Reimagining Inclusive Education in Multilingual Contexts

Supporting Linguistic Diversity in English-Medium Instruction via Universal Design for Learning

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Agenda

Focus on the practitioner experience

1

Context

EMI classrooms as multilingual spaces

2

Evidence

Barriers to inclusive EMI, and the near-absence of UDL

3

A design lens

UDL principles and the shift from deficit to design

4

Putting it to work

Practical strategies for incorporating UDL into EMI

EMI classrooms are multilingual spaces

Defining EMI spaces

"the use of English—whether through sole use, partial use, code-switching, or other forms—by both students and content teachers to teach and learn academic subjects (other than English itself) within university settings, regardless of their locale"

Akıncıoğlu (2023, p. 4)

Students learn in a second, third or fourth language, with varied proficiency, disciplinary literacy and experience.

Yet EMI provision often:

- Expects monolingual, English-only EMI (Akıncıoğlu, 2025; Bhatt et al., 2022)
- Frames language support as remediation of individual deficits (Wingate, 2025)

Result: linguistic diversity is not addressed proactively or equitably

What does the evidence say?

A small-scale lit review of 10 sources across 4 world regions: reviews, syntheses, a survey, case studies and a handbook.

Question 1

To what extent are accessibility and inclusivity considered in EMI implementation?

→

Valued in principle, uneven in practice

A consistent gap between values and implementation, rooted in rapid rollout without pedagogical infrastructure.

Question 2

How is UDL used in EMI to promote accessibility and inclusivity?

→

Almost not at all

Only 1 of 10 sources consulted explicitly applies UDL to EMI (Nijakowska et al., 2025).

Four layers of barriers to inclusive EMI

Improving lecturer English alone does not make classrooms more interactive or inclusive (Dang et al., 2021)

Language	Low student and lecturer proficiency; lecturer English an obstacle in **10 of 40** studies Ismailov et al., 2021
Pedagogy	Monologic lecturing (**99%** teacher talk in one course); inflexible materials and assessment Dang et al., 2021; Lasagabaster, 2022
Social and affective	Incidental local-language use excludes international students; anxiety and silence Ismailov et al., 2021; Nijakowska et al., 2025
Institutional and policy	Rapid rollout; lecturer training “very eclectic” across **70** European universities Williams, 2015; O’Dowd, 2018

What is Universal Design for Learning?

Three principles: design multiple means of…



Engagement: the why of learning

Welcoming Interests & Identities · Sustaining Effort & Persistence · Emotional Capacity



Representation: the what of learning

Perception · Language & Symbols · Building Knowledge



Action & Expression: the how of learning

Interaction · Expression & Communication · Strategy Development

Sources: CAST (2024), UDL Guidelines 3.0; CAST (n.d.)

Goal: learner agency that is purposeful & reflective, resourceful & authentic, strategic & action-oriented

Applying UDL to EMI

Nijakowska et al. (2025): 11 architecture students in Poland; interviews mapped to UDL Guidelines 3.0

Representation

- Multimodal slides valued
- Few recordings
- Slides not shared or editable
- Low awareness of assistive tech

Engagement

- Inflexible syllabi
- Mostly teacher-driven
- Polish use alienated international students

Action & Expression

- Predetermined, inflexible assessment
- Inconsistent feedback

Partial, inconsistent application: a gap between students' expectations and what lecturers provided

From language deficit to learning design

UDL is “a framework to guide the design of learning environments that are accessible, inclusive, and challenging for every learner” (CAST, 2024)

Remediation lens

- Problem: the student’s or lecturer’s English
- Response: add-on courses, thresholds
- Diversity as a deficit to fix

Design lens (UDL)

- Problem: how courses are designed
- Response: flexibility from the start
- Diversity as a resource to design for

Learner agency: students make informed choices in service of their learning goals (CAST, 2024)

Putting UDL to work in EMI

Practical Strategies

Pedagogical translanguaging by design

Engagement: welcome repertoires

Map students' languages; co-create a course language-use statement

Representation: multilingual input

Bilingual glossaries; key sources or summaries in shared languages

Action & Expression: multilingual output

Think, discuss and draft in any language; agree which outputs are in English, and why

Pedagogical translanguaging

Planned use of learners' whole repertoire for language and content learning (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021; Hopkyns, 2022; Williams, 2023)

One plurilingual repertoire (Council of Europe, 2020)

Planned, not incidental: Translangauging that excludes is a barrier (Nijakowska et al., 2025)

Representation: Perception

Offer multiple ways to perceive content

Why it matters

Students with uneven skill profiles can use their strongest channel, and adjust to unfamiliar accents.

Multilingual resources

Turn on translated captions where available; share summaries in shared languages.

Captions and transcripts

Live captions in Zoom, Teams or PowerPoint. Tools miss some Englishes.

Text-to-speech

Read Aloud in Microsoft and Google apps, PDF readers and most LMSs.

Share materials early

Editable slides and recordings in advance, to translate, annotate and replay.

Representation: Language & Symbols

Make disciplinary language accessible

Why it matters

Many students meet disciplinary vocabulary and text types for the first time, and may know the content in other languages.

Course glossary

Build a class multilingual glossary: students add key terms in their own languages.

Clarify vocabulary (UDL 2.1)

Glossaries, pre-teaching, visuals and worked examples.

Grade texts

Use the Oxford 3000 Text Checker or Hemingway Editor as a guide, not a rule.

Connect across languages (UDL 2.3)

Ask students to compare key terms and concepts across their languages.

Action & Expression: Expression & Communication

Let students show learning in more than one way

Why it matters

Students show learning in their strongest medium while building fluency and confidence

Plurilingual Process

Plan, discuss and draft in any language; agree which outputs are in English, and why.

Speech recognition

Students dictate drafts in Word or Google Docs.

Choice of format

Written, oral, visual or recorded, where outcomes allow.

Inclusive assessment

Separate content and language criteria, so language does not mask learning.

Engagement: Interests, Identities & Persistence

Design for interaction, not monologue

Why it matters

After language, students most often report “sage on the stage” lecturing as a barrier to learning.

Classroom Language Policy

Co-create a course language-use statement: which languages are welcome, when, and why.

Low-stakes participation

Polls, chat and online whiteboards before whole-class speaking.

Talk in pairs first

Rehearse ideas in any language before sharing in English.

Ask the design question

Does this activity have to be language-intensive to meet the outcome?

Find tools: Free UDL Tech Toolkit

Key takeaways

1. **Inclusion in EMI is a pedagogical design issue,** not only a matter of students' or lecturers' language proficiency
2. **UDL offers a systematic lens and framework,** yet it is almost absent from EMI research and practice.
3. **Design for deliberate pluri-/multilingualism:** planned translanguaging, captions, glossaries, choice and interaction build flexibility for every learner.



Thank you · Merci
Wela’lin

Questions and discussion

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CAST Universal Design for Learning Guidelines

The goal of UDL is **learner agency** that is purposeful & reflective, resourceful & authentic, strategic & action-oriented.

	Design Multiple Means of **Engagement**	Design Multiple Means of **Representation**	Design Multiple Means of **Action & Expression**
Access	Design Options for **Welcoming Interests & Identities** (7) • Optimize choice and autonomy (7.1) • Optimize relevance, value, and authenticity (7.2) • Nurture joy and play (7.3) • Address biases, threats, and distractions (7.4)	Design Options for **Perception** (1) • Support opportunities to customize the display of information (1.1) • Support multiple ways to perceive information (1.2) • Represent a diversity of perspectives and identities in authentic ways (1.3)	Design Options for **Interaction** (4) • Vary and honor the methods for response, navigation, and movement (4.1) • Optimize access to accessible materials and assistive and accessible technologies and tools (4.2)
Support	Design Options for **Sustaining Effort & Persistence** (8) • Clarify the meaning and purpose of goals (8.1) • Optimize challenge and support (8.2) • Foster collaboration, interdependence, and collective learning (8.3) • Foster belonging and community (8.4) • Offer action-oriented feedback (8.5)	Design Options for **Language & Symbols** (2) • Clarify vocabulary, symbols, and language structures (2.1) • Support decoding of text, mathematical notation, and symbols (2.2) • Cultivate understanding and respect across languages and dialects (2.3) • Address biases in the use of language and symbols (2.4) • Illustrate through multiple media (2.5)	Design Options for **Expression & Communication** (5) • Use multiple media for communication (5.1) • Use multiple tools for construction, composition, and creativity (5.2) • Build fluencies with graduated support for practice and performance (5.3) • Address biases related to modes of expression and communication (5.4)
Executive Function	Design Options for **Emotional Capacity** (9) • Recognize expectations, beliefs, and motivations (9.1) • Develop awareness of self and others (9.2) • Promote individual and collective reflection (9.3) • Cultivate empathy and restorative practices (9.4)	Design Options for **Building Knowledge** (3) • Connect prior knowledge to new learning (3.1) • Highlight and explore patterns, critical features, big ideas, and relationships (3.2) • Cultivate multiple ways of knowing and making meaning (3.3) • Maximize transfer and generalization (3.4)	Design Options for **Strategy Development** (6) • Set meaningful goals (6.1) • Anticipate and plan for challenges (6.2) • Organize information and resources (6.3) • Enhance capacity for monitoring progress (6.4) • Challenge exclusionary practices (6.5)

CAST | Until learning has no limits*

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UDL Guidelines Graphic Organizer

Available in multiple languages

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