



FONDATION
ZAKOURA

Le devoir d'agir

ZAKOURA FOUNDATION: ANEER

In 2015, Zakoura initiated “ANEER” – a community-based preschool – to extend quality early years learning into rural areas to uplift the entire community. ANEER, which means the source of light in the Amazigh language, offers children between the ages of 4 to 6 years old living in rural areas a free and high-quality Early Childhood Education (ECE). The model aims to create the most favorable conditions for successful education through the implementation of projects for parents, youth, local associations/NGOs/champions, and local teachers.

The program was started as an initiative to bring preschool education to rural areas; The ANEER model evolved to develop an integrated approach that engages all stakeholders in Early Childhood Education (ECE) in a single community to achieve a better and higher commitment. The model is founded on the international best practices concerning ECE raising awareness of parents and broader community and ensuring on-time registration in primary school (6 years old completed).

In Morocco, 500.000 children are excluded from preschool every year. Only 15.6% of children are preschoolers in public education. In rural areas, only 47% of children and 39% of girls have access to preschool. Due to low national budgets and high levels of poverty, thousands of children don't have access to good quality education.

Due to strategic partnerships with the Moroccan Ministry of National Education and The National Initiative for Human Development (INDH), the Foundation expects an exponential growth per year for community-based preschool program creation. Zakoura has been chosen by the INDH to contribute to generalizing the ECE in Morocco. The INDH committed to financing the first year of partnerships with 300 ANEER preschools and will continue so every year until 2023.

ANEER operates at a national level and is currently present in 8 out of 12 regions of the country. By the end of 2019, ANEER had established 391 preschools benefitting more than 20,000 children.

Parents are sensitized to follow-up on the development of their children according to the milestones and objectives that are explained to them. The strong collaboration between parents

and educators helps to adjust the programs when necessary and plan an early intervention for children with specific needs. The ANEER model is a **threefold formula** that includes:

1. **Preschool:** 2-year program education for children between 4-6 years old
2. **Parental education:** education dedicated to parents (mainly the mother since she is usually closer to the children and also has more time available for them). Parents are involved through:
 - a. **Parent committee:** Monthly meetings organized with two main objectives: share the progression of their children in education and continuous sensitization.
 - b. **Parental education:** dedicated to parents and the local community, the objective is to create an environment for the children with an aligned- shared philosophy and skills.
3. **Capacity reinforcement** from a local association that will ensure the long-term life of the program of the ANEER model sustainability. This integrated approach has allowed ANEER to have a better impact on the local population, but also to answer the target population-specific needs better.

SOLUTION

Criteria	Category	Details
Technological Readiness	No technology	ANEER's model advocates for low-tech innovation and human-centered instructional design for pre-primary education. Children attend a physical establishment where they learn from a trained educator.
Content availability	Yes	The teaching material is adapted to the age of the children and is designed so that the facilitator can help students integrate into primary school. All content aligns with the national curriculum.
Personalization	Yes	ANEER's model is sensitive to local cultures and vernacular languages (Amazigh, Hassania, Tamazight, Tachelhit, Darijas, Tarifit). Also, school schedules are partially flexible and chosen by parents at their convenience as long as there are: 3

		hours of class per day per group; 6 days a week; 11 months a year over 2 years.
Interactivity	Yes	ANEER works with children so they can achieve a specific level of sensory and motor skills, teach them about emotions and expression of emotions, how to communicate well, and how to tune in to school. They work with the students to make sure they are participating enough and that they thrive in this enabling environment.
Mode	Synchronous	ANEER is delivered in the classroom.
Feasibility to replicate		
Time	Medium	To ensure the project's relevancy and sustainability, ZEF devotes a phase to pre-diagnosis focused on qualitative and quantitative research in and around an identified Douar, which means a local village in Moroccan dialect. That first phase completed by the signature of a convention with local authorities to launch a preschool program, ZEF moves on to implement a high-quality program. They also train the educators and assistants before the project and during the project with a 6-day training session monthly to address needs that arise during the project.
Effort	High	Zakoura Foundation identifies the site, develops and equips the school, recruits, and trains the two educators through the Zakoura Academy, welcomes the children, ensures the management and monitoring of the project, and strengthens the capacities of the local association to perpetuate this initiative.
Money	Medium	Under the program, the cost needed to create and manage each school for 2 years is approximately 32,000 USD. Over this period, the local partners' capacities are reinforced to allow them to take

		over the program through workshops on pedagogical principles, the operational methodology to carry out a preschool program, and the basics of project management. In case a Douar has no NGO or local association, ZEF helps create one during the project.
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FOLLOW-UP AND IMPLEMENTATION

Zakoura approaches vulnerable rural communities with preschool needs; one of the requirements for the Foundation to decide to run ANEER in a “douar” – a local village in Moroccan dialect – is the existence of a proximal primary school. Zakoura makes sure that the children that will benefit from the preschool model will be able to continue their education by registering them to a public school once they have finished the model.

The operating process consists of 3 phases:

- the preparation phase includes prospection (in which they select and enroll beneficiaries), recruitment of the 2 educators and their training;
- implementation: preschool program launch, continuous training, parental education & community meet-ups, local association empowerment;
- monitoring and analysis of performance, model enhancement, and recommendations.

Criteria	Category	Details
Preparedness of teachers to design and facilitate learning	Low	Educators are trained at the “Zakoura Academy” under the ECE model to be able to ensure the sustainability of the pedagogical program. There is an initial training of 12 days for educators and assistants. Then they train the educators and assistants through a 6-day continuous training to address needs that arise during the project.

<p>Availability and ability of parents or caregivers to facilitate effective home-based distance learning</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>Parents need to be highly involved in their children’s education. To ensure an efficient continuation of the preschool program, the Foundation has enhanced the accompaniment of parents by educators to support ongoing learning. They have monthly parenting classes to help teach them how to help the children as well as to raise awareness of what the children are learning.</p>
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BUILDING RESILIENCE

During the COVID-19 outbreak, The Zakoura Foundation has suspended all units, following national guidelines from the government. To ensure education continues, Zakoura has developed alternative solutions to adapt to the current crisis.

Since most of the operations are located in rural areas where there is low internet access, the Foundation has set up a project which focuses on connecting with parents and helping them support learning. Parents prefer telephone calls and WhatsApp groups since they offer the option to interact with the educator. Where possible, Zakoura uses telecommunication tools to facilitate access to education and follows the progress of the beneficiaries.

Long-distance education is difficult since young learners are not independent and responsible. Zakoura has tried to solve this issue by working with the parents, preparing them with calls, and short videos explaining how to supervise and support the children during their homework. The pedagogical team and the educators have thus shown agility and creativity in adapting the activities and games to distance learning for the continuation of the pedagogical program.

Although the ANEER model has not been created as a long-distance project, due to the pandemic, Zakoura has been forced to adapt. As a temporary solution, they are currently using some digital tools, mainly the parents’ cell phones, to ensure continued education during the pandemic. This approach led to the production of the video series "Mourabyati fi Bayti" which is available on the Foundation’s YouTube and social media channels. The series offers fun educational activities to help children learn skills such as counting, writing and differentiating letters, understanding the 5 senses, and so on.

IMPLEMENTING CHALLENGES

In Morocco, there is a cultural misperception towards preschool education. Parents believe that during preschool, children receive « only » educational knowledge, as they expect their children to learn French and to learn how to write and read. ANEER tries, through parental education and community meet-ups, to create awareness on this matter and to inform and raise awareness about the specifics of Early Childhood Development. In some cases, parents do not appreciate the importance of pre-primary education.

TAKEAWAY LESSONS

For Zakoura's beneficiaries, their remote location puts them at a disadvantage compared to their peers living in cities. The ANEER model helps introduce a community-owned and run preschool that can be sustained within areas that preschools are not available. It ensures that their education is not obstructed due to their location. ANEER works together with the government, local community, and parents to create awareness of the importance of educating a child from a young age, and facilitates this education. This cooperation also aims at preparing the child so that he/she can attend school once they have reached the right age.

Through ANEER, Zakoura creates the right environment to ensure removing barriers to a child's education, leveraging on the strength of a community working together towards a shared goal.

COVID-19 has exacerbated the situation making long-distance education a requirement to ensure the continuation of children's education. By setting up a project dedicated to this purpose, educators used telephone calls and WhatsApp groups to connect with parents to support them in their children's education. Zakoura Foundation has ensured the education of children continued at home during the pandemic. It demonstrates that with this approach, associations can work together with local communities to ensure young children access to quality education.