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Promising Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Models in the MENA Region

BACKGROUND

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn. It aims to address a wide variety of learning needs and abilities, reduce learning barriers or obstacles, and allow students to engage with learning in a way that most benefits them. The framework acknowledges learner variability and promotes the principles of engagement, representation, and action and expression.

PURPOSE

TALEEM completed this study to survey promising models in applying and using UDL in education to support improved learning and education program planning in the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) region.

METHODOLOGY

TALEEM used a combined approach of desk review and key informant interviews to study UDL approaches globally and in the MENA region.

MAIN FINDINGS

Research Question 1: Which promising education models are using UDL in the MENA region?

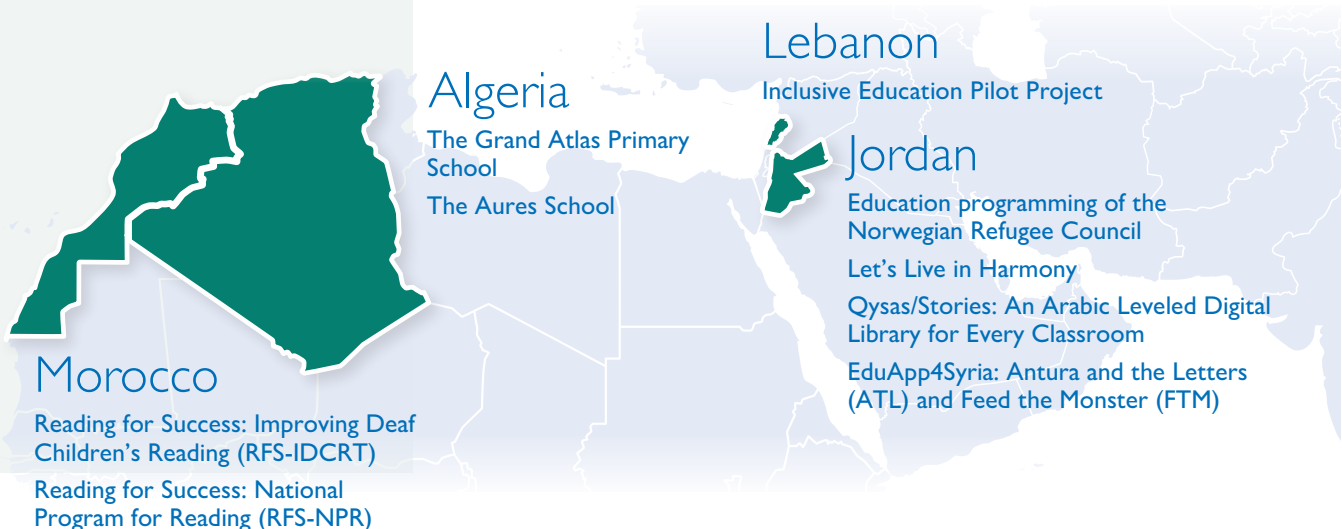
The models reviewed in this study employed the following approaches to provide learners with multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression.

The Grand Atlas Primary School, The Aures School, and the Inclusive Education Pilot Project emphasized **flexible and learner-centered teaching strategies** as part of creating a more inclusive and equitable learning environment for children with and without disabilities.

The Reading for Success–National Program for Reading focused on **curriculum revision** and dynamized literacy instruction for primary school learners, while the education programming of the Norwegian Refugee Council

provided learning support services and catch-up education for refugee children, children with disabilities, and Jordanian and Syrian learners in general.

Some models used **technology** to improve children’s access to literacy learning resources using edtech multimedia materials (Let’s Live in Harmony), digital library (Qysas/Stories: An Arabic Leveled Digital Library for Every Classroom), digital game-based learning (EduApp4Syria), and sign language assistive software (RFS-IDCRT).



There were three promising models that warranted further study:

Algeria: The Aures School. The Aures School is a private K–12 school catering to Algerian and international students between the ages of 5 and 19. The school was established in 2016 to serve as a model for inclusive education in Algeria within the framework of the Algerian national curriculum. A respondent in this study reported that seven percent of its students have disabilities and estimated the figure to be closer to 12 percent, including students with unidentified disabilities in the range of dyslexia and dysgraphia. The school optimizes learning opportunities by **creating an inclusive learning environment; increasing student engagement; adopting flexible, learner-centered teaching strategies; and employing choice-based assessment.**

Jordan: EduApp4Syria. Antura and the Letters (ATL) and Feed the Monster (FTM) are digital game-based learning (DGBL) applications that may be downloaded using smartphones and played offline. The DGBL applications were piloted in the Azraq refugee camp in Jordan in 2017 to improve the Arabic literacy skills and psychosocial well-being of Syrian refugee children and ensure learning continuity through **autonomous learning in a non-formal education setting.** EduApp4Syria provided learning opportunities to Syrian refugee children in a non-formal education setting by **incorporating literacy lessons into digital games and facilitating children’s access and engagement with educational content.**

Morocco: RFS-IDCRT. This approach aimed to improve the reading skills of students in Grades 1–3 who are deaf or hard of hearing by developing Moroccan Sign Language (MSL) Clip and Create, an **assistive technology software that enables teachers to create sign-language-supported educational materials.** The program was implemented from 2015–2018 in 10 schools: nine private education centers catering specifically to students who are deaf or hard of hearing and one public general education school with an integrated classroom. RFS-IDCRT improved learning opportunities for students who are deaf or hard of hearing by **providing access to MSL-supported educational materials, promoting appropriate reading instruction techniques, and designing a reading and sign language assessment tool.**

Research Question 2: What is the evidence base to support these models? What are the conditions for implementation?

The UDL models used a variety of evidence, which included the following three categories:

Classroom-based assessments to measure student engagement and mastery of competencies

Large-scale standard assessments in reading programs, the use of early grade reading assessments

Tracking student sense of well-being combined with report cards

Common factors or conditions that facilitated the delivery and implementation of promising models:

Educator
capacity-building

Integration into
the education
ministry

Stakeholder
engagement

Phased
implementation

Strategic use
of edtech
resources

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UDL PROGRAMMING IN THE MENA REGION

Research Question 3: What uses of UDL in education programming are recommended in the MENA region?



Embed UDL principles in education programming in the MENA region to reduce barriers to learning, improve access to learning opportunities, and improve learning outcomes for all learners.



Consider how technology can increase access to learning materials, improve learner engagement, and increase ways to express or demonstrate learning.



Consider implementing phased interventions that include data collection and pilot testing to inform program design and rollout.



Integrate UDL interventions into the education ministry to ensure relevant programming and increase the potential for impact, sustainability, and scaling.



Build the capacity of school leaders to create an inclusive school climate and model UDL practices.



Establish stakeholder consultation and engagement mechanisms, including government partners, educators, parents, students, academia, private institutions, and civil society organizations, to facilitate sharing insights, expertise, and resources on UDL implementation.



Build the capacity of teachers to meet learners' diverse needs and abilities by moving toward more flexible teaching strategies and away from a rigid, one-size-fits-all approach.



Install a system for monitoring and evaluating UDL models.