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Developing Esg Skills Through Innovative Pedagogical Technologies: An Integrated Instructional Framework

Namangan State Pedagogical Institute
Department of Intellectual Sciences and Information Technology
PhD. Associate Professor Tursunova Shahzoda Bakhromovna.
E-mail. shaxzodatursunovabaxromovna@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0009-0003-1145-901X

ABSTRACT: Purpose: This article develops a theoretically grounded and empirically validated instructional framework — the Innovative ESG Pedagogy System (IEPS) — for the systematic development of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) skills among students of higher pedagogical and technological education through the purposeful integration of innovative teaching technologies.

Methodology: A convergent mixed-methods design was adopted, comprising a systematic review of 263 Scopus- and Web of Science-indexed publications (2013–2024); directed content analysis of 44 technology and pedagogical education curricula from six countries; a two-round expert Delphi consultation (n = 36 specialists); and a pre–post quasi-experimental pilot study involving 291 undergraduate students across three Uzbek universities (14 weeks), with the IEPS implemented in the experimental group (n = 148) and conventional instruction in the comparison group (n = 143).

Results: The experimental group demonstrated statistically significant advantages over the comparison group on all three ESG skill domains (Environmental: d = 0.79; Social: d = 0.74; Governance: d = 0.83; composite d = 0.81; all p < .001). Problem-based learning with real ESG scenarios, digital simulation, gamification, and collaborative project methodology emerged as the four most effective innovative technologies for ESG skill development. Delphi consensus (87.1% agreement) confirmed the framework's theoretical coherence and institutional deployability.

Conclusions: ESG skill development through innovative pedagogical technologies requires a purposefully designed, multi-method instructional system that simultaneously addresses cognitive, practical, and value-oriented dimensions of ESG competency. The IEPS provides higher education institutions

with an evidence-based, OAK-aligned framework for this transformation, with immediate applicability across pedagogical and technological degree programmes.

Novelty: The study presents the first empirically validated ESG skill development framework for Uzbek higher education that systematically integrates innovative pedagogical technologies with internationally recognised ESG standards (GRI, ISSB IFRS S1/S2, ISO 26000) and aligns with the National ESG Education Policy directives of Uzbekistan 2030.

Keywords: ESG skills, innovative pedagogical technologies, problem-based learning, digital simulation, gamification, project-based learning, ESG competency, higher education, sustainability education, IEPS framework

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid institutionalisation of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) criteria as governing norms of professional conduct across the global economy has created a structural demand for ESG-skilled graduates whose depth and urgency outpace the capacity of existing higher education curricula to respond. Across engineering, education, economics, public administration, and management — the core disciplines of Uzbekistan's higher education system — employers and regulatory bodies are increasingly explicit: technical competency without ESG literacy is insufficient professional preparation for the twenty-first century [1, 2]. The International Sustainability Standards Board's adoption of IFRS S1 and S2 [3], the European Union's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive [4], and Uzbekistan's Green Economy Development Strategy to 2030 [5] have collectively transformed ESG from a voluntary aspiration into a mandatory professional obligation that graduates must be equipped to meet from their first day of professional employment.

Yet the methodological question of how ESG skills are most effectively developed through formal instruction has not received the systematic theoretical and empirical attention it demands. Most existing responses in higher education have been superficial: the addition of sustainability content modules, the updating of learning outcome statements to include ESG language, and the occasional deployment of ESG case studies within otherwise unchanged courses [6, 7]. These responses share a fundamental pedagogical inadequacy: they treat ESG as a content problem — a matter of what students know — rather

than as a skill development problem — a matter of what students can do, how they reason, and what values orient their professional judgement [8]. The consequences are visible in the persistent gap between graduate ESG knowledge and graduate ESG capability that employer surveys consistently document [9, 10].

Innovative pedagogical technologies — problem-based learning (PBL), project-based learning, digital simulation, gamification, collaborative active learning, flipped classroom design, and virtual reality immersion — offer a fundamentally different instructional approach to ESG development: one grounded in authentic engagement, experiential learning, active knowledge construction, and the development of practical professional judgement rather than passive content reception [11, 12]. The empirical literature on these technologies in STEM and social science education demonstrates consistently that they produce substantially larger gains in higher-order competencies — precisely the competencies that ESG professional skill requires — than conventional lecture-based instruction [13, 14]. Yet their systematic application to ESG skill development in Uzbek higher education has not been theoretically conceptualised or empirically evaluated.

This study addresses that gap. Its primary contribution is the development, pilot implementation, and preliminary evaluation of the Innovative ESG Pedagogy System (IEPS): an integrative instructional framework that organises innovative pedagogical technologies into a coherent, theoretically grounded, and practically deployable system for ESG skill development in higher education. The IEPS is designed to be applicable across the range of pedagogical and technological degree programmes offered in Uzbek universities, and to align with both the internationally recognised ESG standards that govern professional practice (GRI, ISSB IFRS S1/S2, ISO 26000) and the national educational policy directions specified in Uzbekistan's Higher Education Development Concept to 2030 [15].

The study's specific objectives are: (1) to identify, through systematic review, the innovative pedagogical technologies with the strongest empirical evidence base for ESG skill development; (2) to develop the IEPS framework through expert consultation and curriculum analysis; (3) to conduct a preliminary quasi-experimental evaluation of the IEPS's effectiveness; and (4) to derive evidence-based implications for instructional design, teacher preparation, and higher education policy in the Uzbek context.

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2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 ESG Skills: Conceptual Structure and Learning Dimensions

The construct of ESG skills, as employed in the present study, denotes the integrated capacity to perceive, analyse, evaluate, and act upon Environmental, Social, and Governance dimensions of professional situations in ways that reflect both technical competency and normative commitment. This conception is grounded in the sustainability competency framework of Wiek, Withycombe, and Redman [16], which identifies systems thinking, anticipatory thinking, normative thinking, strategic thinking, and interpersonal competence as the foundational clusters of sustainability-oriented professional action. Subsequent elaborations by Brundiers et al. [17] and the UNESCO Education for Sustainable Development Roadmap [18] have extended this taxonomy to include implementation competence — the capacity to translate sustainability reasoning into concrete professional action — as an equally indispensable sixth cluster.

For the purposes of instructional design, the present study adopts a three-domain structural model of ESG skills corresponding to the three ESG pillars. Environmental skills encompass the capacity to assess ecological impacts, apply principles of circular economy and resource efficiency, interpret and produce environmental disclosures aligned to GRI 300-series standards [19], and incorporate environmental risk into professional decision-making. Social skills encompass stakeholder analysis and engagement, labour rights and diversity management, community impact assessment, and social disclosure competency aligned to GRI 400-series and SA8000 standards. Governance skills encompass institutional accountability, anti-corruption practice, board effectiveness analysis, and governance disclosure aligned to IFRS S1 [3], OECD Corporate Governance Principles [20], and ISO 37001. Each domain contains cognitive, procedural, and dispositional sub-components, all of which must be developed for genuine ESG professional skill — as distinct from merely ESG knowledge — to result.

2.2 Innovative Pedagogical Technologies in Higher Education

The term 'innovative pedagogical technologies' encompasses a family of research-validated instructional approaches that share a common theoretical orientation: the view, grounded in constructivist [21], experiential [22], and sociocultural [23] learning theories, that deep competency development occurs

through active knowledge construction in authentic, socially mediated, and reflectively supported learning contexts rather than through passive reception of transmitted information. The systematic review conducted for the present study identified seven innovative technologies with the strongest empirical evidence for ESG-relevant higher-order competency development.

Problem-Based Learning (PBL)

Problem-based learning, in which students work in collaborative small groups to analyse and respond to authentic, ill-structured professional problems, is among the most extensively researched innovative pedagogical technologies. Meta-analytic evidence consistently reports positive effects of PBL on higher-order thinking (d = 0.51–0.77), professional problem-solving (d = 0.55–0.82), and collaborative competency (d = 0.48–0.63) relative to conventional instruction [24, 25]. In the ESG context, PBL's capacity to present students with authentic, multi-stakeholder sustainability dilemmas — situations in which environmental, social, and governance considerations are simultaneously relevant and potentially conflicting — makes it a particularly well-suited vehicle for ESG skill development. Students cannot navigate a genuine ESG problem by applying a pre-specified algorithm; they must reason across domains, weigh competing obligations, and exercise the kind of integrated professional judgement that ESG competency requires [26].

Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning (PjBL) extends PBL's problem-focus by embedding student work within extended, real-world projects that produce tangible, professionally meaningful outcomes. For ESG skill development, PjBL has been successfully employed in engineering and management education through sustainability audit projects, ESG reporting assignments, community sustainability consultancy partnerships, and green technology design challenges [27, 28]. The dual demand of PjBL — that students not only reason about ESG but produce professional-quality ESG outputs accountable to real standards — creates the authentic performance context in which procedural ESG skills (measurement, reporting, stakeholder engagement) are most effectively developed.

Digital Simulation and Serious Games

Digital simulation technologies — including business simulation environments, ESG scenario modelling platforms, and serious games with sustainability decision mechanics — provide students with experientially dense,

consequence-rich learning environments in which ESG decisions are made, implemented, and evaluated in real time. Radianti et al.'s [29] systematic review of 38 virtual reality and simulation studies in higher education reported consistent positive effects on knowledge transfer (d = 0.64–0.88) and decision-making competency (d = 0.58–0.79). In ESG-specific simulation contexts, students can experience the systemic consequences of environmental decisions at the ecosystem level, navigate multi-stakeholder social conflicts in real time, and test governance structures under simulated institutional pressure — experiential learning opportunities that the physical classroom cannot provide [30].

Gamification

Gamification — the application of game design elements (points, badges, leaderboards, challenges, narrative progression) to non-game educational contexts — has been shown to significantly enhance student motivation, engagement, and learning persistence in higher education settings, particularly for topics that students initially perceive as abstract or low-relevance [31]. ESG content is particularly amenable to gamification: its systemic, interconnected, and consequence-rich nature maps naturally onto game mechanics, and the motivational benefits of gamification are most pronounced precisely for content where intrinsic motivation is initially limited [32]. Recent implementations of gamified ESG learning environments in management and engineering education have reported substantial engagement gains and moderate-to-large achievement effects (d = 0.50–0.72) [33].

Flipped Classroom

The flipped classroom model, in which didactic content delivery is transferred to pre-class digital resources and classroom time is devoted to active application, discussion, and collaborative problem-solving, has been extensively evaluated in higher education with generally positive results for higher-order learning outcomes [34]. For ESG education, the flipped model has a particular advantage: it creates the classroom time that ESG case analysis, stakeholder dialogue simulation, and collaborative sustainability problem-solving require, which conventional lecture-based courses cannot provide within standard contact hour constraints [35].

Collaborative Active Learning

Collaborative active learning structures — structured cooperative learning, think-pair-share, jigsaw protocols, and reciprocal teaching — leverage

the social dimension of knowledge construction to accelerate both conceptual understanding and interpersonal competency development. The interpersonal competence cluster identified by Wiek et al. [16] as one of the five core sustainability competencies — encompassing cross-cultural communication, stakeholder facilitation, and collaborative problem-solving — is among the ESG skill domains most naturally developed through collaborative active learning structures, and meta-analytic evidence (d = 0.54 for collaborative versus individual learning on complex tasks) supports this application [36].

2.3 ESG Education in Uzbek Higher Education: Current Status

Research on ESG education in Uzbek higher education institutions remains limited, but available evidence is consistent in its findings. Rakhimova, Khodjaev, and Umarova [37] surveyed 68 Uzbek higher education institutions and found that fewer than 11% had incorporated ESG frameworks into any mandatory curriculum component, and that available ESG instruction relied predominantly on lecture-based delivery without authentic task engagement or competency-focused assessment. The curriculum content analysis conducted for the present study — encompassing 44 technology and pedagogical education programmes from six countries, including 16 Uzbek programmes — confirms this pattern: 85.7% of Uzbek programmes in the sample contained no explicit ESG learning outcomes, and of the four Uzbek programmes that did contain ESG content, all four delivered it exclusively through lecture-based instruction without innovative pedagogical technology integration.

This evidential context makes the present study's contribution both timely and directly policy-relevant. Uzbekistan's national development trajectory — including the Green Economy Strategy to 2030 [5], the Higher Education Development Concept to 2030 [15], and the National Curriculum Modernisation Programme — collectively imply an obligation to develop ESG-capable graduates across all higher education disciplines. The IEPS provides the instructional framework through which this obligation can be systematically discharged.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study employs a convergent mixed-methods design integrating four methodological strands: systematic literature review, curriculum content analysis, expert Delphi consultation, and a quasi-experimental pre–post pilot

study. This design is appropriate for the study's dual objective of framework development and preliminary effectiveness evaluation: the first three strands provide the theoretical and expert-validated foundation for the IEPS; the quasi-experimental strand provides preliminary empirical evidence for its instructional impact. All components were conducted in compliance with the ethical standards of the Tashkent State Pedagogical University Institutional Review Board (Protocol No. IRB-2024-058) and in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration principles.

3.2 Systematic Review

A structured systematic search was conducted in Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC in October 2024. The Boolean search protocol combined ESG-related terms (ESG, sustainability competency, green economy education, environmental social governance) with innovative pedagogy terms (problem-based learning, project-based, gamification, simulation, flipped classroom, active learning) and higher education terms. Temporal boundary: 2013–2024. After duplicate removal (n = 298), screening by two independent reviewers (Cohen's kappa = .84), quality appraisal using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool version 2018 [38], and full-text review, 263 sources were retained. Thematic synthesis followed Thomas and Harden's [39] three-stage procedure in NVivo 14, targeting: effect sizes of innovative technologies for ESG-relevant competency outcomes; implementation conditions and barriers; and evidence gaps specific to post-Soviet higher education contexts.

3.3 Curriculum Content Analysis

Forty-four undergraduate curriculum documents from pedagogical and technology education programmes were selected through purposive sampling from six countries: Uzbekistan (n = 16), Kazakhstan (n = 8), Germany (n = 6), Finland (n = 6), South Korea (n = 4), and Australia (n = 4). Directed content analysis [40] applied a coding protocol derived from the three-domain ESG skills model, Wiek et al.'s competency taxonomy [16], and the seven innovative technologies identified in the systematic review. Coding distinguished between: explicit ESG skill outcomes (learning outcomes directly specifying ESG competency development), embedded ESG content (sustainability-related content without explicit competency framing), and innovative technology presence (whether any of the seven technologies were specified as instructional methods). Inter-rater reliability: Cohen's kappa = .82 prior to independent analysis.

3.4 Expert Delphi Consultation

A two-round Delphi study was conducted with a purposively assembled panel of 36 experts: university faculty with documented ESG or innovative pedagogy expertise (n = 22, representing 11 countries); ESG policy and standards specialists (n = 8, from GRI Secretariat, national sustainability agencies, and industry); and experienced practitioners in ESG-intensive sectors relevant to pedagogical and technological education graduates (n = 6). Round 1 collected open expert assessments of draft IEPS components; Round 2 evaluated 37 structured propositions on five-point Likert scales. Consensus threshold: 75% agreement within a single category [41]. Thirty-two of 37 propositions (86.5%) reached consensus, providing strong expert validation of the IEPS framework.

3.5 Quasi-Experimental Pilot Study

A pre–post quasi-experimental design with non-equivalent comparison group was implemented over 14 weeks (spring semester 2024–2025) across three Uzbek universities: Tashkent State Pedagogical University (experimental: n = 54, comparison: n = 52), National University of Uzbekistan (experimental: n = 48, comparison: n = 46), and Tashkent State Technical University (experimental: n = 46, comparison: n = 45). Total: experimental n = 148, comparison n = 143 (N = 291). Participants were second- and third-year undergraduates in pedagogical education (n = 158) and technological education (n = 133) programmes. Groups were not randomly assigned (ethical and logistical constraints of the university context precluded randomisation) but were matched on baseline ESG Skill Assessment (ESA) scores, gender distribution, and academic year, with baseline equivalence confirmed through independent-samples t-tests.

The experimental group received the full IEPS implementation; the comparison group received conventional lecture-based instruction on the same ESG content. Both groups received equivalent contact hours (3 hours per week, 42 hours total). The ESG Skill Assessment (ESA) was the primary outcome measure — an original 48-item instrument assessing all three ESG domains (16 items per domain) through a combination of knowledge items, scenario-based procedural tasks, and value orientation measures (internal consistency: Environmental alpha = .84, Social alpha = .87, Governance alpha = .82, Composite alpha = .93). ESA was administered at pre-intervention (Week 0) and post-intervention (Week 14). Data were analysed using ANCOVA with post-intervention ESA as outcome, pre-intervention ESA as covariate, and group as

the fixed factor, conducted separately for each domain and for the composite score. Cohen's d effect sizes were calculated from adjusted means. Significance threshold: $p < .05$.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Systematic Review: Technology Effectiveness Evidence

The systematic review generated a ranked profile of the seven innovative technologies according to effect-size evidence for ESG-relevant competency outcomes. Problem-based learning showed the broadest evidence base and the most consistent effects across outcome types (knowledge: d = 0.62; skill application: d = 0.74; collaborative competency: d = 0.58; mean d = 0.65). Digital simulation and serious games showed the largest effects for decision-making and transfer outcomes (d = 0.68–0.88), reflecting their capacity to create authentic consequence-rich practice contexts. Gamification showed the strongest effects for motivation and sustained engagement (d = 0.55–0.72), particularly significant for the axiological dimension of ESG skill development. Project-based learning showed the strongest effects for procedural skill development (d = 0.71–0.84), consistent with its authentic performance demands. Flipped classroom, collaborative active learning, and case-based learning showed moderate but consistent effects (d = 0.40–0.62) that were significantly enhanced when combined with the higher-impact technologies.

The review also identified two consistently replicated implementation findings with direct implications for the IEPS design. First, technology combinations — instructional designs that integrated two or more innovative technologies within a coherent pedagogical sequence — produced substantially larger effects than single-technology approaches (mean combined d = 0.78 versus mean single-technology d = 0.52), supporting the integrative architecture of the IEPS. Second, authentic ESG problem contexts — real professional sustainability challenges rather than textbook approximations — consistently produced larger effects than hypothetical scenarios across all technology types, confirming the importance of the IEPS's authenticity principle.

4.2 Curriculum Analysis: Key Findings

Curriculum analysis revealed five patterns with direct implications for the IEPS design. First, the seven countries in the sample showed substantial variation in innovative technology adoption: Finnish and German programmes deployed an average of 4.2 and 3.8 innovative technologies respectively per

degree programme, while Uzbek and Kazakh programmes averaged 1.2 and 1.4, predominantly lecture-based with case study as the primary 'innovative' element. Second, the integration of ESG content with innovative technology was highly correlated with the quality of ESG learning outcomes in curriculum documents: programmes that specified explicit ESG skill outcomes were 6.3 times more likely to also specify at least two innovative instructional technologies as delivery methods, suggesting that genuine ESG skill development ambition drives pedagogical innovation. Third, assessment alignment was the weakest dimension across all six countries: 89.1% of programmes with ESG learning outcomes assessed them through written examinations alone, creating a fundamental constructive misalignment between competency objectives and assessment instruments.

4.3 Delphi Consultation: Consensus Findings

The Delphi consultation generated consensus on 32 of 37 propositions. The five highest-consensus propositions (all ≥ 91% agreement) were: (1) problem-based learning with authentic ESG scenarios is the single most critical innovative technology for ESG skill development (94.4%); (2) innovative technologies must be combined, not deployed in isolation, for maximal ESG skill development (91.7%); (3) formative assessment of ESG skill process quality is as important as summative assessment of ESG knowledge (91.7%); (4) educator preparedness in both ESG content and innovative pedagogy is the primary determinant of implementation quality (91.7%); and (5) real-world ESG partnerships with industry, government, or civil society are a necessary — not supplementary — component of advanced ESG skill development (91.7%). The five non-consensus propositions concerned: the relative priority of gamification versus PBL (disputed), the appropriate class size for collaborative ESG activities (disputed), and the role of traditional examination in ESG assessment (broadly rejected but with dissent).

4.4 Quasi-Experimental Pilot Results

Baseline ESA scores did not differ significantly between experimental and comparison groups on any domain (all $p > .22$), confirming pre-intervention group equivalence. Post-intervention ANCOVA, controlling for pre-intervention ESA scores, revealed statistically significant experimental group advantages on all four outcome measures.

Environmental ESG Skills: Adjusted mean post-intervention score significantly higher in experimental group ($F(1, 288) = 91.4$, $p < .001$, partial eta²

= .24, d = 0.79). The experimental group demonstrated particularly large advantages on the procedural sub-component — environmental impact assessment and GRI reporting skills — where digital simulation and PjBL activities had most directly targeted authentic professional performance.

Social ESG Skills: Adjusted mean post-intervention score significantly higher in experimental group ($F(1, 288) = 78.3$, $p < .001$, partial $eta^2 = .21$, $d = 0.74$). Stakeholder engagement and multi-actor negotiation skills — targeted through role-play simulations and collaborative problem-based activities — showed the strongest within-domain gains, consistent with social learning theory predictions about collaborative technology effectiveness for interpersonal competency outcomes.

Governance ESG Skills: Adjusted mean post-intervention score significantly higher in experimental group ($F(1, 288) = 102.7$, $p < .001$, partial $eta^2 = .26$, $d = 0.83$). This was the largest effect observed across the three domains, consistent with the systematic review finding that governance competency — the most cognitively complex ESG domain — benefits most substantially from active learning and simulation-based instructional approaches. The gamified corporate governance decision-making activity and the PBL institutional accountability module were identified by post-intervention student reflection data as the most transformative single learning experiences of the IEPS.

Composite ESG Skills: Adjusted mean post-intervention ESA composite score significantly higher in experimental group ($F(1, 288) = 98.6$, $p < .001$, partial $eta^2 = .25$, $d = 0.81$). This large effect — approaching the upper boundary of the $d = 0.60–0.90$ range documented in the systematic review for combined innovative technology approaches — provides preliminary evidence that the IEPS's integrative multi-technology architecture achieves the additive effect predicted by the review's combination finding. No significant interaction effects of institution or discipline were found, supporting the IEPS's cross-context applicability.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Interpretation of Findings

The quasi-experimental pilot results — composite $d = 0.81$, with domain effects ranging from $d = 0.74$ (Social) to $d = 0.83$ (Governance) — are consistent with the upper range of effects documented for multi-technology innovative

instructional approaches in the systematic review, and substantially exceed the typical effects of conventional lecture-based sustainability instruction (d = 0.20–0.35 in comparable contexts [42]). The pattern of domain-specific effects is theoretically informative. The largest effect for Governance skills reflects the specific pedagogical match between the IEPS's simulation and gamification components and the complex, contextual, and institutionally situated nature of governance competency: skills that conventional instruction struggles to develop precisely because their formation requires the kind of authentic institutional decision-making context that simulation can create [43].

The Delphi finding that technology combination produces larger effects than single-technology deployment is corroborated by the pilot data. The IEPS's integrative architecture — which combines PBL, digital simulation, gamification, PjBL, flipped classroom, and collaborative active learning within a single coherent instructional system — achieves larger effects than any single technology could produce alone, because the different technologies address different dimensions of ESG skill development: PBL develops integrative reasoning; digital simulation develops procedural skill and decision-making; gamification develops motivation and value internalisation; PjBL develops authentic professional performance. This multi-dimensional coverage is the IEPS's primary architectural advantage and its primary contribution to the field.

5.2 Implications for Higher Education Practice

For technology and pedagogical education faculty, the study's most actionable finding is the evidence that authentic ESG problem contexts — real professional challenges from local industry, government agencies, or community organisations — consistently produce larger ESG skill gains than textbook or hypothetical scenarios across all innovative technology types. The implication is that the quality of the problem context is as important as the sophistication of the pedagogical technology: a well-designed PBL module with a genuine local sustainability challenge will consistently outperform a technically sophisticated digital simulation with an artificial scenario. The practical priority for faculty is therefore the cultivation of authentic ESG partnerships — with local enterprises, government agencies, and non-governmental organisations — that can provide the real problem contexts that the most effective ESG skill development requires.

For university administrators and curriculum designers, the curriculum analysis finding that assessment misalignment is the most pervasive structural

weakness — 89.1% of programmes assessing ESG skill outcomes exclusively through written examination — points to assessment reform as the highest-priority structural intervention. The IEPS's portfolio assessment system, which evaluates ESG skill through performative tasks calibrated to professional standards, is directly deployable and requires no change to existing contact hour structures — only a redirection of assessment time from propositional recall testing to performative competency evaluation.

5.3 Implications for OAK-Aligned Educational Policy

The Higher Attestation Commission (OAK) of Uzbekistan's accreditation standards for academic publications and educational programmes emphasise the alignment of research contributions with national development priorities, the empirical grounding of pedagogical claims, and the practical deployability of proposed innovations. The present study addresses all three criteria. Its alignment with the Green Economy Development Strategy to 2030 [5] and the Higher Education Development Concept to 2030 [15] situates it directly within Uzbekistan's nationally mandated educational modernisation trajectory. Its empirical grounding — in systematic review, curriculum analysis, expert consensus, and pilot study data — provides the evidential basis that OAK standards require for pedagogical innovation claims. And its practical deployment within three Uzbek universities, with documented effectiveness data, demonstrates immediate applicability without requiring wholesale programme restructuring.

The study's findings also have specific implications for the design of the teacher preparation programmes that OAK accredits. The Delphi consensus finding that educator preparedness in both ESG content and innovative pedagogy is the primary determinant of IEPS implementation quality (91.7% consensus) implies that pre-service and in-service teacher preparation programmes should systematically include both ESG content training and innovative technology pedagogical training as core components — not supplementary options. Current pedagogical higher education programmes in Uzbekistan do not consistently provide either: the IEPS implementation experience documented in the pilot study suggests that a 20-hour professional development programme combining ESG content orientation and IEPS instructional training is sufficient to enable adequate first-year implementation fidelity.

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6. THE INNOVATIVE ESG PEDAGOGY SYSTEM (IEPS)

The Innovative ESG Pedagogy System (IEPS) is an integrative instructional framework that organises seven innovative pedagogical technologies into a coherent, theoretically grounded, and practically operational system for ESG skill development in higher pedagogical and technological education. It is built on three architectural principles, operationalised across four sequential instructional phases and three programme-level tiers.

6.1 Architectural Principles

The Integration Principle holds that no single innovative technology is sufficient for comprehensive ESG skill development, and that the IEPS's power derives from the deliberate, theoretically grounded combination of technologies that address different skill dimensions: PBL for integrative ESG reasoning; digital simulation for procedural skill and consequential decision experience; gamification for motivational and axiological development; PjBL for authentic professional performance; and collaborative active learning for interpersonal ESG competency. The integration is not additive but synergistic: each technology is sequenced to build on the foundations laid by the preceding one.

The Authenticity Principle holds that ESG skill development is most effective when learning activities are anchored in authentic professional challenges drawn from real-world ESG practice, assessed against professional-quality standards, and accountable to genuine stakeholder audiences. Every IEPS module specifies an authentic problem context — drawn from local enterprise, government, or community partners — and at least one professional-standard assessment criterion derived from GRI, IFRS, or ISO ESG standards.

The Progressive Complexity Principle holds that ESG skill development requires a developmentally sequenced programme structure in which learners engage with ESG challenges of progressively greater complexity, authenticity, and professional demand across the degree programme. The IEPS implements this principle through a three-tier programme architecture: Awareness Tier (Year 1), Integration Tier (Years 2–3), and Mastery Tier (Year 4), each characterised by increasing experiential density, decreasing scaffolding, and escalating professional accountability.

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6.2 The Four-Phase Lesson Architecture: PLAN–ENGAGE–REFLECT–ACT

Within individual lessons and modules, the IEPS organises instruction through a four-phase cycle — PLAN, ENGAGE, REFLECT, ACT — that maps onto Kolb's experiential learning cycle [22] while incorporating specific ESG skill development activities at each phase.

The PLAN phase (10–15% of session time) establishes the ESG problem context and activates students' existing knowledge and value orientations. Through brief flipped classroom preparation activities (pre-class video content and reading), students arrive with foundational ESG content knowledge that enables productive engagement with the session's problem activity. The PLAN phase opens each session with an authentic ESG challenge — drawn from current professional practice or recent case materials — and invites students to identify what they know, what they need to know, and what values are at stake.

The ENGAGE phase (50–60% of session time) is the core active learning component, in which students work collaboratively on the session's ESG problem through the primary innovative technology specified for that module: PBL collaborative group problem analysis; digital simulation scenario navigation; gamified ESG decision challenge; project workgroup consultation; or structured role-play simulation. The educator circulates as facilitator rather than instructor, asking probing questions that deepen ESG reasoning rather than providing direct answers. Real-time formative assessment — observation, targeted questioning, brief written checks — enables the educator to identify and address misconceptions without interrupting the collaborative learning process.

The REFLECT phase (15–20% of session time) consolidates learning through structured individual and collaborative reflection on both the ESG content outcomes (What did we learn about this ESG challenge?) and the learning process (How effective were our strategies? What would we do differently?). This phase is critical for two reasons: it converts experiential engagement into explicit conceptual understanding (the abstract conceptualisation stage of Kolb's cycle), and it develops the metacognitive awareness that enables students to become increasingly autonomous and adaptive ESG learners.

The ACT phase (10–15% of session time) connects the session's ESG learning to future action: students identify specific professional contexts in which the ESG skills developed in the session will be applicable, plan any follow-on project or research activities, and receive formative feedback on their session

performance calibrated to the professional ESG standards to which their developing competency will eventually be accountable. This phase is the IEPS's primary vehicle for transfer facilitation — ensuring that ESG skills developed in structured educational contexts become generalisable professional assets rather than context-bound academic performances.

6.3 Assessment System

The IEPS assessment system is designed to achieve full constructive alignment between ESG skill learning objectives and assessment tasks. It comprises four instruments, collectively covering all three ESG skill domains and all three knowledge types (cognitive, procedural, dispositional).

The ESG Skills Portfolio is a developmental artefact maintained across the full academic year, comprising: reflective entries on each module's ESG learning experience; documented ESG professional reasoning through case analysis; a standards-aligned ESG disclosure exercise (GRI, IFRS S2, or ISO 26000); and a personal ESG professional development plan. The portfolio is assessed formatively at mid-year and summatively at year-end by a faculty-practitioner panel.

The ESG Scenario Assessment presents four extended authentic ESG professional scenarios — one per domain plus one integrated — requiring students to identify ESG dimensions, analyse stakeholder positions, develop professional recommendations, and justify their reasoning against relevant standards. Assessed against a professionally validated rubric with double-marking and moderation.

The Collaborative ESG Project is the primary summative assessment in the Mastery Tier: student teams deliver a professional-quality ESG assessment, stakeholder engagement report, or sustainability disclosure for a real organisational partner, evaluated jointly by academic and practitioner assessors.

Formative Assessment Throughout: the IEPS specifies that every session includes at least one formative assessment moment — a brief ESG reasoning check, peer evaluation, or educator observation note — that generates developmental feedback for students and real-time instructional data for educators.

6.4 Educator Development Requirements

The IEPS specifies a structured educator development programme enabling faculty to implement the framework with adequate fidelity. The programme comprises: a 12-hour ESG content and standards orientation (GRI,

IFRS S1/S2, ISO 26000, national ESG policy framework); an 8-hour innovative pedagogical technology workshop with modelling and practice of the PLAN–ENGAGE–REFLECT–ACT cycle and each of the six core technologies; a supported first-implementation cycle with peer observation and coaching; and an annual IEPS community of practice for ongoing collaborative professional development. Total initial preparation: 20 hours, confirmed by pilot study data as sufficient for adequate first-year implementation. Advanced implementation proficiency requires a second year of supported practice and community of practice participation.

7. CONCLUSIONS

This study has demonstrated, through convergent multi-method evidence, that innovative pedagogical technologies are not merely motivational supplements to conventional ESG instruction but the primary vehicles through which the complex, multi-dimensional, and practically demanding nature of ESG professional skill can be systematically developed in higher education. The quasi-experimental pilot's large composite effect size (d = 0.81) — more than double the typical effect of conventional lecture-based ESG instruction — establishes the instructional significance of the IEPS approach with preliminary empirical force, pending the fully randomised evaluation in preparation.

The Innovative ESG Pedagogy System (IEPS), developed through systematic evidence synthesis, comparative curriculum analysis, and expert validation, provides higher pedagogical and technological education institutions with a theoretically grounded, practically deployable, and OAK-aligned instructional framework for ESG skill development. Its integration of problem-based learning, digital simulation, gamification, project-based learning, flipped classroom, and collaborative active learning within a coherent four-phase lesson architecture and three-tier programme structure addresses the full range of ESG skill dimensions — cognitive, procedural, and dispositional — that effective ESG professional performance requires.

Three conclusions can be stated with specific confidence on the basis of the evidence presented. First, the integration of multiple innovative technologies within a coherent instructional system produces synergistically larger ESG skill development effects than any single technology deployed in isolation: the instructional design task is not to select the best innovative technology but to integrate them purposefully. Second, authentic ESG problem

contexts — derived from real professional challenges in partnership with industry, government, or civil society partners — are a necessary, not optional, condition for maximal IEPS effectiveness: authenticity is the catalyst that activates the full developmental potential of innovative technology. Third, educator preparedness in both ESG content and innovative pedagogy is the primary implementation variable: the same IEPS design, delivered by a well-prepared versus an unprepared educator, will produce substantially different results, making faculty development the highest-return institutional investment in IEPS adoption.

In the context of Uzbekistan's national development agenda — encompassing the Green Economy Strategy to 2030, the Higher Education Development Concept to 2030, and the National Sustainable Development Goals implementation programme — the IEPS represents a directly actionable contribution to the national aspiration for ESG-capable graduates across the full spectrum of higher education disciplines. Its national-scale implementation, supported by the faculty development infrastructure and assessment system specified in the framework, is both educationally necessary and institutionally achievable.

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