
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Teaching Soft Skills in Primary Schools in Morocco: Challenges of Training In-Service Teachers and Pre-Service Teachers

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| ABSTRACT

Morocco has recently embarked on a transformative educational reform aimed at integrating soft (life) skills into the primary school curriculum (2021) to enhance students' cognitive and socio-emotional development. However, the success of this reform is heavily contingent upon the pedagogical readiness of teachers. This study examines the status of professional training in soft skills among in-service and pre-service teachers in Morocco. Using a descriptive-analytical approach with AI human post-editing, data were collected through two structured questionnaires administered to a sample of 100 participants (50 in-service teachers and 50 trainee teachers). The results reveal a significant systemic gap: approximately 80% of both groups reported a total lack of official training in life skills pedagogy. Furthermore, despite the high willingness to undergo training (89.6%), nearly 50% of the practitioners had ceased teaching these skills due to insufficient training and time constraints. The study highlights a "training-practice gap" where the 2021 curriculum was launched without adequate preparation within the Regional Centers for Education and Training Professions (CRMEFs). The article concludes with strategic recommendations, emphasizing the need for a unified, mandatory training framework, the integration of e-learning tools, and the professionalization of educational supervision to ensure the sustainability of soft skills integration.

| KEYWORDS

CRMEF, curriculum reform, life skills, Morocco, primary education, soft skills, teacher training|

ARTICLE DOI:**1. Introduction**

Currently, there is a growing tendency to use the new term *soft skills*. This collective term encompasses a variety of characteristics and skills that can be applied in many fields and over the long term. In this regard, Morocco has developed a new development model that emphasizes a set of recommendations, such as: *“The national education and training system must be learner-centered and based on accountability and motivation of stakeholders, with the aim of training citizens who contribute to economic and social progress.”* (Conseil Economique, Social et Environnemental, 2019)

Thus, Morocco has committed to projects integrating life skills into its school system. These ambitious projects aim to establish life skills modules within vocational and higher education training frameworks. In a spirit of continuity, the Moroccan education system has undertaken, within the framework of recent reforms, revisions to the 2021 curriculum that take these life skills into account. The importance of this reconfiguration of primary education lies in the fact that these so-called “soft” life skills must be acquired from early childhood.

In line with these new orientations, the training of teachers and future teachers appears to be a necessary condition for the success of these projects and requires the mobilization of all training institutions. This objective can only be achieved if training programs are based on a pedagogical framework that includes, in addition to traditional training modules, modules dedicated to teaching soft skills.

Thus, to what extent does initial and continuous teacher training in Morocco prepare teachers effectively to teach soft skills in primary school? To address this issue, this research seeks to analyze how initial and continuous teacher training programs in Morocco contribute to preparing in-service and pre-service teachers to teach soft skills in primary education, in order to identify strengths, limitations, and areas for improvement.

2. 1. Teacher Training for Teaching Soft Skills (Life Skills) at CRMEF**A. 2.1. Teaching Life Skills in Primary Education**

The concept of soft skills began to develop in the 1980s within the U.S. military during a conference of the Armed Forces Command (Whitmore, 1972). In the 1990s, soft skills emerged in the labor market as essential competencies for employee recruitment. These skills encompass personality traits that determine how individuals interact with

others, enabling them to successfully manage challenges and opportunities in their positions (Perreault, 2004). In parallel, in 1993, the World Health Organization (WHO) defined psychosocial skills, namely soft skills, as a person's ability to maintain a state of mental well-being by adopting appropriate and positive behavior in interactions with others, their culture, and their environment. Several definitions have been proposed for soft skills. One of them states: "Soft skills are behavioral, emotional, and sometimes cognitive abilities that represent human qualities or personality-related characteristics." (taleez.com) These skills are so essential that they are also called life skills. Soft skills therefore contrast with hard skills, which refer to professional knowledge and technical know-how.

Since the 2000s, soft skills have increasingly permeated the education sector, as children and young people face numerous challenges in learning, employment, and social integration. Education systems often struggle to advance learners' individual and social development. As UNICEF has emphasized, "Success in school, work, and life must be supported by a broad range of skills and values, the development of which should be encouraged by education systems." (unicef)

Regardless of the terminology used, it is necessary to clarify why these skills are indispensable at school and in life. A student who can solve problem situations and collaborate with peers has greater chances of academic success and social and personal fulfillment. Teaching these skills also improves the quality of learning. In this context, Morocco has integrated life skills modules into university and vocational programs over the past decade. In 2021, these skills were officially included in the new primary school curriculum under the designation life skills, as part of the implementation of Framework Law 51-17, particularly Integrated Project No. 8 of the twelfth lever of the Strategic Vision 2015–2030. The implementation of the new curriculum also draws inspiration from the 2017 Life Skills and Citizenship Education Initiative in the Middle East and North Africa region, adapted to the sociocultural specificities of Moroccan schools.

The transition toward the 2021 curriculum was preceded by several national initiatives, such as the 'Maharati' project and the 'Open P-Tech for Africa' program. While these initiatives provided a foundation, Zemrani and Ezzahri (2021) identified significant constraints that limit their effectiveness, stressing the necessity of a holistic implementation model that spans all educational cycles to ensure sustainability.

B. 2.2. Teacher Training at CRMEF

Training is defined as all actions capable of enabling individuals and groups to competently perform their current or future functions (Valter, 2000). It also refers to a set of planned actions, methods, techniques, and tools through which employees are encouraged to improve their knowledge, behaviors, attitudes, skills, and mental abilities in order to achieve organizational, personal, and social objectives and adapt to their environment (Sekiou, 2014).

Like other countries, Morocco has considered human resource training a major priority in education system reforms. Since 2000, the National Charter for Education and Training has given strategic importance to teacher training,

linking teachers' commitment to school renewal. (Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, de la formation et de la recherche scientifique, 2000)

Three types of institutions have been dedicated to teacher training since independence:

- Teacher Training Centers (CFI) for primary teachers,
- Regional Pedagogical Centers (CPR) for lower secondary teachers,
- Higher Normal Schools (ENS) for secondary teachers and agrégation candidates,
- Regional Centers for Education and Training Professions (CRMEF), which operate under the supervision of the Ministry of Education.

CRMEFs in Morocco (12 centers) cover three educational cycles (pre-school, primary and high schools), and are responsible for:

- teacher qualification,
- aggregation preparation,
- leadership training,
- continuous professional development,
- and scientific and educational research.

At the pedagogical level, the architecture of the new training system is based on fundamental principles: a competency-based approach with a modular structure, and an alternation between theoretical training and professional practice situations. A group of trainers is responsible for delivering training within these centers and for carrying out the missions mentioned above. Based on our experience as teachers and our interactions with CRMEF trainers, we assert that these trainers are generally agrégation holders, PhD holders, teacher-researchers, and primary and secondary public-school teachers who have accumulated professional experience and are recruited solely through an admission interview. Currently, there is no dedicated center for training these trainers. However, they occasionally benefit from certain forms of training, such as continuing training sessions organized by the Central Unit for Staff Training within the Ministry of National Education, Preschool and Sports, as well as internal training within the CRMEFs, where trainers share their training contributions with their colleagues. In addition, they participate in national and international conferences and study days.

C. 2.3. The Place of Life Skills in CRMEF Training Programs

The CRMEF pedagogical framework defines four competencies to be developed among trainee teachers: planning, classroom management, assessment of learning, and research and project management. These competencies are developed through core modules, support modules, and optional modules.

Since their establishment in 2011, CRMEFs have not included specific modules dedicated to teaching life skills within teacher training programs.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study Sample

The first questionnaire was administered to 50 primary school teachers, as they have been directly involved in teaching these skills to pupils since the 2021–2022 school year. The second questionnaire was addressed to 50 trainee teachers within the CRMEFs, who are the beneficiaries of the current training and are expected to enter the teaching profession in the coming months. The questionnaires were sent via Google Forms to teachers from more than eight regional academies and to trainee teachers from nine training centers representing nine CRMEFs. The analysis of the results was carried out manually.

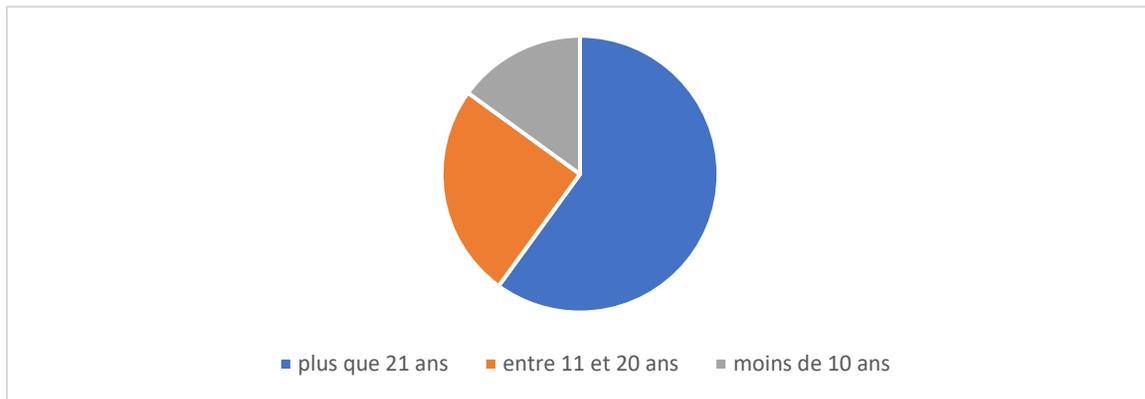
4. 3.2. Results and Discussion

Regarding the 50 questionnaires addressed to in-service teachers, we received 50 responses from experienced teachers (100%) and 40 completed questionnaires from trainee teachers (80%). The teachers and trainee teachers surveyed showed interest and goodwill and answered almost all the questions contained in the questionnaires. The questions were divided into three sections: general information, training, and the teaching of soft skills (life skills).

Data collected from the first section indicate that 54.70% of respondents are male teachers and 45.30% are female teachers. This distribution reflects gender representativeness across the entire sample.

In response to the question related to seniority, the teachers' questionnaire shows that 60% of respondents have more than 21 years of experience, 25% have between 11 and 20 years of experience, and 15% have less than 10 years of experience. Thus, the survey included teachers ranging from the most experienced to newly appointed staff.

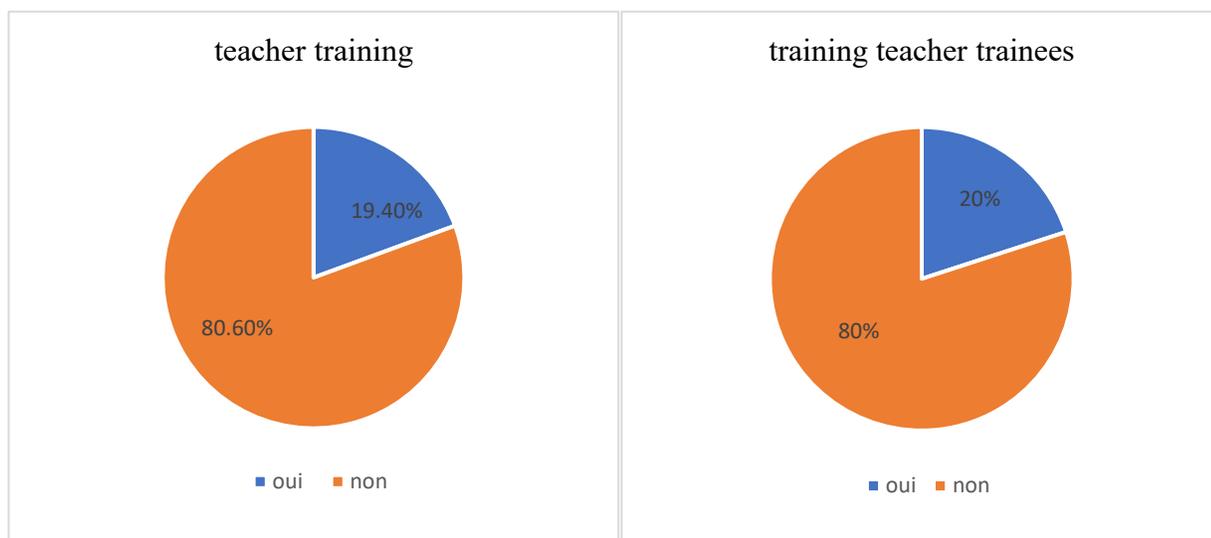
Figure 1 Distribution of In-Service Teachers by Years of Experience



Regarding the regions of the CRMEFs and the schools, it should be noted that ten out of the twelve regions are covered by the survey. This distribution therefore remains reliable for drawing observations and generalizations at the national level.

The first question addressed to teachers in the training section was: *Have you received training related to teaching life skills?*

Figure 2 Comparative Analysis of Life Skills Training Status Between In-Service and Trainee Teachers

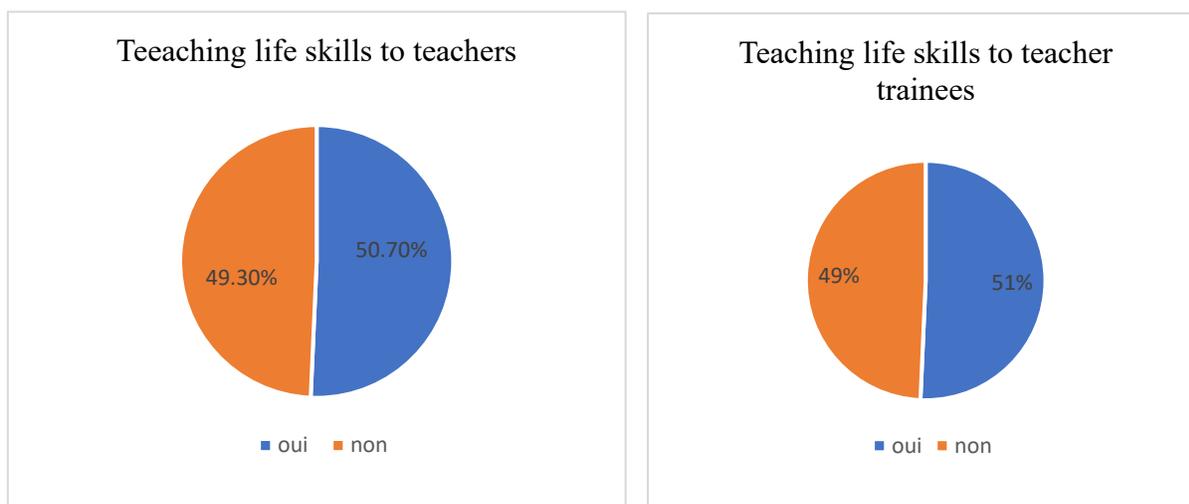


19.40% of teachers and 20% of trainee teachers reported having received training related to teaching life skills. According to the second question, this training was self-training in 53.80% of cases, while 7.70% of respondents received in-service training, and 37.20% received initial training. Regarding the third question, the duration of this training ranged from half an hour to a maximum of five hours. From the fourth question, we note that 76.50% of trained individuals believe that this training is insufficient. Moreover, 80.60% of teachers have never received such training and cited reasons such as lack of time, absence of training in their region, shortage of trainers, and waiting for their turn in their academy's training programs.

The last two questions in the training section show that 89.60% of the teachers surveyed wish to benefit from training in teaching life skills. Of these, 71.70% prefer face-to-face training, while 40% would like distance training. The final question in this section was: *Have you consulted the pedagogical guide: Development of Life Skills?* 53.70% answered no. These percentages among teachers are approximately the same as those observed among trainee teachers.

For the third section on teaching life skills, the first question showed that nearly half of teachers (49.30%) and trainee teachers (51%) no longer teach these skills.

Figure 3 Implementation Rate of Life Skills Teaching Among Practitioners and Trainees



The second question indicates that 59.70% of teachers consider the instructional time allocated to the subject (Development of Life Skills) in the timetable to be insufficient. The final question confirms that 67.1% of teachers consider the teaching of these skills to be important to very important, while 23.9% of practitioners consider it to be of little or no importance.

4.3. Interpretation

An alarming observation emerges from the following data: a minority of 20% of teachers who received training attended only half-hour, two-hour, or at best five-hour sessions, and in 53% of cases this was self-training, far from formal training. These data, among others, help explain why nearly half of teachers no longer teach the life skills development subject that appears in their timetables.

The overwhelming majority of teachers have not received initial or in-service training within CRMEFs. All these teachers have a new subject to teach for one hour per week on their timetables: life skills development, covering three important areas (road safety education, fiscal and entrepreneurial education, and career discovery and initiation into personal projects). However, these skills can be developed and utilized in students' personal projects as well as in

extracurricular activities, and consequently in lifelong learning. This study therefore shows that current CRMEF training related to teaching life skills does not meet teachers' current needs.

We also note that no significant difference was observed between the training status of new teachers (less than six years of experience) and experienced teachers. This indicates that decision-makers in the field of education and training did not anticipate the launch of the 2021 primary curriculum with training programs that qualify teachers to educate students in life skills.

In a related context, the findings of this study align with recent trends in Moroccan educational research that link the acquisition of soft skills in early stages to success in higher education and professional integration. Specifically, Riahi (2022) emphasizes that strengthening these skills within the university pedagogical architecture requires building precise measurement indicators and training trainers on specialized modules. This supports the current research hypothesis that deficiencies in the initial training of primary school teachers will inevitably weaken the foundation upon which higher-level skills are built. Consequently, a holistic approach that integrates e-learning and institutional partnerships is essential to address these training gaps.

Furthermore, the study revealed positive indicators, such as the readiness and willingness of most teachers and trainee teachers to benefit from training related to teaching life skills. A significant proportion of teachers also believe that distance training can be a solution to reduce time and effort and complement face-to-face training. In addition, these teachers confirm that teaching life skills is important or even very important. Therefore, they can engage in the training lever to ensure the success of integrating life skills from early childhood. Finally, the Ministry of National Education, Preschool and Sports must intensify efforts to meet urgent training needs by scheduling high-quality training programs with sufficient duration and by introducing life skills training modules within CRMEFs as soon as possible. Regarding teacher training, CRMEFs and regional academies of education and training must coordinate to ensure initial and continuous training that aligns with teachers' expectations.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores that the successful integration of soft skills within the Moroccan primary education system is fundamentally dependent on a robust and innovative teacher training strategy. While the 2021 curriculum reform represents a significant policy shift toward a more holistic pedagogical model, the findings reveal a critical gap between theoretical intentions and classroom reality. As the primary institutions responsible for teacher preparation, the Regional Centers for Education and Training Professions (CRMEFs) must evolve beyond traditional instructional methods to embrace innovation in initial training, continuous professional development, and applied pedagogical research. High-quality, specialized training is no longer an elective enhancement but a necessity in an era where students must navigate complex socio-emotional and cognitive challenges.

Historically, teacher training has been a complex component to stabilize within Morocco's reform processes. However, a future-oriented perspective necessitates a collective commitment from all educational stakeholders. Only through a synchronized effort can the Moroccan school system fulfill its responsibility of preparing citizens who are not only academically proficient but also socially and personally resilient.

5.1. Recommendations

Based on the empirical evidence and the challenges identified, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of soft skills education:

- To ensure sustainability, it is recommended to adopt a pedagogical model that treats life skills as an independent subject with its own systematic curriculum. As suggested by Zemrani (2022), this should follow a continuous and progressive matrix extending from primary to university education, tailored to the Moroccan socio-cultural context.
- The content of both initial and continuous training must be unified across all CRMEFs to ensure equity in teacher preparation and national pedagogical coherence.
- There is an urgent need for high-quality pedagogical guides and digital resources that can serve as reliable references for self-training and distance learning.
- Rigorous evaluation of the life skills project at the primary and university levels should be a prerequisite before its expansion to the secondary cycles.
- Teacher training in life skills pedagogy should be mandatory prior to the integration of these skills into lower and upper secondary curricula.
- Leveraging educational technologies is essential to facilitate blended learning models, making training more accessible and flexible for teachers in diverse geographical locations.

5.2. Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings underscore that the effective integration of soft (life) skills within the Moroccan education system is contingent upon a profound reconfiguration of teacher training frameworks. First, the central role attributed to CRMEFs implies that these institutions must evolve from being primarily certification-oriented bodies to becoming centers of pedagogical innovation and applied educational research. This shift carries the implication that teacher education should be reconceptualized as a continuous, research-informed process rather than a finite phase preceding classroom practice.

Second, the call for unified training content across all CRMEFs highlights the necessity of national coherence and standardization in teacher competencies, particularly with regard to life skills education. Such unification would

contribute to equity in training quality and reduce regional disparities, while also enabling the establishment of shared benchmarks for evaluating teachers' preparedness to teach transversal skills.

Third, the emphasis on accelerating training programs and prioritizing pedagogical materials for distance and self-directed learning implies a need to rethink traditional training modalities. From an academic standpoint, this suggests the adoption of blended and flexible learning models grounded in adult learning theory, which can better respond to teachers' professional constraints and evolving classroom realities.

Moreover, the insistence on stakeholder commitment indicates that teacher training for life skills cannot be addressed in isolation. Rather, it requires a systemic and collaborative governance approach involving policymakers, training institutions, school leadership, and higher education actors. This has implications for educational policy research, as it calls for studies that examine coordination mechanisms, institutional accountability, and shared responsibility within the Moroccan education reform ecosystem. Afri et al. (2024) and Essaoudi et al. (2014) emphasize that integrating soft skills into the initial training of educational inspectors is fundamental for the professionalization of supervision in Morocco. Their research identifies a specific mapping of soft skills required for inspectors to effectively fulfill their roles, suggesting that high-quality educational performance is contingent upon the soft skills of both teachers and their supervisors. This underscores the need for a systemic reform where soft skills are not only taught to students and teachers but are also integrated into the professional frameworks of the inspectorate to ensure consistency and high-quality pedagogical support.

The recommendation to evaluate life skills teaching at the primary and university levels before scaling it to secondary education further implies the importance of evidence-based policy implementation. Rigorous evaluation frameworks should inform decision-making, ensuring that curricular expansion is grounded in empirical data rather than prescriptive reform agendas.

Additionally, making teacher training mandatory prior to the integration of life skills at lower and upper secondary levels reinforces the principle that pedagogical change must precede curricular change. Academically, this supports the argument that teacher capacity-building is a prerequisite for sustainable educational innovation and student learning outcomes.

The strengthening of life skills training within bachelor's programs in education also suggests a long-term, anticipatory approach to teacher preparation. This has implications for curriculum design in higher education, calling for the early and systematic integration of transversal competencies into pre-service teacher education.

Finally, the promotion of educational technologies and the encouragement of scientific research point to the necessity of cultivating a knowledge-producing training system. The dissemination of empirical research, best practices, and

advanced experiences among trainers and teachers can foster reflective practice and contribute to the development of a localized body of knowledge on life skills education adapted to the Moroccan context.

5.3. Future Research Directions

Future research should first investigate the effectiveness of current teacher training models within CRMEFs in developing teachers' competencies related to life skills education. Comparative studies across different CRMEFs could identify institutional strengths, gaps, and best practices, thereby informing the design of a unified national training framework.

Second, empirical research is needed to examine the impact of initial versus continuous professional development on teachers' ability to integrate soft skills into classroom practice. Longitudinal studies tracking teachers from pre-service training through in-service practice would provide valuable insights into how life skills pedagogy evolves over time and how training translates into sustained instructional change.

Another promising avenue concerns the pedagogical approaches and instructional strategies most conducive to teaching life skills in Moroccan classrooms. Classroom-based research, including action research and mixed-methods studies, could explore how learner-centered, experiential, and project-based pedagogies influence students' acquisition of transversal skills across different educational levels.

In addition, future studies should focus on the role of educational technologies in teacher training for life skills. Research could assess the effectiveness of blended learning, distance training platforms, and digital pedagogical resources in enhancing teachers' autonomy, accessibility to training, and instructional innovation, particularly in geographically remote or under-resourced areas.

The systemic dimension of reform also warrants scholarly attention. Research examining stakeholder collaboration and governance mechanisms—including the roles of ministries, CRMEFs, universities, and schools—would shed light on how coordination and shared accountability affect the success of life skills integration within teacher education reforms.

Furthermore, there is a need for evaluation studies of pilot life skills programs at the primary and higher education levels prior to their extension to secondary education. Such studies should employ robust assessment tools to measure both teacher readiness and student outcomes, thereby contributing to evidence-based scaling strategies.

Another important research direction relates to curriculum alignment in higher education. Studies could explore how bachelor's programs in education integrate life skills training and the extent to which these programs prepare future teachers for the pedagogical, ethical, and social dimensions of their profession.

Finally, future research should aim to document and analyze innovative practices and professional experiences of trainers and teachers through qualitative case studies. This line of inquiry would contribute to the construction of a localized knowledge base on life skills education, grounded in Moroccan educational realities and capable of informing both policy and practice.

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