Importance of Green Analytical Chemistry in UV-Visible Spectrophotometric Methods: Solvent Systems, Greenness Metrics, and Sustainable Perspectives

Sarif Niroush Konari, Khaleel P, Muhammed Ajmal V C, Rifa Sherin M T, Shani Nasri,

Shijas Rahman N.

Department of pharmaceutical chemistry, JDT Islam College of Pharmacy, Jamiath Hill, Vellimadukunnu, Kozhikode -673012, Kerala, India.

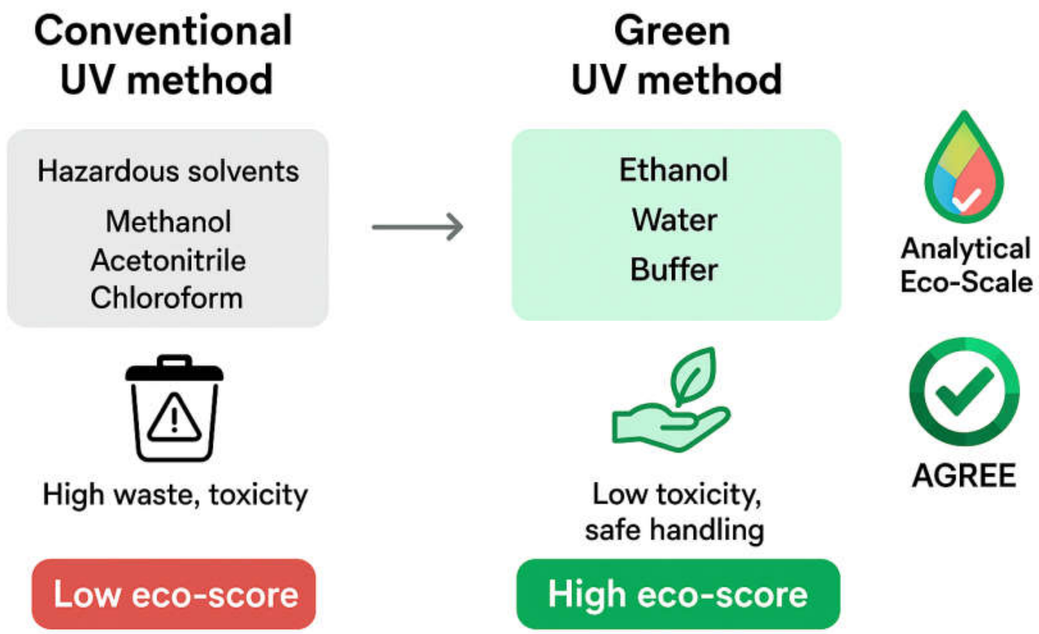
Abstract

Green Analytical Chemistry (GAC) is an essential strategy to reduce the environmental effects of analytical procedures without compromising accuracy, sensitivity, and reproducibility. Among numerous analytical methods, UV-Visible spectrophotometry is among the most used techniques based on ease of use, affordability, and quick analysis. Yet, selection of the solvent system profoundly affects analytical performance as well as the environmental legacy. This review emphasizes the significance of GAC principles in UV analytical method development, focusing on solvent choice, greenness evaluation tools like Analytical Eco-Scale, AGREE metrics, and NEMI pictograms, and their bearing on sustainable laboratory practices. The benefits of using greener solvents like ethanol and water instead of traditional toxic solvents like methanol and acetonitrile are thoroughly explored. Case studies in pharmaceutical, food, and environmental industries depict the shift towards conventional to green UV techniques. The review concludes that the incorporation of GAC into UV techniques not only decreases ecological risks but also enhances regulatory compliance, industrial acceptance, and cost-effectiveness in daily analysis.

Keywords

Green Analytical Chemistry; UV spectrophotometry; solvent systems; eco-scale; sustainability; analytical method development; chemometrics

Fig 1: Graphical Abstract



Introduction [1-20]

The need for green practice in pharmaceutical, food, and environmental analysis has propelled the implementation of Green Analytical Chemistry (GAC) principles. Traditional analytical chemistry has done much to serve science but at the expense of wasteful consumption of toxic solvents, the generation of hazardous waste, and energy-consuming protocols. The regulatory agencies like ICH, EMA, and USP place ever more importance on greener, safer, and less costly approaches. UV-Visible spectrophotometry with its own strengths of simplicity and affordability is a perfect means of embracing green principles, as long as judicious solvent and methodological selections are exercised.

Principles of Green Analytical Chemistry

The 12 GAC principles, based on Green Chemistry, are rules for the design of environmentally benign analytical techniques. Among them are waste reduction, safer solvents and reagents, reduced sample preparation, energy conservation, automation, and monitoring in real time. Their applicability to UV analysis is in the following areas:

- Solvent replacement with less toxic alternatives (ethanol, water)
- Micro-volume cuvettes to minimize solvent use
- Utilization of chemometrics to prevent unnecessary chemical derivatization
- Utilization of software-based instruments (e.g., AGREE metric) to ensure compliance.

Principles of UV-Visible Spectrophotometry

UV-Visible spectrophotometry is the measurement of absorbance of light in the range 200–800 nm by analytes in solution. It is crucial for proper analysis that an appropriate solvent should be chosen, as solvent cut-off wavelengths, refractive index, and polarity can influence spectra. Methanol (cut-off ~205 nm) and acetonitrile (cut-off ~190 nm) are both widely used but pose health risks. Ethanol (cut-off ~210 nm) presents a cleaner, safer, yet equally effective option. Water, the most environmentally friendly solvent, is an option where solubility allows. Table 1 outlines common solvents utilized in UV spectroscopy.

Solvent Systems and Environmental Impact

Solvent systems define solubility, stability, and reproducibility of analyte spectra. Traditional solvents such as methanol, acetonitrile, and chloroform present critical risks in terms of toxicity and disposal. Ethanol and water are viable options, with ethanol finding a compromise between solubility and eco-friendliness. New green solvents like glycerol, ionic liquids, and deep eutectic solvents are also being explored. Their high viscosity or spectral interferences, however, could restrict UV applications. Substitution of methanol by ethanol in pharmaceutical UV assays has been successfully reported in case studies.

Analytical Greenness Assessment Tools [21-35]

Greenness evaluation tools are:

- Analytical Eco-Scale: Scoring system (0–100) where >75 is green. Hazardous solvents and energy consumption incur penalty points.

- AGREE Metric: Offers a clock-like diagram visualizing compliance with all 12 GAC principles.

- NEMI Pictograms: Qualitative figure indicating waste generation, persistence, and safety issues. Illustrative example: A UV assay for paracetamol in methanol has a score of 76 on Eco-Scale, but in ethanol it receives a score of 88.

Table 1: Solvent Systems and Eco-Scale Scores

Solvent	UV Cut-off (nm)	Toxicity	Eco-Scale Penalty	Score
Water	190	None	0	100
Ethanol	210	Low	12	88
Methanol	205	Moderate	24	76
Acetonitrile	190	High	36	64
Chloroform	245	Very High	60	40

Applications of Green UV Techniques in Various Industries [36-40]

Pharmaceuticals: Green UV spectrophotometry is increasingly being adopted by the pharmaceutical industry, particularly for quality control (QC) and routine assay procedures. Methanol and acetonitrile have been conventionally used for drug analysis owing to their solubilizing ability. Their toxicity, flammability, and waste disposal issues have prompted the move towards greener alternatives like ethanol and water. Ethanol, with its high polarity and lower UV cut-off, has been utilized successfully in the estimation of commonly used drugs like paracetamol, ibuprofen, and diclofenac. Further, regulatory agencies are promoting approaches that minimize the use of hazardous solvents, which has prompted the pharmaceutical laboratories to validate UV techniques in ethanol for drug assay, dissolution testing, and stability studies. This shift not only enhances environmental safety but also allows for harmonization with the concepts of Quality by Design (QbD) and regulatory sustainability policies. Food and Beverages:

The food sector increasingly adopts UV spectrophotometry for authenticity, adulteration analysis, and determination of additives. Green UV methods have been reliably proven for the determination of artificial sweeteners (e.g., saccharin, aspartame, sucralose) and natural pigments like curcumin, anthocyanins, and carotenoids. Employing ethanol and water as solvents improves safety during food matrix handling and maintains regulatory demands of food safety levels. For example, curcumin has high UV absorbance in ethanol, which is convenient for fast quantification in turmeric functional foods. Likewise, green UV techniques have been used to quantify benzoates and sorbates in drinks with no need for toxic solvents. The use of greener solvents not only saves the analyst but also ensures consumer safety and market integrity. Environmental Monitoring:

UV spectrophotometry has been a long-standing tool in environmental chemistry for the analysis of inorganic pollutants, organic pollutants, and heavy metals. Green modifications include substituting organic solvents with aqueous systems for nitrates, phosphates, and chromium (VI) monitoring in water samples. Direct analysis of such pollutants in water by UV sidesteps the need for extraction solvents, following green sample preparation philosophy. In addition, UV techniques combined with chemometrics have found their way into monitoring rising contaminants such as microplastics and endocrine-disrupting substances in environmental waters. Such green modifications minimize the solvent-intensive treatment and uphold the ISO 14000 environmental standard.

Benefits of Applying GAC to UV Methods [41-59]

Adoption of Green Analytical Chemistry in UV spectrophotometry has several technical, economic, and social benefits: Lower Environmental Impact: Less solvent usage and avoidance of toxic organic solvents lower carbon emissions, reduce the ecological footprint, and make it easy to manage wastes. Enhanced Laboratory Safety: By substituting poisonous solvents like methanol, acetonitrile, and chloroform with greener alternatives like ethanol and water, laboratories ensure safer working conditions and minimize risks to analysts' health. Regulatory Compliance: Green practices have harmonic convergence with international efforts like ICH Q3C (Guidelines for Residual Solvents), European Medicines Agency (EMA) sustainability guidelines, and ISO 14001 environmental management system. Economic Benefits: Green practices minimize the cost of solvents, decrease energy usage (through the absence of solvent distillation and disposal), and minimize waste treatment costs. Alignment with SDGs: In particular, greener UV approaches help achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) including SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

Improved Public and Industrial Image: Organizations and research centres implementing greener practices are seen to be socially responsible, enhancing credibility among stakeholders, regulatory authorities, and the public at large.

Challenges and Limitations:

Although their advantages are apparent, green UV spectrophotometric approaches have some challenges:

- Solubility Restrictions: Numerous APIs and food analytes are poorly soluble in water or ethanol and require the use of a co-solvent or complex sample-preparation procedures.
- Spectral Interference: Overlapping absorbance bands stemming from dissolved organic material or pH-dependent ionization of analytes are often introduced by aqueous solvents, lowering method selectivity.
- Limited Universal Metrics: Although tools such as Analytical Eco-Scale, NEMI, and AGREE exist, there is no agreed-upon green metric, thus comparisons among methods are not consistent.
- Industrial Resistance: Pharmaceutical and food sectors are likely to resist shifts since revalidation is very costly, regulatory acceptance is a concern, and they fear compromising method robustness.
- UV Cut-off Limitations of Green Solvents: Ethanol and water possess higher UV cut-offs than acetonitrile, limiting their use for analytes that absorb in the deep-UV range (<200 nm).
- Need for Training and Awareness: Most laboratories do not receive adequate training in the use of green metrics and solvent-selection tools, which slows the transition to greener alternatives.
- Future Perspectives: The future of Green UV spectrophotometry is bright, with several developing trends likely to reshape analytical practice:
- Lab-on-a-Chip Devices and Miniaturization: Portable UV-based sensors and microfluidic platforms enable analysis with microliter quantities, minimizing solvent and sample consumption.
- AI-Supported Solvent Selection: Artificial intelligence and machine learning codes are being investigated to precalculate ideal green solvents for analytes from physicochemical characteristics and spectral profiles.
- Greenness Evaluation Automation: Laboratory information management systems (LIMS)-based software tools can automatically compare analytical methods with green metrics like AGREE in real-time during method development.

- Coordination with Chemometric Tools: Multivariate calibration strategies will facilitate overcoming spectral overlaps in aqueous systems and make green solvents more relevant to complex matrices.
- New Solvents: New green solvents, such as deep eutectic solvents (DESs) and ionic liquids, are being researched. DESs are especially promising with their low toxicity, biodegradability, and ability to modify solvent properties. But their UV cut-offs and matrix effects compatibilities should be further tested.
- Policy and Incentive Frameworks: Regulatory bodies can implement incentives, tax credits, or expedited approval for more environmentally friendly analytical techniques, pushing their wide-scale adoption in various industries.
- Sustainability-Driven Research Culture: Industrial and academic partnerships will keep on developing green UV approaches, thereby resulting in greater peer-reviewed journal, pharmacopeia, and worldwide guideline acceptance.

Conclusion

The implementation of Green Analytical Chemistry (GAC) principles within UV spectrophotometry is not just possible but also imperative for obtaining sustainability in contemporary analytical science. Traditional UV techniques have previously depended on organic solvents like methanol, acetonitrile, and chloroform, which work well but are highly toxic, environmentally taxing, and expensive to dispose of. A practical and effective move towards greener reagents like ethanol, water, and environmentally friendly buffers offers a functional and effective compromise that meets analytical trustworthiness with ecological stewardship.

Ethanol, for instance, provides a great balance between green credentials and solvent power, and water is still the most benign of solvents with incredibly high safety and accessibility. Aside from their inherent merits, such green solvents also rank well on standard greenness evaluation tools like the Analytical Eco-Scale and AGREE metric, further reinforcing their applicability to sustainable UV analysis. Significantly, embracing such practices puts laboratories in line with international sustainability frameworks, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and transforming regulatory incentives for more environmentally friendly analytical practices.

The advantages of green UV procedures go beyond environmental benefits. By minimizing solvent dangers, laboratories provide analysts with safer working conditions, reduce the costs associated with the treatment of chemical waste, and better comply with safety and environmental regulations. Furthermore, the use of green solvents in analytical procedures promotes public image of research and industry processes, build trust and credibility between academia and industry.

In the future, the growth of green UV techniques will be contingent upon greater awareness among researchers, active encouragement by governing bodies, and ongoing progress with novel solvent systems, chemometric tools, and miniaturized equipment lowering net resource usage. With the adoption of GAC ideals, UV spectrophotometry has the potential to become a paradigm of sustainable analysis—giving accuracy, reproducibility, and regulatory compliance without placing a large ecological burden.

In summary, the incorporation of ethanol, water, and other environmentally friendly solvent systems into UV analytical techniques is not only a technical innovation but also an ethical necessity. Increased awareness, encouragement of adoption, and support for innovation will individually, collectively, move the world towards greener, safer, and more sustainable laboratories.

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