Organic Law of Georgia "on the Constitutional Court of Georgia", "motives, which are used by the Constitutional Court to neglect an opposite opinion or statement" should be mentioned in the motivation part of the Constitutional Court decision or conclusion. So, the court is obliged to use the ECHR and the Precedent Law of the ECtHR in the above-mentioned cases. Otherwise, it is a violation of the law.

The development of the practice of the CCG itself, or the fact that the judge is limited only by the constitution, is not an argument in favor of such a lack of practice of interpreting the case law of the ECHR (Gegenava, 2022).

Ideally, the CCG should use comparative case law. This would significantly improve the quality of the content, justification, and legal technique going into the decision itself, as well as increase public confidence in the court (Gegenava, 2022).

Conclusion

The CCG has a very bad practice of using the case law of the ECtHR. In fact, in recent years, the CCG has not interpreted the case law of the ECtHR in its decisions at all, which does not shine positive light on the constitutional control body of Georgia. Of course,

interpretation of the ECHR and the case law of the ECtHR is not mandatory for the Constitutional Court in every decision. However, it would be better for the CCG to apply the case law of the ECtHR when the latter offers a higher standard of protection of human rights than exists in Georgia. In addition, when a party or parties involved in a CCG trial use the case law of the ECtHR to strengthen their position, the Constitutional Court is obliged to interpret the case law of the ECtHR. Otherwise, the decision of the Constitutional Court cannot be considered sufficiently justified.

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Sustainable Development: Educational Initiatives for Well-Being (Vocational Education in Georgia)

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ABSTRACT

Resolution 70/1, Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, implies the ability of forthcoming generations to meet their needs for the future of mankind, needs that are being significantly challenged in these modern times. Resolution 70/1 has outlined 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and one of them is high-quality education, seen as essential for gaining progress in the other 16 goals. Keeping in mind those challenges, we think issues on education are important and relevant at both the international and local levels. In the given research, we discuss aspects of professional education and teaching techniques in Georgia.

This case study is based on the desk research of official documents and an analysis of secondary data. The main goals of the research are to explore the challenges and difficulties in the Georgian reality and to define the system's compatibility with the Western educational space with a view to integration, and what support may be needed in this regard. It is worth mentioning that the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought the world new educational realities by having students switch to online study or hybrid models of learning and seeing Georgia's traditional teaching process go online, was a wide-scale experiment Georgia was simply not ready for.

The given issue also has a social character. The existing realities in the professional educational field have been under the watchful eye of various spheres of expertise. Since 2005, reforms have been implemented in the professional educational system, most of which concentrated on the preparation of highly competent personnel. It must be mentioned that Georgia's European partners in particular bring a meaningful contribution, especially in the process of experience-sharing. Still, considering the progress of Georgian professional educational development, it is a fact that the country needs to do more to keep up with modern tendencies.

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Introduction

At the modern stage, human capital is the most important resource for any country. Due to this fact, the United Nations Organization chose 17 goals for sustainable development, which include modern global challenges such as peace, well-being, and justice. Among them, one of the most important goals is the fourth, on raising the quality of education, according to which, by 2030, everyone should be guaranteed access to quality education. Getting there means eliminating inequality in the educational system, ensuring a safe environment to create in, increasing the number of qualified teachers, and "affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university."¹

Most governments do prioritize the educational sphere, and, in general, are actively involved in the process, being the initiators of dozens of interesting projects. While researchers carefully study the ongoing processes, however, their attention is most often drawn to the high and secondary education cases, and fewer are engaged in the research of vocational education. As such, our research aims to bring into the spotlight the challenges to and perspectives of vocational education in Georgia. Based on the desk research method, this paper concentrates on an analysis of the official documents that regulate the vocational education process in Georgia. The given work will be useful for comparing the regulation practices of different countries, and, in Georgia's reality, it can help to give a clear understanding of how policy

¹ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/>

documents help the vocational educational process, while, for future comparison, it can guide interested persons through the institutionalized and practical approaches, demonstrating which demands in practice might need more elaboration and work among the different layers of society.

1. Historical Retrospective

Generation upon generation in Georgia has passed its technical know-how down to the next professional in line. The high-quality monuments of diverse material and non-material cultures in the country are indicators of the level of professional knowledge, proving the existence of special educational institutions in the country. Considering this, it is meaningful and interesting to recall a few examples of the Georgian historical experience, the challenges the country faced, and improvements made, so as to see what one can learn from the past for future vocational education development. A number of examples of metal processing in Georgia allow us to assume that the history of Georgian professional knowledge began in the Bronze Age. Niko Marr mentions a few times the role of the Georgians in developing metal processing, and the antiquity of some branches has been confirmed by written, folklore, ethnographic, and archaeological material, interwoven throughout Georgia and in centers of Georgian culture abroad. Georgia was renowned for its medical achievements even in the BC years, with the oldest art of medical treatment described in ancient Greek mythology, in the legend of the Argonauts and Medea of Colchis, who was known for her knowledge of medicine.

Georgian Folklore is also particularly significant to the Georgian reality. Folklore boasts musical instruments, polyphony, and harmony as the main reasons behind our belief that in the ancient and Middle Ages, Georgia had special professional education centers that created and passed on knowledge to new generations. In those times, there were libraries and book-protection areas where monks or other competent people created and copied out different manuscripts.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, there were study centers for craftsmen in Georgia, with the apprenticeship period defined by the complexity of skills that were needed to learn the art of the profession.

Keeping in mind this evidence, we can state that in the ancient times and Middle Ages, Georgia had multiple ranges of vocational education centers, and based on that past experience, it is more important than ever for the country to achieve success in the field today (Kakutia, 2017).

2. Vocational Education: Initiatives for Well-Being

After the 1991 restoration of state independence in Georgia, the Council of the Supreme Republic of Georgia approved the regulation "On paid schools in the Republic of Georgia". In 1997, the law "On Education" was adopted, which regulated professional education until 2005. Yet, the economic situation in the country could not respond to the existing requirements and could not at the time implement the proper approach to vocational education (Agencies of the Parliament of Georgia, 1997).

Changes were implemented in 2007 to the Law "On Vocational Education" adopted by the Parliament of Georgia, which defined the function, place, and importance of the creation of a Vocational Education System in order to meet the demands of the ever-changing labor market, among them conditions, activity types and levels, principles of financing, as well as types of professional education and levels, system regulation management bodies, organizational-legal forms, and property status (Parliament of Georgia, 2007). The aforementioned law underwent changes again in 2018, and was introduced in 2019 in response to the socio-economic challenges the country was facing, as well as to the obligations stipulated by the Association Agreement with the European Union, namely lifelong learning and the development of key competencies, the establishment of the "European Framework of Qualifications", vocational education, and quality assurance for training on the formation of the European framework. On the basis of the abovementioned law, a part of the unified educational system - a new model of vocational education - was established. At the same time, a solid foundation was created for the integration of secondary-level education into general vocational education, and the possibility of transitioning to the level of higher education. The possibility of implementing different forms of work-based learning was also defined, a crucial part of which is the implementation of various joint and exchange programs for the development of the adult education system, and the creation of conditions for the recognition of both informal and formal education. It was also highly recommended to organize the

training of teachers for vocational development and career advancement.

It is important to note the strategy of vocational education reform developed over the last decade, the role of which is determined by the policy of the Georgian government on vocational education. This strategy was adopted and developed on the basis of the common interests of the interested parties, the consensus of opinions, taking into account the country's socioeconomic priorities, and the experience of European and other countries. The strategy envisages the right of all layers of society to receive vocational education.

To achieve the goals of the vocational education strategy, general priorities have been defined which refer to: 1. Improving the regulatory environment of the system, strengthening existing opportunities in accordance with the requirements of the labor market and modern economy; 2. Improving the quality of teaching, with the aim of overcoming competition (on the basis of effective financing); 3. Caring for/promoting the development of teachers; 4. Improvement of the quality assurance mechanisms of professional education; 5. Promotion of employment of graduates, improvement of professional skills for employment of students; 6. Development of entrepreneurial skills in cooperation with employers and business representatives, equipping students with the necessary skills for a specific specialty (foreign language, computer programs, etc.) (Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, 2013).

In February 2020, new authorization standards were approved in vocational educational institutions. Accordingly, changes were made to the authorization regulation,

according to which there are currently 19 authorized state colleges in Georgia, 7 based on state-shared data, and 37 authorized private professional/public colleges. There are also 5 general educational institutions implementing vocational programs and 13 higher educational institutions implementing vocational programs (Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, 2022).

The Association Agreement between Georgia and the European Union (2014) stipulates obligations in the field of education, research and technology development. Further, equal quality, opportunity and access to education is a priority issue at all levels of education and are priority directions of European vocational education and youth policy that have been adopted and shared. In particular, in the direction of the development of professional education, it is important to create skills so as to make competences, qualifications and professions compatible with the European framework (ESCO) (Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, 2021).

In order to increase participation in professional education, it is a priority for Georgia to ensure territorial accessibility and offer diverse educational programs for the purpose of employment, self-employment, professional and personal development, and self-realization of all strata of the population. It is also important to strengthen the role of vocational education in the process of human capital development and to increase involvement in the system by ensuring its attractiveness and accessibility, a fact well understood by official structures.

In this regard, the reforms carried out during the implementation of the 2017-2021 Education and Science Strategy, aimed

at improving the availability and quality of vocational education and training, are important. In 2019, as a result of the mid-term evaluation of the 2017-2021 strategy, a trend of progress appeared, despite some faults, based to some extent on one of the specific goals of the mentioned strategy - to increase the number of professional students for the socio-economic development of the country, and to ensure their competitiveness in the development of professional and general skills. In order to achieve this goal, the following were considered necessary: 1. Compliance with the requirements of the labor market and internationalization of the system; 2. Provision of access to professional education based on the principle of lifelong learning; 3. Promotion of vocational education and increasing its attractiveness (Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, 2020).

Inclusive professional education at the level of vocational education was introduced in 2013, and, since then, more than 1000 people with special educational needs and disabilities have been involved. Also worth noting are the availability of other support services in vocational educational institutions- sign language interpreters, for example. Regarding the involvement of ethnic minorities, educational resources related to industry terminology have been developed in the Georgian language according to profession, which will help beneficiaries to complete vocational training programs in the Georgian language (Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, 2021).

Since 2019, all programs introduced in the vocational education system have been implemented with a modular approach, and

are characterized by compliance with the requirements of the labor market, orientation on learning outcomes, strengthening of the practical component, and modern approaches to teaching and evaluation. At the level of vocational education, in order to develop entrepreneurial thinking, an entrepreneurship module was prepared and defined as a mandatory component of the program. More than 30 dual education programs have been introduced, in the implementation process of which over 50 private companies are involved. The implementation of the dual program is jointly ensured by the educational institution and the partner company (employer), and 50% or more of the learning outcomes are achieved in a real environment.

A meaningful achievement is the establishment of a new model of vocational education management, on the basis of which the "Professional Skills Agency" was founded in 2021 by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Georgia and the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. Its main principle is to guide the process of management and the development of vocational education. This reform had a positive impact on the rate of employment and self-employment of graduates of vocational programs. According to the conducted research, since 2019, the employment rate of graduates of vocational programs has increased by 20%.

At the current stage, the Ministry of Education (as stated by the Minister repeatedly in official speeches) is promoting projects implemented by foreign donors in order to improve the quality of Georgia's vocational education and to bring it closer to the European educational standards. In addition to the numerous activities carried out in this re-

gard, the Minister highlights the construction of new practical training spaces in different regions of Georgia throughout 2022, the addition of new programs, and the special attention given by the government toward the promotion of employment for the socially disadvantaged through equipping them with professional skills.

In the professions in demand in the labor market, a state program of professional training, professional retraining, and qualification improvement, which is based only on authorized programs, has been implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia and the Ministry of IDPs from Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Protection.

It is also important to introduce new mechanisms to ensure the quality of vocational education, which fully responds to the indicators of the European Quality Network in Vocational Education (EQAVET). From 2026, all educational institutions will function in accordance with the new standards, thereby strengthening international ties, while promoting the recognition of national qualifications at the international level. As for the recognition of non-formal education, in case of confirmation, a certificate or a corresponding statement about the results of the confirmed studies will be issued (Recognition of non-formal education, 2020).

As part of the mentioned reform, from 2022, the direction of vocational education was launched within the existing Erasmus+ program, and foreign language centers were opened in colleges. From the point of view of internationalization, the implementation of joint vocational educational programs, in particular the active cooperation of the Min-

istry of Education and Science of Georgia with Switzerland via the Lausanne EHL Hospitality Business School, which is currently recognized as the best in the world and is sharing its experience with Georgia, is extremely important for the country. Implementation of the planned joint work in the direction of vocational education development will be a big step forward.

An interesting project implemented in cooperation is “Modernization of the Consultative Service Systems of Vocational Education and Training in the Field of Agriculture in Georgia”, which was implemented by the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP), the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, and the Swiss Development Agency (Ministry of Sustainable Development and Agriculture of Georgia, 2017).

The planned and current works being carried out in Gurjaani, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, the Basque Culinary Center, and the Caucasus University, from 2024 will offer both Georgian and foreign students the opportunity to receive high-quality vocational education. Interesting projects are planned with the involvement of different countries in many directions. A positive step is the professional development of teachers, which envisages a 20% increase in the hourly pay of vocational education teachers from 2023. In 2022, the Government of Georgia approved the regulatory framework for work-based learning, which guarantees the relevance, quality, and effectiveness of vocational education in meeting the requirements of the labor market.

Within the framework of the 2022-2030 unified national strategy of education and sci-

ence of Georgia, along with many interesting issues, the introduction of a diversified model of financing is envisaged, which will contribute to the development of financial and human resources and more effective budget management in growing vocational education. The new model of financing professional education, taking into account international practices, is based on results-based financing (Chkhenkeli, 2022).

To popularize vocational education and make a significant contribution to the economic development of the country, with the support of the “Millennium Challenge Fund” and the Gudavadze-Patarkatsishvili Foundation, the “National TVET Award” competition has been held since 2017. The competition has already been held five times. It, and the establishment of similar ceremonies, are important and can be considered one of the best ways for society to see the advantages of professional education, celebrate achievements, assess challenges, and plan a success-oriented future (Chkhenkeli, 2020).

In the system of professional education, despite several existing measures, the results of which are definitely visible, it is confirmed by a number of studies that challenges still remain, the regulation of which is one of the most important components for the growth of the country’s economy (Gigiberia, 2018).

Conclusion and Recommendation

From the official data studied in this paper, it is clear that despite the great traditions in Georgia, from the declaration of the restoration of state independence un-

til almost the last decade, proper attention could not be paid to the promotion of the development of professional education programs. However, recently, by the goals of sustainable development, the work of several professional educational programs has been activated, and initiatives developed in connection with it which are designed for the well-being of society and, in accordance with modern standards, are implemented with the involvement of foreign partner/donor organizations through experience sharing.

The state policy should be directed towards the market research conducted, with the active cooperation of the state agency, for the promotion of basic employment and vocational schools (taking into account the characteristics of regional development), and, based on the results of the research, recommendations should be developed to help these schools successfully implement programs and get graduates employed. It is strongly recommended to raise awareness among Georgian citizens and better highlight the positive outcomes of vocational education.

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Some Aspects of the Historical Connection between Traditional Hydrothermal Public Baths and the Modern Spa Industry

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ABSTRACT

The volume of wellness tourism in the world was rated at 639.4 billion US dollars in 2017. This is one of the fastest-growing segments in tourism, and it grew by 6.5% annually from 2015 to 2017. In 2017, 830 million wellness trips were made, which is 139 million more than in 2015.

Throughout the millennia, numerous different cultures have used the power of water and warmth for cleanliness and treating their ills. In ancient times, both water and warmth were considered luxuries and were scarcely available.

On the outskirts of Dzalisa village in Georgia, an ancient settlement was found, where a bath made with hewn stones was discovered within part of a palace complex. The Roman-type bath was constructed at the beginning of the 3rd century and consisted of three sections, with cold, warm and hot water tubs, and a well-preserved heating hypocaust system. The floors of the cold and warm baths and the dressing room were covered with mosaics.

The origin of Roman thermal baths, Turkish hamams, Finnish saunas, Japanese onsens, and other hydrothermal spa procedures led to the custom of body cleaning and cleansing. Today, however, the health and aesthetic benefits of hydrothermal bathing are more widely recognized. In recent years, medical scientists have been researching the effect of cold action on high temperatures and the body, and have determined that a key benefit of such a temperature change is detoxification. Body heat and sweating rid the body of toxins, and the extreme change in temperature improves blood circulation and gives a positive boost to organism function.

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic plunged the travel and tourism sector into a deep crisis around the world. A similarly strong blow was dealt to the health tourism and spa industry. The consequences of this crisis in the post-pandemic period are having a major impact on both the demand and supply of the health and wellness tourism markets. Now that Georgian tourism is starting to emerge from its stagnation, the industry must prepare for the resumption of business in the wellness and medical tourism markets. It is likely that the growth of this sector, which was two times higher than the general rate of tourism development in the pre-pandemic period, will be maintained- a prognosis made possible by the fact that this unprecedented crisis has once again convinced people of the importance of health and wellness procedures.

Georgia has a long and rich history of hydrothermal spa treatments, but we should note the unfortunate fact that the country's unique natural factors need to be more actively made use of by the tourism industry. And in terms of tourism marketing, a lot more needs to be done to develop the wellness and spa economy, so as to advance the industry through modern marketing methods.

Theoretical Background

Issues in the history of health tourism and the spa industry and its state before the COVID-19 pandemic

The volume of health tourism in the world in 2017 was estimated at 639.4 billion US dollars. This is one of the fastest-growing tourism segments, having grown by 6.5% an-

nually in the years 2015-2017. In 2017, 830 million wellness trips were made, which is 139 million more than those carried out in 2015. Such an increase was driven by the growth in the number of the middle class globally, consumers' aspirations towards a healthy lifestyle, the increase in the affordability of flights, and the availability of a vast number of trips. Europe leads the world in the number of wellness trips, while North America ranks first in terms of revenues from health tourism.

One of the most important parts of recreational tourism is spa tourism, which is characterized by a fairly high rate of development. Although wellness tourism is much broader than spa tourism, still, the spa industry is a major business in this market. Revenue from spa tourism in 2017 was estimated at 309.1 billion USD (48% of wellness tourism), while the number of spa trips stood at 450.0 million. Since 2015, the revenues of the spa industry have been growing by 8% annually.

Interestingly, local spa tourism revenues amounted to 172 billion USD, which is more than the volume of international spa tourism - 137 billion USD (Global Wellness Institute, 2018).

The statistics presented above clearly show that the spa and wellness industry is constantly growing and, at present, there are more than 100,000 resorts and spa centers in the world. More and more people are looking for natural and authentic ways to improve their own health. Among these ways, the oldest, best proven, and most effective spa treatments are hydrothermal baths, which improve the state of the immune system, promote weight loss, regulate high blood pressure, and detoxify the body.

For millennia, various cultures have sought to use water and heat for cleansing

and healing, being largely hard to find and considered something of a luxury. This led to the desire of relatively civilized societies worldwide to find creative ways to deliver “Hydro” and “Thermal” to their own citizens.

Often, the easiest way to achieve this was through natural hot springs in regions that had always played a crucial role in hydrothermal bathing. The abundance of hot springs in many cultures around the world made it possible to use such places for said purpose, and to build special buildings around them, the concept of which would be public bathing.

It is now scientifically proven that the geothermal waters that flow from beneath the earth were used not only for the bathers’ hygiene, but also to replenish their bodies with various minerals, improve their skin condition, and ease the pain of joint and muscle diseases. Chinese historical sources, as far back as the 7th century BC, mention a “spring containing sulfur for treating diseases”.

In the old days, private and individual baths were few and far between, and the most effective means of bathing was to take the waters in public bathhouses. Perhaps the best-known example is the Roman public baths, with their advanced technology and magnificent architecture. According to historical sources, as early as 339 BC, some Roman baths were used specifically for healing purposes, and people visited them to heal wounds and treat rheumatic diseases and paralysis. Roman baths can rightly be considered the forerunners of modern hydrothermal baths (Cavanah, 2016).

However, there are other cultures that, along with the Romans, also claim to have invented modern popular hydrothermal applications. For example, the Finnish sauna, with its popular and long-lasting hydrothermal

impact on the body. With its cold climate, heating is an expensive endeavor in Finland, yet the Finns found a way to achieve the same form of cleanliness and detoxification through steam. They developed a system of heating a wooden cabin to a temperature high enough to make those within it sweat. The cleansing came when the occupants of the cabin left and dove into the snow outside, using it to cleanse away the sweat and dirt. This process was to be repeated several times until an acceptable level of cleanliness was reached. That is why Finns, even today, as a rule, after taking a sauna, rub their bodies with snow. The practical reason for the use of snow in ancient times is that there was a shortage of running water due to severe frosts in the north. However, the result is a cleansing/detoxification ritual that is still highly valued today, one which has been proven to improve the immune system and lower blood pressure.

Although Finland is recognized as the homeland of the sauna, there were similar types of baths throughout Northern Europe, for example, the Russian “Banya” is practically identical in its construction and purpose.

In the 16th century, the well-known hamam, or Turkish bath, was said to have been born in the Ottoman Empire. However, there is evidence that these types of baths were widely used in North Africa and the Middle East long before the Ottomans, even before the advent of Islam. Stopping by a traditional hamam became especially popular before visiting the mosque, as a means of cleansing the body through sweat. The old hamams of Istanbul have excellent interiors, featuring fantastic traditional Muslim ceramic and mosaic art, often with wall texts derived from the Quran. You can also see excellent examples of hamams in Syria,

Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, and Morocco. Note: The name of the Turkish bath contains only one central letter sound “m” (Turkish hamam), while the Moroccan hammam is written with two “m”s (Cavanah, 2016).

Japan is also known for its great tradition of bathing, and, consequently, the ethic of cleanliness is deeply rooted in its culture. As far back as in 3rd-century historical sources, there are references to the Japanese habits of body hygiene, and in the 6th-7th centuries, the dominance of Confucianism and Buddhism generally reinforced the cult of cleanliness, along with the love of the bathing ritual.

There are more than 20,000 natural hot springs in Japan, based on which the Japanese Onsen were formed. Onsen is the name of a hot spring in Japan. Often, the term Onsen involves not only the hot spring but also its associated tourist infrastructure – hotels and restaurants that are built around the spring. Onsens can be open-air, when swimming is practiced in a natural hot water pool, or closed - when special hot baths, “furo,” are filled with mineral waters to soak in.

In Japan, another form of popular recreation is the steam bath, which are called Sento. These facilitate aromatherapy elements and wet skin scrubbing. The furo is a wooden bath in which one must lay for a time to absorb the beneficial minerals. Such baths are common in private homes.

From 1900, the French began to use the healing-restorative properties of seawater. Seawater is rich not only in sodium chloride (salt), but also in minerals and trace elements. The treatment, known as “thalassotherapy,” was developed using warm seawater (Cavanah, 2016).

The spa industry in Georgia

According to the remains found of sanitary-hygienic structures, we can assess the high standard of living of the population in this era and, consequently, the highly hygienic culture.

From this point of view, Dzalisa ruins are especially interesting. Dzalisa’s architecture, especially the bath and pool planning, hot and cold-water supply and hypocaust heating systems, sewer, mosaic flooring, use of a hydraulic system to fill the pool, and other high-tech building materials in the area, unsurprisingly astonish those who see it. Detailed information about the Dzalisa monument is given in the book “History of Georgian Art” by Professor Irakli Tsitsishvili:

“In the Mukhrani field, on the left bank of the River Narekvavi, near the village of Dzalisa, the ruins of a town were discovered. Remains of large buildings built of hewn stone, cobblestone foundations for mudbrick walls, water supply and sewage networks, stone bases and pillars were found there. The bath, which was presumably a part of the palace complex, is relatively well preserved. The Roman-type bath consisted of three sections, with cold, warm and hot water tubs and a well-maintained hypocaust heating system. The floors of the warm and cold baths, as well as the adjoining dressing room of the latter, are covered with mosaics. Especially important is the mosaic floor in the “House of Dionysus”, which is directly connected to the dressing room of the bath. The bath must have been built at the beginning of the III century A.D.. Near this bath, a second, larger (1500 sq.m.), public bath was discovered. In addition to the traditional bathroom sections, it also includes an atrium, an open courtyard, and even a temple. The largest

building in Dzalisa is the palace (its ruins exceed 2500 sq.m.). It included up to three dozen rooms of different sizes and shapes, with a courtyard-atrium in the center. The remains of a stone fountain can be seen in the center of the atrium. There is a hall, bedrooms, and a two-section toilet with its own water supply and sewer system. It is noteworthy that the palace had a separate building for the central hypocaust heating system.

1. Next to the bath, the first known swimming pool in Georgia was found. It is rectangular in plan, and all four of its sides have semicircular apses in the center of all four walls. The dimensions of the pool are: length 33.4 m., with apses 39.6 m.; width 11.5 m.; height of the remaining walls 2.07 m.. The walls of the basin are built of cobblestone on mortar, and the inside is covered with well-smoothed white stone slabs. In the northern apse, which once connected the pool with the bath, there is a nine-step entrance staircase. In the south-east and north-west corners, stone slabs have been placed for bathers to relax on. In the northeast corner there was a trap and a locking building connected to the sewage collector. The pool floor was plastered with hydraulic mortar, and the pool walls were plastered on the outside. The swimming pool had another large building to the south which had seven halls, three of which had gabled apses - triangular in the middle and semicircular on the sides. Arranged in the north wall of the apse rooms are narrow permeable arches, conceivably to conduct hot air for heating. The purpose of this building has not yet been determined, but it is conceivable that there were halls of

the Roman curia type here. Since this building is said to have damaged the water pipeline of the palace during its construction, it must be of a later period, probably the IV-V centuries.

The Dzalisa complex, according to its buildings, was likely the residence of a high-ranking official. The Dzalisa settlement was turned into a residence around the end of the 1st century BC, and its development dates back to the I-III centuries A.D., following periods in which it was destroyed.

The Dzalisa mosaics are characterized by construction tectonics. The designs exhibit the traditions of Hellenistic art - the movement is alive, and the form is depicted with light and shadow; something that is no longer a plastic sculpture, but a linear drawing. The mosaics of Dzalisa once again confirm the popularity of the cult of Dionysus in Georgia, where viticulture and winemaking were developed. Only in recent years have more discoveries been made attesting to this, among them: a bronze statue of Pan in Mtskheta Akldama, terracotta statues of Dionysus and Ariadne in Sarkineti, a bronze statue of Dionysus from Kodistskaro village, and a silver mirrored statue depicting Dionysus awakening Ariadne from Samtavro. The Mosaics of Dzalisa demonstrate Iberia's close contact with the Western Roman world and Hellenistic culture in the East (Tsitsishvili, 1955).

2. We mentioned the Turkish Hamam above, and when we talk about this type of bath, we should remember the Abastumani resort. The healing properties of the essential minerals found in this area have long been acknowledged, even since ancient times. Historian, geographer, and cartographer

Vakhushti Bagrationi wrote that on the site of present-day Abastumani, as early as the VIV century, there was a densely populated town of Otrzkhe, home to renowned healing waters. In the 17th century, during Ottoman rule, a Turkish bath was built there. In the 1870s, the heir to the throne of the Russian Empire, Prince George, who was ill with tuberculosis, was forced to relinquish the royal throne and move to Abastumani. A palace was built for him, as was a bath near the thermal spring, which still functions today.

One of the most famous resorts in Georgia is Tskaltubo, written about as early as the VII-IX centuries. In the XII-XIII centuries, Tskaltubo, as a healing destination, was already widely popular. According to legend, a shepherd was out with his grazing herd near the springs of Tskaltubo, when he accidentally stumbled upon a “pump” of warm water, which he discovered he could bathe in. He suffered from joint pain and soon noticed that he felt relieved after putting his diseased legs in the water. This story was told by the shepherds to the “Queen of Megrelia”. After swimming in warm water several times, she also found herself healed of her ills, and this is how this particular spring got its name.

It is well known that the history of Tbilisi began with sulfur water, and for centuries people used it in the form of baths. Especially great interest in Tbilisi’s sulfur water was observed in the 18th century, when it was often visited by foreign scholars and travelers, among them Turenfort, Delaporte, Parot, and Du-Boa.

In 1866, by the order of the Governor of the Caucasus, a commission headed by the world-famous geologist Academician Abich

began to study the mineral springs of Tbilisi. In his findings, the scientist expressed great surprise that “the mineral waters have not been studied and have no purpose other than to supply baths and laundries.” He considered such a situation to be “a disrespectful attitude towards the healing treasures that nature so readily gifts the oppressed humanity here” (Nodia, 1954).

Following the results of Abich’s research, the issue of creating a Tbilisi balneological resort became part of the agenda. The commission, headed by Niko Nikoladze, created various versions of plans and projects, but it went no further than that until the 1930s. In 1930, under the leadership of physiotherapist and spa specialist Mikheil Zandukeli, a unique project was created, according to which the resort around the Krtsanisi government residence would be built on an area of 3-4 km. In 1938, the Tbilisi Balneological Resort was put into operation. Today, a scientific-practical center of spa, physiotherapy, rehabilitation, and medical tourism operates on this base.

The Georgian capital’s sulfur baths are a beautiful feature of Tbilisi, and have become something of a visiting card. In the 10th century, Arab geographer Ibn Hawqal, in his *Book of Roads and Kingdoms*, states: “In the city [Tbilisi], there are baths similar to those of Tiberias, the water of which boils without fire” (*Essays on the History of Georgia*, 1973). According to historical records, in the 13th century, there were 65 mineral baths in Tbilisi. Further information is provided about the baths of Tbilisi in the XIII-XIV c.c. works of Venetian traveler Marco Polo, 18th century Russian merchant Vasily Gagarin, and of Vakhushti Bagrationi. In 1833, the great Russian poet A.S. Pushkin wrote: “I have never encountered anything

more glorious in my life, neither in Russia nor in Turkey, than the baths in Tbilisi” (Chronicle of Friendship, 1961).

Today, the capital’s sulfur baths are visited by many foreign tourists besides Georgians. Abanotubani is something of an Asian corner in the city, one that strives towards Europe, and so it is a popular destination for European tourists.

Intangible cultural heritage and health tourism

A most interesting and important event in medical tourism occurred in 2016 when UNESCO recognized medical tourism as an intangible cultural heritage. Two decades ago, it would have been impossible to read or hear of such a proposal, because cultural heritage was not divided into parts, tangible and intangible, while medicine was not even considered an object deserving of such a label. However, there are examples worthy of the rare title, one being in Germany, where, in 2016, “Kneipp” was included in the list of the intangible heritage of Germany. “Kneipp” comes from a popular German doctor Sebastian Kneipp, and, since his last name consists of two “P”s, we have brought it as-is into the Georgian text so as not to confuse it with Kneipe, which refers to a brewery, or pub.

The Kneipp Baths (Kneippheilbad) or Kneipp Resorts (Kneippkurort) are distinguished by the fact that the water treatment is carried out using a method promoted by a Bavarian priest, Sebastian Kneipp (1821-1897), in the 1850s got a reputation as a “water doctor” due to his ability to treat the sick using cold baths, in particular, using the healing properties of water to cure those suffering from tuberculosis. He conducted his research in secret, mainly treating students,

gained a great deal of knowledge in hydrotherapy, and developed a new direction of therapy that became known as Kneipp Therapy. In 1855, he left his pastor position at the church in order to devote the rest of his life to water treatment and the formation of this new direction. He also laid the foundation for the first Kneipp resort.

The German Association of Kneipp Resorts and Kneipp Baths, located in the city of Bad Münstereifel, considers the inclusion of Kneipp Resorts and Kneipp Baths in the German Intangible Heritage List as a major success of 2016. “Today is a special day,” said Achim Bedorf, Executive Chairman of the Association of Kneipp Resorts and Kneipp Baths. This association includes more than 60 of the largest medical companies in the whole of Germany. The baths and resorts of this system cover the whole country, from the Baltic Sea to the Alps, and from Eifel to Saxony. In addition to the resorts, there are hundreds of Kneipp clubs. The German Commission for UNESCO and the Permanent Conference of the Ministry of Culture (KMK) were able to jointly assert the special place and role that Sebastian Kneipp’s treatment, based on traditional knowledge and practice, holds in the history of the German people. Knapp was the first person whose healing procedures and methodologies were incorporated into the list of intangible cultural heritage and, thus, it was the first instance that one was able to have a positive impact on the decision of the Interdisciplinary Commission of Experts. It was included in the UNESCO list as follows: “The Committee of Experts considers your proposal as a priority aimed at restoring human health by traditional methods. Traditional medicine must constantly evolve and improve its base. This idea can be spread all over the world and take deep root, especial-

ly since the existing network of Kneipp clubs, baths, and resorts guarantees that this experience will be enriched and developed in the future” (Kneipp, 2022).

Conclusion and Recommendation

In summary, the emergence of Roman thermae, hamam/hammam, sauna, onsen, and other hydrothermal spa treatments was ultimately related to the cleansing and cleanliness of the body. It is well known that the use of natural cold and hot waters for hygiene and relaxation was widespread both in Europe and Asia. Later, steam baths also came into use. The next stage was aromatherapy and thalassotherapy.

It is now widely accepted that all types of hydrothermal bath are associated with improved health and aesthetic benefits. Physicians have been studying the effects of cold on a body previously heated to high temperatures, and have found the main advantage of such temperature fluctuations to be detoxification. Heating the body to the point it sweats leads to the release of toxins, while extreme changes in temperature improve blood circulation and give a positive impetus to the functions of the body (Cavanah, 2016).

Various forms of treatment and healing have become a tradition in a number of countries. The inclusion of the Kneipp method as an intangible cultural heritage in 2016 should be considered as an example of recognizing and acknowledging traditional methods.

Georgia has a long and rich history of hydrothermal spa treatments, and these unique natural factors need to be highlighted and used more actively by the tourism industry. In terms of tourism marketing, a lot needs to be done to develop the wellness and spa

economy in order to advance the industry with modern marketing methods.

Now that Georgian tourism is starting to emerge from its pandemic-induced stagnation, the industry must prepare for the resumption of business activity in the wellness and medical tourism markets. It is likely that the growth of this sector, which was two times higher than the general rate of tourism development in the pre-pandemic period, will be maintained. The grounds for saying this are given by the fact that this unprecedented crisis reminded people of the importance of health and wellness procedures.

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Aspects of Green Transition in Georgia

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ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, the issue of sustainable development has taken on a key role in every field of the economy and business. The development of a green economy can play an important part in the sustainability of environmental protection, being an economic model that focuses on human health and the environment in parallel. Sustainable development involves protecting the environment and ensuring community well-being, having the world's citizens living in ecological cleanliness and health. The growth of sustainable development and green economy contributes to overcoming the risks related to environmental pollution and the reduction of ecological problems. As such, green transition has been set as a goal by many countries today. Yet, it is a multi-faceted process that needs the broad-reaching involvement of numerous stakeholders in a focused network for collaboration. The main direction of the green concept in the process of economic activity is to reduce the use of natural resources and protect the principles of ecological health and sustainable development. Much attention is given to the prevention of natural disasters and, in the best case, to their complete avoidance. The article covers the challenges faced by Georgia in its own process of green transition, and touches on issues related to green business development, air pollution, waste management, energy efficiency, and other sustainable development issues that provide an overview of aspects of the green transition.

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Introduction

Nowadays, the development of a green economy and green business is a global essential need, awareness of which is growing and gaining popularity. The main goals of the green economy are the well-being of society and the efficient use of natural resources to prevent further environmental pollution. Green economy is closely related to environmental problems, and includes the following: green transportation and green buildings, and waste, water and land management (UN Environment Program Publications).

Environmental protection experts of the United Nations (UN) consider the green economy as the most important direction to ensure the material and social well-being of people. It is said that a green economy can make a significant contribution to reducing the risks of environmental pollution and social deterioration. The development of a green economy and green businesses is becoming more and more important, both for developed and in developing countries. Therefore, over the next decade, the field of sustainable development has been set as the highest priority for all countries.

In recent years, economies around the world have been developing rapidly. In these conditions, which see the environment being carelessly polluted and natural resources being used irrationally, human health is under the greatest threat (Beridze, 2018). Issues such as water and air pollution, unchecked use of natural resources, unreasonable management of industrial or household waste, land erosion, deforestation, and desertification are especially acute.

Therefore, people must take steps to stop the negative impact on the environment, which can have devastating consequences for humanity (Ranvir, 2020). To solve these issues, the development of the green business sector is vital (Cameron & Clouth, 2012), as it can play an important role in the development of the economy and the creation of a healthy environment.

The Green Deal developed by the European Union is a useful reference example in the process of green transition. The European Green Deal set the blueprint for transformational change, a change that will bring with it many benefits, from creating new opportunities for innovation, investment, and green jobs, to improving citizen health and wellbeing. All 27 EU Member States committed to turning the EU into the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. To get there, they pledged to reduce emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to the 1990 levels (The Green Deal, 2021).

As a result of the Association Agreement with the European Union, Georgia is developing along the European path, and this requires making appropriate changes in almost all fields. Both Europe and Georgia's transition towards a green economy is a critical, ongoing process.

The green transition is a multi-faceted process and requires a wide range of stakeholders to collaborate in a focused network. Its benefits are distributed to society as a whole and cover all spheres of socio-economic life.

The article aims to examine various aspects of the green transition and identify challenges to it faced in Georgia. Based on anal-

ysis of the studied material, conclusions are drawn and recommendations are developed.

Green Business in Georgia

Today, human well-being is a vital world issue, something which includes not only material goods but also health as a key. This is why it is extremely necessary to develop green businesses for the supply of both material and non-material goods. Green business, as the main force of the economy, ensures the development of said economy and serves as a guarantor of a healthy environment (Sustainable Development Goals, 2020), and hence people's well-being.

The development of green business can have a positive impact on the country's financial sector, social stability, and the well-being of the population. At the end of the last century, it became clear that such a pace of economic development would be harmful to humanity. As a result of industrial waste and climate change, water and land resources become dirty and depleted, plants and animals are going extinct or are on the verge of extinction, and human diseases have increased because of environmental pollution. The situation around the world today indicates that the current economic development has brought society and the planet to a crisis point, seeing us gradually losing the opportunity to live in a healthy environment, and bringing with it an increasing number of diseases that threaten the life and health of children and adults. With all this in mind, it is vitally essential to introduce a green economy throughout the world, now.

The development of the green business and green economy concepts is a relatively

new direction for Georgia, and is something which has gained special significance in recent years (Ananiashvili, 2014). When entrepreneurs decide to start a business, when building their strategies, they need to first analyze environmental and social issues to as to be able to positively impact the well-being of their future beneficiaries.

In 2016, Georgia signed the Green Growth Declaration, a cooperation pact between countries for the development of green economy and green business. Georgia also signed the Association Agreement with the European Union, the purpose of which is to promote economic integration and political association. This agreement implies Georgia's active involvement in EU programs and campaigns, a key element of which is to promote green economy and sustainable development. One of the most important directions for the development of Georgia's economy, as in other countries, is the rational use of natural resources, ensuring an ecologically healthy environment for its people, and eliminating or minimizing the risks of natural disasters.

The absence of a healthy environment causes harm to human health and well-being. As a result, many diseases are appearing among us, some of which are completely new and unstudied, and some which are modified versions of old illnesses. As a result of these diseases, the mortality rate has been increasing. According to the data of the National Statistics Service, the mortality rate in Georgia increased until 2010, decreased again, then peaked in 2016. As such, it is clear that urgent measures to reduce the mortality rate need to be taken.

There are numerous challenges related to environmental health in Georgia, and the growth and development of green business

is a very important way to overcome them. Air pollution, garbage management, wasted water, deforestation, and imports over local produce are among them. Solving the mentioned issues will ensure that people live in a healthy environment and that this environment has a positive impact on the overall health and well-being of the population.

Air Pollution

Today, air pollution is a very significant problem in Georgia. Compared to previous years, the number of harmful materials in the air has increased dramatically, despite the well-recognised fact that clean air is a guarantee for a healthy life (Evans, 2011), while polluted air has a negative impact on people's health. Polluted air can lead to numerous deadly diseases, and can impact the socio-economic situation: Sick people can't work normally, yet they need money for treatment and medicines, a cycle which ultimately damages the economy of the country.

Unfortunately, Georgia is in a leading position on the list of air-polluted countries. The main cause of air pollution here is cars and their fumes, as Georgia boasts a high number of second-hand or very old cars, the unchecked exhaust of which pollutes the air.

In addition, polluted air may have a certain negative impact on climate change, soil conditions, and flora and fauna, each boasting their own human-impacting knock-on effects.

Garbage

Georgia has a deplorable situation with its garbage, with city streets full of such waste.

Sea and river pollution are also very common here, waste which is then pushed back onto Georgia's beaches.

There are also many cases where people dump industrial waste into water. As a result, not only is the drinking water polluted, but also the organisms that live in the water.

Water

The pollution of rivers through economic activities or natural disasters may not directly harm human health, but it significantly deteriorates the quality of drinking water. Agricultural lands are irrigated by rivers, and the products in that water are spread over consumable products, resulting in negative impacts on people's health. In addition, a large amount of water is wasted in both industrial and home use, which we call irrational use of water.

Deforestation

Because the human population is increasing, more and more plants and trees are being destroyed. In the most part, trees are cut for repurposing as timber. Deforestation has greatly changed landscapes around the world, which naturally results in more carbon dioxide being released into the atmosphere. The loss of trees can also make the soil more prone to erosion (Nunez, 2019).

There is an appalling situation regarding forest protection in Georgia. For centuries, people have been felling trees and using their wood for household purposes, as well as construction. This is an ongoing issue of growing concern, particularly in the last decades, and especially considering the current energy, financial and economic crises.

The development of a green economy and green business serves to eliminate these problems. Georgia needs to encourage the development of green businesses. This will strengthen the country's economy and have a positive impact on people's material well-being, as well as their health.

Lack of Local Food

In parallel with rising global food prices, the local harvest in Georgia is gradually decreasing. Due to a lack of funds, farmers are increasingly unable to cultivate their land. This leads to a large amount of food products being imported, and yet Georgia has great potential to develop in the agrarian direction and minimize the amount of imported food.

Genetically modified food directly impacts the health of the population. Some believe that genetically modified food is in fact harmful to human health, while others claim the opposite, stating it does not cause significant negative effects on overall health (Talikadze, 2019). In 2015, Georgia enacted a law, according to which labeling genetically modified food and informing consumers about the mentioned issue became mandatory, empowering the consumer to decide on and take responsibility for whether they consume genetically modified food or not.

Green Projects in Georgia

In general, sustainable development is one of the most important issues in the world today, and almost all countries are trying to develop green economies through the introduction of projects at the local and international levels. Several significant proj-

ects are being actively implemented by the state of Georgia.

In 2019, restrictions were imposed by law in connection with polyethylene bags. According to the law, the use and production of non-biodegradable polyethylene bags was banned. The purpose of this ban is the fact that polythene bags can cause severe damage to the environment, as they take a significant amount of time to decompose. Further, the production of polyethylene bags requires the use of minerals that are on the list of exhaustible resources. The mentioned law had a positive impact on the protection and improvement of the environment in the country, with shoppers switching in large part to "bag for life" bags.

Waste recycling is also being implemented in Georgia through a variety of on-going projects. The first stage of waste sorting is carried out at home, and so homeowners require four boxes- for plastic, glass, paper, and metal. To expand this, four recyclable waste containers need to be installed in neighbourhoods countrywide.

Since 2017, the green roof concept has been highlighted globally- green roofs are already well implemented in many countries, with some even regulating the issue of green roofs through local legislation. People are interested in this issue in Georgia, too, and we have seen private home owners installing such roofs during the construction of their own houses, and small and medium business owners taking on the concept in their office designs (Guidelines and Best Practices, UNECE, 2021).

To reduce environmental pollution created by businesses in Georgia, and to increase

business efficiency, in 2015, an important campaign in the direction of agriculture - "Implant the Future" was launched, the purpose of which was to support and encourage the production of high-quality planting materials, with a focus on strengthening local production so as to make it possible to replace imported produce with local products. Although there are still funding challenges, this project was successfully implemented and brought positive results to the field of agriculture in Georgia. The purpose of the mentioned project was also the rational use of agricultural lands.

For the green economy and business to develop in Georgia, it is important to make rational use of natural resources and the ecosystem. In those regions of the country where industrial and mining production is carried out, local communities face a huge problem of polluted water, soil and air. That is why the development of a green economy and green business is critical for Georgia, now.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The green economy and growth of green businesses is a great opportunity for Georgia to improve the living conditions of the population, as well as to boost the economy. But it is necessary to take certain measures to develop and encourage such green businesses. With the development of green business, Georgia will gain a unique environment, the capitalization of which will positively impact almost all directions.

It is important to identify the mechanisms that can help green businesses to develop in Georgia. First is the allocation of a

budget for green priorities and investment, and the minimization or complete cessation of subsidizing activities that damage the environment. In addition, the relevant tax reform is needed. The development of the economy largely depends on tax reform, as taxes are both directly and indirectly related to the prices of products. A rational tax system will help to create an eco-friendly product and will also encourage entrepreneurs to work hard in this direction.

Energy-efficient buildings are also essential elements of sustainable development and green economy. Because buildings consume a large amount of energy, energy reduction in this area will play a major role in the sustainable development of the country. According to the trends of recent years, it can be said that the number of construction projects is on the rise, although, unfortunately, there are as yet no relevant regulations to regulate the construction industry in Georgia. The presence of energy-efficient buildings will increase employment in the sector, develop technologies, introduce innovations, and reduce harmful effects on the environment, all of which is directly related to people's health and safety. A specific date should be set, after which only energy-efficient buildings can be built. The EU directive in this regard requires member states to implement certain incentive measures that stimulate the building of new energy-efficient buildings, and in parallel the renovation of old ones, so that they will approximate the energy efficiency standards. Incentive measures include the introduction or establishment of regulations, laws, rules, and tax benefits. Such measures will motivate entrepreneurs to concentrate on the construction of energy-efficient buildings.

The requirements of the European Union Directive, which refers to the construction of energy-efficient buildings, must be reflected in national legislation.

In addition, to develop green businesses in Georgia, it is most important that people be informed about the importance of sustainable development. This point significantly depends on changing the lifestyle of the country's citizens. Educational institutions are excellent places where this goal can be realized through various training programmes and lectures.

When discussing sustainable development and the green transition, it is important to mention the European Competence framework (GreenComp, 2022), the familiarization and implementation of which in the educational space will be useful to promote this process, helping educational institutions to acquire knowledge and develop skills for sustainable development.

Green business development ensures an ecologically clean environment. For the sustainable development of the country, it is necessary and most important to preserve resources and use them rationally. As the population grows, so do the demands, and this can lead to an ecological disaster. Therefore, it is necessary to promote and encourage green businesses to save natural resources and prevent environmental crises.

The joint involvement of the government and society in Georgia will help the country in its sustainable development, while the development of green businesses will ensure the creation of an ecologically clean environment in the country, thus helping to prevent those dangerous diseases that have become so common today.

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3) Preparation of manuscripts

preparation of text

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