



## UNICEF EDUCATION

### Education Case Study

## GHANA

### Championing inclusive practices for children with disabilities

31 January 2022

UNICEF was instrumental in the strategic development of [Ghana's Inclusive Education Policy](#) in 2015, which defines the government's path for the education of children with disabilities. One of the policy's pillars, the [Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\)](#), recognises that all children learn differently and benefit from differentiated learning techniques in the classroom. The idea is that—by adjusting materials and ways of communicating as well as paying closer attention to how students respond to curricula—teachers can include and reach a wider range of learners in regular classroom instruction.

Despite these solid policy efforts, children with disabilities remained overlooked because teachers lacked training in inclusive practices. Among primary school children in Ghana not acquiring reading or numeracy skills, [23 per cent](#) have a functional difficulty, signalling that more must be done to accommodate the learning needs of these children. To bridge this gap, UNICEF, the Ghana Education Service (GES) and Inclusive Development Partners (IDP) piloted a programme from 2019-2021 with 15 first grade teachers, headteachers and district-level staff in Ada West and West Gonja Districts.

The goals were to produce formative research on the impact of a UDL approach on teaching and learning, develop instructional models to support educators in applying these strategies to the Ghanaian context, and provide technical guidance for implementation and monitoring in the 2019/2020 school year. Together with IDP, UNICEF provided technical, financial and logistical support to train teachers in performing simple hearing and vision screenings and identifying children with learning difficulties in the classroom. Students who needed further diagnosis were referred to specialists for early intervention services. The project also built-in extra support for teachers through regular classroom observation and monitoring visits, and teachers were trained in using learning assessment to adapt teaching to become more engaging. This included catering to a wider variety of learning styles (visual, auditory/aural, reading/writing, kinesthetic/tactile), with the ultimate goal of improving learning outcomes for all children.

## RESULTS ACHIEVED

- In Ada West and West Gonja Districts, the programme targeted 15 schools with 693 first grade students (305 girls), better preparing educators to implement inclusive education practices in their classrooms.
- UNICEF helped develop and distribute a [UDL teachers' toolkit](#) to the 15 schools.
- UNICEF provided technical, financial and logistical support for two training workshops for over 40 teachers, school administrative staff and district-level education officers, instilling UDL tenets to promote inclusive teaching practices.
- UNICEF contributed to the establishment of a national cadre of trainers, comprising over 200 teachers and lecturers to support further trainings in universities and Colleges of Education across the country.
- UNICEF disseminated the findings from the [formative research](#) at both national and global events, including the [Comparative and International Education Society](#) annual meeting in April 2021, reaching almost 200 development and government partners, teachers and non-governmental organizations, among others.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- **UDL does not require high-cost material resources for effective implementation.** Most UDL strategies required no additional classroom materials, and where materials were present, they were constructed locally using low or no-cost resources such as cardboard or manila paper. This finding dispels the mistaken belief that supporting children with disabilities is too expensive, given competing priorities.
- **UDL implementation impacts both individual teachers and the broader community.** At the end of the school year, 100 per cent of classroom teachers engaged in the programme stated that

attitudes toward disability in the community improved significantly. Likewise, more positive disability perceptions at the individual level were linked with increased dialogue on issues of inclusion within school communities. [See this video](#) for more information.

- **Pre-service education may support teacher preparedness for inclusive teaching.** Teachers with degrees in basic education reportedly used more of the UDL strategies learned in the trainings such as morning meetings, visual schedules, small group instruction and songs and games. This finding suggests that more years of formal training correlate to increased use of inclusive teaching practices.
- **Engaging learners with different techniques boosts participation for all students.** Using varying methods to motivate students is an important UDL principle and contributed to noticeably high student engagement across the board. Students with and without disabilities appeared attentive and interested in lesson content.

## NEXT STEPS

While initial efforts to broaden the reach of the UDL toolkit were stalled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the International Development Association and Global Partnership for Education, through the [Ghana Accountability for Learning Outcomes Project](#), are now working with the Government to implement this approach to teaching in 10,000 primary schools. Other strategies to sustain the gains of the pilot project include mainstreaming UDL principles in national in-service teacher training and continuous professional development frameworks grounded in the outcomes of the formative research. Further, the national cadre of trainers, supported by UNICEF, is underpinning the roll out of this intervention at pre-tertiary and pre-service levels, in line with Ministry of Education and GES plans to implement UDL in all primary schools nationally.

**Cost effectiveness:** From 2019 to date, UNICEF has invested approximately US \$400,000 in formative research; training of teachers and district-level officers in the two project districts; establishment and training of the national cadre of trainers; and provision of a UDL toolkit for teachers. These interventions have helped improve teachers' knowledge of inclusive practices and bolstered support to all early grade learners, especially those with disabilities, with the long-term goal of improving learning outcomes of all Ghanaian children.

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