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Flexible participation pathways for inclusive multilingual primary classrooms

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Abstract: This article proposes a design framework for flexible participation in inclusive multilingual primary classrooms. It compares five sources: CAST's Universal Design for Learning Guidelines 3.0, UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring report on inclusion, UNESCO's 2023 Global Education Monitoring report on technology in education, Florian and Black-Hawkins' inclusive pedagogy framework, and the Council of Europe's CEFR Companion Volume. Four dimensions were coded: access to content, flexible expression, language participation, and learner agency/belonging. The comparison shows broad support for multiple pathways but less consistent operational connection between accessibility and multilingual interaction. A participation-planning matrix is proposed across input, interaction, response, and assessment, with examples that preserve a shared learning goal while offering different routes to demonstrate understanding. The framework emphasizes that choice must not become a lower expectation track and that accommodations require collaboration with learners and families. Counts represent an author-coded source comparison, not evidence of classroom prevalence or impact. The framework should be tested through co-designed classroom research and monitored for participation, learning, and unintended exclusion.

Keywords: inclusive education; multilingual classrooms; Universal Design for Learning; participation; accessibility; primary education.

Introduction

The present article addresses a question that is central to flexible participation pathways for inclusive multilingual primary classrooms: how can educators move from broad commitments to a defensible, observable design? The problem matters because a concept can be endorsed in policy or scholarship without specifying what a teacher, learner, or analyst should do. This paper therefore brings together a bounded set of influential sources and develops a practical analytic model. Its claim is deliberately limited: it offers a transparent synthesis and a proposition for further testing, not a causal estimate or a report of participant outcomes.

The topic is especially relevant in Uzbekistan, where educational institutions work across changing linguistic, cultural, disciplinary, and technological conditions. A model imported without adaptation may overlook local curriculum, access, institutional policy, and the knowledge communities learners bring. The analysis consequently treats local context as part of the research question. It does not assume a single learner profile or present national generalizations unsupported by data.

The paper has three objectives. First, it identifies how selected sources address the dimensions most relevant to the topic. Second, it reports an explicit cross-source coding matrix so readers can inspect the basis of the synthesis. Third, it translates the pattern into a design sequence, an

implementation matrix, and a set of questions for empirical follow-up. The contribution lies in connecting theory and policy to a replicable decision process.

Three research questions guide the work: (1) which dimensions receive explicit attention in the selected source set; (2) where does the comparison reveal an operational gap or tension; and (3) what design principles can address that gap while preserving the intellectual aims of the field? These questions structure the methods and results below.

Methods and materials

The five-source corpus includes CAST's UDL Guidelines 3.0 (2024), UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring report Inclusion and Education (2020), UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring report Technology in Education (2023), Florian and Black-Hawkins' inclusive pedagogy model (2011), and the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020). The sources represent design guidance, global policy evidence, pedagogy, and multilingual competence. The selection is purposive and does not replace local legal or disability policy requirements.

The comparison used four dimensions: access to content, flexible expression, language participation, and agency/belonging. A dimension was coded explicit when the source provided direct principles or guidance, partial when relevant but not operationalized, and not explicit when absent from the examined sections. Coding was conducted by one analyst. The table records source-level judgments and the figure summarizes explicit plus partial presence; the counts do not represent implementation rates or student outcomes.

Analytic framework and procedure

The unit of analysis was a source-level statement or concept relevant to one of the four dimensions listed in Table 1. Explicit, partial, and not explicit categories were used to prevent absence of a detailed procedure from being mistaken for rejection of a principle. During synthesis, the analyst compared the coded pattern with the intended educational task, noted contradictions, and drafted a design response. Counts are descriptive bookkeeping for this selected corpus. They are not inferential statistics, prevalence estimates, or evidence of effectiveness. A replication should specify exact editions, passages, coder training, and adjudication rules.

Ethical and evidentiary boundaries

No human participants, student records, classroom observations, or unpublished institutional data were collected for this article. The worked examples and proposed tools are illustrative. Citations identify the source base; interpretations and matrices are the author's synthesis. This distinction is necessary because a useful framework can be analytically original without being mislabeled as an intervention result.

Results

Comparative document-analysis results

Table 1 presents the source-level crosswalk. "Explicit" means directly addressed in the examined source; "partial" indicates conceptual relevance without a full operational procedure; "not explicit" means that the dimension was not developed in the passages reviewed. Table values are judgments under the stated codebook, not independent ratings of source quality.

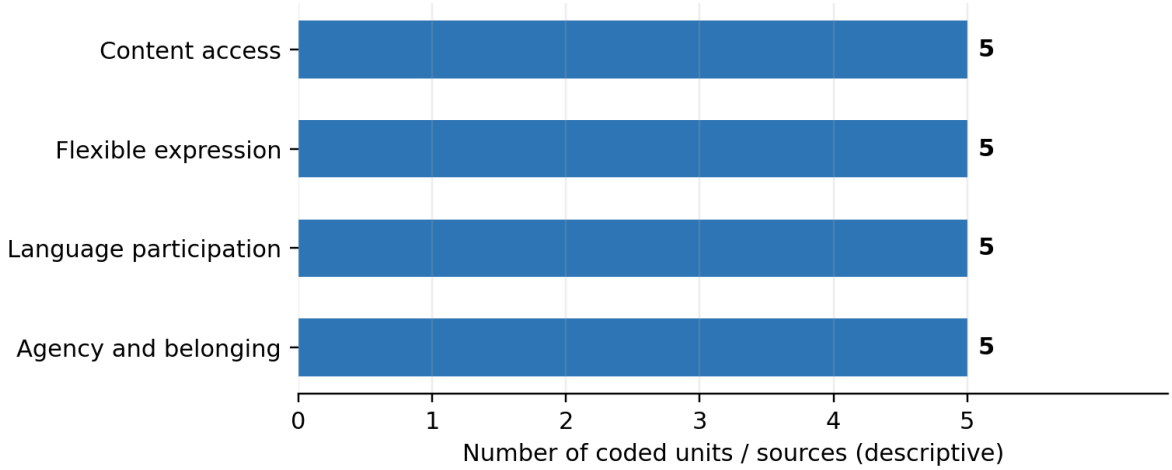
Table 1. Cross-source analytic matrix

Source	*Content access*	*Flexible expression*	*Language participation*	*Agency and belonging*
CAST UDL 3.0	Explicit	Explicit	Partial	Explicit

Source	*Content access*	*Flexible expression*	*Language participation*	*Agency and belonging*
(2024)				
UNESCO Inclusion (2020)	Explicit	Partial	Partial	Explicit
UNESCO Technology (2023)	Explicit	Partial	Partial	Partial
Florian & Black-Hawkins (2011)	Explicit	Explicit	Partial	Explicit
CEFR Companion Volume (2020)	Partial	Explicit	Explicit	Explicit

Across-source counts are content access: 5 of 5; flexible expression: 5 of 5; language participation: 5 of 5; agency and belonging: 5 of 5. The pattern identifies emphasis within the selected documents; it does not measure classroom prevalence or learner benefit.

Figure 1. Descriptive source counts by analytic dimension



Note. Counts are derived from the bounded corpus and codebook described in Materials and Methods; dimensions can co-occur.

Interpretive synthesis

Inclusive participation requires more than physical presence or a single alternative format. A learner may access content through text, speech, demonstration, or visual representation, yet still be excluded from peer exchange if classroom interaction assumes one language or one response speed. Multilingual learners and disabled learners are not homogeneous groups; a support that helps one student may create a barrier for another. Planning should therefore offer meaningful options, obtain learner feedback, and retain a common intellectual purpose.

The source crosswalk found explicit or partial support for access to content in all five sources, flexible expression in five, language participation in five, and agency/belonging in five. Accessibility and multilingual participation appear across the corpus but are not always treated together. This suggests that classroom design can use UDL pathways while deliberately specifying language supports, interaction norms, and ways for learners to contribute without public disclosure of diagnoses or language histories.

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The planning matrix maps four moments. Input options include spoken explanation, concise text, image, object, and vocabulary preview. Interaction options include think time, pairs, small groups, multilingual peer discussion, and teacher conference. Response options include speech, writing, drawing, demonstration, or assistive technology when they assess the same learning goal. Assessment communicates success criteria in accessible language and separates conceptual understanding from language form when these are distinct objectives.

A science lesson on local plant adaptation could use the same question for all pupils: explain how one plant feature supports survival in its environment. Learners may examine a real specimen, image, or tactile model; discuss in a preferred language before preparing an answer; and respond through a labeled drawing, brief oral explanation, or written paragraph. The teacher uses shared criteria for feature–function reasoning and adapts language scoring only if English or Uzbek academic language is itself the target. This is an illustrative design, not observed evidence.

Design model and practical application

Figure 2. Proposed process model



The sequence is a planning aid. Educators should adapt the steps to course aims, participant age, disciplinary norms, local resources, and applicable institutional guidance. It is not a validated instrument and should not replace professional judgment.

Table 2. Operational design and evidence to collect

Stage	Tool or evidence	Analytic purpose
Input	Text, speech, image, object, preview	Access barriers anticipated
Interaction	Wait time, pairs, multilingual talk	Participation routes broadened
Response	Speech, writing, drawing, demonstration	Same learning aim retained
Assessment	Shared criteria plus needed accommodation	Learning and language targets distinguished

Extended analytical implications

Universal design and individualized accommodation are complementary. Designing multiple access routes in advance can reduce predictable barriers for many learners, but some students still need specific tools, additional time, or adjustments developed with specialists. A universal option does not justify withholding an accommodation, and individualized support should not isolate a learner from shared class activity. Teachers need a process for asking learners and families what works, checking whether a strategy helps, and adjusting it without requiring a child to repeatedly disclose a diagnosis.

Language flexibility requires purposeful scaffolding. A student can discuss an idea in a preferred language and still need support to learn key academic terms in the language of assessment. Teachers may provide visuals, bilingual glossaries, model responses, sentence starters, or peer talk before individual output. These supports should be available without implying that

multilingualism is a deficit. If language form is part of the learning target, it should be assessed explicitly; if the target is scientific reasoning, language mechanics should not obscure conceptual understanding.

Participation is a quality of classroom relationships as well as task design. Counting raised hands can miss children who contribute through writing, drawing, assistive technology, or thoughtful peer exchange. A participation audit should ask whose ideas influence the group's conclusion, not only who speaks most often. Teachers should also avoid repeatedly assigning disabled or multilingual pupils to helper or translator roles. Such patterns may appear cooperative while limiting the learner's own access to challenging work.

The same learning goal can be represented in several modes when the mode is not itself the target. For example, a pupil may explain a plant adaptation in a labeled drawing, oral response, or paragraph. If the objective is writing, however, a drawing alone cannot demonstrate the targeted writing skill. Teachers should map each response option to the relevant success criterion and state where formats are equivalent or not equivalent. This alignment maintains rigor and prevents flexible pathways from becoming arbitrary grading.

Technology can expand access through captions, speech-to-text, translation, adjustable text, or communication devices, but it can introduce costs, data exposure, and reliability problems. A tool should be selected because it addresses a documented need and should be tested under actual classroom conditions. Teachers need a non-digital alternative when connectivity or device access is uneven. Student work should not be uploaded to external systems without checking privacy and school policy, and families should receive clear information about the purpose of technology use.

The illustrative plant lesson shows the importance of identifying participation barriers before instruction begins. Tactile materials can support some learners but may be inaccessible without handling adaptations; images can offer detail but may not convey texture. Spoken explanation can clarify a diagram but may overwhelm a learner sensitive to sound. Multiple options work only if the teacher knows how each option functions and checks that it preserves the same conceptual demand. Learner feedback during the activity is therefore part of assessment, not an afterthought.

A classroom audit should be repeated rather than used as a one-time compliance checklist. Teachers can select a small question each week, such as whose responses were included in the group summary, and record one adjustment. Over time, these records may reveal patterns that are invisible in an individual lesson. The audit should be conducted collaboratively with learners and, where appropriate, support staff and families. It should avoid labelling individual children as the source of a barrier that the environment can change.

Future studies should examine both intended benefits and burdens of flexible participation. Researchers might track access to tasks, quality of conceptual responses, student-reported agency, peer interaction, and the additional labor placed on teachers or classmates. A co-design approach can help determine which options students consider meaningful rather than token choices. Studies should report context, languages, disability supports, and the learning objective so that findings can be interpreted and adapted responsibly.

Discussion

Flexible pathways should not become a permanent sorting system in which some learners receive less complex work. Options need to be available without stigma and revisited as needs change. Peer collaboration can support belonging but should not make one child a permanent translator or helper. Teachers should communicate with learners and families about access needs, protect personal information, and coordinate specialist supports. Universal design reduces predictable barriers but does not eliminate the need for individualized accommodations.

A short weekly audit can ask: who spoke, whose ideas shaped the shared product, which response formats were accepted, where language or sensory barriers appeared, and what adjustment

is planned next. Teachers should document the learning goal, the options offered, learner feedback, and any individual accommodation needed. School leaders can support co-planning time, accessible materials, interpretation for family communication, and access to assistive tools. Technology should be selected for pedagogical need and evaluated for privacy and equity.

Further analytical interpretation

Universal design and individualized accommodation are complementary. Multiple access routes can reduce predictable barriers, but some learners need specific tools, additional time, or adjustments developed with specialists. A universal option does not justify withholding an accommodation, and individualized support should not isolate a learner from shared activity. Teachers should ask learners and families what works and adjust without requiring repeated disclosure of a diagnosis.

Language flexibility requires purposeful scaffolding. Learners can discuss in a preferred language and still need support with academic vocabulary in the assessment language. Teachers may use visuals, glossaries, models, or peer talk. Such support should not frame multilingualism as a deficit. If language form is a target, assess it explicitly; if the goal is scientific reasoning, mechanics should not obscure conceptual understanding.

Participation is relational as well as task-based. Counting raised hands misses contributions through writing, drawing, assistive technology, or peer exchange. A participation audit asks whose ideas influence the group's conclusion. Teachers should avoid repeatedly assigning multilingual or disabled pupils to helper roles, which can look cooperative while limiting access to challenging work.

Technology can expand access through captions, speech-to-text, translation, and adjustable text, but it can also add cost, data exposure, and reliability problems. Select tools for a documented need, test them in classroom conditions, and maintain a non-digital route. Student work should not be uploaded to external systems without checking privacy requirements and school policy.

A classroom audit should be repeated and collaborative. Teachers can ask whose responses shaped the shared product, which options were used, and where barriers appeared, then record one adjustment. Learners, support staff, and families can identify problems adults miss. Future studies should examine learning, agency, peer interaction, and unintended burdens, reporting disability supports and language context.

Table 3. Evidence trace supporting the coding decisions

Source or scene	Evidence anchor	Reason for interpretation	Analytic use
CAST UDL 3.0	Engagement, representation, expression	Supports multiple routes	Access
UNESCO Inclusion	Systemic inclusion barriers	Supports equity perspective	Belonging
UNESCO Technology	Technology and equity conditions	Supports cautious selection	Access/risk
Florian & Black-Hawkins	Inclusive pedagogy	Supports extending ordinary provision	Participation
CEFR Companion Volume	Mediation and plurilingual competence	Supports language interaction	Multilingual access

Reproducibility and operational codebook

Replication should document which sections of the frameworks are compared and what classroom context is assumed. The analysis codes source-level guidance as explicit, partial, or not explicit. It does not score the quality of a specific accommodation or decide legal compliance. Analysts should preserve examples and record whether a source concerns general access, disability-specific supports, multilingual participation, or technology risks, since the concepts overlap but are not interchangeable.

The codebook below distinguishes access, expression, language participation, and agency/belonging. A source may support multiple dimensions. Counts map coverage in the selected corpus; they do not represent implementation, school compliance, or improved outcomes.

Table 4. Operational definitions and boundary cases

Dimension	*Operational rule*	*Boundary / exclusion*
Content access	Source provides ways to perceive or engage with content.	Format variety without relation to barriers is partial.
Flexible expression	Source allows multiple valid response modes.	Options that assess different targets are not equivalent.
Language participation	Source supports multilingual communication or mediation.	Translation labor assigned to one learner is not inclusive.
Agency/belonging	Source supports choice, participation, or membership.	Presence without influence is partial.

Implementation and evaluation considerations

A useful planning meeting can map one learning goal against possible barriers before a lesson begins. Teachers identify the key concept, the language demand, sensory or motor demands, and the response mode that the assessment requires. They then select a small number of options and check who might still be excluded. This procedure is more manageable than creating a separate lesson for every possible need, while leaving room for individualized accommodations and real-time adjustment.

The participation audit should distinguish access to a task from influence over learning. A pupil may complete an assignment yet have no opportunity to shape peer discussion or the shared conclusion. Teachers can observe whether group roles rotate, whether contributions in different modes are acknowledged, and whether a learner can request more time or a quieter response route without stigma. School-level implementation depends on coordination. Classroom teachers, special educators, language-support staff, families, and learners may each know different parts of the access problem. A short shared record can note the learning goal, strategies tried, learner feedback, and next review date while limiting sensitive information to those who need it. Such coordination prevents repeated experimentation from falling on the child and supports consistent practice across subjects.

Limitations and future research

This article synthesizes five sources rather than observing classrooms. The coding is interpretive and single-analyst; local policy and language ecology may change what counts as an accessible pathway. The plant lesson is illustrative and provides no evidence of improved achievement or belonging. Future research should co-design participation audits with disabled and multilingual learners, examine classroom interaction over time, and report both learning outcomes and possible unintended burdens.

Conclusion

Inclusive multilingual classrooms can retain shared learning goals while offering multiple routes to access content, interact, and demonstrate understanding. The comparative analysis

identifies the need to connect general accessibility principles more deliberately with language participation and belonging. The proposed planning matrix supplies a practical starting point, subject to learner consultation, local policy, and empirical evaluation. Its success should be judged by meaningful participation and learning, not by the number of options alone.

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