

# **The Universal Design for Learning (UDL): Is it a Local Need or a “Foreign Concept”?**

**By**

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It has been reported in many countries of the global south that the programs and courses are not always accessible to all learners, do not equitably meet their needs and expectations and do not necessarily adapt to their differences and learning styles. Several international studies and reports (World Bank, 2018; UNESCO, 2017) have revealed that, the rigidity of the curricula, the complexity of the learning situations, the uniformity of tasks and the unattractiveness of offered courses, are the main source of several problems from which these countries suffer: a very worrying dropout and repetition rates, unsatisfactory learning outcomes, and forms of exclusion recorded among girls and boys with disabilities.

## **How could the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) be of use in the global south?**

The benefits of a systematic use of the universal concept of learning in education are getting more and more recognized. The countries, which have adopted the UDL, have recorded a marked improvement in the results of its learners and a decrease in inequalities in access to learning. It is through the diversification of educational content, educational objectives, methods and assessments (CAST, 2011), that the UDL offers opportunities to everyone, supports groups of varying levels of knowledge, skills and different learning styles, including those with physical disabilities, sensory impairments, or communication and learning disabilities. By aligning with the principles and strategies of the UDL, the countries of the global south will give each learner the opportunity to access to the required skills for success.

## **How can UDL improve the learning outcomes in these countries?**

The principles and guidelines of UDL suggest a set of strategies aimed at providing alternatives and flexibility for a better accessibility for everyone; overcoming obstacles, finding solutions, offering the necessary simplicity to optimize learning opportunities, and engaging the interest and commitment of everyone to become an actor of their success.

**Flexibility:** The planning of activities must be flexible enough to provide real learning opportunities for all. This flexibility is achieved by employing a great variety of teaching strategies and relevant participatory teaching materials corresponding to each learning need.

**Simplicity:** In order to avoid unnecessary complications and to minimize distractions, learning objectives must be shared, the expectations must be consistent and achievable, and the instructions must be clear and accessible.

**Engagement:** Motivation is a prerequisite for any successful learning. Learning tasks should inspire and attract the interest of the learners by offering multiple means for active

participation and providing various environments to support efforts and promote perseverance.

**Would UDL be a foreign concept to the context of the global south, or simply difficult to implement?**

As such, UDL has much in common with other inclusive pedagogical approaches already existing in these countries; it is situated at the “intersection of pedagogical initiatives” (Tremblay, 2015). Its implementation will not, therefore, be an additional burden or investment, but rather a framework to rethink of the act of teaching and learning, to save energy and effort and to encourage the success of more students.