



جائزة خليفة التربوية
Khalifa Award for Education



ANEER Model :
**An Innovative Path to Inclusive
Early Learning in Rural Areas**

Abstract

This paper explores the ANEER model, recognized by the Khalifa International Award for Early Learning, as a groundbreaking and sustainable approach to early childhood education in rural areas. It examines the model's unique features, transformative impact, and significance in bridging the education gap. Emphasizing community involvement and cultural sensitivity, ANEER sets a precedent for effective and inclusive education. This paper is organized into four sections.

Section 1 examines the innovativeness of ANEER, centered around its community-based approach. Emphasizing inclusivity, the model engages local communities in a threefold formula comprising a pre-primary program, a positive parenthood program, and capacity-building for educators. Sustainability is a guiding principle, ensuring long-term impact and relevance.

Section 2 sheds light on the importance of ANEER, addressing the gap in pre-primary education in rural areas. By enhancing community involvement and parental education, ANEER fosters a sense of identity and belonging among children. The model's cultural sensitivity enables a smooth transition from local languages to classical Arabic, creating a nurturing and empowering learning environment.

Section 3 focuses on impact evaluation, emphasizing strong internal systems for reporting and monitoring. Swift identification of improvement areas and continuous educator development contribute to the success of ANEER's high-quality programs. Rigorous impact studies, including Randomized Control Trials (RCTs) and parental education assessments, validate ANEER's transformative power.

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Section 4 delves into the feasibility and sustainability of ANEER, examining cost-effective strategies such as recruiting and training local educators. Empowering local champions and associations ensures the program's continuity beyond the initial implementation. Low-tech innovations foster scalability, making ANEER adaptable to diverse contexts.

Through these four sections, the paper highlights the model's success in fostering a nurturing and empowering learning environment, and its potential for scalability and long-term impact.

Introduction

Zakoura Foundation, a prominent Moroccan non-profit association founded in 1997, focuses on human development, especially in rural and disadvantaged areas. With a commitment to gender equality, local capacity-building, and sustainability, the foundation aims to provide free, high-quality education to children aged 4 to 6 in rural regions of Morocco. ANEER (Action Nationale pour l'Education de la petite Enfance en zone Rurale i.e. National Initiative for Early Childhood Education in Rural Areas), launched in 2015 in partnership with the Moroccan Ministry of Education and UNICEF, is a pioneering program based on a community-based pre-schooling model. ANEER aims to create a conducive learning environment by impacting various aspects, from school implementation to parental education.

Since 2015, Zakoura Foundation has developed an innovative community-based model offering free, high-quality pre-school education to rural children. This distinctive model comprises three components :

- a pre-primary program for children aged 4 to 6,
- a positive parenthood program with awareness modules for parents and communities, and a capacity-building initiative for educators, teachers, and
- local associations to ensure long-term sustainability.

ANEER stands out in Morocco and the MENA region as one of the few initiatives providing pre-primary education in rural areas, with a strong focus on community involvement and parental education.

Introduction

1. Innovativeness in ANEER - A Community-Based, Inclusive, and Sustainable Approach to Early Learning

The ANEER model stands out as an innovative and transformative approach to early learning, encompassing key elements that set it apart from conventional preschool programs. This section explores the innovativeness of the ANEER model, focusing on its community-based, inclusive, and sustainable characteristics, as well as its threefold formula for success.

- **Community-Based Model for Early Learning**

The ANEER model is rooted in a community-based approach to early learning. It actively involves local communities in the entire process, making them integral stakeholders in the education of their children. By partnering with local authorities, parents, teachers, and associations, ANEER fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the preschool program. This community engagement ensures that the educational initiatives align with the specific needs and values of the targeted rural areas.

- **Inclusive Approach Involving Local Communities**

ANEER's inclusive nature goes beyond merely providing access to education. It aims to create an environment that celebrates diversity and inclusivity, welcoming children from all backgrounds and abilities. By recognizing and respecting the unique cultural heritage of each community, ANEER ensures that children feel valued and respected within their learning environment. This inclusivity nurtures a sense of belonging and encourages a positive attitude towards education.

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- **Threefold Formula : Pre-Primary Program, Positive Parenthood Program, Capacity-Building for Educators**

ANEER's comprehensive threefold formula is at the core of its success. Firstly, the pre-primary program provides children aged 4 to 6 with a high-quality early education that lays a solid foundation for their future academic journey. Secondly, the positive parenthood program empowers parents with the knowledge and skills to support their child's learning and development at home, creating a cohesive learning experience between school and home. Lastly, capacity-building programs for educators and local associations ensure the sustainability and continuous improvement of the ANEER model.

- **Emphasis on Sustainability and Long-Term Impact**

ANEER's commitment to sustainability is evident in its focus on empowering local communities and associations. By investing in training and capacity-building initiatives, ANEER ensures that the preschool program continues to thrive beyond its initial implementation. The model is designed to have a long-term impact on the educational landscape, with the capacity to scale up and be replicated in various rural regions. This emphasis on sustainability aligns with ANEER's vision of creating lasting positive change in early childhood education.

The innovativeness of the ANEER model lies in its community-based, inclusive, and sustainable approach to early learning. By actively involving local communities, embracing diversity, and empowering educators and parents, ANEER creates a transformative educational experience for children in rural areas. This threefold formula and focus on sustainability make the ANEER model a pioneering initiative that has the potential to revolutionize early education practices and shape the future of rural communities.

Introduction

2. Importance of ANEER - Bridging Educational Gaps and Empowering Rural Communities

The ANEER model holds immense importance as it addresses critical challenges in early childhood education in rural areas. This section highlights the significance of the ANEER model by exploring how it bridges the gap of pre-primary education, enhances community involvement and parental education, and fosters a sense of identity and belonging among children.

- Bridging the Gap of Pre-Primary Education in Rural Areas

In many rural regions, access to pre-primary education is limited or nonexistent. The ANEER model plays a crucial role in bridging this educational gap by providing children in rural communities with access to high-quality pre-primary education. By offering a free and holistic preschool program, ANEER ensures that children in these underserved areas have the opportunity to develop essential cognitive, social, and emotional skills that lay the foundation for future learning and success in primary school and beyond.

- Enhancing Community Involvement and Parental Education

ANEER's community-based approach is a game-changer in early childhood education. By actively involving local communities in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the preschool program, ANEER fosters a sense of ownership and pride among community members. Parents, teachers, and local associations become key stakeholders, invested in the success of the program and the well-being of the children. Through the positive parenthood program, ANEER also empowers parents with valuable knowledge and skills to support their children's learning journey, creating a strong bond between the home and school environments.

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- **Addressing Local Language and Cultural Sensitivity**

In rural areas, children often grow up speaking local vernacular languages, which differ from the official language used in formal education. ANEER recognizes the importance of preserving local languages and cultures, and the model is designed to address this linguistic and cultural diversity. By incorporating local languages and traditions into the curriculum, ANEER creates a culturally sensitive and inclusive learning environment where children feel a strong connection to their heritage. This approach not only enhances children's self-esteem but also encourages a positive attitude towards learning.

- **Fostering a Sense of Identity and Belonging among Children**

ANEER's emphasis on cultural sensitivity and inclusivity fosters a sense of identity and belonging among children. By valuing and celebrating their cultural heritage, ANEER empowers children to take pride in their unique identities. This sense of belonging creates a positive and nurturing learning environment, enabling children to thrive and develop their full potential. As a result, children become confident and active participants in their own education, laying the groundwork for a lifelong love of learning.

The importance of the ANEER model cannot be overstated. By bridging the gap of pre-primary education, enhancing community involvement and parental education, and fostering a sense of identity and belonging among children, ANEER creates a transformative educational experience for rural communities. This approach not only equips children with essential skills for future academic success but also empowers communities to take charge of their children's education. The ANEER model exemplifies the power of inclusive and culturally sensitive education in building a brighter future for the next generation of rural children.

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3. Impact of ANEER - Measuring the Transformative Power of ANEER

For continuous program improvement and scaling, Zakoura Foundation (ZF) team members constantly assess ANEER's programs. Every year, information from data collection and surveys is incorporated by ZF into a final global report. For ANEER, data is analyzed regarding the:

- average absence rate of children,
- attendance rate of parents to the monthly meetings,
- dropout rate,
- rate of on-time enrollment in the primary school system.

Quality assurance is taken seriously at ZF where we evaluate not only process (output) indicators, such as the number of children who attend the pre-school program regularly, but also outcome indicators such as children's psychosocial well-being that are contextually relevant, measurable, and developmentally appropriate, and also indicators of improved parental behaviors that support early childhood development.

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- In 2017, two impact evaluation studies were launched to review outcomes' progress towards impact.

The first impact evaluation study is a randomized control study (RCT) conducted by the independent agency Evalua Development. It analyses how ANEER's pre-school graduates perform in primary school compared to their peers who did not access any pre-school system, and those who accessed different systems before primary schools (traditional structures mostly).

The second study, also conducted by Evalua Development, assesses how ANEER's parental education programs are affecting attitudes and behaviors towards pre-school education. Both studies evaluate ANEER's community-based preschool models:

- relevancy,
- overall efficiency,
- cost-effectiveness, and
- sustainability

Both studies consider to what extent ANEER is providing a working solution following a theory of change based on Quality Education for All.

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A third evaluation was initiated in order to carry out a critical and constructive assessment of the results of the model. The Zakoura Foundation conducted this impact study of the model during the period 2016 – 2021 in the light of the implementation of the 65 units at the national level. The study was by a external consulting firm and encompassed three phases :

- a documentary analysis phase of public policies, studies, activity reports, statistics, etc.,
- a qualitative phase with 36 semi-structured interviews and focus groups (central team, implementation team, educators and parents), and
- a quantitative phase with the consultation of 52 parents, 39 associations and 50 educators.

These impact studies of the ANEER 2016-2021 model were the first of their kind in Morocco and showed the following results displayed in Table 1.

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Table 1. Results of Quantitative Evaluation of ANEER, 2016-2021

65	20	77%	163	10
Number of units implemented	Million MAD Funds raised for educational equity	Rate of financial contribution from economic actors	Number of educators recruited and trained	Number of rural communes covered
23	11	2	16000	8014
Number of rural communes covered	Average number of units implanted per year	Number of teachers per classroom	Number of educators allocated per unit	Number of girls who benefited from the program
2600	70%	74%	0,60%	0,46%
Average number of children integrated per year	Level of appropriation of learning outcomes	Level of acquisition of behavioral skills	Average absence of children in the preschool program	Wastage rate of children in the preschool program

The ANEER model's impact on early childhood education goes beyond anecdotal evidence; it is supported by robust internal systems for reporting, monitoring, and evaluation. This section delves into the impact evaluation mechanisms that make ANEER an evidence-based and data-driven approach.

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- Strong Internal Systems for Reporting and Monitoring

ANEER takes reporting and monitoring seriously to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of its programs. The foundation has established strong internal systems that continuously track the progress of each preschool unit. Regular updates and feedback from educators, parents, and local associations are collected to assess the program's performance and identify any potential challenges. These systems enable real-time adjustments and improvements, contributing to the overall success of ANEER's early learning initiatives.

- Quick Identification of Improvement Areas

ANEER's commitment to continuous improvement is reflected in its ability to swiftly identify areas that require enhancement. With the help of the internal monitoring systems, ANEER can pinpoint specific aspects of the program that may need adjustment or additional support. By promptly addressing these improvement areas, ANEER ensures that the quality of education remains consistently high and aligned with the evolving needs of the community.

- Continuous Development of Educators for High-Quality Programs

ANEER places great emphasis on the professional development of its educators. Through regular training and capacity-building initiatives, educators are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to deliver high-quality programs. This investment in continuous development not only enhances the educators' teaching abilities but also enriches the learning experience for the children. Well-trained and motivated educators play a pivotal role in ensuring the success and impact of the ANEER model.

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- Evaluation through Impact Studies, including RCTs and Parental Education Assessments

ANEER employs rigorous impact evaluation studies to assess the outcomes and effectiveness of its programs. Randomized Control Trials (RCTs) are conducted to compare the performance of ANEER pre-school graduates with peers who did not attend any pre-school or those in different preschool systems. Additionally, parental education assessments evaluate the impact of ANEER's positive parenthood program on parents' attitudes and behaviors towards early childhood education. These evidence-based evaluations provide valuable insights and contribute to refining and strengthening the ANEER model.

The impact evaluation measures implemented by ANEER demonstrate its commitment to evidence-based practices and data-driven decision-making. Strong internal systems for reporting and monitoring, quick identification of improvement areas, continuous development of educators, and impact studies all contribute to the transformative power of ANEER's early learning initiatives. By continuously measuring and refining its programs, ANEER ensures that it remains a pioneering and impactful model for early childhood education, creating lasting positive change for children and communities in rural areas.

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4. Feasibility and Sustainability of ANEER- Building a Long-lasting Educational Model

The ANEER model's feasibility and sustainability are integral to its success in providing quality early learning opportunities in rural areas. This section explores the cost-effective strategies and innovative approaches that ensure the program's viability and continuity.

- Recruiting and Training Local Educators for Cost-Effectiveness

ANEER's emphasis on recruiting educators locally not only strengthens community involvement but also contributes to cost-effectiveness. By hiring educators from the same communities where the preschools operate, ANEER reduces overhead costs associated with relocation and accommodation. Moreover, local educators are familiar with the cultural nuances and language, allowing for a more relatable and impactful learning experience. The comprehensive training provided by Zakoura Academy ensures that these educators are equipped with the necessary skills to deliver a high-quality program, making the investment in their training highly cost-effective.

- Empowering Local Associations for Sustainability

ANEER is not merely a temporary intervention ; it is designed to empower local communities to sustain the program in the long run. By collaborating with local champions and associations, ANEER ensures that the program's benefits extend far beyond the initial implementation phase. These empowered stakeholders take ownership of the preschools, managing resources, fundraising, and making decisions that align with the community's needs. This community-led approach enhances the sustainability of the ANEER model and creates a lasting impact on early childhood education in rural areas.

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- Low-Tech Innovation for Practical and Scalable Solutions

ANEER's approach to innovation is rooted in practicality and scalability. The model advocates for low-tech solutions, leveraging cost-effective and easily accessible resources. The Information System "SIZA" is an example of how ANEER employs technology to provide instant guidance and instructional materials to educators and assistants. Furthermore, the creation of the MOOC "Mama Tabiaa" ensures the continuity of ANEER's curriculum even after the initial project period. These low-tech innovations not only minimize costs but also make the program replicable and adaptable to different contexts.

- Ensuring Continuity of the Program Beyond the Initial Implementation

ANEER's sustainability efforts extend beyond the project's duration. By empowering local associations and providing access to instructional materials, ANEER ensures the continuity of the program even after the Zakoura Foundation's direct involvement ends. Educators are well-equipped to continue delivering high-quality programs, and local champions are trained to manage and sustain the preschool units. This seamless transition from project to community-led initiative guarantees the longevity and impact of the ANEER model.

Conclusion

The ANEER model stands as a beacon of innovative and impactful early learning in rural areas. By adopting a community-based, inclusive, and culturally sensitive approach, ANEER fills the gap of pre-primary education, enhances community involvement, and fosters a sense of identity among children.

The model's feasibility and sustainability are equally commendable, achieved through cost-effective strategies, empowerment of local stakeholders, low-tech innovations, and a focus on continuity beyond the initial implementation. ANEER's success serves as a testament to the transformative power of education and the potential for positive change when communities come together to invest in the future of their children.

The ANEER model is not only a blueprint for effective early childhood education but also a testament to the significance of collaboration, innovation, and community engagement in building a better and more equitable future for all children, regardless of their geographic location or socio-economic background.