ARTICLE

Cooperative Leadership in the Digital Age: *The Case of the Universidad FUNDEPOS de Costa Rica*

Gloriana Rodríguez Alvarez[a] & Ennio Rodríguez Céspedes[b]

Available online 09 March 2026

ABSTRACT

The case of FUNDEPOS Alma Mater, Costa Rica's only cooperative-owned university, reveals both the transformative potential and challenges of digital education. To this end, this article examines the institution's shift to fully online delivery during COVID-19, which expanded enrolment from rural areas. Drawing on faculty interviews, the study shows that educators are reshaping digital classrooms through methods grounded in empathy, co-construction, and real-world relevance. Grounded in decolonial and cooperative education frameworks, the study finds that online programmes, when aligned with participatory pedagogy, can democratise access and cultivate collective leadership. However, challenges persist, including digital infrastructure gaps, uneven participation, and emotional fatigue. Hence, FUNDEPOS represents an evolving experiment in digital education justice. By anchoring its work in cooperative values and developing context-specific alternatives, the university dares to ask not just who accesses education, but what kind of future it can build.

Keywords: Cooperative Leadership; Digital education justice; Social Inclusion; Participatory pedagogy; Latin America

1. INTRODUCTION

This article examines the role of online education in a Global South context, with a focus on the Universidad FUNDEPOS in Costa Rica, owned by the cooperative movement. Drawing from decolonial education frameworks, the study analyses how online programmes cultivate contextually grounded agency among students working within the cooperative sector. In Costa Rica, geography remains a barrier to access higher education, with most universities concentrated in the Greater Metropolitan Area (GMA), which encompasses the capital city, San José, as well as the capitals of three other provinces: Alajuela, Heredia, and Cartago. This urban-centric model has historically excluded students from peripheral regions. However, state-run universities, along with a few private ones, have expanded beyond the GMA by establishing campuses in some of the main cities. There is also an

[a] Gloriana Rodríguez Álvarez is a Lecturer in Leadership, Development, Peace, and Security Education. She holds a PhD in Latin American Studies and a PhD in Leadership with reference to Security and Development from King's College London.
[b] Ennio Rodríguez Céspedes is an economist and educator. He holds a Doctor of Philosophy, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex (1984), Bachelor's (1974), Licenciatura (1976) at the University of Costa Rica.

open university (Universidad Estatal a Distancia), which, through its model, reaches rural areas.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, FUNDEPOS transitioned fully to online education. Following this shift, an evaluation of student demographics revealed expanded outreach into rural areas, prompting a strategic decision to maintain digital delivery beyond the pandemic. As a cooperative institution grounded in principles of equity and social inclusion, FUNDEPOS's move to online education represents a key intervention in addressing spatial inequalities. Notably, 61% of its students now come from rural cantons (non-GMA). In comparison, only 40% of the total population resides in these cantons, reflecting the platform's success in reaching relatively more remote communities.[1] By embracing digital education, the university has broadened access to undergraduate and graduate-level programmes. It is instilling cooperative leadership principles among students who might otherwise be excluded from formal educational systems.

Based on qualitative data gathered through interviews and document analysis, the article examines *in what ways can a cooperative university in Costa Rica navigate the limitations of online education while cultivating its transformative possibilities?* It critically explores how structural inequalities and dominant leadership models shape, and often limit, the transformative role of education. At the same time, the study highlights how cooperative principles embedded in the university's ethos provide fertile ground for developing emancipatory leadership capacities that are relevant to the Costa Rican and broader Latin American contexts.

The paper explores how education in the Global South must move beyond technology adoption to interrogate power, positionality, and knowledge hierarchies. It demonstrates how online education, when grounded in participatory approaches, can become a means for instilling critical consciousness and fostering collective problem-solving. Ultimately, this article contributes to the growing body of scholarship on educational leadership in the Global South by offering empirical and theoretical insights into the intersection of education and leadership in virtual graduate programmes.

Following this introduction, the paper is divided into four subsequent sections. Section Two, below, situates FUNDEPOS within debates on digital education justice. Furthermore, Section Three examines the Costa Rican context and the university's cooperative role. Subsequently, Section Four analyses online education at FUNDEPOS, highlighting democratisation, participatory practices, and challenges. Finally, Section Five explores the cooperative model and leadership, before the conclusion reflects on implications for digital education justice in Latin America.

2. DIGITAL EDUCATION JUSTICE

The context of digital education research reveals profound power asymmetries between the Global North and the Global South. It should be noted that with regard to digital educational research, the "USA, UK, China, and Australia being the most cited countries."[2] Empirical bibliometric studies show that the vast majority of highly cited scholarship originates from these countries, giving them a disproportionate influence in shaping global research agendas and pedagogical frameworks.[3] Additionally, institutions within these countries dominate authorship, editorial boards, and funding mechanisms, leading to an overrepresentation of topics such as artificial intelligence and standardised learning analytics, areas often disconnected from the lived educational realities of the Global South.[4]

As a result, it contributes to the ongoing "issues of social justice and inequities across and within global boundaries."[5] To make matters worse, scholars from Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia encounter systemic constraints, including linguistic marginalisation, limited access to high-impact publication venues, and funding dependencies that encourage alignment with Northern paradigms.[6] This

The Human Development Index for the GMA cantons is 0.817 and for non-GMA it is 0.726. UNDP. Atlas de desarrollo humano cantonal 2024. (data 2022).

[2] Marine Levidze, 'Mapping the Research Landscape: A Bibliometric Analysis of e-Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic', *Heliyon* 10, no. 13 (2024): e33875, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e33875.

[3] Su-ming Khoo et al., 'Epistemic (in)Justice and Decolonisation in Higher Education: Experiences of a Cross-Site Teaching Project', *Acta Academica: Critical Views on Society, Culture and Politics* 52, no. 1 (2020): 54–75, https://doi.org/10.18820/24150479/aa52i1/SP4.

[4] Olaf Zawacki-Richter et al., 'Elements of Open Education: An Invitation to Future Research', *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning* 21, no. 3 (2020), https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v21i3.4659.

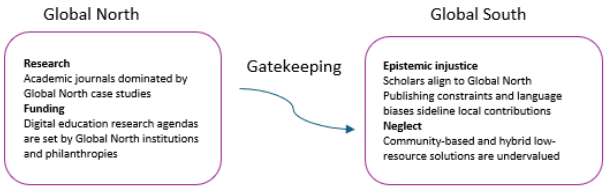
[5] Sheriya Sareen and Sayantan Mandal, 'The Old and the New Digital Divides Continue to Separate Global North and South in Blended Higher Education', *LEARNING ANYTHING*, 2025, 97.

[6] Catherine Cronin and Laura Czerniewicz, eds, *Higher Education for Good: Teaching and Learning Futures* (Open Book Publishers, 2023).

situation has been described as epistemic injustice[7] or epistemic dependency, whereby local knowledges, indigenous pedagogies, and low-tech digital innovations are devalued or rendered invisible.[8]

Figure 1 showcases the structural imbalance between the Global North and the Global South in the domain of digital education research and policymaking. On the left, the Global North is depicted as dominating research outputs, editorial boards, and funding flows. As a result, it sets the global agenda for what counts as valuable knowledge in digital education. This is further reinforced by philanthropic and institutional gatekeeping, which shapes access to platforms, resources, and visibility. The arrow labelled "Gatekeeping" highlights how this control over publishing and research priorities marginalises the Global South, where scholars face epistemic injustice, language barriers, and limited funding. As a result, community-based and hybrid educational models, often more contextually appropriate in resource-constrained settings, are undervalued or overlooked. This diagram visually portrays how digital education is not a neutral field, but one deeply entangled with global hierarchies of knowledge and power.

Figure 1: Power asymmetries in digital education



These global imbalances in digital education research have significant implications for how technology is imagined and implemented in the Global South. Whilst institutions in the Global North dominate the discourse, digital education in Latin America is frequently framed through externally defined priorities, often aligned with donor or tech-corporate agendas.[9] As a result, the design and evaluation of digital learning tools often fail to reflect the sociocultural, linguistic, and infrastructural conditions of the region.[10] Furthermore, the innovations emerging from Latin America are frequently overlooked or omitted altogether.[11]

This disjuncture reinforces what has been termed "epistemic extractivism," wherein knowledge flows from the South to the North without reciprocal recognition or benefit.[12] Against this backdrop, it is essential to examine how Latin American actors are reinterpreting and reclaiming digital education not just as a tool of access, but as a field of political, cultural, and pedagogical resistance.[13] For this reason, it is necessary to examine the regional context, exploring how digital education has unfolded in Latin America, particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, whilst highlighting both its potential for mitigating and exacerbating inequalities. [14]

However, scholars caution that these developments also exposed and exacerbated existing inequalities. The digital divide in Latin America remains profound, characterised by uneven internet connectivity,

[7] Gloria Origgi and Serena Ciranna, 'Epistemic Injustice: The Case of Digital Environments', in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice* (Routledge, 2017).
[8] Alexander I Stingl, *The Digital Coloniality of Power: Epistemic Disobedience in the Social Sciences and the Legitimacy of the Digital Age* (Lexington Books, 2015); Emilie Munch Gregersen et al., 'Digital Dependence: Online Fatigue and Coping Strategies during the COVID-19 Lockdown', *Media, Culture & Society* 45, no. 5 (2023): 967–84.
[9] Paola Ricaurte et al., 'Algorithmic Governmentality in Latin America: Sociotechnical Imaginaries, Neocolonial Soft Power, and Authoritarianism', *Big Data & Society* 11, no. 1 (2024): 20539517241229697; Douglas Kellner and Douglas Kellner, 'Globalization, Technopolitics and Revolution', *Technology and Democracy: Toward a Critical Theory of Digital Technologies, Technopolitics, and Technocapitalism*, Springer, 2021, 153–77.
[10] Javier Gómez Ferri, 'Cultura: Sus Significados y Diferentes Modelos de Cultura Científica y Técnica', *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación* 58 (January 2012): 15–33, https://doi.org/10.35362/rie580471.
[11] Gabriela Sued, 'The Digital Turn in Latin America', in *New Approaches to Latin American Studies: Culture and Power; Vol. 2*, ed. Juan Poblete (Routledge, 2025), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003586661.
[12] Ramón Grosfoguel, 'Epistemic Extractivism: A Dialogue with Alberto Acosta, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui', in *Knowledges Born in the Struggle* (Routledge, 2019).
[13] Emiliano Treré and Claudia Magallanes Blanco, *Battlefields, Experiences, Debates: Latin American Struggles and Digital Media Resistance*, 2015.
[14] Yuanchen Yang et al., 'Digital Development and Employment Gender Gaps during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Evidence from Latin America and the Caribbean', *Journal of Internet and Digital Economics*, Emerald Publishing Limited, 2024; Andres Paya Rico, 'Inclusion and the Right to Education in Latin America and the Caribbean: Policies, Resources, and Good Practice in the COVID-19 Social and Educational Emergency', in *Inclusive Pedagogical Practices Amidst a Global Pandemic: Issues and Perspectives Around the Globe* (Springer, 2022).

infrastructural disparities, and digital literacy gaps.[15] In this regard, the digital divide extends beyond mere technology, encompassing critical dimensions of social, cultural, and political inequities.[16] Effective digital education, therefore, demands strategies that transcend technology adoption to address underlying epistemological hierarchies, advocating for culturally relevant curricula and participatory pedagogical methods that empower students.

In response to these challenges, a growing body of research recommends a shift towards culturally responsive pedagogy, anti-racist teaching, and inclusive classroom environments. Anti-oppressive frameworks in education emphasise the need to critically examine and deconstruct the power dynamics that are inherent in both educational structures and digital technology deployments. This pedagogical shift is not merely technical but requires a profound rethinking of the relationships between educators, students, and broader socio-political structures. The objective is to transform classrooms into spaces where students' voices are not only heard but also empowered to challenge prevailing inequities and injustices.

Impact of COVID-19

Digital education has emerged as a critical tool for expanding educational access in the Global South, including Latin America. The COVID-19 pandemic was an inflexion point that accelerated the shift to online and blended learning across the region.[17] This rapid pivot to online education revealed both new opportunities and persistent inequalities. On the one hand, moving to digital platforms has enabled universities and schools to reach learners in remote and underserved areas. For instance, many Latin American higher education institutions launched online programs during the pandemic, allowing students from rural communities to enrol without relocating.

In many ways, COVID-19 prompted a paradigm shift, given that until then, online/digital teaching had been seen as something "exceptional".[18] Governments channelled emergency funds into technological upgrades and online learning platforms, driving the development of mixed-mode teaching methods.[19] For example, Peru nearly doubled its internet coverage, rising from, "26% in 2019 to 57.6% in 2024."[20] Such examples show the promise of digital education to bridge geographic barriers and include students who might otherwise be left out of traditional campus-based education. Indeed, there is room for optimism. On the other hand, the experience of 2020–2022 also revealed a deep digital divide that complicates digital education in the Global South.[21] Many countries in Latin America struggle with uneven internet access,[22] varying degrees of technological infrastructure,[23] and gaps in digital skills.[24]

Moreover, beyond the immediate concerns of technological access, digital education initiatives often overlook critical elements of equity, power dynamics,

[15] Adderly Mamani-Flores et al., 'Beyond Technology Adoption: Analysis of Student Experiences in Virtual Learning Environments at a Latin American University', *International Journal of Innovative Research and Scientific Studies* 8, no. 2 (2025): 3751–62, https://doi.org/10.53894/ijirss.v8i2.6105.

[16] Christoph Lutz, 'Digital Inequalities in the Age of Artificial Intelligence and Big Data', *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies* 1, no. 2 (2019): 141–48; Padmashree Gehl Sampath, 'Governing Artificial Intelligence in an Age of Inequality', *Global Policy* 12, no. S6 (2021): 21–31, https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12940.

[17] Emma Sabzalieva et al., *Transforming the Digital Landscape of Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean*, UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2024.

[18] Judit García-Martín and Jesús-Nicasio García-Sánchez, 'The Digital Divide of Know-How and Use of Digital Technologies in Higher Education: The Case of a College in Latin America in the COVID-19 Era', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19, no. 6 (2022): 3358, https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19063358.

[19] Sabzalieva et al., *Transforming the Digital Landscape of Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean*.

[20] Ed Mukoma, 'Expanding Internet Access in Rural Latin America, One Course at a Time', Internet Society, 3 June 2025, https://www.internetsociety.org/blog/2025/06/expanding-internet-access-in-rural-latin-america-one-course-at-a-time/.

[21] Najeh Aissaoui, 'The Digital Divide: A Literature Review and Some Directions for Future Research in Light of COVID-19', *Global Knowledge, Memory and Communication* 71, no. 8/9 (2022): 686–708, https://doi.org/10.1108/GKMC-06-2020-0075.

[22] Doina Stratu-Strelet et al., 'Exploring the Links between Democracy and Digital Transformation in Developing Latin America Countries: Building a Democracy Consolidation Theory', *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 195 (2023): 122742.

[23] Perpetua Ogechi Aondover et al., 'Two Nations, Same Technology, Different Outcomes: Analysis of Technology Application in Africa and America', *Journal of Educational Research and Review* 1, no. 1 (2022): 001–008.

[24] Kingsley Okoye et al., 'Impact of Digital Technologies upon Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in Latin America: An Outlook on the Reach, Barriers, and Bottlenecks', *Education and Information Technologies* 28, no. 2 (2023): 2291–360, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-022-11214-1.

and epistemological relevance. Scholars argue that the digital divide is not merely technological but profoundly social and political. Consequently, effective digital education justice must extend beyond infrastructure improvements to include pedagogical innovations that interrogate and dismantle existing hierarchies of knowledge and power. It involves adopting context-sensitive, culturally relevant curricula and participatory methodologies that empower learners rather than simply delivering standardised content through digital channels.

Decolonial and Cooperative Foundations

Digital education justice, particularly in Latin America, must be understood as a struggle not only for technological access but for epistemic equity and the transformation of educational structures. Drawing from Paulo Freire's concept of *conscientização* (critical consciousness), digital education should empower learners to interrogate the systems that shape their marginalisation and develop agency to challenge them.[25] Freire emphasised that education must be dialogical and rooted in the lived experiences of students. As such, he envisioned education as a highly interactive process which transformed the student and educator alike, enabling them to understand and rewrite the world.[26] In the digital age, this means that platforms and pedagogies must go beyond content delivery to instil critical engagement with technology, power, and inequality.

Digital education is often deployed within a market framework that prioritises efficiency and scalability over justice, reproducing existing social hierarchies unless deliberately countered.[27] For this reason, Selwyn (2016) critiques the "solutionism" of edtech interventions, which treat technology as a panacea, thereby overlooking the deeply rooted issues of inequality, surveillance, and exclusion. A justice-oriented approach must therefore prioritise local knowledge, participatory design, and culturally sustaining pedagogies that centre the voices of historically excluded communities.[28]

In Latin America, scholars such as Dussel (2020) have advocated for a *pedagogía del acontecimiento*, in which digital learning is not merely about transmitting information, but rather about creating spaces for reflection, emotion, and the collective construction of meaning. The experience of Universidad FUNDEPOS reflects this ethos: by maintaining online delivery after the pandemic and reaching a predominantly rural student population, it operationalises digital education as a tool of social inclusion and cooperative leadership formation. Through such approaches, digital education can fulfil its emancipatory potential, building not only skills but solidarity, critical awareness, and the capacity for collective leadership.

To that end, it is important to note that the university builds upon cooperative leadership. This model of leadership emphasises collective decision-making, mutual accountability, and democratic participation.[29] Principles are key in a context defined by inequality and social exclusion. Moreover, they are foundational for addressing structural inequalities in education.[30] At FUNDEPOS, cooperative values inform the university's pedagogical orientation, aiming to cultivate democratic, socially conscious leaders who are capable of challenging dominant hierarchies in both education and society.[31] This approach reinforces the idea that digital education, when aligned with cooperative values, can serve as a transformative force for equity and justice.[32]

Methods and Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design informed by decolonial methodologies to investigate the role of online education in advancing cooperative

[25] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Repr (Bloomsbury, 2012).
[26] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Heart*, trans. Donaldo P. Macedo and Alexandre K. Oliveira (Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).
[27] Patricia Burch, *Hidden Markets: Public Policy and the Push to Privatize Education*, 2nd ed, Critical Social Thought Ser (Taylor & Francis Group, 2021).
[28] Neil Selwyn, *Education and Technology: Key Issues and Debates*, Third edition (Bloomsbury Academic, 2022).
[29] Rory Ridley-Duff and Mike Bull, *Understanding Social Enterprise: Theory and Practice*, Second edition (SAGE, 2016); Richard C. Williams, *The Cooperative Movement: Globalization from Below*, Corporate Social Responsibility Ser (Ashgate, 2007); Sonja Novkovic and Tom Webb, eds, *Co-Operatives in a Post-Growth Era: Creating Co-Operative Economics* (Zed Books, 2014), https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350219380.
[30] Dolors Cañabate et al., 'Cooperative Learning to Reduce Inequalities: Instructional Approaches and Dimensions', *Sustainability* 13, no. 18 (2021): 10234, https://doi.org/10.3390/su131810234.
[31] Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne, 'What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy', *American Educational Research Journal* 41, no. 2 (2004): 237–69, https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312041002237.
[32] L Lund, 'Solidarity as a Business Model: A Multiple Stakeholder Cooperative Manual', *Ohio Center for Employee Ownership*, 2011.

leadership at Universidad FUNDEPOS. Given that dominant research paradigms often perpetuate colonial power dynamics and epistemic exclusion,[33] this methodological approach seeks to centre educators in the Global South. As such, it explores the knowledge systems and aspirations of educators operating within digitally mediated cooperative education. This is especially important because they have been marginalised within the literature on higher education.

For this reason, the primary data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of educators currently engaged in FUNDEPOS's online programmes. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure the inclusion of participants involved in the cooperative sector. This focus allows the research to explore contextually grounded accounts of how 1) digitalisation is reshaping education and 2) the role of cooperative values within an educational setting. To this end, the interviews were conducted with an emphasis on dialogical engagement, in line with Freire's pedagogy of critical consciousness, wherein knowledge is co-constructed through reflection and experience.[34] Interviews were designed not merely to extract information but to create space for reflexive engagement, allowing participants to articulate their experiences, critiques, and visions for more just forms of education.

The analytical framework draws from Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method, allowing for an inductive process that identifies patterns across interview and documentary data while remaining sensitive to the socio-political context of the research setting.[35] Throughout the research process, a reflexive stance was maintained to account for the researchers' positionality and the ethical imperative of working collaboratively with participants.[36] By centring the voices of educators engaging with the cooperative ethos of FUNDEPOS, this paper aims to promote a broader understanding of educational practices. Moreover, it seeks to contribute to a wider reimagining of digital education. It provides insights into how virtual learning environments, when grounded in principles of participation and social transformation, can instil leadership capacities that subvert conventional hierarchies in knowledge production.

3. THE COSTA RICAN CONTEXT

Over the past two decades, Costa Rica has made notable efforts to tackle educational disparities in digital access through coordinated initiatives led by the Ministry of Public Education and the Ministry of Science and Technology, and key civil society partners.[37] These efforts have aimed to bridge the urban–rural digital divide, reduce socioeconomic barriers and strengthen digital competencies across the country.[38] Disparities persist not only along geographic lines but also across gender, with women and girls, particularly in rural areas, often facing additional barriers to accessing and effectively using digital technologies.[39] According to the Ministry of Science, Innovation, Technology and Telecommunications (MICITT) and the Superintendence of Telecommunications (SUTEL), internet connectivity among households rose from 65.7 % in urban and 46.0 % in rural areas (2015) to 86.0 % urban and 76.2 % rural (2022), reducing the geographic gap from 19.7 to just 9.8 percentage points.[40]

In the Latin American context, Costa Rica had been a model of innovative digital education. It's National Program of Educational Informatics (PRONIE MEP-FOD) exemplifies the country's progressive stance on digital learning.[41] This initiative, developed in

[33] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Third edition (Bloomsbury Academic, 2022).
[34] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.
[35] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101, https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.
[36] Django Paris and Maisha T. Winn, *Humanizing Research: Decolonizing Qualitative Inquiry with Youth and Communities* (SAGE Publications, Inc., 2014), https://doi.org/10.4135/9781544329611; Bagele Chilisa, *Indigenous Research Methodologies* (SAGE Publications, 2012).
[37] Melchor Gómez-García et al., 'Digital Transformation Training and Digital Inclusion in Costa Rica', in *From Digital Divide to Digital Inclusion*, ed. Łukasz Tomczyk et al., Lecture Notes in Educational Technology (Springer Nature Singapore, 2023), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-7645-4_7.
[38] Gómez-García et al., 'Digital Transformation Training and Digital Inclusion in Costa Rica'.
[39] Luis Vargas Montoya et al., *Análisis Del Vínculo Entre La Inseguridad y El Desempeño Económico: Costa Rica y Experiencias Internacionales*, San José, CR: PEN, 2024.
[40] Pablo Mora Vargas, *Brecha Digital: Vivir En Zonas Rurales y Tener Menos Nivel Educativo Son Factores de Vulnerabilidad*, Informe Hacia la Sociedad de la Información y el Conocimiento 2023 (Universidad de Costa Rica, 2024), https://www.ucr.ac.cr/noticias/2024/3/08/brecha-digital-vivir-en-zonas-rurales-y-tener-menos-nivel-educativo-son-factores-de-vulnerabilidad.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com.
[41] Alejandro Calvo-Rodriguez, 'Learning with Mobile Technologies at Public Primary Schools in Costa Rica: The

partnership with the Omar Dengo Foundation, relies on mobile technologies to address the digital divide in public primary schools, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas.[42] PRONIE has connected over 90 % of public schools with mobile labs and ICT resources.[43] The program's emphasis on constructivist pedagogy and teacher professional development further reinforces the belief that digital literacy is central to empowering students and ensuring equitable access to educational resources. The current Administration (2022-2026), however, ended the collaborative project with FOD, which had lasted over 25 years. No clear substitute organisational arrangement has emerged.

According to Chacón et al. (2022), Costa Rica's education system has placed increasing emphasis on integrating technology as a right rather than a privilege, with national policies seeking to democratise access to digital tools. However, as the data makes clear, access alone is not sufficient.[44] Disparities in home connectivity, digital skills, and gender representation highlight the need for strategies that integrate technology with contextualised pedagogy, community engagement, and ongoing capacity-building. [45]

The role of FUNDEPOS

The Universidad FUNDEPOS de Costa Rica presents a compelling case study for exploring the intersection of digital education and cooperative leadership principles. FUNDEPOS's transition to fully digital graduate-level programs during the COVID-19 pandemic reveals the potential of digital education to overcome spatial inequalities, significantly increasing access for rural students, who now constitute 59% of its student body.

The concept of cooperative leadership aligns closely with the ethos of cooperative institutions, emphasising democratic governance, equity, and shared accountability.[46] Cooperative leadership contrasts with traditional hierarchical models by promoting participatory decision-making, community accountability, and collective problem-solving.[47] Empirical studies have shown how cooperative leadership instils social responsibility within organisations, embedding democratic principles into governance structures and operational strategies.[48] Over recent decades, this form of leadership has gained significant attention across multiple sectors, including cooperative enterprises, educational institutions, and grassroots organisations.[49]

Within educational settings, cooperative leadership encourages pedagogical approaches grounded in participation and collective empowerment. This model facilitates critical consciousness among students, aligning with broader Latin American traditions of emancipatory education articulated by scholars like Paulo Freire and Boaventura de Sousa Santos. Cooperative educational models emphasise not only access but also agency, highlighting education as a transformative process rooted in social equity and democratic participation.

The following analysis draws on in-depth interviews with faculty members at FUNDEPOS to explore how cooperative values, online education, and participatory pedagogy are experienced and interpreted in practice. Rather than offering a singular narrative, these interviews reveal a constellation of perspectives that reflect both the university's cooperative mission and the challenges of implementing it across diverse teaching

Case of the National Program of Educational Informatics of the Ministry of Public Education and the Omar Dengo Foundation', *Journal of Universality of Global Education Issues* 7, no. 1 (2021).

[42] Lucila Didier and David Perez Retana, 'Digital Technologies in Public Education: Comparative Study between Costa Rica and Argentina', *Foro de Educación* 20, no. 1 (2022): 265–80.

[43] Pablo Mora, 'Costa Rica | Brecha Digital: Vivir En Zonas Rurales y Tener Menos Nivel Educativo Son Factores de Vulnerabilidad', *Digital Policy & Law*, 11 March 2024, https://dplnews.com/costa-rica-brecha-digital-vivir-en-zonas-rurales-y-tener-menos-nivel-educativo-son-factores-de-vulnerabilidad/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

[44] Oscar Quesada Madriz, 'Brecha y Transformación Digital Dos Caras de Una Misma Moneda Para Los Territorios Rurales En Costa Rica', *Revista Centroamericana de Administración Pública*, no. 81 (2021): 33–49.

[45] Anneth Mora Jiménez, 'La Brecha Digital En El Sistema Educativo Costarricense', *Universidad Internacional San Isidro Labrador Research Paper (Forthcoming), Revista El Labrador* 8, no. 01 (2024): 10.61285.

[46] Nav Raj Simkhada and Prakash C. Bhattarai, 'The Quest for Leadership Qualities in Cooperative Societies: An Exploratory Analysis', *Heliyon* 9, no. 9 (2023): e20109, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e20109.

[47] Yannis Papadopoulos, 'Cooperative Forms of Governance: Problems of Democratic Accountability in Complex Environments', *European Journal of Political Research* 42, no. 4 (2003): 473–501.

[48] Arash Shahin and Mohamed Zairi, 'Corporate Governance as a Critical Element for Driving Excellence in Corporate Social Responsibility', *International Journal of Quality & Reliability Management* 24, no. 7 (2007): 753–70.

[49] Michael Neary et al., *Co-Operative Leadership for Higher Education* (Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, 2018), https://josswinn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Final-published-version-of-the-report.pdf.

contexts. Organised around five key thematic areas, including *democratisation, participatory methodologies, digital challenges, cooperative ideals, and leadership*, this section aims to capture the institutional ethos of FUNDEPOS as it is lived and negotiated by its educators.

4. ONLINE EDUCATION

Faculty at FUNDEPOS consistently described online education as both an opportunity and a challenge. For many, the digital shift redefined who could access higher education, how knowledge was shared, and what kinds of relationships could be built in the classroom. Three themes stand out across the interviews. First, democratisation, as online modalities broadened access to students who might otherwise have been excluded. Second, participatory methodologies, in which faculty sought to adapt cooperative and student-centred pedagogies to virtual platforms. Finally, the challenges of online education complicate the promise of digital inclusion.

Democratisation

One of the most emphasised themes across all interviews was the democratising potential of online education at FUNDEPOS. Faculty members highlighted how digital modalities have expanded access to students who were previously excluded due to geographic, economic, or social barriers. As Melvin explained, online learning has allowed FUNDEPOS to enact "a kind of democratisation of access to knowledge." He noted that compared to face-to-face formats, online education is "more flexible," enabling students, "from different geographical contexts to participate with only minimal technological infrastructure." This flexibility, he argued, eliminates the need to relocate or commute to the Greater Metropolitan Area (GAM), which had historically concentrated educational opportunities: "Students no longer have to face the barrier of travelling all the way to the central region just to study."[50]

Jessica echoed this perspective, framing virtuality as a tool for geographic equity. "Virtuality allows more people to access graduate programs without having to travel physically to the main campus, which is crucial in a country with so many regional disparities." She emphasised that this has enabled participation from "very remote places (...) people who perhaps would not have been able to study if it weren't for this modality."[51] Importantly, she also noted that flexibility benefits students with work or caregiving responsibilities, groups often excluded from traditional full-time programs.

Sebastián went further, framing online education as a direct intervention in regional inequality. "One hundred per cent (...) This is going to give people in rural areas opportunities they may never have had before," he said, adding that with scholarships and outreach, the university is not only including more students in academic programs, "but also in entrepreneurship initiatives we are developing." He mentioned that people from urban centres also benefit, especially those "who finish work late and wouldn't have had the chance to attend classes otherwise." Yet, he also cautioned that access does not automatically translate into engagement: "Some students are really present, and others are not."[52] Genoveva emphasised that digital education allows "many students from remote areas the opportunity to earn a university degree, grow, and become leaders in their communities."[53] Genoveva's view positions digital education as a transformative tool for individual advancement and community development.

Yet not all accounts were unequivocally optimistic. Raquel acknowledged that "virtuality has been an excellent tool to allow many people who could not travel to access quality education." In her experience, "students from rural areas would not be able to study without this modality." However, she also cautioned that access is uneven: "Access also depends on the tools students have at home, which are sometimes limited."[54] Her insight suggests that while online education removes some barriers, it introduces others, namely, unequal digital infrastructure in homes.

Overall, these reflections suggest that digital education at FUNDEPOS is not merely a logistical shift. Indeed, it resulted in a structural reconfiguration of who gets to learn, lead, and participate. The *Informe de Avance PAO 2025* highlights that the growth of virtual education has enabled wider geographic reach. In fact, 61% of enrolled students come from cantons outside the GAM. This reflects how virtual modalities have opened access for students beyond the metropolitan area. In addition, 14% of students come from cantons characterised by lower social development indicators.[55] Notably, there are still

[50] Interview, Melvin, San José, July 5, 2025.
[51] Interview, Jessica, San Pedro, July 3, 2025.
[52] Interview, Eduardo, San José, July 9, 2025
[53] Interview, Genoveva, San José, July 4, 2025,
[54] Interview, Raquel, Alajuela, July 11, 2025.
[55] FUNDEPOS, *Informe de Avance PAO 2025 al 31 de Mayo* (San José, Costa Rica., 2025).

challenges, particularly regarding home technology and sustained engagement. However, online modalities have expanded educational opportunities for rural, working, and economically disadvantaged populations. This aligns with broader goals of digital education justice in Latin America, based on infrastructural inclusion[56] and social equity.[57]

Participatory Methodologies

A central theme that emerges from the interviews is the commitment to participatory, student-centred pedagogies at FUNDEPOS. Faculty members describe a range of practices that value experiential learning, critical dialogue, and collective knowledge production. This pedagogical ethos is evident in the way faculty intentionally try to cultivate inclusive classroom environments. Indeed, Raquel places great emphasis on experiential participation: "I try to ensure that every class includes spaces for dialogue, so it's not just another lecture," she states. She reflects on how students support and include each other, particularly those from rural areas:

> *"You don't see any kind of differentiation here, unlike in other places where I've seen that when someone speaks a little differently, maybe because they're from a rural area, others don't want to work with that person. On the contrary, here they are very inclusive and will say something like, "Oh, [so-and-so], when you come to San José, you'll see this," or things like that. They make an effort to include the person, and if someone hasn't had a particular experience, they'll explain it to them with a lot of care and sensitivity. So the person opens up."*[58]

She recounts how one student unfamiliar with urban life shared her experiences candidly:

> *"I had a very sweet student who said, 'I don't know San José." So sometimes there were case studies,* and she would say*, "I don't have experience with such a big supermarket like you're describing."* Then her classmates would say, *"I'll send you a video," or "I'll send you some photos when I go this weekend." They're very collaborative, and there's a lot of respectful dialogue."*[59]

For Raquel, these instances exemplify how participatory spaces are co-created through empathy and respectful dialogue. Similarly, Alejandra speaks to the shift away from top-down instruction toward shared learning processes: "I remember when they started talking to us about collaborative learning (…) how knowledge could be built in groups." She critiques traditional pedagogies in favour of "bilateral conversations in virtual environments,"[60] highlighting how participatory methods result in the mutual construction of knowledge and disrupt hierarchical modes of transmission.

On a similar note, Jessica highlights the importance of grounding learning in students' lived realities. She aims to make classes "as dynamic as possible," incorporating "forums, group work, and spaces for reflection." She explains: "I like when they share examples from their jobs or contexts because it enriches everyone's learning. Learning is more meaningful when it starts from students' realities."[61] Her approach resonates strongly with critical pedagogy, in which students' lived experiences become foundational to teaching.[62]

Melvin echoes these principles, integrating active methodologies that draw on students' professional backgrounds. "I use forums, collaborative activities, real case analyses, and social impact projects," he explains. "Students share their professional experiences, which greatly enriches the process," he adds, highlighting how the classroom becomes a site for situated and horizontal learning. For Melvin, "there is a collective construction of knowledge,"[63] indicating a shift from teacher-centred transmission to co-construction grounded in lived experience.[64] His pedagogy aligns with dialogical, inclusive models that empower learners and affirm their agency.[65]

---

[56] Antonio García Zaballos et al., *The Impact of Digital Infrastructure on the Sustainable Development Goals: A Study for Selected Latin American and Caribbean Countries*, vol. 701 (Inter-American Development Bank, 2019).
[57] Simone Cecchini, 'Digital Opportunities, Equity, and Poverty in Latin America', in *Information Communication Technologies and Human Development: Opportunities and Challenges* (IGI Global Scientific Publishing, 2007).
[58] Interview, Raquel, San José, July 11, 2025.
[59] Interview, Raquel, San José, July 11, 2025.
[60] Interview, Raquel, San José, July 11, 2025.
[61] Interview, Jessica, San Pedro, July 3, 2025.
[62] Sheryl V Taylor and Donna M Sobel, *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Teaching like Our Students' Lives Matter*, vol. 4 (Brill, 2011).
[63] Interview with Melvin, San José, July 5, 2025.
[64] Nozomi Sakata, *Learner-Centred Pedagogy in the Global South: Pupils and Teachers' Experiences* (Taylor & Francis, 2023).
[65] James Ryan, 'Dialogue, Identity, and Inclusion: Administrators as Mediators in Diverse School Contexts', *Journal of School Leadership* 17, no. 3 (2007): 340–70; Janeth Juliana Contreras León and Claudia Marcela Chapetón Castro, 'Transforming EFL Classroom Practices and Promoting Students' Empowerment: Collaborative Learning

However, not all faculty members are equally confident in the digital affordances for participation. Maria José expressed concern: "Doing live dynamics to involve participants is more complex and less effective."[66] Indeed, educational research carried out in Mexico has highlighted that the "biggest problem is the lack of interaction between professors and students; this is why live streaming is an important issue."[67] This reflects ongoing challenges in maintaining interactivity and presence in online formats, raising questions about how to preserve the human dimension of education in virtual spaces.

Overall, these accounts highlight a shared institutional effort to create pedagogical spaces that are dialogical and grounded in lived realities. Participatory methodologies at FUNDEPOS are not merely instrumental; they represent a broader epistemological shift that centres students as co-creators of knowledge. These approaches reflect the values of cooperative education, as well as critical pedagogy traditions, where the classroom is imagined as a space of inquiry and collective learning.[68]

Challenges of online education

Although digital education has enabled increased access to higher education at FUNDEPOS, faculty members unanimously highlight that this modality also presents significant technical, pedagogical, and emotional challenges.

Melvin emphasises three core challenges: technological limitations, the need for continuous teacher training, and the erosion of emotional connection. "Not everything is ideal... some students have technological limitations," he observes, pointing to digital divides that disproportionately affect students from rural areas. Melvin adds, "There is a constant need for teacher training, especially in digital tools," underlining that digital competence is essential but not always guaranteed. He also reflects that "sometimes the human connection offered by in-person learning is lost,"[69] pointing to the affective dimensions of teaching. His insights reinforce that while online education can expand access, it also demands intentional design and sustained support systems to be truly effective.

On a similar note, María outlines a series of interrelated barriers: "capturing and maintaining attention in a virtual session demands more from the teacher." Technical issues remain pressing: "Stable internet access, sufficient bandwidth, and proper use of platforms are important." The shift to online teaching has also impacted peer collaboration: "There's little face-to-face interaction between faculty members, which could otherwise stimulate initiatives among them."[70] These remarks indicate that digital education can hinder collective pedagogical innovation by reducing informal collaboration and mutual support among educators.

Genoveva offers a comprehensive critique that spans technological, pedagogical, and structural concerns. "Some students have limited internet access in certain areas… they often lose connection due to power outages," she explains. In addition, she observes that "there's less personal interaction… some professors don't know how to use the platform well… so they don't organise group work, and the classes become very lecture-based and inactive." Genoveva responds proactively: "I've had to take courses to update myself."[71] Her account stresses that while student autonomy is valuable, it cannot substitute for skilled teaching, particularly when structural inequalities persist.

On the other hand, Eduardo describes the emotional and logistical toll from the educator's side: "It's one thing to teach a class in person… It's another thing to teach a class with a bunch of closed boxes." His metaphor reveals the invisibility and disengagement often felt in virtual classes. He adds that "the strategy has to change a lot" and reflects on the personal toll of digital teaching: "As a facilitator, I'm now tied to virtual work almost all day."[72] Eduardo acknowledges that the university provided training to help adapt to the digital shift. Still, his comments reveal that the burden of online education, particularly its isolating and exhausting aspects, can weigh heavily on faculty members.

from a Dialogical Approach', *PROFILE: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development* 19, no. 2 (2017): 135–49; Teresa Maria Cappiali, 'A Paradigm Shift for a More Inclusive, Equal, and Just Academia? Towards a Transformative-Emancipatory Pedagogy', *Education Sciences* 13, no. 9 (2023): 876.

[66] Interview, María José, Alajuela, July 11, 2025.

[67] Ramón Ventura Roque-Hernández et al., 'Instructor Presence, Interactive Tools, Student Engagement, and Satisfaction in Online Education during the COVID-19 Mexican Lockdown', *Interactive Learning Environments* 31, no. 5 (2023): 2841–54, https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2021.1912112.

[68] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

[69] Interview, Melvin, San José, July 5, 2025

[70] Interview, María José, Alajuela, July 11, 2025

[71] Interview, Genoveva, San José, July 4, 2025

[72] Interview, Eduardo, San José, July 9, 2025

For this reason, Alejandra focuses on the pedagogical adaptation required during the transition to online teaching. "The switch was easy to implement," she says, "but the real challenge was for the teacher, who had to adapt to new tools."[73] She emphasises that instructors had to "explain concepts, theories, and course content dynamically… because otherwise, it would just become a lecture and one-way communication." Alejandra's comments highlight how digital learning demands a shift from content delivery to interactive, student-centred learning.

For Jessica, technical challenges are compounded by relational ones: "A lot of the personal interaction is lost. Sometimes it's hard to create community in the virtual environment."[74] Echoing this emotional dimension, Raquel states, "One of the biggest challenges is emotional connection with students; sometimes they feel alone." The lack of functional microphones or cameras also hinders interaction: "They don't always have cameras or mics that work well, and that really affects the dynamic." Finally, she points to widespread digital fatigue: "There is digital fatigue, both for them and for us."[75] These remarks highlight the emotional labour involved in online education and the risk of isolation, a recurring theme throughout the interviews. Raquel's observations suggest a need to redesign pedagogical strategies to promote wellbeing and human connection in digital environments.

Overall, the interviews reveal a complex and nuanced understanding of online education. While digital learning has unlocked new opportunities, it has also intensified inequities, isolated students, and stretched faculty capacities. Challenges range from basic infrastructure (e.g., internet access, electricity) to a lack of digital literacy among both students and faculty, as well as the emotional strain of disconnection and fatigue. Moreover, the shift has exposed a need for moving beyond magisterial content delivery toward interactive models of learning. From a critical education perspective, these insights underscore that technology alone cannot guarantee equity or quality.[76]

FUNDEPOS appears to be navigating these tensions with intention, but the interviews make clear that a deeper transformation is necessary to realise a truly participatory digital education model. Indeed, this echoes broader findings in critical education literature that structural change is necessary to support pedagogical innovation.[77] There is a need for continuous professional development and structural support systems that acknowledge the lived challenges of students and educators alike. Above all, online education must be embedded in pedagogies of care.[78] Rooted in the work of Noddings and Clegg & Rowland, pedagogical care, based on kindness and reciprocal relationships, has been shown to truly improve student learning.[79] In the digital realm, where faces fade and silence lingers, it is all the more necessary to offer warmth, presence, and meaning in a space too often left cold. The role of educators is not simply to inform but to uplift.

5. COOPERATIVISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

At FUNDEPOS, cooperativism shapes pedagogy and leadership. Faculty reflections reveal two core themes. First, the cooperative model, frames education as a space for community-building. Second, cooperative leadership, where participatory and horizontal practices disrupt hierarchical traditions and invite students to share responsibility in shaping their learning. Overall, these dimensions highlight how cooperativism is both a concrete framework and a guiding ideal.

Cooperative model

A recurring theme across all interviews is the importance of FUNDEPOS institutional and philosophical identity. Indeed, several interviewees explicitly emphasised that it is the only cooperative owned university in Latin America. This distinction carries both symbolic and practical implications for how education is designed and delivered. As one definition states, "co-operative education is understood as the connection between the co-operative movement and co-

[73] Interview, Alejandra, Heredia, July 10, 2025
[74] Interview, Jessica, San Pedro, July 3, 2025
[75] Interview, Raquel, San José, July 11, 2025
[76] Selwyn, *Education and Technology*.
[77] Michael W Apple, 'Understanding and Interrupting Neoliberalism and Neoconservatism in Education', *Pedagogies* 1, no. 1 (2006): 21–26; Freire, *Pedagogy of the Heart*.
[78] Jerry Flores and Andrea Román Alfaro, 'Critical Pedagogy: Loving and Caring within and beyond the Classroom', *Curriculum Inquiry* 52, no. 3 (2022): 385–96; Karen Gravett et al., 'Pedagogies of Mattering: Re-Conceptualising Relational Pedagogies in Higher Education', *Teaching in Higher Education* 29, no. 2 (2024): 388–403.
[79] Sue Clegg and Stephen Rowland, 'Kindness in Pedagogical Practice and Academic Life', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 31, no. 6 (2010): 719–35, https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2010.515102; Nel Noddings, 'Moral Education and Caring', *Theory and Research in Education* 8, no. 2 (2010): 145–51, https://doi.org/10.1177/1477878510368617.

operative learning."[80] The interviews reveal a range of ways in which faculty members understand cooperative ideals, some explicitly and others more implicitly. Across all conversations, principles such as "equity, equality, social justice, [and] solidarity" [81] and a commitment to collaborative learning emerged as consistent markers of a cooperative ethos in higher education.

For Melvin, the cooperative model is not simply a label but a comprehensive pedagogical philosophy. Accordingly, "the cooperative vision translates into pedagogical practices such as collaborative learning, teamwork, and horizontal dialogue between teachers and students." He emphasises that these ideals guide the pedagogy in theory and praxis: "the institutional culture promotes solidarity and equity, not just in words, but in the dynamics of the classroom." Subsequently, "the cooperative model permeates not only the content but also the way teaching and learning are carried out."[82] In this vision, the virtual classroom has the potential to become a space for collective meaning-making, echoing Freirean ideals of dialogical learning and shared transformation.[83] Moreover, his remarks reflect an understanding of the cooperative ethos as a foundational framework at FUNDEPOS, more than an add-on. It is a core part of the institution's practice.

Similarly, Jessica sees cooperative values as implicitly embedded in her practice: "Cooperative values such as solidarity and teamwork are present in our classes, although sometimes implicitly." She affirms that "we do promote a collaborative environment."[84] To this end, Jessica notes that she tries to instil teacher-student reciprocity, "the methodology I use is to ask completely open questions. For example, if I am explaining Bauman's liquid theory of leadership, I don't ask, 'What does Bauman say about this?' Instead, I say: we are in this group… so I ask them, 'What is your perspective on what the text says?'". Beyond the theory, Jessica also brings in lessons from the social economy, explaining to students the potential of building enterprises on associative foundations and emphasizing that, "in cooperatives or social economy organizations, all collaborators, whether an administrator, an accountant, or a cleaner, should receive a fair and decent wage, because that is part of the movement's values." For Jessica, these values are normalised through pedagogical relationships rather than formal curricula. Hence, a cooperative ethos often exceeds institutional blueprints, materialising instead in classroom practices.

In contrast, Eduardo articulates his educational practice within the cooperative logic: "The facilitator has to include collaboration from everyone… to know that knowledge is no longer just ours… but that we're working so that this is distributed more equitably." He further emphasises, "Knowledge belongs to everyone. Best practices should grow among all of us; we can all grow."[85] Eduardo's language reveals a deep alignment between his role as an educator and the cooperative values of collective ownership applied to knowledge. He firmly rejects the notion that knowledge is a commodity. Instead, he considers knowledge to be a communal good, based on a collaborative and emancipatory process.

Genoveva also expressed a strong alignment with cooperative principles, both pedagogically and institutionally. "I promote collaborative work, joint decision-making, and respect for the diversity of opinions and contexts," she stated. For her, cooperativism is "a philosophy that drives collective learning, shared responsibility, and the social commitment of students." She highlighted FUNDEPOS's broader social role, explaining: "The close link between FUNDEPOS and organisations in the cooperative sector, banking, and its presence in very remote regions is what sets it apart."[86] Her comments link cooperativism to classroom practices and the broader goals of territorial equity and community development.

Overall, these faculty comments on the various ways in which cooperative values are practised at FUNDEPOS. For some educators, these values are central to their teaching philosophy and institutional identity. For others, they operate more informally through collaborative norms and respectful interactions. Alejandra notes that, rather than the passive transmission of knowledge, cooperative education

[80] Joss Winn, 'Co-Operative Leadership for Higher Education', 3 September 2018, https://josswinn.org/2018/09/03/co-operative-leadership-for-higher-education-2/.

[81] Ennio Rodriguez, 'La Respuesta Cooperativa', *La República* (Costa Rica), 24 July 2025, https://www.larepublica.net/noticia/la-respuesta-cooperativa?fbclid=IwY2xjawLwuOlleHRuA2FlbQIxMQBicmlkETFNNlhWNEJuSExpSEEzeEdHAR7IlbbkXWRLPc6nGpHZKHq6qCkxGqovKnfgvFPAqq6KCiEvJSdWLzNSxZn2dQ_aem_jhVy-RzHMmm4S8hK7VourA.

[82] Interview, Melvin, San José, July 5, 2025

[83] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Heart*.

[84] Interview, Jessica, San Pedro, July 3, 2025

[85] Interview, Eduardo, San José, July 9, 2025

[86] Interview, Genoveva, San José, July 4, 2025

entails community-building. For instance, she explains: "when forming work groups, I use very small groups of four to five people, with clear instructions, and they create their own code of coexistence. How would they like the group dynamic to be? There they talk about participation… and they themselves reach agreements that begin to establish a small community."[87] Even when not formally labelled as "cooperative pedagogy," practices such as teamwork, shared decision-making, and dialogue embody key tenets of the cooperative model. Importantly, this diversity of interpretation reflects broader debates in the literature on cooperative education. As Winn and Hall (2017) and DeLeon and Brantmeier (2010) suggest, democratic education transcends institutional formality, as it is also defined by the values that underpin pedagogical relationships. The FUNDEPOS case shows that cooperative pedagogy can emerge both structurally and culturally, through explicit curricula and the informal ethos of teaching.

Yet the interviews also point to a potential tension: the gap between institutional rhetoric and classroom implementation. One educator noted that they had "not incorporated those values directly," and while they recognised the humanistic and social relevance of cooperativism, they questioned its practical integration. This ambivalence mirrors critiques in the literature of tokenistic uses of cooperative language in educational institutions.[88] For cooperative pedagogy to be fully realised, it may require not only faculty buy-in but also ongoing institutional support.

Thus, the cooperative model at FUNDEPOS appears as both a lived reality and an aspirational project. While some educators embody its values in their everyday practice, others point to its implicit presence. Still, there is a shared commitment to building education based on social justice, solidarity and teamwork, goals that are at the heart of cooperativism. Additionally, there is room for a more formal inclusion of cooperativism in curricula, courses, and case studies.

Cooperative leadership

Across the interviews, faculty members at FUNDEPOS emphasise participatory and horizontal leadership practices that diverge from traditional hierarchical models. Although the extent and form of participation vary, there is a consensus in support of a shift toward shared governance in the classroom, consistent with the values of cooperative leadership. This participatory ethos empowers students, instilling a sense of collective responsibility, and models democratic educational structures.

To this end, Eduardo sees cooperative leadership as relational and emergent, shaped through ongoing dialogue: "We are all owners, all participants, all decision-makers." He insists that "the cooperative has this same spirit (…). In the master's program, we definitely promote those two themes [leadership and decision-making] because they are central to sustainability," emphasising the alignment between institutional values and pedagogical practice. "It's part of the process... even if others don't see it that way, it still is,"[89] he adds. While he acknowledges that not all students or colleagues fully engage with this ethos, he affirms the importance of maintaining participatory spaces regardless. Eduardo's reflections highlight both the promise of democratic leadership and the practical challenges of implementation; a tension explored in much of the cooperative education literature.[90]

According to Genoveva, cooperative leadership is akin to distributed leadership, based on shared responsibility: "When I talk about shared responsibility,

[87] Interview, Alejandra, Heredia, July 10, 2025

[88] Michael Fielding, *Beyond Student Voice: Patterns of Partnership and the Demands of Deep Democracy: Más Allá de La Voz Del Alumnado: Patrones de Colaboración y Las Exigencias de La Democracia Profunda* (Ministerio de Educación, 2012); Elizabeth Cooper et al., 'Beyond Tokenism: Relational Learning and Reconciliation within Post-Secondary Classrooms and Institutions', *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 40, no. 1 (2018): 54–73; Kurata Lehlohonolo, 'Religious Diversity in Lesotho's Secondary Religious Education Syllabus: Genuine Inclusion or Superficial Tokenism?', *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development* 7, no. 4 (2023): 414–22.

[89] Interview, Eduardo, San José, July 9, 2025

[90] Michael Fielding and Peter Moss, *Radical Education and the Common School: A Democratic Alternative* (Routledge, 2010); Hall and Winn, 'Hall, R. & Winn, J. (Eds.). (2017). Mass Intellectuality and Democratic Leadership in Higher Education. London'.

it's the University, the professor, and the student." She elaborates on the participatory methods she employs, including activities based on current events that engage students in real-world analysis: "I've had excellent results, and they enjoy it." For Genoveva, distributed leadership strengthens both student engagement and critical thinking. Yet she maintains a critical lens, noting, "I believe the University can still do more with its teaching model, but it is a change agent that provides inclusive and accessible educational opportunities."[91] Her comments convey both optimism and realism, acknowledging the transformative potential of cooperative leadership while recognising the need for ongoing structural support.

Likewise, Melvin presents a clear example of distributed leadership in practice. "I believe there is shared leadership between teachers and students," he notes. He explains that "students have a voice and vote in aspects such as course organisation, the selection of some content, and the forms of evaluation." In his view, this collaborative approach breaks with "the traditional vertical model,"[92] replacing it with a more dialogical and co-constructed form of leadership. His framing aligns with the cooperative principle of member participation and the pedagogical ideals of student-centred learning, where agency and shared decision-making are critical. By actively involving students in shaping their learning environment, Melvin encourages both democratic engagement and a more profound sense of belonging in the educational process.

Echoing this sentiment, Jessica offers a more flexible, situational interpretation of participatory leadership: "In class, we try to make decisions together, for example, in choosing topics or how to work," she says. For Jessica, "the leadership we promote is horizontal, where students also take on responsibilities and participate actively."[93] Her comments reinforce the idea that leadership is not solely the responsibility of the educator, but rather a collective practice shared among all participants.

Similarly, Raquel reinforces this trend toward co-responsibility and student involvement. "I like to give students space to propose topics or adjust deadlines when possible."[94] However, she also notes that "not all decisions can be negotiated, but I do try to make them feel that their opinions matter." Her approach balances the constraints of curriculum and institutional requirements with an openness to student voice, reflecting a semi-democratic model of classroom governance. Even where full co-decision-making is not feasible, the intention to include students in meaningful ways speaks to a commitment to horizontal interaction and mutual respect. Both are core tenets of cooperative education. Raquel believes that this instils leadership in the student body: "I do feel that the university cultivates transformative leadership. We are invited to participate in discussions on relevant issues where we can contribute our perspectives. In this sense, leadership is not simply about exercising authority, but about being constructive and forward-looking. It is a leadership that encourages us, as faculty, to engage critically with society and to propose solutions, not just to replicate existing practices."[95]

Subsequently, the interviews suggest that cooperative leadership in FUNDEPOS is neither uniform nor universal. There is no singular definition of cooperative leadership; instead, Faculty members are experimenting with participatory approaches, often grounded in respect for student agency and aligned with broader cooperative values such as democracy, shared ownership, and community responsibility. While some speak of formalised practices (e.g., shared curriculum decisions), others describe relational dimensions of leadership. From a theoretical standpoint, this constellation of practices aligns with distributed leadership[96] and transformative pedagogy.[97] These frameworks reject command-and-control structures in favour of leadership as a socially situated, participatory process.[98]

Moreover, the challenges of fully enacting shared leadership remain. Time constraints, curricular rigidity, and uneven student engagement all limit the possibilities for deep democratisation. Several faculty members acknowledge these barriers but persist in seeking ways to amplify student voice and de-centre authority in their classrooms. This represents a significant departure from traditional educational hierarchies and offers the promise of a model for cooperative leadership in the digital age.

[91] Interview, Genoveva, San José, July 4, 2025
[92] Interview, Melvin, San José, July 5, 2025
[93] Interview, Jessica, San Pedro, July 3, 2025
[94] Interview, Raquel, San José, July 11, 2025
[95] Interview, Raquel, San José, July 11, 2025
[96] Alma Harris, 'Distributed Leadership: Conceptual Confusion and Empirical Reticence', *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 10, no. 3 (2007): 315–25.
[97] Omiunota Ukpokodu, 'The Practice of Transformative Pedagogy', *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching* 20, no. 2 (2009).
[98] Daniel Schugurensky, 'Transformative Learning and Transformative Politics: The Pedagogical Dimension of Participatory Democracy and Social Action', in *Expanding the Boundaries of Transformative Learning: Essays on Theory and Praxis* (Springer, 2002).

6. CONCLUSION

The case of FUNDEPOS Alma Mater reveals the transformative potential and lingering obstacles associated with digital education in the Global South. As a cooperative university, FUNDEPOS, dares to reimagine what teaching, leadership, and inclusion can look like when rooted in solidarity. Overall, the transition to online education has broadened access for rural and marginalised communities in Costa Rica. Nonetheless, the study reveals that access alone is not enough. True transformation demands pedagogies that are participatory, emotionally attuned, and an internet connectivity infrastructure at the national level.

Ultimately, the case of FUNDEPOS demonstrates that a cooperative university in Costa Rica can navigate the limitations of online education by embedding cooperative values into pedagogy and leadership, thereby transforming challenges of access and participation into opportunities for democratic, student-centred learning. Nonetheless, the study also faces limitations. The analysis draws exclusively on faculty interviews, meaning that students' perspectives on cooperative leadership and digital inclusion are absent. Including student perspectives would provide insight into whether practices such as shared decision-making, collaborative projects, and horizontal interaction are felt as empowering, or if they reveal tensions and gaps not visible from the faculty side. Future research should therefore prioritise student interviews to enrich understanding of how cooperative leadership is both taught and lived in digital education settings

Faculty accounts reveal that digital education, when aligned with cooperative ideals, can deepen participatory and student-centred learning environments. In this regard, educators are reimagining pedagogy in ways that democratise the digital classroom. Participatory methodologies, grounded in real-world relevance, empathy, and co-construction, emerge as powerful counterpoints to hierarchical models of instruction. Likewise, the enactment of cooperative leadership, while diverse in form and practice, signals a growing institutional commitment to distributed authority and shared governance in education. At the same time, the interviews highlight persistent challenges that complicate these aspirations. Digital inequities, emotional fatigue, uneven participation, and infrastructural limitations reveal that online education cannot be equated with justice by default. Faculty members express a shared concern that technology, without intentional support and care, risks reproducing exclusion rather than promoting connection and empowerment.

Yet it is precisely within these tensions that FUNDEPOS's experience offers valuable lessons. Rather than presenting a seamless model, the university reflects an evolving experiment in digital education justice. The model's plurality encompasses different strategies for pedagogical inclusiveness. Equally important, cooperative identity is a structural feature continually negotiated in classrooms, curricula, and community relationships.

In this sense, FUNDEPOS serves as an example of how educational institutions in the Global South can defy extractive and homogenising models of digital learning. By centring cooperative ideals and leadership and expanding access to remote regions, the university is making a theoretical and tangible contribution. Indeed, rather than mirroring blueprints developed elsewhere, it is developing locally rooted alternatives. Even as obstacles remain, the cooperative ethos of FUNDEPOS stands as both anchor and compass. In many ways, serving as a reminder that education is not a race to adapt to technology, but rather a means for reclaiming our humanity through it. Bit by bit, and voice by voice, it dares to ask not only who can access education, but what kind of world that education might help us build.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adeoye-Olatunde, Omolola A, and Nicole L Olenik. 'Research and Scholarly Methods: Semi-structured Interviews'. *Journal of the American College of Clinical Pharmacy* 4, no. 10 (2021): 1358–67.

Aissaoui, Najeh. 'The Digital Divide: A Literature Review and Some Directions for Future Research in Light of COVID-19'. *Global Knowledge, Memory and Communication* 71, no. 8/9 (2022): 686–708. https://doi.org/10.1108/GKMC-06-2020-0075.

Aondover, Perpetua Ogechi, Eric Msughter Aondover, and A. M. Babele. 'Two Nations, Same Technology, Different Outcomes: Analysis of Technology Application in Africa and America'. *Journal of Educational Research and Review* 1, no. 1 (2022): 001–008.

Apple, Michael W. 'Understanding and Interrupting Neoliberalism and Neoconservatism in Education'. *Pedagogies* 1, no. 1 (2006): 21–26.

Brantmeier, Edward J., Jing Lin, and John P. Miller, eds. *Spirituality, Religion, and Peace Education*. Peace Education. IAP-Information Age Publ, 2010.

Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology'. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.
Burch, Patricia. *Hidden Markets: Public Policy and the Push to Privatize Education*. 2nd ed. Critical Social Thought Ser. Taylor & Francis Group, 2021.

Calvo-Rodriguez, Alejandro. 'Learning with Mobile Technologies at Public Primary Schools in Costa Rica: The Case of the National Program of Educational Informatics of the Ministry of Public Education and the Omar Dengo Foundation'. *Journal of Universality of Global Education Issues* 7, no. 1 (2021).

Cañabate, Dolors, Remigijus Bubnys, Lluís Nogué, Lurdes Martínez-Mínguez, Carolina Nieva, and Jordi Colomer. 'Cooperative Learning to Reduce Inequalities: Instructional Approaches and Dimensions'. *Sustainability* 13, no. 18 (2021): 10234. https://doi.org/10.3390/su131810234.

Cappiali, Teresa Maria. 'A Paradigm Shift for a More Inclusive, Equal, and Just Academia? Towards a Transformative-Emancipatory Pedagogy'. *Education Sciences* 13, no. 9 (2023): 876.

Cecchini, Simone. 'Digital Opportunities, Equity, and Poverty in Latin America'. In *Information Communication Technologies and Human Development: Opportunities and Challenges*. IGI Global Scientific Publishing, 2007.

Chilisa, Bagele. *Indigenous Research Methodologies*. SAGE Publications, 2012.

Clegg, Sue, and Stephen Rowland. 'Kindness in Pedagogical Practice and Academic Life'. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 31, no. 6 (2010): 719–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2010.515102.

Contreras León, Janeth Juliana, and Claudia Marcela Chapetón Castro. 'Transforming EFL Classroom Practices and Promoting Students' Empowerment: Collaborative Learning from a Dialogical Approach'. *PROFILE: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development* 19, no. 2 (2017): 135–49.

Cooper, Elizabeth, Rebecca Major, and Emily K Grafton. 'Beyond Tokenism: Relational Learning and Reconciliation within Post-Secondary Classrooms and Institutions'. *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 40, no. 1 (2018): 54–73.

Cronin, Catherine, and Laura Czerniewicz, eds. *Higher Education for Good: Teaching and Learning Futures*. Open Book Publishers, 2023.

Didier, Lucila, and David Perez Retana. 'Digital Technologies in Public Education: Comparative Study between Costa Rica and Argentina'. *Foro de Educación* 20, no. 1 (2022): 265–80.

Fielding, Michael. *Beyond Student Voice: Patterns of Partnership and the Demands of Deep Democracy: Más Allá de La Voz Del Alumnado: Patrones de Colaboración y Las Exigencias de La Democracia Profunda*. Ministerio de Educación, 2012.

Fielding, Michael, and Peter Moss. *Radical Education and the Common School: A Democratic Alternative*. Routledge, 2010.

Flores, Jerry, and Andrea Román Alfaro. 'Critical Pedagogy: Loving and Caring within and beyond the Classroom'. *Curriculum Inquiry* 52, no. 3 (2022): 385–96.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Heart*. Translated by Donaldo P. Macedo and Alexandre K. Oliveira. Bloomsbury Academic, 2021.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Repr. Bloomsbury, 2012.

FUNDEPOS. *Informe de Avance PAO 2025 al 31 de Mayo*. San José, Costa Rica., 2025.

García-Martín, Judit, and Jesús-Nicasio García-Sánchez. 'The Digital Divide of Know-How and Use of Digital Technologies in Higher Education: The Case of a College in Latin America in the COVID-19 Era'. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19, no. 6 (2022): 3358. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19063358.

Gehl Sampath, Padmashree. 'Governing Artificial Intelligence in an Age of Inequality'. *Global Policy* 12, no. S6 (2021): 21–31. https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12940.

Gómez Ferri, Javier. 'Cultura: Sus Significados y Diferentes Modelos de Cultura Científica y Técnica'.

Revista Iberoamericana de Educación 58 (January 2012): 15–33. https://doi.org/10.35362/rie580471.

Gómez-García, Melchor, Roberto Soto-Varela, Ana Cristina Umaña-Mata, and Estíbaliz Pérez-Pérez. 'Digital Transformation Training and Digital Inclusion in Costa Rica'. In *From Digital Divide to Digital Inclusion*, edited by Łukasz Tomczyk, Francisco D. Guillén-Gámez, Julio Ruiz-Palmero, and Akhmad Habibi. Lecture Notes in Educational Technology. Springer Nature Singapore, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-7645-4_7.

Gravett, Karen, Carol A Taylor, and Nikki Fairchild. 'Pedagogies of Mattering: Re-Conceptualising Relational Pedagogies in Higher Education'. *Teaching in Higher Education* 29, no. 2 (2024): 388–403.

Gregersen, Emilie Munch, Sofie Læbo Astrupgaard, Malene Hornstrup Jespersen, Tobias Priesholm Gårdhus, and Kristoffer Albris. 'Digital Dependence: Online Fatigue and Coping Strategies during the COVID-19 Lockdown'. *Media, Culture & Society* 45, no. 5 (2023): 967–84.

Grosfoguel, Ramón. 'Epistemic Extractivism: A Dialogue with Alberto Acosta, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui'. In *Knowledges Born in the Struggle*. Routledge, 2019.

Hall, R, and J Winn. 'Mass Intellectuality and Democratic Leadership in Higher Education. London: Bloomsbury.' *Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching* 1, no. 1 (2018). https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2018.1.1.8.

Harris, Alma. 'Distributed Leadership: Conceptual Confusion and Empirical Reticence'. *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 10, no. 3 (2007): 315–25.

Kellner, Douglas, and Douglas Kellner. 'Globalization, Technopolitics and Revolution'. *Technology and Democracy: Toward a Critical Theory of Digital Technologies, Technopolitics, and Technocapitalism*, Springer, 2021, 153–77.

Khoo, Su-ming, Witold Mucha, Christina Pesch, and Cori Wielenga. 'Epistemic (in)Justice and Decolonisation in Higher Education: Experiences of a Cross- Site Teaching Project'. *Acta Academica: Critical Views on Society, Culture and Politics* 52, no. 1 (2020): 54–75. https://doi.org/10.18820/24150479/aa52i1/SP4.
Lehlohonolo, Kurata. 'Religious Diversity in Lesotho's Secondary Religious Education Syllabus: Genuine Inclusion or Superficial Tokenism?' *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development* 7, no. 4 (2023): 414–22.

Levidze, Marine. 'Mapping the Research Landscape: A Bibliometric Analysis of e-Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic'. *Heliyon* 10, no. 13 (2024): e33875. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e33875.

Lund, L. 'Solidarity as a Business Model: A Multiple Stakeholder Cooperative Manual'. *Ohio Center for Employee Ownership*, 2011.

Lutz, Christoph. 'Digital Inequalities in the Age of Artificial Intelligence and Big Data'. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies* 1, no. 2 (2019): 141–48.

Madriz, Oscar Quesada. 'Brecha y Transformación Digital Dos Caras de Una Misma Moneda Para Los Territorios Rurales En Costa Rica'. *Revista Centroamericana de Administración Pública*, no. 81 (2021): 33–49.

Mamani-Flores, Adderly, Jorge Apaza-Ticona, Julian Apaza-Chino, Yuselino Maquera-Maquera, and Soledad Jackeline Zegarra-Ugarte. 'Beyond Technology Adoption: Analysis of Student Experiences in Virtual Learning Environments at a Latin American University'. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Scientific Studies* 8, no. 2 (2025): 3751–62. https://doi.org/10.53894/ijirss.v8i2.6105.

Mora Jiménez, Anneth. 'La Brecha Digital En El Sistema Educativo Costarricense'. *Universidad Internacional San Isidro Labrador Research Paper (Forthcoming), Revista El Labrador* 8, no. 01 (2024): 10.61285.

Mora, Pablo. 'Costa Rica | Brecha Digital: Vivir En Zonas Rurales y Tener Menos Nivel Educativo Son Factores de Vulnerabilidad'. *Digital Policy & Law*, 11 March 2024. https://dplnews.com/costa-rica-brecha-digital-vivir-en-zonas-rurales-y-tener-menos-nivel-educativo-son-factores-de-vulnerabilidad/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

Mukoma, Ed. 'Expanding Internet Access in Rural Latin America, One Course at a Time'. Internet Society, 3 June 2025. https://www.internetsociety.org/blog/2025/06/expanding-internet-access-in-rural-latin-america-one-course-at-a-time/.
Neary, Michael, Katia Valenzuela-Fuentes, and Joss Winn. *Co-Operative Leadership for Higher Education*. Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, 2018. https://josswinn.org/wp-

content/uploads/2018/09/Final-published-version-of-the-report.pdf.

Noddings, Nel. 'Moral Education and Caring'. *Theory and Research in Education* 8, no. 2 (2010): 145–51. https://doi.org/10.1177/1477878510368617.

Novkovic, Sonja, and Tom Webb, eds. *Co-Operatives in a Post-Growth Era: Creating Co-Operative Economics*. Zed Books, 2014. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350219380.

Okoye, Kingsley, Haruna Hussein, Arturo Arrona-Palacios, et al. 'Impact of Digital Technologies upon Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in Latin America: An Outlook on the Reach, Barriers, and Bottlenecks'. *Education and Information Technologies* 28, no. 2 (2023): 2291–360. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-022-11214-1.

Origgi, Gloria, and Serena Ciranna. 'Epistemic Injustice: The Case of Digital Environments'. In *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*. Routledge, 2017.

Papadopoulos, Yannis. 'Cooperative Forms of Governance: Problems of Democratic Accountability in Complex Environments'. *European Journal of Political Research* 42, no. 4 (2003): 473–501.

Paris, Django, and Maisha T. Winn. *Humanizing Research: Decolonizing Qualitative Inquiry with Youth and Communities*. SAGE Publications, Inc., 2014. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781544329611.

Paya Rico, Andres. 'Inclusion and the Right to Education in Latin America and the Caribbean: Policies, Resources, and Good Practice in the COVID-19 Social and Educational Emergency'. In *Inclusive Pedagogical Practices Amidst a Global Pandemic: Issues and Perspectives Around the Globe*. Springer, 2022.

Ricaurte, Paola, Edgar Gómez-Cruz, and Ignacio Siles. 'Algorithmic Governmentality in Latin America: Sociotechnical Imaginaries, Neocolonial Soft Power, and Authoritarianism'. *Big Data & Society* 11, no. 1 (2024): 20539517241229697.

Ridley-Duff, Rory, and Mike Bull. *Understanding Social Enterprise: Theory and Practice*. Second edition. SAGE, 2016.

Rodriguez, Ennio. 'La Respuesta Cooperativa'. *La República* (Costa Rica), 24 July 2025. https://www.larepublica.net/noticia/la-respuesta-cooperativa?fbclid=IwY2xjawLwuOlleHRuA2FlbQIxMQBicmlkETFNNlhWNEJuSExpSEEzeEdHAR7IlbbkXWRLPc6nGpHZKHq6qCkxGqovKnfgvFPAqq6KCiEvJSdWLzNSxZn2dQ_aem_jhVy-RzHMmm4S8hK7VourA.

Roque-Hernández, Ramón Ventura, José Luis Díaz-Roldán, Adán López-Mendoza, and Rolando Salazar-Hernández. 'Instructor Presence, Interactive Tools, Student Engagement, and Satisfaction in Online Education during the COVID-19 Mexican Lockdown'. *Interactive Learning Environments* 31, no. 5 (2023): 2841–54. https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2021.1912112.

Ryan, James. 'Dialogue, Identity, and Inclusion: Administrators as Mediators in Diverse School Contexts'. *Journal of School Leadership* 17, no. 3 (2007): 340–70.

Sabzalieva, Emma, Eglis Chacón, Adrian Estrela Pereira, Arianna Valentini, Luz Gamarra Caballero, and Dana Abdrasheva. *Transforming the Digital Landscape of Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean*. UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2024.

Sakata, Nozomi. *Learner-Centred Pedagogy in the Global South: Pupils and Teachers' Experiences*. Taylor & Francis, 2023.

Sareen, Sheriya, and Sayantan Mandal. 'The Old and the New Digital Divides Continue to Separate Global North and South in Blended Higher Education'. *LEARNING ANYTHING*, 2025, 97.

Schugurensky, Daniel. 'Transformative Learning and Transformative Politics: The Pedagogical Dimension of Participatory Democracy and Social Action'. In *Expanding the Boundaries of Transformative Learning: Essays on Theory and Praxis*. Springer, 2002.

Selwyn, Neil. *Education and Technology: Key Issues and Debates*. Third edition. Bloomsbury Academic, 2022.

Shahin, Arash, and Mohamed Zairi. 'Corporate Governance as a Critical Element for Driving Excellence in Corporate Social Responsibility'. *International Journal of Quality & Reliability Management* 24, no. 7 (2007): 753–70.

Simkhada, Nav Raj, and Prakash C. Bhattarai. 'The Quest for Leadership Qualities in Cooperative Societies: An Exploratory Analysis'. *Heliyon* 9, no. 9 (2023): e20109. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e20109.

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Third edition. Bloomsbury Academic, 2022.
Stingl, Alexander I. *The Digital Coloniality of Power: Epistemic Disobedience in the Social Sciences and the Legitimacy of the Digital Age*. Lexington Books, 2015.

Stratu-Strelet, Doina, Hermenegildo Gil-Gómez, Raúl Oltra-Badenes, and Vicente Guerola-Navarro. 'Exploring the Links between Democracy and Digital Transformation in Developing Latin America Countries: Building a Democracy Consolidation Theory'. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 195 (2023): 122742.

Sued, Gabriela. 'The Digital Turn in Latin America'. In *New Approaches to Latin American Studies: Culture and Power; Vol. 2*, edited by Juan Poblete. Routledge, 2025. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003586661.

Taylor, Sheryl V, and Donna M Sobel. *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Teaching like Our Students' Lives Matter*. Vol. 4. Brill, 2011.

Treré, Emiliano, and Claudia Magallanes Blanco. *Battlefields, Experiences, Debates: Latin American Struggles and Digital Media Resistance*. 2015.

Ukpokodu, Omiunota. 'The Practice of Transformative Pedagogy'. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching* 20, no. 2 (2009).

Vargas Montoya, Luis, Gabriel Madrigal Quesada, and Darío Espinoza Torres. *Análisis Del Vínculo Entre La Inseguridad y El Desempeño Económico: Costa Rica y Experiencias Internacionales*. San José, CR: PEN, 2024.
Vargas, Pablo Mora. *Brecha Digital: Vivir En Zonas Rurales y Tener Menos Nivel Educativo Son Factores de Vulnerabilidad*. Informe Hacia la Sociedad de la Información y el Conocimiento 2023. Universidad de Costa Rica, 2024. https://www.ucr.ac.cr/noticias/2024/3/08/brecha-digital-vivir-en-zonas-rurales-y-tener-menos-nivel-educativo-son-factores-de-vulnerabilidad.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com.
Westheimer, Joel, and Joseph Kahne. 'What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy'. *American Educational Research Journal* 41, no. 2 (2004): 237–69. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312041002237.

Williams, Richard C. *The Cooperative Movement: Globalization from Below*. Corporate Social Responsibility Ser. Ashgate, 2007.
Winn, Joss. 'Co-Operative Leadership for Higher Education'. 3 September 2018. https://josswinn.org/2018/09/03/co-operative-leadership-for-higher-education-2/.

Yang, Yuanchen, Silvia Granados Ibarra, Manuk Ghazanchyan, and Gustavo Canavire-Bacarreza. 'Digital Development and Employment Gender Gaps during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Evidence from Latin America and the Caribbean'. *Journal of Internet and Digital Economics*, Emerald Publishing Limited, 2024.

Zaballos, Antonio García, Enrique Iglesias Rodríguez, and Alejandro Adamowicz. *The Impact of Digital Infrastructure on the Sustainable Development Goals: A Study for Selected Latin American and Caribbean Countries*. Vol. 701. Inter-American Development Bank, 2019.

Zawacki-Richter, Olaf, Dianne Conrad, Aras Bozkurt, et al. 'Elements of Open Education: An Invitation to Future Research'. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning* 21, no. 3 (2020). https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v21i3.4659.