

# HEP-M gathers Moroccan universities to strengthen primary-school teacher preparation



ASU experts facilitate an exercise in Universal Design for Learning during a week of workshops with teacher-trainers from throughout Morocco in February 2022. *(Photos: Daniel Lynx Bernard for ASU)*



By Daniel Lynx Bernard – April 8, 2022

More than 300 teacher trainers from throughout Morocco gathered in February 2022 to brainstorm a wide-ranging overhaul of Morocco's system for preparing primary school teachers as part of the Higher Education Partnership-Morocco (HEP-M) funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by Arizona State University's Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College.

As they met in person for the first time since the advent of the coronavirus pandemic, the professors in primary teacher preparation emerged from six days of workshops with rejuvenated curricula and course material aimed at equipping primary school teachers in Morocco to connect effectively with students who have varying needs.

The gathering in Morocco's capital, Rabat, was a key step in HEP-M, in coordination with the Moroccan government. Moroccan officials said the coordination and expert advice provided by MLFTC is helping the country improve its system for training teachers, which the government recognizes as essential for combating poverty and social inequality.

Morocco is racing to fill the gap in its supply of teachers while acknowledging needs in its teacher training systems. A World Bank survey in 2016 found that many who complete teacher training in Morocco do not meet minimum international qualifications for language and math teaching. The Moroccan government's New Development Model vision statement in 2021 identified investing in teacher training as the first "fundamental lever of education quality" that can bring about an "educational renaissance."

"In the process of reforming our education system, the teacher is at the heart of these developments," said Mohamed Tahiri, director of Higher Education and Pedagogical Training in Morocco's Ministry of Higher Education, in remarks to participants during the opening session. "We are working with USAID to really stress the importance of the primary education teacher. That's why we have this program. This meeting is one of the major milestones in this program."

USAID Morocco Mission Director Brooke Isham said the effort coordinated by ASU will "create a new generation of better-qualified teachers in Morocco."

"The partnerships that we have all established will build teachers' skills, and in so doing, change the future for millions of Moroccan students, ensuring that the country will deliver to these students the education that they need to meet the challenges of our century," Isham said.



USAID Morocco Mission Director Brooke Isham addresses a workshop in Rabat in February 2022 attended by faculty from teacher-preparation institutions from throughout Morocco. *(Photo: Daniel Lynx Bernard for ASU)*

Under the project, MLTFC is sharing its experience in teacher preparation with counterparts from Moroccan universities and regional teacher training centers. In the past, primary school teachers in Morocco focused on a subject during their undergraduate studies and learned how to teach only briefly in regional centers during pre-service training. Morocco introduced a bachelor's degree dedicated to primary education in 2018.

Under the HEP-M project, universities offering a bachelor's degree in primary education are collaborating substantively with the pre-service training centers for the first time. Working together in 11 research and development groups, they are revising the bachelor's program to meet international standards.

By bringing together teacher-trainers from different institutions, the groups have had a secondary benefit, said ASU's project manager for HEP-M and Clinical Assistant Professor Tanya Pinkerton, by enabling collaboration that otherwise would not happen, along with sharing perspectives on the state of teacher training around the country.

The HEP-M project launched in January 2020. With the emergence of COVID-19 and restrictions on in-person gatherings, the groups and ASU experts worked remotely to revise syllabi for courses in the bachelor program. With the lifting of restrictions, the February 2022 workshops were the first time the partners could meet face-to-face. At the workshops, the groups finished the syllabi and proceeded to create course content.





A Moroccan teacher-trainer presents her group's brainstorming on instructional methods accessible to learners with different needs during a workshop in Rabat, Morocco, in February 2022 under the HEP-M project. (Photo: Daniel Lynx Bernard for ASU)

ASU is also leveraging the resources of the project to support Moroccan teacher-trainers as they research the effectiveness of their training. At the workshops, ASU provided participants with a structure to increase the relevance and coherence of their research projects. Under HEP-M, ASU experts provide mentorship and selected funding to researchers and will even find journals that may be interested in publishing the work. Participants said they hope to research varied topics such as the impact of extracurricular activities on soft skills; the use of mind maps in math instruction; attitudes among Moroccan learners toward science, technology, engineering and math; and instructional practices for children with autism.

"I thank Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College for their huge effort expended to support and accompany the work of the Higher Education Partnership–Morocco," said Nouredine El Mazouni, deputy director of Pedagogical Training.

Because Moroccan faculty are generating these ideas, the curriculum has a strong chance of sustaining beyond the initial phase, according to ASU's Chief of Party for HEP-M, Abdessamad Fatmi. "What struck me was to see the level of engagement of the groups," Fatmi said. "I was truly impressed and proud, because I think this project has the characteristics of having the ownership of the teams on the ground, and this is what's making it strong. The fact that we have such a high percentage of professors and instructors from the centers who have owned the project is a sort of guarantee that they will defend it."