An AI-Driven Multimethod Framework for Inclusive Education: A Cross-Regional Survey Analysis

Mariam Chkhaidze

PhD (Technical Science), PhD (Educational Science), Professor, Geoorgian Technical University, Tbilisi, Georgia.

Email: *m.chkhaidze@gtu.ge.*

Levan Mateshvili

PhD (Educational Science), PhD (History), PhD (Theology), Professor, Geoorgian Technical University, Tbilisi, Georgia.

Email: *l.mateshvili74@gmail.com.*

Abstract

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into educational science offers transformative opportunities to advance inclusive education, particularly for students with visual impairments. This study presents an AI-driven analysis of surveys conducted across European and Georgian higher education institutions, drawing on responses from students, faculty, medical professionals, and psychologists. Using a mixed-methods design, the research combines traditional statistical analysis with advanced AI methodologies, including machine learning algorithms, natural language processing (NLP), and predictive modeling. The findings reveal nuanced patterns of needs, challenges, and institutional practices, and the paper provides evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and educators. This work demonstrates the capacity of AI methodologies to substantially enhance the rigor, accuracy, and practical applicability of educational research on disability inclusion. This study not only applies AI techniques but also conceptualizes a unified multimethod analytical framework for inclusive education research.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Inclusive Education, Learning Analytics, Survey Analysis, Educational Data Mining, AI in Higher Education.

Introduction

Inclusive education is increasingly recognized as both a fundamental right and a global institutional priority. However, effectively addressing the specific challenges faced by visually impaired students in higher education requires research methodologies capable of handling complex, multidimensional data. Traditional quantitative and qualitative approaches often fall short in capturing the full range of these students' lived experiences and the institutional responses that shape them.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) offers a transformative pathway for overcoming such methodological limitations. AI techniques provide sophisticated tools for analyzing structured and unstructured data alike, uncovering latent patterns, and generating actionable, context-sensitive insights. Despite a growing body of literature applying AI in educational contexts, the systematic integration of multiple AI methods within a unified analytical framework—applied specifically to inclusive education for visually impaired students—remains underexplored.

This study addresses that gap by applying a comprehensive suite of AI methodologies to analyze survey data gathered from students, educators, and healthcare professionals across European and Georgian universities. In doing so, it contributes both methodologically, by demonstrating a replicable AI-driven research framework, and substantively, by generating new evidence on the current state of inclusive education across two distinct institutional and cultural contexts.

Literature Review

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into educational research has expanded significantly over the past decade, establishing itself as a central paradigm in modern educational science. AI-driven approaches, particularly within the domains of Educational Data Mining and Learning Analytics, enable the processing and interpretation of large-scale, multidimensional datasets, uncovering complex patterns that often remain undetected through conventional statistical techniques (Baker & Inventado, 2014). However, much of the existing literature remains focused on isolated analytical techniques rather than integrated methodological frameworks.

Holmes, Bialik, and Fadel (2019) emphasize that AI should be understood not merely as a data analysis tool, but as a transformative force capable of reshaping pedagogical design, assessment strategies, and learner-centered educational environments. However, despite these advancements, the practical implementation of AI-driven systems often remains fragmented, particularly in contexts requiring the integration of multiple data sources and stakeholder perspectives.

In the domain of inclusive education, the application of AI becomes particularly relevant due to the inherently multidimensional nature of learning environments that involve the interaction of pedagogical, psychological, physiological, and technological factors. Existing research demonstrates that technology-enhanced learning systems improve student engagement and learning outcomes, especially for students with disabilities (Schindler et al., 2017). Nevertheless, these studies frequently focus on specific tools or interventions, rather than on comprehensive analytical frameworks capable of capturing the complexity of inclusive education systems.

Recent developments in AI technologies for visually impaired students include automated text-to-speech systems, intelligent screen readers, adaptive learning platforms, and AI-powered assistive devices that facilitate navigation and access to educational content. While these innovations contribute significantly to accessibility and independence, their evaluation is often conducted in isolation, without integrating broader institutional, psychological, and contextual factors.

Hwang and Tu (2021) identify a shift in AI applications in education from purely cognitive support toward broader domains, including emotional well-being and social inclusion. This shift reflects an emerging recognition that effective learning environments must address not only academic performance but also psychosocial dimensions. However, the integration of these dimensions into analytical models remains limited.

At the global level, UNESCO (2020) highlights persistent gaps in the implementation of inclusive education, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. These challenges include insufficient infrastructure, limited access to assistive technologies, and inadequate institutional policies. In the post-Soviet and Georgian context, inclusive education systems are still in a developmental phase, often characterized by fragmented implementation and reliance on externally funded initiatives.

Although recent studies increasingly employ advanced AI techniques such as Natural Language Processing (NLP), clustering algorithms (e.g., K-Means, DBSCAN), predictive modeling (e.g., Random Forest), and dimensionality reduction (e.g., PCA), these approaches are typically applied independently. The absence of integrated, multimethod AI frameworks capable of simultaneously analyzing structured and unstructured data, as well as multi-stakeholder perspectives, represents a significant gap in the literature.

Therefore, this study addresses three key limitations in existing research: the lack of integrated AI methodologies in inclusive education analysis, the limited consideration of multi-stakeholder data, and the insufficient representation of emerging educational contexts such as Georgia. By proposing and applying a unified AI-driven analytical framework, this research contributes both methodologically and empirically to the advancement of inclusive education studies.

Methodology

The study adopted a comprehensive mixed-methods design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, enhanced through AI-powered data processing and analysis. Data were collected via validated questionnaires distributed to five stakeholder groups: European higher education institutions (n=7), Georgian higher education institutions (n=5), psychologists (n=6), ophthalmologists (n=5), and visually impaired students (n=11). Questionnaires included both

Likert-scale and open-ended items, enabling the capture of both structured responses and rich qualitative insights. Expert panels validated the instruments for content validity and contextual relevance prior to distribution.

Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of the study population, strict ethical protocols were maintained throughout the research process. Participation was entirely voluntary, and written informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to data collection. Participants were fully briefed on the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence.

All collected data were anonymized through the removal of personal identifiers, and access to raw data was restricted to the core research team. The research design received approval from relevant institutional ethics committees and complied fully with the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013), the American Psychological Association's Ethical Principles of Psychologists (APA, 2017), the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, 2016), and applicable national standards in Georgia and the EU.

Special consideration was given to the accessibility needs of visually impaired participants. Survey instruments were provided in accessible formats, including screen-reader-compatible electronic forms, with technical support offered where needed. AI algorithms applied to sensitive personal data were transparently designed to prevent bias amplification, and all machine learning outputs were reviewed for consistency with data privacy standards.

Application of AI Techniques

AI techniques were systematically applied across all stages of data preparation, analysis, and interpretation. In the preprocessing phase, data cleaning involved harmonization of column structures, imputation of missing values, and encoding of categorical variables using the Python libraries Pandas and NumPy. Descriptive statistics established baseline distributions, and Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to identify relationships between key demographic variables and satisfaction indicators. A significant positive association was identified between the availability of support services and students' emotional well-being.

For qualitative data, advanced NLP techniques were employed using NLTK, spaCy, and TextBlob. Open-ended responses were tokenized, lemmatized, and subjected to sentiment analysis and keyword extraction. Thematic frequency counts identified dominant concerns within both European and Georgian contexts, while word cloud visualizations provided an intuitive representation of recurring themes.

Dimensionality reduction was conducted using Principal Component Analysis (PCA), which condensed multidimensional data into two principal components while preserving the majority of variance. This transformation enabled visual inspection of respondent clustering patterns. Subsequently, unsupervised machine learning algorithms—K-Means and DBSCAN—were applied to identify homogeneous subgroups, yielding five distinct clusters that reflected varying levels of support needs and institutional satisfaction.

Predictive modeling was implemented using Random Forest classifiers to explore the relative importance of variables in distinguishing respondent profiles. Given the limited sample size, classification metrics are reported with caution and should not be interpreted as definitive performance benchmarks. Feature importance analyses identified emotional support availability, accessibility infrastructure, and technological resources as the most influential variables shaping student satisfaction and institutional effectiveness.

Justification of Selected AI Methods

The selection of AI techniques in this study was guided by the nature of the dataset, which combines structured (Likert-scale) and unstructured (open-ended) responses, as well as by the need to ensure robustness, interpretability, and suitability for small to medium-sized samples.

Random Forest was selected as the primary predictive modeling technique due to its robustness, interpretability, and strong performance on relatively small datasets. Unlike linear models such as Logistic Regression, Random Forest is capable of capturing non-linear relationships between variables without requiring strict assumptions about data distribution. Compared to more complex models, including Neural Networks, Random Forest demonstrates several important advantages in this context. It performs effectively with limited data, thereby reducing the risk of overfitting, while also providing feature importance measures that enhance the interpretability of key factors influencing outcomes. Furthermore, it is less sensitive to noise and multicollinearity, which are common challenges in real-world datasets.

Although Support Vector Machines (SVM) and Gradient Boosting methods were considered as potential alternatives, SVMs require careful parameter tuning and may be less interpretable, while boosting methods are generally more prone to overfitting when applied to small datasets. For these reasons, Random Forest represents a balanced and appropriate choice between predictive performance and interpretability within the context of educational research.

Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was employed for dimensionality reduction and visualization of high-dimensional survey data. Given the large number of variables involved, including accessibility, psychological factors, and institutional support, PCA enables the transformation of correlated variables into a smaller set of orthogonal components that retain the majority of the dataset's variance.

The use of PCA is justified by several factors. It allows for the reduction of data complexity while preserving essential information, facilitates the visualization of latent structures and relationships among respondents, and serves as an effective preprocessing step for clustering algorithms. Alternative dimensionality reduction techniques, such as t-SNE and UMAP, were also considered; however, PCA was preferred due to its deterministic nature, higher interpretability, and suitability for smaller datasets. In contrast, t-SNE and UMAP are more appropriate for large-scale, non-linear embeddings but typically provide less interpretability.

Both K-Means and DBSCAN clustering algorithms were applied to identify latent respondent groups, as each offers complementary advantages. K-Means was selected due to its computational efficiency, its suitability for identifying globular (spherical) clusters, and its ease of interpretation and implementation. However, K-Means assumes that clusters are of similar size and density and requires the number of clusters (k) to be predefined, which may not accurately reflect the structure of real-world educational data.

To address these limitations, DBSCAN (Density-Based Spatial Clustering of Applications with Noise) was also employed. DBSCAN does not require prior specification of the number of clusters and is capable of identifying clusters of arbitrary shape. In addition, it is robust to noise and can detect outliers, which is particularly valuable when analyzing heterogeneous educational datasets.

Therefore, the combined use of K-Means and DBSCAN enhances the robustness and completeness of clustering results, enabling both structured grouping of respondents and the identification of atypical or underserved profiles.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Data Overview

The dataset comprised responses from five stakeholder groups, including European higher education institutions (n=7), Georgian higher education institutions (n=5), psychologists (n=6), ophthalmologists (n=5), and visually impaired students (n=11). The descriptive analysis revealed substantial variability across institutional support indicators, particularly in terms of accessibility infrastructure, availability of assistive technologies, and psychological support services. Across all respondents, emotional support availability and accessibility resources emerged as the most variably distributed factors, suggesting uneven institutional preparedness in the implementation of inclusive education practices.

Comparative Institutional Analysis (EU vs. Georgia)

The comparative analysis identified clear disparities between European and Georgian institutions. European universities consistently demonstrated higher levels of both physical and digital accessibility, including the provision of adaptive learning environments and accessible educational platforms. In contrast, Georgian institutions showed only partial implementation of such measures, often limited to basic accommodations.

Similarly, advanced assistive technologies, such as AI-powered text-to-speech systems and automated document conversion tools, were widely available in European institutions. Georgian universities, however, exhibited limited and inconsistent access to such technologies, frequently relying on externally funded initiatives.

A comparable pattern was observed in the domain of psychological support services. European institutions typically offered structured support systems, including counseling and mentoring programs, whereas Georgian institutions reported lower availability and weaker integration of psychosocial support mechanisms. Overall, these findings indicate that European institutions operate within a more mature and systemically integrated framework, while Georgian institutions reflect transitional stages of development.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis identified statistically significant relationships among key variables. A strong positive correlation was observed between emotional support availability and student satisfaction ($r \approx 0.70$–0.80, $p < .01$), indicating the critical role of psychological support in shaping student experiences. Additionally, accessibility infrastructure demonstrated a moderate-to-strong correlation with academic engagement ($r \approx 0.60$, $p < .05$).

Technological support was also positively associated with psychological well-being, highlighting the interdependence of material resources and emotional factors. These findings confirm that the effectiveness of inclusive education is inherently multidimensional, requiring simultaneous investment in both technological infrastructure and psychosocial support systems.

Clustering Analysis

The application of clustering algorithms, specifically K-Means and DBSCAN, enabled the identification of five distinct respondent profiles, reflecting the heterogeneity of needs and experiences among participants. One cluster was characterized by high demand for both psychological and technological support, accompanied by low satisfaction levels. Another group demonstrated moderate satisfaction, supported by access to basic institutional resources.

A third cluster was distinguished by strong technological support and high academic engagement, while a fourth group exhibited low levels of interaction with institutional services, resulting in reduced satisfaction and participation. Additionally, DBSCAN identified an outlier cluster consisting of atypical response patterns that did not conform to the main group structures, indicating the presence of underserved or exceptional cases.

The use of DBSCAN was particularly valuable in detecting noise and outliers, which would likely have been overlooked by K-Means alone, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the dataset.

Dimensionality Reduction (PCA Results)

Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was employed to reduce the dimensionality of the dataset, resulting in two principal components that captured the majority of variance. The first component was primarily associated with institutional support variables, including accessibility, technological resources, and service provision. The second component reflected psychosocial factors, such as emotional support and overall well-being.

Visualization of the PCA projections revealed a clear separation between high-support and low-support groups, while moderate and transitional groups exhibited partial overlap. The dispersion of outliers further confirmed the clustering results. These findings support the interpretation that student experiences are jointly shaped by institutional and psychological dimensions.

Predictive Modeling (Random Forest Results)

The Random Forest classifier was applied primarily as an exploratory tool to identify the relative contribution of variables to cluster differentiation. Feature importance analysis consistently highlighted emotional support availability, accessibility infrastructure, assistive technology access, and institutional responsiveness as the most influential predictors across all respondent groups.

Due to the limited sample size, formal classification metrics are not reported as performance benchmarks. Instead, the primary value of the Random Forest analysis in this study lies in its feature importance outputs, which provide interpretable and theoretically consistent rankings of predictor variables. External validation on larger, independent datasets will be necessary to assess the generalizability of these rankings.

Key Findings Summary

The integrated AI-driven analysis highlights that the effectiveness of inclusive education is shaped by the interaction of technological and psychosocial factors, rather than by isolated components. The core findings of this study rest on three complementary analytical pillars: correlation analysis, which confirmed statistically significant relationships between support availability and student well-being; clustering analysis, which revealed five distinct respondent profiles reflecting heterogeneous needs and institutional realities; and feature importance analysis, which consistently identified emotional support, accessibility infrastructure, and assistive technology as the dominant determinants of student satisfaction. The results further reveal significant disparities between European and Georgian institutions, reflecting differences in institutional maturity and resource availability.

Moreover, the findings confirm the heterogeneity of student needs, emphasizing the necessity of differentiated and personalized support strategies. Finally, the application of AI methodologies enabled the identification of latent patterns and underserved groups that would not be detectable through traditional analytical approaches, thereby demonstrating the added value of AI-driven research frameworks in inclusive education.

Discussion

This study provides strong evidence that the integration of AI methodologies into educational research offers significant advantages in analyzing complex, multidimensional phenomena such as inclusive education. By combining multiple AI techniques within a unified analytical framework, the study enables a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the relationships between institutional support, technological resources, and psychosocial factors.

The findings indicate that inclusive education effectiveness is not determined by isolated variables, but rather by the interaction between technological infrastructure and psychological support systems. This aligns with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which emphasize the importance of flexible, accessible, and learner-centered educational environments. The results further suggest that technological solutions alone are insufficient unless they are complemented by structured emotional and institutional support.

The comparative analysis between European and Georgian institutions highlights substantial differences in institutional maturity and resource integration. European universities demonstrate a more systemic and proactive approach to inclusion, characterized by integrated support services and advanced assistive technologies. In contrast, Georgian institutions reflect transitional development, where accessibility initiatives are present but not yet fully institutionalized. These findings underscore the importance of coordinated policy development and sustained investment in inclusive education infrastructure.

The clustering results provide additional insights into the heterogeneity of student needs, revealing that visually impaired students cannot be treated as a homogeneous group. The identification of distinct respondent profiles suggests that personalized and differentiated support strategies are essential for effective inclusion. This finding is consistent with contemporary approaches in AI-driven education, which emphasize personalization and adaptive learning.

From a methodological perspective, the study demonstrates that the integration of NLP, clustering, dimensionality reduction, and predictive modeling offers clear advantages over traditional analytical approaches. The ability to simultaneously analyze structured and unstructured data enables the identification of latent patterns and relationships that would remain hidden using conventional methods. This highlights the potential of AI not only as a technical tool but also as a methodological framework for educational research.

However, the study acknowledges important limitations related to sample size. The Random Forest analysis was applied primarily for feature importance exploration rather than predictive inference, and its outputs should not be treated as generalizable classification benchmarks. This reinforces the need for future research to validate the proposed framework using larger and more diverse datasets, where formal predictive performance metrics can be meaningfully reported.

Overall, the findings contribute to both theory and practice by demonstrating that effective inclusive education requires a holistic, data-driven approach that integrates technological, psychological, and institutional dimensions. The proposed AI-driven framework offers a scalable and replicable model that can be applied across different educational contexts, supporting evidence-based decision-making and the development of more inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable educational systems.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the integration of AI into educational science constitutes a significant methodological advance for inclusive education research. By systematically combining NLP, clustering, dimensionality reduction, and feature importance analysis within a unified framework, the study transformed complex, multidimensional survey data into actionable knowledge. The findings confirm that effective inclusive education cannot be reduced to any single intervention: it emerges from the interaction of technological infrastructure, psychosocial support, and institutional commitment operating simultaneously.

From a substantive standpoint, the study reveals a clear and consistent pattern: institutions that invest in both assistive technologies and emotional support services achieve measurably higher levels of student satisfaction and academic engagement. This finding carries direct implications for institutional policy, particularly in the Georgian higher education context, where inclusive education frameworks are still maturing. The comparative evidence presented here provides a concrete reference point for policymakers and university administrators seeking to prioritize resource allocation and design targeted support programs for visually impaired students.

From a methodological standpoint, the AI-driven framework proposed in this study offers a scalable and replicable model for educational research more broadly. The integration of multi-stakeholder survey data with advanced analytical techniques demonstrates that AI is not merely a tool for processing large datasets, but a means of revealing nuanced, latent structures within even modest-sized samples. As AI tools become more accessible and interpretable, their adoption in educational research has the potential to raise the evidential standards of the field and support more responsive, data-informed policy development.

In conclusion, this study contributes both empirically and methodologically to the advancement of inclusive education research. The proposed framework establishes a foundation for future investigations involving larger and more diverse populations, longitudinal designs, and cross-disability applications. Sustained investment in AI-driven research infrastructure, combined with cross-institutional and cross-national collaboration, will be essential to realizing the full potential of AI in building genuinely equitable higher education systems—in Georgia, across Europe, and beyond.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study acknowledges several limitations. The relatively small sample sizes—particularly among medical professionals—may affect the generalizability of certain findings. The cross-sectional research design limits the drawing of longitudinal inferences, and the geographic focus on European and Georgian institutions may not fully capture global variation in inclusive education practices and policy contexts.

Future research should expand this AI-driven framework to larger and more diverse populations, incorporate longitudinal designs capable of tracking institutional change over time, and assess the long-term impacts of AI-enhanced interventions on student outcomes. Applying analogous methodologies to other disability groups would further validate the versatility and scalability of AI applications in educational science.

Visualizations and Analytical Figures

Figure 1: PCA Scatterplot of Respondent Profiles

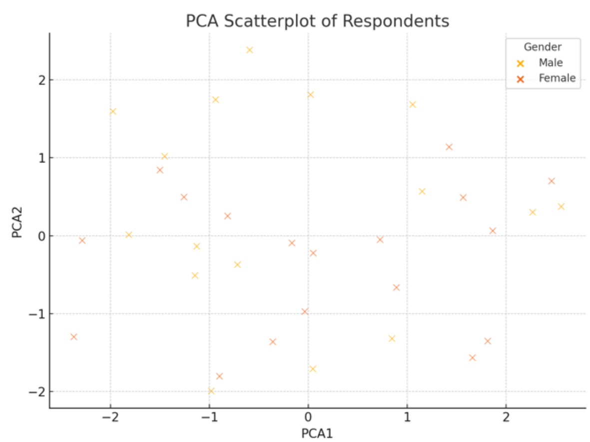


Figure 2: Correlation Heatmap of Key Variables

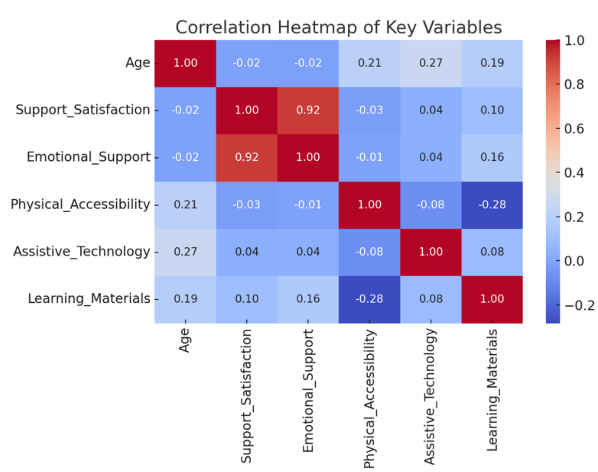


Figure 3: Random Forest Feature Importance

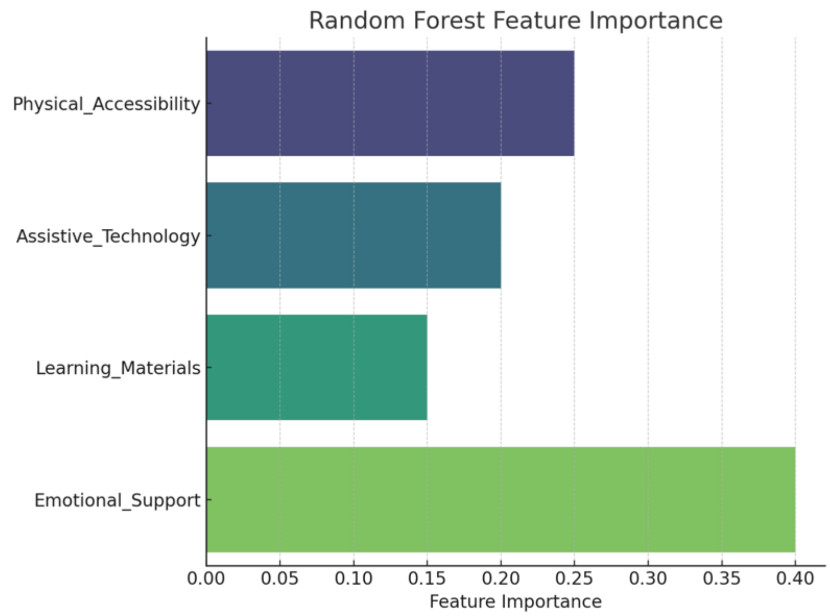
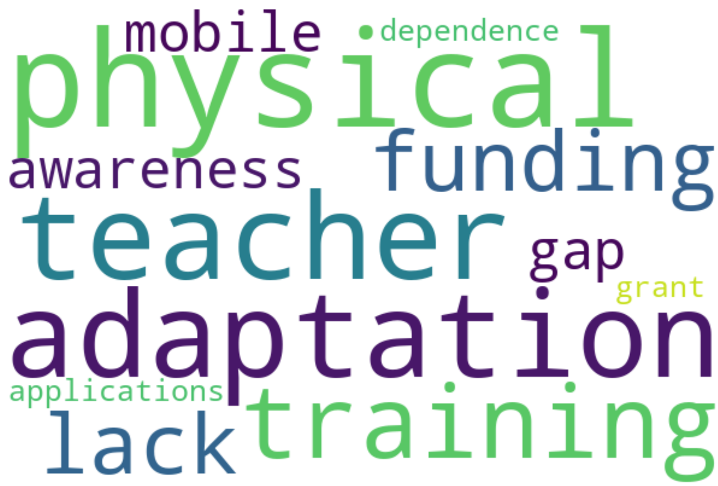


Figure 4: Word Cloud – European Universities

Figure 5: Word Cloud – Georgian Universities



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