

MAINTAINING FARSI AS A HERITAGE LANGUAGE IN THE UNITED STATES:  
EXPLORING PERSIAN PARENTS' ATTITUDES, EFFORTS, AND CHALLENGES

by

Maryam Salahshoor  
A Dissertation  
Submitted to the  
Graduate Faculty  
of  
George Mason University  
in Partial Fulfillment of  
The Requirements for the Degree  
of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Education

Committee:

\_\_\_\_\_ Chair

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Program Director

\_\_\_\_\_ Dean, College of Education and Human  
Development

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Spring Semester 2017  
George Mason University  
Fairfax, VA

Maintaining Farsi as a Heritage Language in the United States: Exploring Persian  
Parents' Attitudes, Efforts, and Challenges

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy at George Mason University

by

Maryam Salahshoor  
Master of Education  
University of North Florida, 1999  
Bachelor of Science  
Ferdowsi University, 1990

Director: Marjorie Hall Haley, Professor  
College of Education and Human Development

Spring Semester 2017  
George Mason University  
Fairfax, VA



THIS WORK IS LICENSED UNDER A [CREATIVE COMMONS  
ATTRIBUTION-NONCOMMERICAL 3.0 UNPORTED LICENSE](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/).

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of late my mother, Sakineh Hadadian, who emphasized the importance of education and instilled in me the inspiration to set high goals and the confidence to achieve them. And to the memory of my late father, Ali Javanmardi, who has been my role-model for hard work, persistence and personal sacrifices. I would also like dedicate this to my loving Husband Amir Salahshoor who has been proud and supportive of my work and who has shared the many uncertainties, challenges and sacrifices for completing this dissertation and to my lovely daughter Mondona, my two sons Kian and Cyrus who were supportive and encouraged me to complete this dissertation.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my Chair, Dr. Marjorie Hall-Halley, who provided me with invaluable knowledge and experiences in planning and executing action research in the field of second language learning and teaching. Further, I would like to thank Dr. Rachel Grant for challenging my thoughts and encouraging me to dig deeper into what I needed to say and do for the dissertation and Dr. Joe Maxwell who have guided me in every step of the way. I am grateful for the multiple meetings my committee held with me in order to complete the writing and analyses successfully. You all were the best. Also a very special thank you to Dr. Anastasia Kitsantas and Ms. Joan Stahle for helping me with the guidance for the dissertation and being available to me when I had questions concerning the dissertation process.

## Table of Contents

	Page
List of Tables .....	ix
List of Figures .....	x
List of Abbreviations .....	xi
Abstract .....	xii
Chapter One: Introduction .....	1
Problem Statement .....	1
Purpose of the Study .....	5
Significance of the Study .....	6
Personal, Practical, and Intellectual Goals .....	9
Research Questions .....	14
Design, Data Collection and Analysis .....	14
Limitations of the Study .....	16
Definitions of Terms .....	17
Organization of the Thesis .....	19
Chapter Two: Literature Review .....	21
Introduction .....	21
Theoretical Framework .....	22
Ecological Perspective .....	22
Conceptual Framework .....	28
Review of Heritage Language .....	35
Defining Heritage Language and Heritage Language Learner .....	35
Heritage Language Education in the United States .....	41
Heritage Language Schools .....	48
Heritage Language Development and Maintenance .....	49
Heritage Languages as National Resource .....	51
Critical Need Languages .....	55

Language Shift.....	59
Heritage Language Loss .....	60
Parental Heritage Language Maintenance Efforts .....	64
Iranians in the United States .....	67
Persian (Farsi) as a Heritage Language .....	70
Iranian-American Language Maintenance in the U.S.....	72
Iranian-American Heritage Language Education .....	76
Conclusion .....	79
Chapter Three:Methodology .....	81
Research Questions .....	81
Method.....	82
Interactive Research Design .....	83
Recruitment .....	84
Participants .....	86
Settings.....	86
Piloting the Instrument .....	87
Data Collection .....	88
Interviews.....	89
Interview Process .....	91
Demographic Questionnaire. ....	93
School Visits and Classroom Observations .....	94
Field Notes .....	94
Data Analysis .....	95
Potential Validity Threats .....	106
Summary .....	109
Chapter Four:Results and Findings .....	110
Demographic Data .....	110
School Visits and Classroom Observation .....	113
Findings from Interview Data .....	116
Themes and Sub-themes .....	116
Theme One: Knowing Farsi Helps My Child .....	121
Farsi Skills .....	121

Farsi Opens Doors of Opportunities .....	131
Children Can Make Connection.....	146
Children are Proud of Themselves.....	165
Theme Two: There is No End to Learning Farsi .....	168
Expectations for Speaking .....	170
Expectations for Reading .....	172
Expectations for Writing .....	175
Expectations for Grade Level .....	176
Expectations for Cultural Learning.....	177
Theme Three: We Do Our Best .....	181
We Work with Them .....	182
We have These Rules at Home .....	195
My Husband Supports Me .....	199
Talking about Iranian Culture .....	202
Visiting Iran .....	209
Theme Four: Sometimes it is Hard .....	211
Children Get Frustrated.....	212
Farsi School has its Own Problems .....	216
Language Loss would be a Tragedy .....	235
Farsi Materials are Hard to Find .....	243
Theme Five: I Like This Farsi School .....	246
Farsi Schools.....	246
English Schools.....	259
Theme Six: Persian Community .....	261
Friends.....	262
Mosques .....	264
Library Groups.....	264
Public Events .....	265
Theme Seven: Politics Change All The Time .....	266
Triangulation of Observational Journal and Interviews.....	269
Summary.....	272
Chapter Five: Discussion, Conclusion, and Implications .....	277



Themes as Applied to Bronfenbrenner's Theory.....	280
Microsystem.....	282
Mesosystem.....	289
Exosystem.....	270
Macrosystem.....	299
Chronosystem.....	302
Implications.....	305
Recommendations .....	306
Additional Limitations.....	308
Final Thoughts.....	309
Appendix A IRB Approval Letter.....	310
Appendix B Principals' Consent Letter .....	311
Appendix C Interview Protocol .....	314
Appendix D Participation in Research Consent Letter .....	317
Appendix E Parents' Demographic Questionnaire .....	320
Appendix F Farsi Language Class Observation Protocol.....	322
References.....	323

## List of Tables

Table	Page
Table 1. <i>Persons Who Speak Languages Other Than English in the United States</i> .....	44
Table 2. <i>Themes, Sub-themes, Categories, and Subcategories</i> .....	105
Table 3. <i>Participants' Demographic Information</i> .....	112
Table 4. <i>Participant Children's Demographic Information</i> .....	113

## List of Figures

Figure	Page
<i>Figure 1.</i> Personal, intellectual and professional goals.....	10
<i>Figure 2.</i> Ecological system theory.....	24
<i>Figure 3.</i> Research Framework.....	29
<i>Figure 4.</i> Interactive research design.....	85
<i>Figure 5.</i> Seven step data analysis overview.....	97
<i>Figure 6.</i> Word clouds for common words and phrases.....	100
<i>Figure 7.</i> Seven major themes and their respective sub-themes.....	118
<i>Figure 8.</i> Research question 1 themes, subthemes, and categories.....	120
<i>Figure 9.</i> Shahnameh illustration of a historical battle in ancient Persia.....	125
<i>Figure 10.</i> Cover of a Hafez poem book commonly found in Iranian homes.....	127
<i>Figure 11.</i> Research question 2 themes, subthemes, and categories.....	181
<i>Figure 12.</i> Painting of Shah Abbas II and the courtiers celebrating Nowruz.....	203
<i>Figure 13.</i> Table set with Haft-Seen items at a 2008 White House Nowruz ceremony...	204
<i>Figure 14.</i> Charshanbe Suri in New York City.....	205
<i>Figure 15.</i> Yalda table setting with dried and fresh fruit and nuts.....	206
<i>Figure 16.</i> Persians (Iranians) in Holland Celebrating Sizdeh-Bedar.....	207
<i>Figure 17.</i> A family dinner table in first grade Farsi books.....	223
<i>Figure 18.</i> Nastaliq hand writing from Iran.....	224
<i>Figure 19.</i> Research question 3 themes, subthemes, and categories.....	245
<i>Figure 20.</i> Heritage language learners' ecological system.....	281

## **List of Abbreviations**

Critical Need Languages.....	CLNs
Less Commonly Taught Languages.....	LCTL

## **Abstract**

### **MAINTAINING FARSI AS A HERITAGE LANGUAGE IN THE UNITED STATES: EXPLORING PERSIAN PARENTS' ATTITUDES, EFFORTS, AND CHALLENGES**

Maryam Salahshoor, Ph.D.

George Mason University, 2017

Dissertation Director: Dr. Marjorie Hall Haley

Many people who live in the United States speak languages other than English in their heritage communities. Although heritage language teaching takes place in different instructional settings such as public and private K-12 education and higher education, for many immigrant groups living in the United States, the maintenance of their heritage language and culture are the sole responsibility of their families. Heritage language research shows that immigrant parents value heritage language maintenance highly and wish their children to maintain their home language. However, many immigrants in the United States struggle with heritage language maintenance in the English dominant society. Members of these communities face challenges in their efforts to preserve their language and pass on their cultural and linguistic legacies to their children. In order to understand obstacles to maintaining heritage language in ethnic communities, it is necessary to examine the issues that each community faces in preserving their language. Much research addresses the nature of heritage language learning in other ethnic

communities, however, the research on Iranian-American heritage language (Farsi) learning or maintenance is scarce within the U.S. context. Using a qualitative lens for inquiry, this study explored Iranian-American parents' perspectives and attitudes about Farsi as their heritage language in the Washington DC metropolitan area. This work focused on parents' attitudes and goals for maintaining the heritage language and the nature of their language maintenance experiences and difficulties they encountered. Data were collected through parents' responses to a demographic questionnaire and interviews, classroom observations, and a semester-long reflection journal.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

*“Millennia of human experiences are wrapped up in the planet’s many languages, and this linguistic diversity may be as essential to our cultural health as biological diversity is to our physical health. No language is an exact map of any other; each is, in a sense, its own world. By allowing so many of these worlds to slip away, we may be forfeiting a lot more than just words.”(Sampat, 2001, p.34)*

### **Problem Statement**

The immigrant population in the United States has increased vastly over the past twenty years. In the last half of the 20th century the United States has experienced the largest influx of immigrant and refugee population since the 19th century. Estimates from 2010 census show that 40 million individuals in the U.S. were first generation, or foreign born immigrants; and one out of four children under 18 in U.S. families had at least one foreign-born parent (Ryan, 2013). In 2012, the foreign born population in the United States grew to 40.8 million, including 40.6 million aged 5 years and older (Gambino, Acosta & Grieco, 2014).

Whatever their initial motives for migration that can range from escaping political oppression or fleeing war and religious persecution to a desire to make a better future for their children, immigrants have one thing in common; they bring a wide range of languages and cultures with them. As a result of demographic changes during the past decades, as a nation, we are becoming more culturally and linguistically diverse.

Although English has been the dominant language in the U.S., language diversity has always been part of the linguistic landscape of the United States. The population of individuals who come from homes in which a language other than English is spoken is growing rapidly as a result of both birth patterns and immigration, therefore, many people in the United States speak languages other than English as their heritage language (Peyton, Ranard, & McGinnis, 2001).

Children from immigrant families often experience a unique challenge in learning English at school while speaking their heritage language at home (Oh & Fuligni, 2010). Immigrant families do worry that in the process of learning English, it will be a challenge to maintain their heritage languages for their children (Guardado, 2002). Valdes (2001) stated:

For the most part, the experiences of these heritage speakers have been similar. They speak or hear the heritage language spoken at home, but they receive all of their education in the official or majority language of the countries in which they live. What this means is that, in general, such students receive no instruction in the heritage language. They thus become literate only in the majority language. (p. 1)

As a result, many immigrant children lose their heritage language by shifting their first language to English, thus making language loss prevalent within many ethnic communities. According to Hinton (2001), when the children of ethnic communities "lose the ability to communicate effectively with their own parents" (p. 331), they will face consequences at the personal, familial, and social level. But beyond this, the loss of ethnic languages weakens the nation as a whole. On the other hand, ethnic language



proficiency highly contributes to the building of ethnic identity, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging (Bankston & Zhou, 1995; Hinton, 2001; Tse, 1999). In regards to language loss, many may blame children of immigrants for not learning their own language.

However, without formal and direct instruction the development of speaking and literacy skills in the heritage language would be minimal and unsuccessful (Cummins, 2005).

Even with an increasing number of immigrants, heritage language education in the U.S. receives less support compared to English programs. Though foreign language education has always been part of the education system in the U.S., school systems have paid little attention to fostering language skills of students who are to some degree proficient in languages other than English (Fishman, 2001). Over the past decade a greater interest has been placed in acquisition of second languages, while heritage language learning has been ignored (Guardado, 2002).

Due to an increasing awareness of the advantages of heritage language maintenance and a growing realization of the consequences of language loss, there has been a growing interest in heritage language maintenance and development, not only in the academic or research communities, but also in the general public and various institutions. For instance, there has been an increasing desire among immigrant and language minority populations to preserve their heritage languages (Campbell & Peyton, 1998; Griffith, 2004).

Concerned about the disappearance of their language in the next generations, many educators and parents of immigrants have attended to the linguistic and cultural needs of the children of immigrants. Although heritage language teaching takes place in

many different instructional settings such as public and private K-12 education and higher education, for many immigrant groups living in the United States, the fostering and maintenance of their language and culture is the sole responsibility of immigrants and their families (Bradunas, 1998; Fishman, 2001; Kloss, 1998). Parents and educators in ethnic communities, who recognize the importance of maintaining their language and culture, show their efforts in many different ways. Sometimes their effort is in the form of reinforcing home language use with different incentives and rewards, other times it is through community heritage language schools. Regardless of the methods for reinforcing language, members of these heritage language communities face many challenges in their efforts to preserve their heritage language and pass on their cultural and linguistic legacies to their children (Peyton et al., 2001).

These problems have been particularly substantial for Iranian-American immigrants, who, for the most part, left their country during late 1970s due to political differences with the current government in Iran and consider themselves a self-exiled group. Many of Iranian families have chosen to remain in the U.S., giving birth and raising their children. According to a survey by Iranian Studies Group at MIT, Iranians living in the United States value and regard language, traditions, festivities, and family values as the most important aspects of the home culture (Mostashari, 2004). However, there is a wide difference in the extent of language maintenance between the first and second generation Iranian-Americans. First generation Iranian-Americans most frequently use “Farsi” as their preferred language. However, ultimately, their children

make American friends, attend American schools, and speak English as their first and sometimes only language.

While the heritage language issue has been recognized for quite some time (Wong Fillmore, 1991), studies on immigrant parents' attitudes toward language maintenance has not received sufficient attention. Few studies have paid attention to how the immigrants use and maintain their home language on one hand and adjust to the U.S. culture and society on the other (King, 2000). Fishman (2006) argued that "immigrant languages were rarely regarded as a national resource, thus study of immigrants' language situations has been neglected" (p.15).

This lack of attention is even more pronounced for Iranian-American immigrants. As families become increasingly aware of the importance of heritage language maintenance and development, they have come to realize that more is needed if they are to maintain their language and prevent language loss. In order to understand the challenges facing ethnic communities, it is important not to essentialize these communities but to examine the issues and challenges faced by each community.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The current study intended to investigate ideologies of Farsi as a heritage language and the underlying attitudes and expectations that set the tone for Farsi language acquisition and goals of language maintenance efforts for Iranian-American ethnic communities. Given the paucity of heritage language programs offered in K-12 education in the United States (Merino, Trueba, & Samaniego, 1993), community efforts to preserve this capability are clearly important and indeed can be viewed as an important

national resource (Fishman, 1980). Much research addresses the nature and issues related to heritage language learning in ethnic communities such as Korean or Chinese (Hu, 2006; Park, 2007). However, the research on Farsi learning or maintenance is scarce within the U.S. context (Modarresi, 2001). Iranian-American living in the Washington DC metropolitan area have received little attention, and to this point, there is a shortage of literature related to their heritage language maintenance. It is very important to learn about the heritage language experience of Iranian-Americans, because it often takes place in the unique context of their homes, the only place where Farsi is used. More research is needed to explore the experiences and challenges faced by families and to provide insight about the unique context on Farsi heritage language use. The primary goal of this study was to address the void in heritage language research by examining Iranian-American immigrant parents' attitudes toward Farsi maintenance in the U.S. and shed light on difficulties associated with language maintenance, both at home and in Farsi heritage language schools.

### **Significance of the Study**

All over the world, languages, as an important part of culture, are changing nations' and people's lives through increased local, regional, national and international communication. As a result the demand for people who are proficient in world/foreign languages is growing worldwide. Globalization and rapidly shifting political and military demands have changed the ways that indigenous and foreign languages are viewed and valued. In a globalized economy, advanced language skills are increasingly important, and in terms of U.S. national security, these skills are now vital (Brecht & Ingold, 1998;

Fishman, 1980; Peyton et.al, 2001). Immigrant languages have long being viewed as a national resource for our social, economic, and security, regardless of whether they are widely spoken or not. Moreover, there are benefits to promoting heritage languages at both societal and individual levels.

At the societal level, heritage language promotion can increase the country's resources for commerce and government services (Krashen, Tse, & McQuillan 1998; Tse, 2001). Increasingly speakers of many other languages are needed in business and government agencies around the world. It is reported that the shortages of staff with foreign language expertise at several agencies have adversely affected U.S. military, law enforcement, intelligence, counter terrorism, and diplomatic efforts (Brecht & Ingold, 1998). As the global economy is shifting away from the English-speaking world, there is a growing need in the United States for individuals who are proficient in languages other than English (Wiley, Moore, & Fee, 2012).

At the individual level, developing the heritage language has social, personal and cultural benefits. People who develop their heritage language have an advantage in social interactions, including the ability to converse fluently with other heritage language speakers. Heritage language development can be an important part of identity formation and can help individuals gain a strong sense of connection with their ethnic group (Cho, 2000). Some studies suggest that higher competence in one's heritage language may lead to higher self-concept and heritage language speaker students may feel pride in their ability to speak their language well when they grow up (Fan, 2002). Benefits in family values, career advantages and cultural vitality are evident as well. In a study conducted

by Cho (2000), participants viewed their heritage language as a tool needed to communicate and socialize with one's family and with others. They believed that their heritage language development provided a personal gain, eventually contributing positively to the improvement of the society.

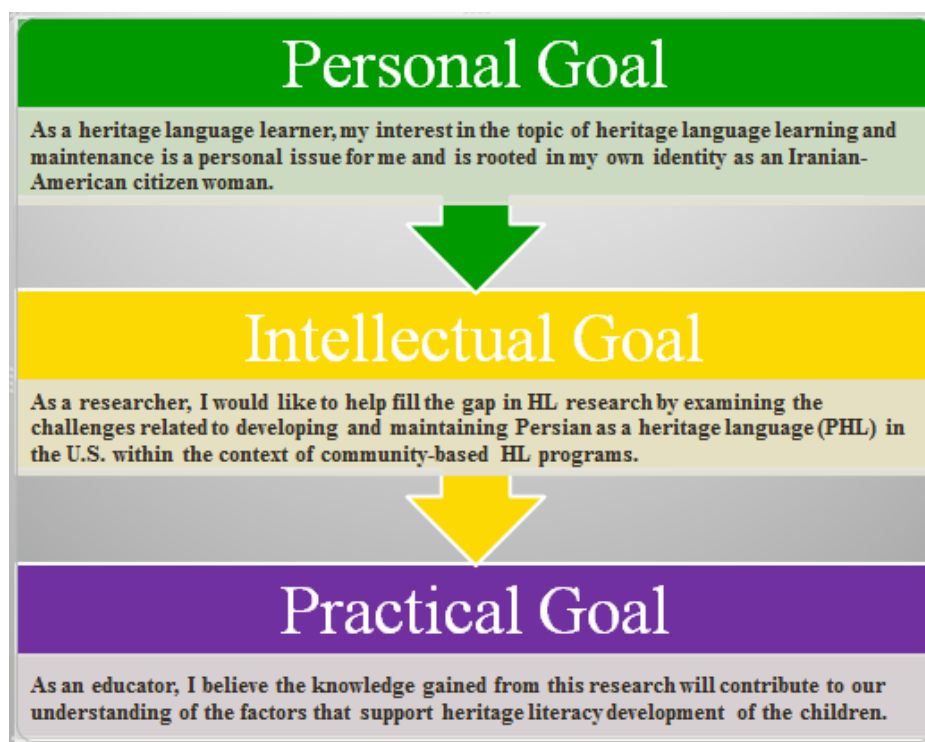
Immigrants are living at the intersection of at least two cultures and two languages on a daily basis (Berry, 2005). They are living in a bilingual environment where they can nurture both languages. Some have argued that in meeting the real and growing needs for professional-level language skills in the U.S., one of the most economical approaches is to tap the ethnic language resources already available (Brecht & Ingold, 1998; Crawford, 1995). According to Brecht and Ingold (1998), ethnic languages should be seen as a national resource, as they possess an “untapped reservoir of linguistic competence” (p. 2). Regular use of a heritage language with family and friends results in advanced language skills that nonnative speakers of the language must spend hundreds of hours of instruction to acquire. Webb and Miller (2000) emphasized that heritage language learners are proficient in their language in ways that traditional foreign language learners are not and possess skills that are rarely attained by non-heritage speakers. By promoting heritage language the nation will benefit by having citizens who are linguistically and culturally competent to advance in international business and to promote diplomatic efforts and enhance national security.

Further, the results of the present study would allow researchers interested in heritage language to learn more about immigrant families' language experiences and issues and offer recommendations for addressing challenges. In addition, findings from

this research offers ideas for training heritage language teachers potentially reducing the shortage of foreign language teachers (Tse, 2001). This current study contributes to the body of research in the field of foreign language and heritage language and will also inform the field of language education of the relevant issues surrounding the complex patterns of heritage language use. The results and implications of this research will also be of value to teacher educators who work with linguistically diverse students and the immigrant families who strive to make informed decisions regarding language planning and education for their children.

### **Personal, Practical, and Intellectual Goals**

My decision to examine Farsi language learning and maintenance through this research project was based on my own personal, practical, and ideological reasons. Because of my own experience as a heritage language speaker and my extensive role in this qualitative study as a researcher in an Iranian community, it is crucial that I examine my positionality, beliefs and values which might have influenced my observations (Merriam, 2001). According to Maxwell (2005), goals of a study include motives, desires, and purposes. "A clear understanding of the goals motivating your work will help you to avoid losing your way or spending time and effort doing things that don't advance these goals" (p. 15). Maxwell (2005) identifies three kinds of goals - personal, practical, and professional (or intellectual). In this section, I describe my personal, academic, and professional backgrounds related to this study and demonstrate how they have shaped and inspired this study (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1. My personal, intellectual and practical goal*

**Personal goals.** I believe that ‘the personal goal’ plays an important role in qualitative research. As a heritage language learner, my interest in heritage language learning and maintenance was indeed a personal issue for me. I chose this topic, because I believe that language loss is a problem that negatively impacts both language minority speakers and dominant language groups worldwide. Further, I believe that immigrants who lose their language can easily become separated from their cultural heritage and this language loss might prevent them from fully realizing the richness of their cultural identity. To date, few studies, directly or indirectly have studied Iranian communities in the U.S. with regard to language loss and maintenance.



Additionally, my interest in the topic of heritage language learning and maintenance is a personal issue for me that is rooted in my own identity as an Iranian-American woman and U.S. citizen. I am aware of ways that culture, language, and race intersect to construct personal identity and I understand that identity and culture are not fixed concepts, but that identity formation is indeed fluid and not fixed. My identity evolves as my experiences vary and past experiences construct and inform the (re) construction of my current identity as a woman, as an Iranian and as an American.

I grew up in a middle class family in Iran. Upon receiving my undergraduate degree in the field of special education, I came to the United States, got married, worked and raised three children. At first it was hard to assimilate into the new environment and to gain the same human capital, i.e., English language skills that native-born English speakers enjoyed. Eventually, I improved my English skills, earned a graduate degree, and became a U.S. citizen. However, deep within me there was always a desire to hold on to the language and culture that had shaped who I was, and who I was becoming. Over the years I have spent in the U.S., I also came to realize how important it was for me to pass on my language and cultural heritage to my children. As a result, I exposed and acculturated my children to Iran's history and Iranian culture by speaking Farsi to them, celebrating events like Nowruz (Iranian's New Year), observing other cultural traditions, and attending Iranian community activities. When they were young, I purchased children's literature on my visits to Iran and read them to my children. Eventually, I even enforced the use of Farsi at home over subtle objections from my husband, who is also Iranian, and growing resistance of my children. As I looked back at my efforts, I came to

feel that I should have done more to pass on my heritage language and culture to my children and feared that the Farsi skills my children had acquired might be lost.

Over the years as I spoke with other Iranian parents, I realized that I was not alone. As a result of my own experiences and challenges in teaching and maintaining Farsi for my children, I want to know what conflicts, both linguistic and cultural, other Farsi speaking parents have encountered and how they have dealt with those issues. I believe that preserving a heritage language requires constant awareness and practice, which can only be accomplished through deliberate and sustained actions. Similar to my situation, many Iranian-American families either don't have extended families in the U.S. or their relatives are spread throughout the United States. Therefore, many Iranian-American families find it difficult to teach and maintain Farsi in their homes and to pass on Iranian cultural traditions to their children.

According to Ramezanzadeh (2010), since the "Iranian Hostage Crisis" in 1980, Iranian-American immigrants have been subjected to discrimination and prejudice in the U.S. In addition to the struggles individual Iranian-American families experience maintaining Farsi at home, we cannot ignore the geo-political and socio-historical reasons why Farsi speakers and Iranians face unique challenges in the U.S. context as compared to other immigrant communities. Some Iranian immigrants have chosen to disassociate themselves from their nationality and chose not to speak their heritage language or teach it to their children in order to avoid the negative stigma associated with being Iranians. I have observed this behavior first hand. Over the years, there have been occasions when my Iranian friends are reluctant to or have refused to speak in Farsi when we are in a

public space, e.g., mall or restaurant, fearing they might draw attention to themselves.

**Intellectual goal.** Maxwell (2005) describes intellectual (or professional) goals, as “those goals that are focused on understanding something - gaining insight into what is going on and why this is happening, or answering some question that previous research has not adequately addressed (p. 21).” As a result, I was interested to find out about the ways other Farsi speaking parents perceive home language learning and maintenance. As a researcher, I wanted to understand the challenges related to developing and maintaining Farsi heritage language in the U.S. within the context of community-based heritage language programs. Also, much research addresses the heritage language learning in ethnic communities such as Korean or Chinese. However, there are relatively few studies that examined Farsi language learning or maintenance in the U.S. It appears that the lack of such research in Farsi may be related to other factors. First, Iranian-American scholars traditionally pursue higher education in engineering and medical field. Second, due to the long-standing animosity between the U.S. and Iran, many Iranian-American scholars prefer to avoid controversial topics that might impede their advancement in academia (Ramezanzadeh, 2010). Also, heritage language study is a relatively less explored area of research compared with other areas such as second language acquisition, or English-as-a-second-language. The findings from the present study will fill a void in the literature by providing information regarding how heritage languages are maintained within Iranian ethnic communities and the role Farsi language schools play in this effort and what it means for Iranian families and communities (Fishman, 2006).

**Practical goal.** Maxwell (2005) indicates that "practical goals are focused on

accomplishing something - meeting some need, changing some situation, or achieving some objective” (p. 21). As an educator, I believe the knowledge gained from this research will contribute to our understanding of the factors that support heritage literacy development of the immigrant children, that is, the findings can aid in better understanding how parents are situated in their efforts and challenges in maintaining Farsi heritage language education in the Washington DC metropolitan area. As well, on a personal level, conducting this research will help me gain a better understanding of how to support parents seeking to maintain Farsi as a heritage language.

### **Research Questions**

The following three questions frame my research:

- 1- What are the Iranian-American parents’ views, motivations and expectations in sending their children to Farsi heritage schools?
- 2- What are some efforts and challenges that parents face in maintaining Farsi heritage language in their children?
- 3- What role does the Persian community (Farsi schools, mosque, etc.) and the larger community play in heritage language development and maintenance?

### **Design, Data Collection, and Analysis**

This study utilized a qualitative methodology to investigate the language beliefs, practices, and challenges faced by Iranian-American immigrants living in the Washington DC metropolitan area as they strive to develop and maintain Farsi as a heritage language. To a lesser extent, this study explored Farsi language instructional practices within two classroom contexts in order to identify the nature of language instruction. Qualitative data

analyses allowed for rich description of Iranian-Americans and gave voice to their experiences as parents seeking to maintain the Farsi language and cultural traditions within the U.S. context.

Semi-structured interviews were used in order to gain in-depth knowledge of the respondents' experiences, to allow 'space' for them to explore their feelings and positionality regarding heritage language maintenance and share their efforts to 'pass-on' the language to their children. In addition, the interviews provided the opportunity for them to express opinions about the nature of language instruction their children received in Farsi language schools. By meeting with participants face-to-face, richer information can be derived from their social cues, such as voice, pitch, and body language in addition to their verbal answers (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Therefore, semi structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted to help me gain in-depth knowledge of respondents' thoughts and provide information on the patterns of heritage language use, the influence of Iranian ethnic identity on language maintenance, and the types of family language practices and factors that work favorably toward language maintenance. Also they were able to share the challenges they encountered.

Questionnaires were the secondary data source for this study. Biographical questionnaires were given to the parent/participants to explore family background and provide other pertinent demographic information. In addition to information provided on the questionnaires, data collected from audio-recorded interviews as well as classroom observations were analyzed, compared and triangulated to identify common elements as well as differences. All of interview data were transcribed in Farsi and translated into

English to support the major findings. Direct quotes from participants were included to illustrate findings as well.

The analysis of data was guided by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory where it was appropriate, thus maintaining self-awareness by constantly going back to the conceptual and theoretical framework and evaluating how those theories help to explain and situate the parents/participants' experiences.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Limitations of a study should be stated explicitly so that the reader can decide to what extent they affect the results (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2003). There are several noteworthy limitations to this study. The first limitation of this study is that only first-generation Iranian-American immigrant parents participated. Given these parameters, children's attitudes toward their heritage language were not studied directly. Excluding the voices of the participants' children, may factor influentially in parents' attitudes toward heritage language maintenance. In addition, while there are various types of Iranian-American families (first- and second-generation Iranian-American immigrants, multi-racial Iranian-American descendants, and adopted Iranian-American individuals), this study only investigated first-generation Iranian-American parents who have settled in the United States in the recent decades. Further, since the study explored 12 Iranian-American immigrant parents from three schools in the Washington DC metropolitan area, the findings are limited to this small sample size, therefore, the study cannot draw a conclusion to generalize its findings to the larger population and does not represent the broader population of Iranian-American immigrant in the United States who receive Farsi

heritage language instruction. Additionally, while the study claims its significance from its context, which is that these families live in an area where support for formal instruction in Farsi as a heritage language may be relatively low, the study did not account for an in-depth investigation of outside-the-home situations to verify the level and quality of heritage language support within the participants' communities. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that my close relationship with the Iranian-American community and my membership with this community might have jeopardized the analysis of the data and interpretation of findings.

### **Definitions of Terms**

Several key terms used throughout this dissertation are defined here in order to provide consistency in their interpretations by readers.

**Biliteracy:** Biliteracy refers to heritage learners' competencies in the literacies of the dominant society and their own heritage community.

**Critical Needs Languages (CNLs):** Defined by the National Language Security Initiative as languages that are critical to the economic competitiveness and security interests of the United States. They include Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Korean and the families of Indic, Persian, and Turkic languages.

**Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity:** "ethnicity" is assumed to be an entity apart from race that connects social actors to larger groups while distinguishing them from others (Fishman, 1980). Rather than a focus on natural elements, ethnic considerations are often viewed as pertaining to a shared history or origin as well as a shared set of traditions, cultural practices, and morals. When applied to groups as a whole,

these patterns are usually referred to as "ethnicity," and when applied to individual uptake of these patterns "ethnic identity" is often used (Rotheram & Phinney, 1987).

**Farsi:** Farsi is the predominant modern descendant of Old Persian, a southwestern Iranian language within the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European languages. It is primarily spoken in Iran, Afghanistan (officially known as Dari since 1958 for political reasons), and Tajikistan (officially known as Tajiki since the Soviet era for political reasons), and some other regions which historically came under Persian influence

**Heritage Language:** The term “heritage language” is used to identify languages other than the dominant language (or languages) in a given social context. Heritage languages defined as “the non-English languages spoken by newcomers and indigenous people” (Peyton et al., 2001, p. 3).

**Heritage Language Communities:** This term refers to indigenous and immigrant groups that speak languages other than the dominant national language (Compton, 2001).

**Heritage Language Learner:** In general, the term “heritage language learner” is used to describe a person studying a language that has proficiency in or a cultural connection to that language (Fishman, 2001).

**Heritage Language Program:** A heritage language program is any language development program that is designed or tailored to address the needs of heritage language learners. Heritage language programs may be at any level or setting, including



community-based, K-12, or higher education, and vary in terms of their approaches to teaching, populations they serve, and other factors.

**Less Commonly Taught Languages:** Languages other than French, German, and Spanish. They tend to be languages that the United States has associated with current economic, strategic, and/or cultural interests (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996).

**Language maintenance:** Language maintenance refers to the continued development of proficiency of children with immigrant background and continued use of heritage language by people with immigrant background (Fase, Japaert & Kroon, 1992).

**Language shift/language loss:** Language shift refers to the change from the habitual use of one language to that of another. Language loss takes place when an individual's linguistic ability in his first language is replaced by his growing second language proficiency (Fase et al., 1992). This study also does not differentiate language shift from language loss.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

The next chapters of this thesis are presented in the following format. Chapter Two will present the theoretical framework of this study and methodology. In this chapter Bronfenbrenner's (1990) ecological perspective is introduced as a theoretical framework of the study followed by several studies investigating immigrant parents' attitudes towards heritage language maintenance. This chapter also offers a literature review on heritage language education, with focus placed on overview of the importance of heritage language education and maintenance in the U.S. Also an overview of the state of Iranian-

American immigrants in the U.S. and their efforts in heritage language maintenance and development will be presented. Chapter Three provides a detailed description of the research methods, which include participant selection, instruments, and procedures, as well as data collection and analysis. Chapter Four will discuss the results of the data and findings. To conclude, Chapter Five presents implications of the findings as well as recommendations for future policy, practice, and research on heritage language maintenance.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

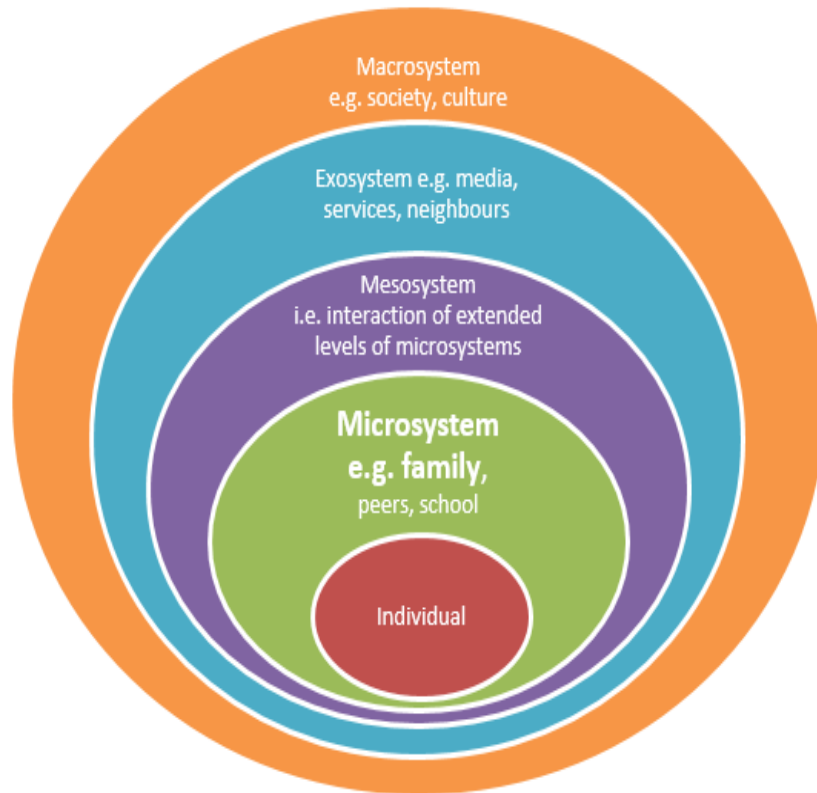
In this chapter a more detailed review of how issues in heritage language education relate to existing theories and current literature is provided. I examine how these theories and other relevant literature apply to heritage language education. Based on the research questions, the literature review is intended to highlight three issues: The first issue is theoretical perspectives-language ideology “Ecological Systems Theory” (Bronfenbrenner, 1990) which serves as a foundation for the present study and examines ecological factors that affect heritage language learning. The second issue is construction of ethnic identity and how it is affected by heritage language development and maintenance. The third issue is a synthesis of research in heritage language programs and maintenance in the U.S. which covers heritage language in four major categories: 1) heritage language learning and maintenance in the United States which offers an overview of how heritage language is dealt with; 2) comprehensive review of various ethnic immigrant parents’ attitudes toward heritage language maintenance from related studies; 3) heritage language loss causes and consequences and 4) heritage language learning and maintenance in Iranian-American communities which includes historical, demographic and supplemental information on the current educational status of Farsi in the U.S.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Bronfenbrenner's (1990) Ecological Systems Theory serves as the theoretical framework for this study. Using an ecological framework, I address the interrelationship of individual, Farsi heritage language school, Iranian-American parental involvement factors, and children's Farsi language success. Ecology of language framework focuses on the power relations among these factors influencing heritage language planning and use. The essential idea of this theory is that in order to understand learning, one must observe a learner's verbal and nonverbal interaction in their learning environment within the context of a system of relationships that form complex layers of environment or ecological system, which affects the individuals who are part of those environments. The ecological framework provides a perspective that is useful for conceptualizing, gathering, and organizing data about and from the various institutions and systems in which individuals function. In order to understand heritage language development in children we must look not only at the child and his/her immediate environment, but also at how the environments of their family, the heritage language school, and the Persian community interact and influence each other. Therefore, Bronfenbrenner's framework was adopted in order to examine how heritage language learning functions in relation to ecological factors in children's life such as sociopolitical, background, and educational contexts (Hornberger, 2003). This section describes the components of the ecological framework details, how the framework has been applied to the three research questions of this study, and discusses how the framework aided in analyzing the results.

## **Ecological Perspective**

The conceptualization of ecology for child development was developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917 – 2005), an influential scholar in the field of human development whose work was influenced by Soviet developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1934-1986) and German-born psychologist Kurt Lewin (1890-1947). Based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory, environmental factors and interrelationships between various environmental settings play a major role in child's development. This model addresses the cause and effect relationships between a child and the environment he or she lives in, both direct (e.g., families, school systems) and indirect (e.g., politics, economy, communities, and government). Bronfenbrenner's (1990) ecological systems framework identifies five socially organized environmental systems which influence human development and learning. Figure 2 presents the ecological systems framework that was modified to present heritage language development in light of this theory. This framework supports thinking about heritage language learners, the contexts of their learning and how learning is related and influenced by the home, the classroom and the wider environment and culture of the child. This model also supports how the various social-political conditions of the larger society can be related to heritage language and how those relationships ultimately create conditions in which heritage language development can be enhanced or diminished.



*Figure 2.* Ecological System Theory adapted from Bronfenbrenner (1979)

Bronfenbrenner (1979) viewed the person's environment as composed of the microsystem, mesosystem, ecosystem and macrosystem. All of these systems work together to create the ecological factors affecting the individuals' life. His ecological system theory proposed that the “developing child is surrounded by layers of relationships like a set of nested Russian dolls” (1979, p. 3). This theory suggest that the child's development takes shape in a system of relationships that forms his or her complex layers of environment, each having an effect on a child's development.

**Microsystem.** Bronfenbrenner (1979) defined the microsystem as the complex system of interrelations within the immediate environment of a person. This layer of the environment is the closest to the children. It concerns the developing personal and face-to-face interactions with those closest to them in their environment. The microsystem contains the child him/herself and the structures, activities, and relationships with significant others which the child has direct contact with in a particular small setting such as family, daycare, school, peer group, community, and neighborhood. Bronfenbrenner's theory (2005) has been revised to emphasize that a child's own biology is a primary environment fueling his or her development, so the theory has recently been also called "Bio-Ecological Systems Theory". The interaction between factors in the child's growing biology, his/her immediate family or community environment, and the social factors directly influences the child's development. It is important to note that the relationship between a child's psychological characteristics and his/her specific environment is unique to individual children. As the child's physical and cognitive structures develop and mature, even in the same setting, such as the same family environment, individual children interact differently with that environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

**Mesosystem.** The mesosystem according to Bronfenbrenner (1979) refers to the interconnectedness of the setting the person participates in and the person's life. The child's mesosystem is the school, church, recreation center, after school program, and any other organization or place a child and family belongs to. The mesosystem is the interrelationship among contexts. Ordinarily, there are cross-relationships between these settings (e.g. home and school, school and community, peer group and school etc.). These

horizontal connections represent the web of interconnections between the structures of the child's microsystem, such as those between the child's mother and a teacher at the child's school (Bronfenbrenner, 1990).

**Exosystem.** The exosystem refers to the interconnectedness of the person with those settings in which he/she does not participate, but which affect his/her life such as the role of external environmental settings or the outer circle of people who are indirectly involved in the children's development. Children are not active participants in these settings, but they ultimately affect their development in one of their microsystems (e.g. parent's workplace, central school administrators, parental social support networks, or the religious community, etc.) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

**Macrosystem.** The macrosystem is the generalized pattern of the nested and interconnected systems that Bronfenbrenner (1979) viewed as the "social institutions common to a particular culture or subculture" (p. 8). This refers to the most distant level of environmental influence such as the impact the children's culture/subculture has on their environment. The macrosystem consists of the dominant cultural and economic conditions of the society and subculture to which children belong, with particular reference to, belief systems, lifestyle (lower/middle/upper class) patterns of social interactions, life changes, or other extended social structures (Bronfenbrenner, 1990). The macrosystem includes cultural values, laws, traditions, economy, and the geographical influences. The macrosystem has a predominant effect throughout the relations of all other systems. For example, the microsystem is embedded within the macrosystem and so as the macrosystem progresses this in turn will impact on the microsystem over time.



**Chronosystem.** According to Bronfenbrenner (1990), the chronosystem is the element of time as it relates to the child's environments. It recognizes that individuals grow and change and also that time passes historically and the world changes. The element of time can be related to events outside to the child, such as time of a family member's death or changes that happen in the political climate of his/her society. Societal developments that impact children and families include the biotechnology, restructuring of societal and individual responsibilities, mobile technology, globalism/nationalism, and information technology. The chronosystem includes sequential changes in ecological systems or inside the children as they develop and produce new conditions affecting their development. The element of time can also be internal, such as changes happening in puberty in physiology and behavior of individual (Berns, 2006).

### **Rationale for Use of Ecological Framework for this Study**

The ecological framework encompasses the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem in the heritage language learner's life. The application of ecology framework as a general theoretical framework is very important in understanding the characteristics of heritage language development and maintenance. Immigrant families do not exist in isolation; they are situated within the larger social structure and are connected with other social institutions. When children of immigrants are developing their heritage language, their microsystem, exosystem, mesosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem all have to be considered as factors affecting their language development and performance. Relationship between immigrant heritage language learner families and other ecological systems such as school, neighborhood, and

peer network is an example of this interconnected social network. Each structure within this model uniquely represents a significant development context for immigrant children. The application of ecology framework assumes that the construction of immigrant children's social and linguistic aspects of how these families experience and negotiate heritage language cannot be comprehended effectively without investigating the interactions between these multiple layers of social structure (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

While each environmental system explains the context of Iranian-American immigrant heritage language learning clearly, the first three systemic structures (microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem) are the closest to immigrant heritage language learners' unique life conditions. Therefore, this study concentrates on the interactions occurring within the microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem of Farsi heritage language learners and their families in regards to heritage language learning development and maintenance in Washington DC metropolitan areas.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Maxwell (2005) recommended that a researcher should construct a conceptual framework for the study a formulation of what he thinks is going on, a "tentative theory of what is happening and why" (p. 25). The function of this theory is to inform the rest of the study design. The interaction between heritage language and ethnic identity has gained increasing scholarly attention over the past decades. Scholars have frequently quoted heritage language as one of the most important and powerful contributors to ethnic identity construction (Mu, 2015). Heritage language serves as a symbol of ethnic identity and cultural harmony that reminds the language minority groups of their cultural

heritage and transfer group feelings. Despite the commonly held assumption that language is the key factor in establishing and maintaining ethnic identity (Bankston & Zhou, 1995; Tse, 1999), little seems to have been done to assess how ethnic identity reacts with the realities of language shift. Therefore, there remains a need for a comprehensive examination of the link between ethnic identity and heritage language formation and vice versa. To illustrate this relation (s) figure 3 presents a framework that shows connections and relations between ethnic identity and heritage language.

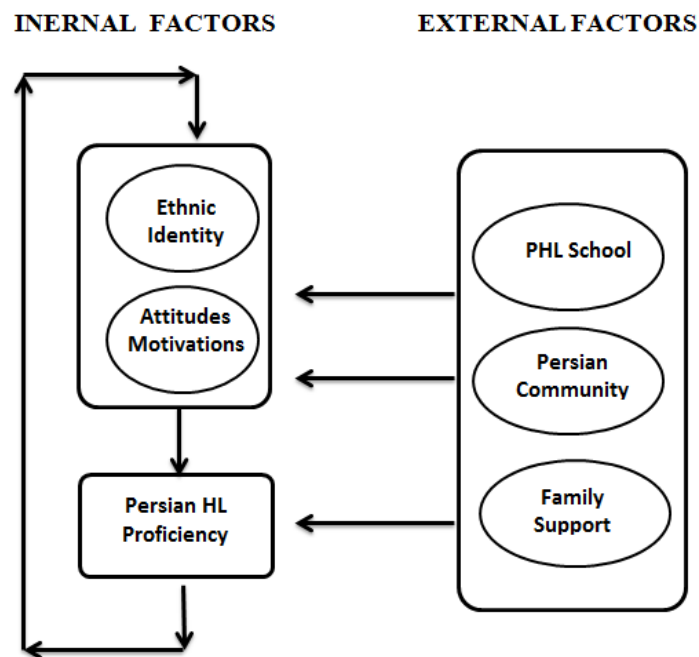


Figure 3. Research Framework

This framework suggests that: 1) an individual's internal factors (ethnic identity, attitudes and motivations) are affected by external factors (Farsi heritage language schools, Persian ethnic community, family support); 2) an individual's heritage language development is affected by external factors; 3) an individual's internal factors influence his/her degree of heritage language development and 4) an individual's heritage language development also influences his/her internal factors. In short, the relationship between an individual's internal factors and heritage language development is mutual. According to (Kagan, 2005), three contexts are necessary for heritage literacy development: family, instruction, and community. Each of the elements can be more or less important in developing heritage language, depending on the specifics of a language group, history of that language group, and attitude to language preservation, among other factors.

Ethnic identity has been frequently understood as the association with, or membership in, a particular ethnic group; as well as a sense of emotional and cultural ties, which a person has with that ethnic group; and the meanings of the ties to that person (Rosenthal & Feldman, 1992). The concepts of race and ethnicity, and culture are occasionally used to designate the same things; however, increasingly some substitute ethnicity for race. Kenyatta and Tai (1997) conclude "Some educators and researchers use ethnicity interchangeably with race, because we believe they are still uncomfortable with race, racism and its role in education." (p.vii).

**Defining ethnicity.** Wright and Leung (1993) defines ethnic group as follows:

Ethnic groups will be so defined if they share a common sociohistory, have a sense of identity of themselves as a group, and have common geographical,

religious, racial, and cultural roots. The central core of each ethnic group, welding it together with the thread of belief, styles of being, and adapting, is culture (p. 13).

**Defining culture.** The term culture has been defined as "a learned system of meanings and behaviors that is passed from one generation to the next" (Carter & Qureshi, 1995, p. 241). According to Sadowsky, Kwan, & Pannu, (1995):

In every culture there is a set of people who have common and shared values; customs, habits, and rituals; systems of labeling, explanations, and evaluations; social rules of behavior; perceptions regarding human nature, natural phenomena, interpersonal relationships, time, and activity; symbols, art, and artifacts; and historical developments. Culture, then, acts as a unifying influence. It combines the different aspects of life into a logical whole (p. 132).

Cultures frequently evolve in response to changes in the environment.

Furthermore, since culture is a learned concept "individuals and groups can and do change their ethnic or cultural identities and interests through such processes as migration, conversion, and assimilation or through exposure to modifying influences" (Carter & Qureshi, 1995, p. 241). The connection between language and identity has been recognized by scholars for many years. Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803), the German philosopher, observed that even the smallest nations treasure the labors of their forefathers through their languages, and concluded that language is the collective treasure of group feeling (Barnard, 1969). Likewise, Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835), the Prussian philosopher, maintained that "language is the spiritual exhalation of a nation"

(Von Humboldt, 1963, p. 277). American researchers have also paid much attention to the role of ethnic community in providing ethnic identity among immigrants. Some studies suggest the existence of a strong tie between the retention of heritage language and ethnic culture (Bankston & Zhou, 1995). Heritage language represents a language other than English that is associated with one's cultural background and may or may not be spoken in the home or in the heritage community (Cho, Cho, & Tse, 1997). Since the 19th century, most newly arrived immigrant groups in the United States have at some time point established a sort of ethnic community network that serves to preserve a sense of ethnicity among the groups through the teaching of ethnic languages, promotion of ethnic heritages and cultural values, etc. (Bankston & Zhou, 1995). In scholarly works, heritage language is frequently cited as one of the most important and powerful contributors to ethnic identity construction. It serves as a symbol of ethnic identity and cultural solidarity to remind the language minority groups about their cultural heritage and to transmit group feelings. Guardado (2002) studied two groups of bilingual and English dominant Latino U.S. born children and found that parents of both groups had strong sense of cultural and ethnic identity and believed that learning Spanish would give their children more opportunities to be successful. Parents' concern for their children's Latino identity, moral development, and cognitive growth was an important factor in whether children remained bilingual or became English dominant. The desire to maintain family relationships was a common reason that parents give when asked why heritage language is important to them. To promote a strong heritage language identity in their children, parents in Guardado's study (2002), used various strategies such as keeping in

touch with grandparents, visiting home country whenever possible, watching Spanish programming, and reading Spanish text.

Ethnic identity has also been examined in studies on second-generation Iranian immigrants (Bozorgmehr & Douglas, 2011; Daha, 2011; Mahdi, 1998; Mobasher, 2012) in relations to issues such as educational achievement, business ambitions, and assimilation to the host society, etc. Ethnic identity plays an important role in maintenance of Persian language among Iranian immigrants in U.S. Bozorgmehr and Douglas (2011) found only 10 percent of the first generation Iranian spoke English at home, while the overwhelming majority 83 percent reported speaking Persian at home. They suggest Iranian parents enforce the use of their ethnic language at home so their children stay connected to Persian culture and the homeland. According to Mahdi (1998), for the second generation Iranian in the United States, the question of identity is not as easily settled as it is for their parents. Their parents have been born in Iran and still hold strong ties with family members in Iran. However, for second-generation Iranians who mostly were born in the U.S. and might know some aspects of their heritage language and culture, the question of ethnic identity is not straightforwardly answered. Mahdi (1998) states:

Second-generation Iranians have shown a strong interest in maintaining a sense of their ancestral roots and culture. However, such a desire is predicated on an Americanized understanding of Iranian culture and conditioned by the characteristics of the American multicultural society (p.77).

Daha (2011) notes that Iranian girls maintain their culture by speaking the Persian language at home, taking Persian language classes, and engaging in cultural activities such as Persian dance, which helped them to be more connected to Persian music, a channel to the culture. In this exemplary poem an Iranian youth, expresses how her ethnic identity was formed through her connection to Persian culture and literature as well as the political climate of the era. Mahdi, (1998) states:

My father has shown to me the brushstrokes of over ten artisans in a Shahnameh manuscript calling the artists my brothers.

My father has shown to me the mighty sculptures of the Apadana in Persepolis calling this the home of my ancestors.

He has shown to me the symmetrical designs of Nishapur ceramics.

He has read to me the poetry of Hafez, Khayam and Saadi that I was not able to understand and said to me my daughter, this is Iran.

My elementary schoolbooks called Iran. Formally known as Persia, with a 2000-year-old history. Today, in political and religious turmoil.

In college, Iran was "dangerous, going through severe changes, anti-west, and involved in many terrorist attacks."

Where in my heart and mind do I mesh my idealistic and realistic visions of my motherland, Iran. (p.95)

While the question of whether heritage language acquisition plays a role in ethnic identity formation has not been ignored by researchers (Cho, 2000; Cho et al., 1997), there remains a need for a comprehensive examination of the link between ethnic language and ethnic identity formation. Despite the commonly held assumption that language is the key factor in establishing and maintaining ethnic identity (Bankston & Zhou 1995; Tse, 1999), little seems to have been done to assess how ethnic identity reacts



with the realities of language shift. Therefore, there remains a need for a comprehensive examination of the link between ethnic identity and heritage language formation and vice versa.

### **Synthesis of Heritage Language Literature**

Many immigrant families face challenges when learning English while also trying to preserve their heritage language in the United States (Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009). Language maintenance has become important to immigrant families, regardless of their ethnic origin, because when the home language is maintained, the outcome is considerably beneficial to the individuals and their families (Becker, 2013). In order to understand the Farsi maintenance situation among Iranian-American immigrant families in the United States, a review of important literature on parental attitudes toward heritage language maintenance is offered. I begin with an overview of definition of the term *heritage language*; how heritage languages has been dealt with in the United States; importance of heritage language development and maintenance; and language loss. A review of the current educational status of Farsi in the United States and parental attitudes on heritage language maintenance follows. Lastly, a summary and a conclusion complete the synthesis of research literature.

### **Defining Heritage Language and Heritage Language Learners**

According to Baker (2011), the term *heritage language* was used mostly in Canada in the 1970s for its different types of language maintenance programs. Although the term has been used in other countries for years, it has only gained significance in the United States since the 1990s, (Hornberger & Wang, 2008). Despite the much attention

given to the term itself, there is no agreement to whom the term heritage language learner refers to. Some even argue that the concept of heritage language “remains ill-defined and is sensitive to a variety of interpretations within social, political, regional, and national contexts” (Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003, p. 212).

According to Kondo-Brown (2003), due to the great diversity that exists in defining a heritage language and those who identify with one, the term heritage language has various definitions in the literature, depending on the perspective involved. Other terms such as, mother tongue, minority language, ethnic language, aboriginal language, and ancestral language have also been used.

Although heritage language definitions could range from broad and inclusive to narrow and restrictive, overall, definitions from three important perspectives (the socio-historical identity perspective, the language proficiency perspective, and the agency and motivation perspective) provide a comprehensive framework for the term *heritage language* in this study.

**The socio-historical identity perspective.** This perspective is based on an ethnic, historical, or sociopolitical investment in the language (Fishman, 2001). From the perspective of linguists the term heritage language has the most inclusive and broad definition, which emphasizes on identity and the socio-historical context of heritage language learners. In this definition heritage language refers to any ancestral language such as indigenous, colonial and immigrant languages. Fishman (2001) describes a heritage language learner as a student who has emotional ties to a language and culture other than English due to ancestral heritage. Since English is the dominant language in

the United States (not an official language, but the primary language used in government, education, and public communication); therefore, any language other than English can be considered a heritage language for speakers of that language. According to Fishman (2001), just as with different heritage languages, there are different types of heritage language learners. For members of indigenous communities (e.g., Navajo, Hawaiian, and Arapaho), any member of the community learning the language can be regarded a heritage language learner. In these cases (e.g., Navajo children learning the Navajo language in school), are all part of the community and are heritage language learners no matter how well they speak the Navajo. Therefore, in these settings, the goal of instruction would be language preservation and maintenance, or it might be on heritage language development. The focus of language instruction is to pass on cultural heritage to the new generation (Fishman, 2001; McCarty, 2002). According to Kelleher (2010), Fishman identifies three types of heritage languages in the United States:

1. Immigrant heritage languages are any of the languages spoken by immigrants arriving in the United States after it became an independent country.
2. Indigenous heritage languages are the languages of the Native American tribes. Many of these languages are now extinct, some are spoken by a very few elders and are at risk of being lost, and a very few are being maintained within communities of speakers through strong educational efforts.
3. Colonial heritage languages are the languages of the various European settlers that first colonized what is now the United States and are still spoken here. These

include such languages as Dutch, German, Finnish, French, Spanish, and Swedish (p.2).

Although Fishman's (2001) categories acknowledge heritage language learners' ancestral heritage and their ties to the heritage language and culture, linguistic proficiency in the heritage language is not a requirement. Some heritage language learners may be able to speak, read, and write the language; while others may only speak or understand the language when others speak to them. Some may not understand their home language largely but be part of a family or community where the language is spoken. However, the term heritage language can be used to describe any connections between a non-dominant language and a person, a family, or a community. In fact, Fishman (2001) believes that a heritage language learner could have never heard the language before, as long as he has established an identity for himself with ancestral ties to that language.

Wiley (2001) uses the example of an African-American student who, in order to reconnect to his African roots, chooses to study Swahili which, according to Fishman (2001), would be then his emotional ties to the language of his family's heritage. Under this definition, third generation Americans who remember their grandparents speaking Italian and who want to learn Italian to reunite to the family roots is considered an heritage language learner, even though they do not have any proficiency in Italian language. Gambhir (2002) notes:

From the language learning perspective such students are not different from the traditional foreign language students. These students are "true beginners" who

have “recently renewed their interest in the ancestral language and culture for ethnic and religious reasons” after generations of no family connections with the target language and culture (p. 214).

**The language proficiency perspective.** The language proficiency perspective (Valdes, 2001) is based on linguistic proficiency. This proficiency-based definition of a heritage language learner is limiting and eliminates those who have family or personal connections to the heritage language but have no knowledge of it.

Thus, a defining difference between a heritage language learner and a foreign language student is that the heritage language learning begins in the home, in contrast to foreign language learning which, at least at first, typically begins in a classroom setting (UCLA Steering Committee, 2000). This precise description of this term is particularly important in the field of education and is essential when designing courses and making decisions regarding curriculum, materials, assessment, and teacher training for heritage language learners (Carreira, 2004). Draper and Hicks (2000) cited the description of heritage language learners by the Texas Education Agency and categorized students with home backgrounds in languages other than English into:

1. Students who are able to understand oral language, but unable to speak the language beyond single-word answers.
2. Students who can speak the language fluently but have little to no experience with the language in its written form.
3. Students who have come to the United States from non-English speaking countries and can understand and speak the language fluently; however their

reading and writing skills may be limited due to a lack of formal education in their countries of origin.

4. Fluent bilingual students, who understand, speak, read, and write another language very well (p.20).

**The agency and motivation perspective.** The agency and motivation perspective (Hornberger & Wang 2008) suggests an inclusive ecological perspective. This view shifts the power in defining the heritage language learners from an outside authority to the heritage language learners themselves.

Agency and motivation become central in their view of heritage language learners and they acknowledge both ethnic/sociopolitical and linguistic definitions and accept anyone who self-identifies and exerts his/her agency as a heritage language learner of a particular language (p. 6).

In particular they believe that languages, like a living organism, live and thrive in their ecological system.

Languages are understood to: 1) evolve, grow, change, live, and die in an eco-system along with other languages (*language evolution*); 2) interact with their sociopolitical, economic, and cultural environments (*language environment*); and 3) become endangered if there is inadequate environmental support for them vis-à-vis other languages in the eco-system (*language endangerment*); and I suggest that central to the language ecology movement, as for other ecology movements, is that it is about not only studying and describing those potential losses, but also counteracting them (Hornberger, 2003, p. 296).

In this view heritage language literacy develops in the context of bilingualism and biliteracy. This means that children learn their heritage language at home at the same time that they learn a dominant language outside of home in the educational system of their mainstream society. The ultimate goal of most of the bilingual programs is to equip students with proficiency of two languages, heritage language proficiency and English language proficiency (Krashen et al., 1998). Like heritage language definition, the term *bilingualism* has not been defined consistently by researchers and theorists (Cummins & Swain, 2014). Some defined bilinguals as those who have complete mastery of two different languages (Oestreicher, 1974); others (Macnamara, 1967) say bilinguals are those who possess at least one of the language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) even to a minimal degree in the second language.

In this study I synthesized these three perspectives and focused on the Iranian-American parents in Washington DC metropolitan area who: 1) are raising children who speak or at least understand their heritage language and are, therefore, to some degree bilingual in Farsi and in English and 2) whose parents express agency and commitment to raising children proficient in the Farsi and affiliate themselves with Farsi weekend schools.

### **Heritage Language Education in the United States**

The United States has had a long bilingual education tradition as described by Heinz Kloss, (1966) and Joshua Fishman (1980). According to Fishman (2001), Amerindian (indigenous people of North and South Americas) were the first groups of indigenous people in the U.S. with various indigenous languages. In 1868, the Indian

Peace Commission found that Native Americans were not following Manifest Destiny because of language difficulties. As a result, Native American children were placed in boarding schools and were forbidden to be instructed in Native American languages (Draper & Hicks, 2000). During 1990s to 2006, as a result of vast language loss and new legal situations (Native American Languages Act and Preservation Act), Native American were allowed children to engage in indigenous languages beyond the classroom (Haynes, 2010).

Early immigrants to the U.S. were predominantly from English speaking countries such as England, Ireland, Scotland, and Canada. Later these trends changed and by the end of the 20th century majority of immigrants were from non-English speaking countries (Tse, 2001; Wiley, 1996). Heritage languages in the United States were introduced with the first European settlers. According to Fishman (2001), these settlers spoke languages referred to as *colonial languages* or languages that were already spoken before the U.S. was established as a country. One of these heritage languages, English, was successfully maintained and ultimately became the dominant language of the United States. From these colonial languages some intergenerational dialects (i.e., Dutch, Swedish, Finnish, and Welsh) were not valued except for French in New England and Louisiana, Spanish in the Southwest, and German in Pennsylvania. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Early German settlers established their bilingual schools with the aid of public and private funds. German schools were founded in areas with large German settlements by Orthodox Lutheran and other Protestant groups, German Catholics, as well as secular organizations. Up to World War I German was the largest



immigrant language spoken in the U.S. schools (Kloss, 1966).

Until a wave of nationalism swept the country during World War I in which German and other languages came under widespread attacks. America's participation in World War I created a wave of anti-German sentiment and German was banned by local school boards both in public and private settings. Similar restrictions were directed against other languages such as Japanese, for example, which became a target in California and the then territory of Hawaii (Kloss, 1998). Restrictions against the use of German and other foreign languages such as Japanese resulted in a swift decline in both foreign and bilingual education as states moved to restrict any foreign languages until Grades 6 to 8, when it was less likely that children would be concerned with their native languages. Other foreign language programs in the public school system that were taught in various schools across the United States since 1900s (e.g. French, Scandinavian languages, Swedish, Norwegian etc.) were also reduced or abandoned during World War I. (Crawford, 1995; Kloss, 1966). Indeed, any language other than English was forbidden as an instrument of instruction in both public and private schools. Other minority groups such as Africans, and Native Americans encountered oppressive policies much earlier. Africans who were brought to the U.S. to work in southern colonies were prohibited from using their native language fearing that if they could communicate in their various languages they could form resistance or rebellion (Wiley & Wright, 2004).

Therefore, as a result of these early language policies many native languages died out in the U.S. Veltman (2000) even held that "all large immigrant groups that arrived prior to 1960s were successfully integrated into the English language majority,

irrespective of the degree of resistance that they may have offered" (p. 61). Although the total number of speakers of languages other than English (see Table 1) increased dramatically from 1910 to 2000, yet in terms of the percentage of the total population, the percentage in 2000 (17.9%) is actually lower than it was in 1910 (24%).

Table 1

*Persons Who Speak Languages Other Than English in the United States: U.S. Census 1910-2000.*

Census Year	1910	1940	1970	1980	1990	2000
Speakers of languages other than English (In millions)	22.2	21.8	42.5	23.1	31.8	46.9
Speakers of languages other than English (Percent of population)	24	16.5	20.1	11	13.8	17.9

This pattern of decline in use of languages other than English in the United States continues to take place. According to U.S. Census Bureau 2010 statistics, the number of Italian, German and polish speakers in the U.S. dropped 55.2%, 32.7% and 25.9% between 1980 and 2010, although the number of Americans who trace their lineage to these countries grew over the same time period (Ryan, 2013).

The story of the Spanish language in the U.S. is still unfolding. Spanish is the second largest immigrant language spoken in the 1980s, making this language a de facto majority second language (Kloss, 1998). Whether Spanish meets the same faith as languages such as German, Italian, or polish is still unknown. Spanish could take a

different path than previous languages. Today's Hispanics youth are more likely to have a positive view about speaking language and are more likely than their parents to say that they think that speaking Spanish is important. The Pew Hispanic Trends Project Report showed 95% of Hispanic adults including those born in the U.S. said it is important that future generations of Hispanic speak Spanish (Taylor, Lopez, Martínez, & Velasco, 2012).

Historically, public schools as well as Spanish foreign language schools have played a major role in the preservation of Spanish in America. Although Fishman (2001) report that "public education had the most important role" (p. 92) in heritage language maintenance, Tse (2001) believes that the crucial contradiction occurs when students are unable to study or are discouraged from studying their heritage language and then are encouraged later in their education to take a foreign language class such as Spanish later.

According to Kloss (1998), after the annexation of New Mexico, school districts could choose English, Spanish, or both as the medium of instruction. However, English-only instruction mandates almost completely removed all of Spanish language from the schools. It wasn't until 1963, following the arrival of large numbers of Cuban refugees into Miami, that a new Spanish-English bilingual program was initiated in Florida. In 1967, Title VII made federal funds available for Bilingual Education Act of 1968 aimed at development of bilingual education programs which provided instruction through the use of heritage languages in 13 states, with the majority being Spanish-English language. However, since the quality of these bilingual programs particularly, the Spanish-English ones, has been questioned legislations such as No Child Left Behind, Propositions 227 in

California, and 203 in Arizona aimed at limiting bilingual education, or at least refocusing goals from bilingual development to acquisition of English.

Much of the debate between English-only advocates and English-plus advocates is the right of individual and ethnic groups to use their heritage language in learning (Cummins, 1991). According to Wang (2009) the most prominent opposition towards heritage language promotion is the English-only movement. Wang argued: “English-only policies drive minority home languages out of school” (p. 14). She explained that such policies are made based on the assumption that making English an official language makes the nation more unified, and thus we become a stronger nation as a whole; as well as helping immigrants learn English quickly and, consequently, expanding their opportunities for a better life. English-only advocates think bilingual programs are threatening the unity of the United States and should be removed from public schools, because they consider heritage language as an obstacle for minority language students in the learning of English.

Heritage language continues to be caught in the middle of this debate. While English continues to be used as the national and global language, other immigrants’ ethnic languages experience repetitive loss from generation to generation. With the dominant society’s lack of interest, along with a growing number of heritage speakers, immigrant parents with little or no heritage language support face growing difficulties. According to Crawford (1995), the debate on bilingual education is becoming more and more politicized, because on one hand, English-only proponents are unwilling to pay high taxes to support schools for immigrants’ children, while on the other hand, bilingual

professional researchers have controlled most of the research evidence on the efficiency of heritage language use in bilingual education. Prior to the 1980s, the main mission of the heritage language researchers was to stabilize American Indian languages and identify different minority languages. In recent years, many research organizations have been established and conferences held to research key themes in heritage language related topics. For example, 1998 launch of the Heritage Language Initiative by the National Foreign Language Center (NFLC) and the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), and the first Heritage Language Research Priorities Conference held at UCLA in September, 2000 (Peyton et al., 2001).

Immersion programs, bilingual programs, foreign language programs, and heritage language programs are all different forms of language programs in the U.S. foreign language programs that teach second language like German and French to students in public schools. According to Draper and Hicks (2000), heritage language instruction traditionally is delivered in one of three ways:

1. Through bilingual education taught by teachers in public school districts either as part of the curriculum or in after school programs. Bilingual education sometimes uses the heritage language in its instruction to teach English to students. Sometimes, bilingual education is mainly a transitional tool to move minority students into English-only education (Valdes, Fishman, Chavez & Perez, 2006).
2. Taught in an immersion program where the teacher offers instruction in both English and the heritage language. An immersion program differs from a second language, because the student's partial or entire school curriculum (full immersion) is taught in the

second/foreign language. Students benefit from learning high levels of proficiency in a foreign language (Cunningham & Graham, 2000).

3. Through heritage language schools which is a type of educational system in which “the native language is protected and developed alongside development in the majority language” (Baker, 2011, p. 208).

### **Heritage Language Schools**

The heritage language schools prior to the 1990s were usually named ethnic community mother tongue schools. Fishman (1980) defines heritage language schools as “an independently effective agency that can attain, or by virtue of its own efforts significantly foster and augment, the attainment of language maintenance.” (p. 454). Such schools are maintained as a means of preserving a native language within a community that may be in the process of losing their heritage language. The language in these programs forms both the curriculum and the medium of instruction. Through its language programs, it fills “an important identity-forming and identity-providing function for millions of Americans” (Baker, 2011, p. 209).

Peyton et al., (2001) explained that a heritage language school often serves a wide variety of students. Classes are held in locations such as a temple, church, community center, or local school building, typically as an extracurricular activity outside of regular school hours. Fishman (2001) suggested that heritage language schools play an important role in reversing language shift, which he defines as an effort to restore, revitalize, or reestablish a language that has shifted or is currently in the process of language shift.

According to Chao (1997), the most distinguishing characteristic of the heritage language schools is their community-oriented schooling system. The immigrants themselves are the administrators, teachers, and volunteers. As for financing, generally the schools are supported through tuition, fundraising, and donations. Further, while bilingual education teaches only the academic form of the second language, heritage language programs teach the heritage language through a variety of means such as courses for language skills, culture, civic involvement, and even traditional cooking.

Compton (2001) indicated that heritage schools are facing challenges such as: lack of public awareness, minimum community support, and absence of connection with other community institutions. Chao (1997) suggested the difficulty to place students, the increase in non-Chinese heritage learner's enrollment, the shortage of teachers and training programs, and the difficulties in obtaining credit from the U.S. public schools, colleges, and universities as the challenges the heritage language schools are facing currently. Krashen et al. (1998) list four major barriers for heritage language schools

1. Lack of input, in the form of interaction, books, and other forms of media.
2. The desire to be fully integrated into the target culture, with rejection of the heritage culture, a stage many minority group members go through.
3. Ridicule and correction when the heritage language is used by more competent heritage language speakers, resulting in a reluctance to use the language and less input.
4. Poor heritage language teaching programs (p. 9).

### **Heritage Language Development and Maintenance**

Researchers say that there are advantages to being bilingual. Vygotsky (2012) has argued that bilingualism has intellectual benefits, because it allows the children to develop and use linguistic and cultural tools of the two literate worlds and realizes that there are two ways of expressing the same thing. Even though there are some that believe that “bilingualism can lead to divisiveness and political unrest” (Krashen et al., 1998, p. 5), the vast majority of the research has shown that bilingualism is beneficial to both individuals and societies. Additionally, concepts learned in one language, could transfer to a second language, since language and thinking are regarded as interrelated. For example, As Cummins (2000) states: "Conceptual knowledge developed in one language helps to make input in the other language comprehensible." (p. 203) which means that students can learn concepts in one language and discuss what they have learned in another, because the concepts themselves learned from the primary heritage language can form the basis for second language learning, a phenomenon Cummins labeled *common underlying proficiency*. Therefore, Cummins emphasizes that heritage language can help linguistically diverse students develop concepts, negotiate meaning, and help read and write in the second language.

Further, recently a significant amount of evidence shows that bilinguals develop significantly in specific cognitive skills such as conservation of measurement, classification according to shape, color, or size, or manipulating and recognizing visual patterns (Gregory & Kelly, 1992). This explains why it is so essential for linguistically diverse students to fully develop their primary, or heritage languages. If students stop developing their heritage language proficiencies, when they enter school and begin using



English, they will suffer from learning difficulties due to the lack of concept support from the heritage language which enables them to develop their general linguistic proficiency in the second language (Cummins, 1991). There is also considerable evidence that a child can benefit emotionally from mastering two languages. Some studies suggest that higher competence in one's heritage language may lead to higher self-concept and students may feel pride in their ability to speak their heritage language well when they grow up (Guardado, 2002). In addition, benefits in family values, career advantages and cultural vitality are evident as well. According to Cho (2000), heritage language development can be an important part of identity formation and can help create a strong sense of identity especially for children of ethnic minority groups and aid them in discovering who they are.

Thus, collected evidence previously mentioned, demonstrates that proficiency in more than one language benefits individuals in many different ways and that those who maintain their heritage language and culture benefit cognitively, socially, and personally. They are more likely to succeed in school and enjoy greater social mobility. Additionally, they are able to experience pride in their heritage and enjoy close relationships with their parents, relatives, and community members. On the other hand, the research indicates that those who fail to maintain their heritage language, experience language shift and encounter negative consequences. Therefore studying ways to support biliteracy is an important task which this study intends to undertake.

### **Heritage Languages as National Resource**

Linguistic diversity boosted by immigration, can play an important role in the political, social, economic, and educational domains of any one nation in the world. Languages, as a substantial constitute of culture, are changing the world, nations' and people's life through the increasingly frequent communication locally, nationally and regionally. In an ever-growing globalized economy the demand for people who are skilled in foreign languages is rising worldwide. As a result of globalized economies, speakers of many languages are needed in business and government agencies around the world. European countries for example, have long implemented a national foreign language strategy to meet the demands for competence in foreign language skills.

Competence in foreign languages has long been recognized as a crucial economic and social resource within a culturally and linguistically diverse Europe and beyond. In 2000, the Lisbon European Council (LEC) called for the establishment of a framework to provide EU citizens with five basic skills: IT skills, technological culture, entrepreneurship, social skills, and foreign language skills (Lisbon Council, 2000). The European Union (EU) recognized proficiency in foreign languages as one of several key competencies "considered vital for a lifetime of successful participation in society" (Key Competencies, 2002, P.3).

According to Pufahl, Rhodes, and Christian ( 2001), a common European framework of reference (Council of Europe, 1996) was developed and revised over the past decade and many European countries have adapted their foreign languages teaching at the national level to the standards articulated by this framework.

“The framework is a planning instrument that provides a common basis and terminology for describing objectives, methods and approaches, skills, practices, and assessments in language teaching, and it is used for planning syllabuses, examinations, teaching materials, and teacher training programs throughout Europe” (p.2).

To fulfil the language competency, the Barcelona European Council in 2002 recommended the learning of at least two foreign languages from a very early age. Students as young as five or six in almost all EU countries have to start learning a foreign language at school. Results of surveys conducted in 2001 and 2002, revealed that 50% or more of students in elementary levels learned at least one foreign language, while 50% of secondary level students learned at least two foreign languages in schools in Europe (Chan, Chin, & Suthiwan, 2011).

Americans are also recognizing that foreign languages are a valuable resource and necessary for growth in today’s competitive economies. According to (Peyton et al., 2001) there is a growing need in the United States for individuals who are proficient in languages other than English. These needs are most important in the areas of national security, diplomacy, and national commerce (Klein, Rice, & Levy, 2012). Americans, historically, tend to pay more attention to foreign language education during crises. Frequently, international relations and matters of national defense have been used as justification for foreign language study throughout United States history. The wars of the 20th century (WWI, WWII, the Korean War, and the Conflict in Vietnam as well as the Cold War) played a significant role in justifying the necessity of foreign language study

(Lantolf & Sunderman, 2001). The September 11 attacks and resulting efforts to fight terrorism in different parts of the globe, once again emphasized the importance of foreign language skills for national security. As the result of the consequences of September 11th in the United States, the nation realized the importance of foreign language and the interest in teaching heritage languages and less common languages that are considered to be critical increased. Commission on foreign language and International Studies concluded that American's lack of foreign language skills threatens to weaken the country's security and could result in negative outcomes on economic progress (Chan et al. 2011). Deficits in foreign language learning and teaching were said to negatively affect the U.S. national security, diplomacy, law enforcement, intelligence communities and cultural understanding by preventing the U.S. citizens from effectively communicating in foreign media environments, hurting anti-terrorism efforts, and restraining the ability to promote intercultural understanding (Chan et al. 2011).

Despite the urgency and the need for foreign language skills, students in the United States are still far behind their counterparts in many developed countries in learning a second language. In fact, the United States is the only technologically advanced Western nation that does not require foreign language study in high school for all students. Approximately, less than 1 percent of American adults today are proficient in a foreign language that they studied in a U.S. classroom (Baldwin-Edwards, 2008). If we want to be compatible with our European Neighbors, we need to do more. As Baldwin-Edwards (2008) noted:

We are now aware that languages are important and that we have a national language crisis, but we are not addressing long-term solutions. We are not building the pipeline that begins in elementary school and continues on through life. Although languages are being seen as a security issue, they are not being valued as an education issue. Until policy makers realize the connection between education and real security, we are not likely to see serious change that improves language learning in the United States and prepares our citizens to deal with the rest of the world. (p. 272)

Realizing that foreign language skills are essential to diplomacy, economic competitiveness, and the security interests of the U.S, efforts have been made to improve the quality and accessibility of foreign language learning and teaching in elementary, secondary, and college level education. The secretaries of state, education, and defense, and the director of national intelligence have launched structured efforts to expand language education starting in kindergarten and continuing through elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education and into the labor force. As a result of these efforts, enrolments in foreign language classes doubled from 23% in 1978 to 44% in 2002 (Chan et al., 2011). However, despite these increase in enrolments, more needs to be done if we want to be compatible with our European counterparts.

**Critical need languages.** Further, Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTL) or Critical Need Languages (CNLs) in the United States are often those most critical to national securities. Only 31% of American elementary schools and 24% of public elementary schools report teaching foreign languages. Of these schools, 79% reported

that they teach foreign language skills at the exposure level. Also out of 44% of high school students enrolled in foreign language classes in 2002, 69% enrolled in Spanish and 18% in French. Less than 1% of high school students combined studied CNLs such as Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, Japanese, Korean, Russian, or Urdu (Pufahl et al., 2001).

In January 2006, President Bush announced the National Security Language Initiative intended to increase the number of Americans learning foreign languages particularly, what the initiative refers to as critical-need languages such as Arabic, Russian, Farsi, Hindi and Chinese and proposed to intensely increase the number of Americans learning these languages in the new and expanded programs from kindergarten through university and into the workforce (Taha, 2007). Additionally, \$114.4 million was allocated to the Foreign Language Assistance Program (FLAP) to expand critical need foreign language education. Grant funds have been available to the partnerships between the local educational agencies that are committed to the development and the implementation of a foreign language curriculum in K-12. This would enable students to achieve a superior level of proficiency in one of the critical need languages. The initiative is most important since it comes at a crucial time when the whole world is confronted with new challenges in developing worldwide understanding, intercultural communication, peace and economic prosperity (Richey, 2007). This initiative has three broad goals:

1. Expanding the number of Americans mastering critical need languages.
2. Increasing the number of advanced-level speakers of foreign language and start at a younger age.

3. Increasing the number of foreign language teachers and the resources for them.

As a result of increased government interest in CLNs, particularly some of less commonly taught languages such as Chinese, Korean, Russian, Arabic, and Farsi, special instruction for heritage language learners is on the rise in the United States. STARTALK is the U.S. government's most recent effort to address the needs of the nation to critical languages. STARTALK aimed at increasing the number of Americans learning, speaking, and teaching critical need foreign languages. This program provides summer language learning experiences for students (K–16) and professional development opportunities for teachers of critical languages. Many StarTalk programs across the country form communities of practice with foreign language and heritage language teachers to seek continuous improvements in areas such as outcomes-driven program design, standards-based curriculum planning, learner-centered approaches, excellence in selection and development of materials, and meaningful assessment of outcomes (Haley & Alsweel; 2012 , Haley & Ferro; 2011, Haley, Steeley & Salahshoor, 2013).

Today heritage language programs focus on a number of different languages both in formal education and community initiatives across the United States. Brecht and Ingold (1998) note that more than 175 languages are used in the U.S., many of which are taught in colleges and universities. Despite these growing efforts, developing high levels of proficiency in the language may require many more hours of instruction than a typical college curriculum provides.

Foreign language educators, however, warned that in spite of already extensive course offerings in foreign languages at many colleges and universities as well as at some

K-12 systems, very few non-native speakers ever develop the level of skill and cultural understanding in a foreign language required for professional level work (Kagan & Dillon, 2004). Further, Brecht and Ingold (1998), noted that developing the high levels of bilingual or multilingual skills for professional purposes require additional hours of instruction compared to a typical curriculum that colleges provide (Brecht & Ingold, 1998). Developing a high level of cultural understanding simultaneously with mastering language skills requires time, commitment, and enormous effort that many students of foreign languages might not be prepared to give. Webb and Miller (2000) suggest that heritage language learners are proficient in their language in ways that traditional foreign languages learners are not, and can provide skills that are rarely acquired by non-heritage speakers. Therefore, heritage language learners who already have some proficiency in their heritage language reduce the cost in instructional time required in training competent multilingual professionals. Brecht and Ingold (1998) stated:

Heritage speakers, including the children of immigrants, already possess linguistic and inter-cultural skills only very rarely attained by non-heritage speakers. As a rule, heritage language learners' listening; comprehension and speaking abilities in the heritage language are superior to those of advanced non-native learners of the language. Moreover, heritage language learners are more attuned to inter-cultural communication because they grow up in families who left the comfort zone of their own language and culture, who invariably left friends and family behind, to come to the land of "the other." They point to an "untapped reservoir of linguistic competence" (p. 2),



Therefore, language professionals and policymakers are increasingly aware of the potential value of heritage languages as a resource to the nation. By promoting heritage languages, the nation will benefit by having citizens who are linguistically and culturally competent to advance in international business and to empower diplomatic and national security force. At the societal level, heritage language promotion can increase the country's resources for commerce and governmental services (Krashen et al., 1998; Tse, 2001). In addition, the nation advances educationally as well by training heritage language speakers as foreign language teachers, thus, reducing the shortage of foreign language teachers because of an increase in the pool of individuals with foreign language skills who can enter the workforce (Tse, 2001).

This is especially true for critical-need languages such as Arabic, Russian, Farsi, Hindi, and Chinese. Although all language varieties are important to their native speakers and to those who interact with them in one way or the other, the critical-need languages are of particular importance for a variety of reasons mentioned previously. Iranian-American immigrants are proud of their heritage and their language and strive to maintain their identities and continuously use their native language (Farsi). As our nation faces a critical shortage of people with proficiency in languages other than English, we need to pay attention to our own rich language resources (e.g. Farsi), spoken in ethnic communities across the United States.

### **Language Shift**

Language maintenance or language shift challenge all immigrants in the U.S although the tendency is more towards language shift. According to Baker (2011)

language shift is the phenomenon of substituting one language with another, often observed in the context of language contact situation as a form of immersion. Whenever two or more language groups are in contact, the phenomenon of a language shift occurs, and the challenge of maintaining the primary language begins. Baker explained language shift from a societal level as a downwards language movement, where there is "a reduction in the number of speakers of a language, a decreasing saturation of language speakers in the population, a loss in language proficiency, or a decreasing use of that language in different domains" (Baker, 2011, p. 59).

Language shift occurred in all parts of the world; current language censuses show that this phenomenon is continuing. We often observe language shift among linguistic minority groups, who replace their native tongue with the dominant language that race, ethnicity, social and economic powers, and colonialism are important elements in determining and legitimatizing the status of a language in a social context (Grant & Lee, 2009).

While a language shift occurs rather naturally in many social contexts, maintaining the ethnic language requires more intentional effort. Historically, many ethnic groups that migrated to the United States tried to maintain their heritage language while they learned English, and for a time, some were able to do so with relatively little resistance (Kloss, 1998). Some immigrant groups seem to be successful in maintaining their heritage language, while other groups experience difficulty.

### **Heritage Language Loss**

*On speech we hear many a tale unwise,*

*each gets judged according to size:  
big peoples' language no danger will reach;  
if a people is small, uncouth their speech.*

(Spolsky & Hult, 2010, p. 71)

In general, maintaining heritage languages in the U.S. is a challenge. Many immigrants arrive in the United States speaking their native languages. Their children begin to learn their heritage language prior to attending regular school. As soon as they enter the formal or regular school system, however, they begin to use the dominant language, English; and their heritage language starts to wear down (Guardado, 2002). Children from immigrant families often experience a unique challenge in learning English at school while speaking their heritage language at home (Oh & Fuligni, 2010). As soon as immigrants come to the U.S., they are expected to adapt to a new environment and must learn the language as soon as possible in order to survive in the new country. However, immigrants are situated in a dilemma as they are pulled in one direction to assimilate to the new culture and language on one hand, and to maintain the culture and language of their country of origin, on the other hand. Therefore, they may experience resistance to their heritage culture, and the resistance may also have impact on their motivation to learn the language. As described in Fan's (2002) study of how cultural identity influences the academic achievement of Chinese-American college students, most American-born Chinese "reported considerable peer pressure during childhood and teenage years to assimilate, consequently, they tended to reject their heritage culture" (p.168). Similarly, Tse (2001) reported that students believed the use of their heritage

language could be seen as a sign of their low minority status; therefore, they tended to refrain from using their heritage language outside of the home to avoid reinforcing that low status in the eyes of their peers.

Once the language shift occurs, heritage languages are usually not maintained and rarely developed (Krashen et al., 1998). In fact, immigrant children usually lose their heritage language ability within three generations. Research shows that as a rule within two to three generation, most non-English-speaking immigrants in the U.S. will have lost or almost lost their heritage language (Veltman, 2000). The process of language loss typically happens over three generations. The first generation speaks the native language at home, but also strives to learn the majority language (English) as well; the second generation speaks English at the native level, but has limited proficiency in their parents' home language; the third generation speaks English all the time, even at home, and has little knowledge of their ancestral native language (Fishman, 1980).

This pattern of language loss does not develop in all communities with the same speed. In fact some studies in the United States show that many language minorities acquire English rapidly, and at the same rate, lose their heritage language, or take it into hiding, using it only in the private spaces of their home and family and small circles of heritage language speaking friends (Colombi & Roca, 2003). Veltman (2000) also points out that as the rate of immigration increases; the rate of language shift is also increasing toward a two-generation shift. Wong Fillmore, (1991), warns against the negative outcome of losing the home language in ethnic minority groups:

When parents are unable to talk to their children, they cannot easily convey to

them their values, beliefs, understandings, or wisdom about how to cope with their experiences. They cannot teach them about the meaning of work, or about personal responsibility, or what it means to be a moral or ethical person in a world with too many choices and too few guideposts to follow. What are lost are the bits of advice parents should be able to offer children in their everyday interactions with them. Talk is a crucial link between parents and children. It is how parents impart their cultures to their children and enable them to become the kind of men and women they want them to be. When parents lose the means for socializing and influencing their children, rifts develop and families lose the intimacy that comes from shared beliefs and understandings (p. 343).

One of the common misconceptions about the immigrants' language behaviors in the U.S. is that immigrants do not want to learn English (Tse, 2001; Wiley, 1996). This idea is well reflected in the media and even in congressional speeches that champion official English policy. Few studies have paid attention to how the immigrants use and maintain their home language on one hand, and adjust to the U.S. culture and society on the other (King, 2000). Fishman examined both the language maintenance and the language shift, finding that ethnolinguistic minority groups were loyal to their heritage language maintenance, "with general shift toward English over time" (Fishman, 1980). Fishman explained this phenomenon more specifically:

The Americanization of immigrants has been explained on the basis of: the irresistible attractiveness of American mass-culture; the destruction of immigrant folkways under the impact of rapid American industrialization and urbanization;

the openness and amplex of the American reward system through public education to social mobility; the geographic mobility of a highly diversified population which worked against the entrenchment of regional traditionalism and for a lingua franca and other shifting but common cultural denominators; the emphases on childhood and youth, and the outdating of adult values and patterns, whether ethnic or non-ethnic; and even an "Old World weariness" which immigrants purportedly carried with them at a subconscious level (p. 29).

Overall, ethnic groups in the United States and other parts of the world treasure their heritage languages and have taken heroic action to maintain it to avoid the risk of being left behind in business or even within their families (Pierson, 2007). However, ethnic minority, immigrants and linguistically diverse students possess their own unique cultural orientation to teaching and learning and have specific learning needs that is much different from other students who are learning a foreign language (Grant & Salahshoor, 2012). They require a language development program that is designed or tailored to address the specific needs of heritage language learners. Without such active intervention, heritage languages will be lost over time among individuals and in the community.

### **Parental Heritage Language Maintenance Efforts**

A large body of research literature documents the positive effects of heritage language maintenance on academic achievement, cognitive development, social and psychological growth, and family relationships. Due to an increasing awareness of the many potential advantages of heritage language maintenance and a growing realization of

the consequences of language loss, there has been a growing interest in heritage language maintenance and development, not only in the academic and research communities, but also in the general public and various institutions. For instance, there has been an increasing desire among immigrant and language minority populations to preserve their heritage languages (Campbell & Peyton, 1998). Several studies have examined parent's views on heritage language loss and their efforts in maintaining their heritage language.

Guardado (2002) explored heritage language experiences of Hispanic families in Canada. Parents were asked to express their views and feelings toward heritage language in their children. Parents believed that their failure to encourage and emphasize their heritage language development was the main cause of heritage language loss among their children. Data also showed that children who maintained heritage language received encouragement from their parents to learn their heritage language. Guardado (2002) emphasized the importance of parental enthusiasm and encouragement of heritage language maintenance. For example, parents should display positive attitudes toward heritage language and aid their children in maintaining it. Other research (Guardado, 2002; Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009) have found that parents set and enforce informal language policies at home to encourage their children to speak their heritage language. Several studies also showed that immigrant parents teach heritage language to their children at home by utilizing workbooks, story books, and playing card for their children (Hashimoto & Lee, 2011). While some parents tried to teach their children at home, others enrolled their children in heritage language schools or attended cultural events with them (Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009). Overall, these studies showed positive

parental attitudes toward heritage language maintenance. Parents made efforts to provide heritage language learning opportunities at home or outside of home so their children can hear and use their heritage language and learn about their heritage culture. Wong Fillmore (2000) argued that, while parents' attitudes are one of the critical factors in heritage language maintenance, the lack of heritage language support in broader education systems should also be considered as a challenge. She claimed that many children from immigrant families lose family language as a result of social and political factors that make them to turn away from it.

Written languages are a different matter. Some challenges in learning and maintaining a heritage language is the difficulty in learning the alphabet and written form of the languages for less commonly taught heritage languages such as Farsi, Chinese or Arabic. Each language presents the learner with a different set of challenges in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, spelling and writing system. Some languages such as Arabic, Farsi, Chinese and Japanese, are difficult to learn even if you are a native speaker. It is usually easier to learn a closely-related language than a distantly-related or unrelated one.

The alphabet and writing directions in non-Roman languages such as (Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, and Farsi) are much more different than Roman languages (Wang & Higgins, 2008). Even for children in their mother countries who learn these languages as their home language or official language, the learning process is slow and involves hours of practice and memorizing, especially in writing characters (Wang & Higgins, 2008). Unlike learners of alphabetical language systems, it is very difficult for Farsi learners to



tackle a new word if they never learn the word before. So the challenges of learning and teaching of some languages are much more noticeable due to differences in language systems between Farsi (Eastern) and English (Western).

### **Iranians in the United States**

The term "Iran" refers to a country located between the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf and the inhabitants that occupy this country are called "Iranian". They are related to the term "Aryan" and it is supposed that the plateau was occupied in prehistoric times by Indo-European peoples from Central Asia. Through many invasions and changes of empire, this essential designation has remained a strong identifying marker for all populations living in this region and the many neighboring territories that fell under its influence due to conquest and expansion.

“Iranian-American” term is used interchangeably as “Persian-American”, partially due to the fact that Iran was called “Persia” officially prior to 1935; as well as the fact that Iran and Persia continue to be used interchangeably since classic times. There is a tendency among Iranian-Americans to categorize themselves as "Persian" rather than "Iranian", mainly to disassociate themselves from the Iranian regime and the negativity associated with it. Few studies have been conducted on Iranians living abroad which makes the case of Iranian immigrants in the United States difficult to address (Hoffman, 1989).

Iranians migrated to the United States in two waves. The first wave of Iranians came and lived in the United States in relatively small numbers since the 1930s. During the 1960s and early 1970s, many Iranians as the recent group of immigrants came to the

U.S. to pursue educational and professional advancement. After WWII and involvement of U.S. in Iran's political and economic landscape; the Iranian government began an industrialization effort by placing emphasis on acquiring modern technology. However, since higher education in Iran lacked the necessary means to train such skilled workers; students were encouraged and received major incentives to study abroad in industrial countries, like the United States. The U.S. was the preferred destination for Iranian students because of its close ties to Iran at the time. In 1979-1980, 51,310 Iranian students were enrolled in American universities, the highest enrollment of foreign students from a single country (Torbat, 2002). Many of the Iranian families remained in the U.S. giving birth to children, enjoying educational and professional successes, living comfortably, and returning to Iran for regular visits. Some of the Iranians who settled in the U.S. before the revolution even became naturalized American citizens.

The second wave of migration began with the Iranian Islamic Revolution (1978-1979) which overthrew the Shah's regime and established the Islamic Republic in Iran. According to Mostashari (2004), the bulk of Iranians migrated to the United States after the Iranian Revolution of 1979, mostly for political reasons. The continued political oppression and authoritarian practices pressed a great number of Iranians to emigrate. Those that left included the educated elite, political activists, intellectuals, and people associated with the previous regime such as technocrats, wealthy entrepreneurs, and members of religious minorities, especially Baha'is and Jews faith (Torbat, 2002). According to Atoofi (2011), Iranian experts who, for the most part, have left their country due to political differences with the current government in Iran, consider themselves a

self-exiled group. However, since the mid-1990's, Iranian immigration to the U.S. has slowed down, particularly after 9/11, when obtaining permanent residency for people from the Middle East countries has become more difficult and discouraging (Der-Martirosian, 2008).

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, there were 338,000 Americans are tracing their heritage to Iran. According to research done by the Iranian Studies Group, an independent academic organization, at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Iranian Americans are most likely far more numerous in the United States than census data indicate. The group estimates that the number of Iranian Americans may have surpassed 691,000 in 2004 more than twice the number of 338,000 cited in the 2000 U.S. census (Mostashari, 2004). Most experts believe that the underrepresented number of Iranian-Americans in the ACS is a problem due to the fact that many Iranian community members have been reluctant in identifying themselves as such because of the problems between Iran and the United States in the past decades. The 2000 U.S. Census (Shin & Bruno, 2003) undercounted the numbers of many ethnic groups and minorities, including the Iranian-Americans. The U.S. Government and other sources estimate that the numbers of Iranian-Americans are close to 1 million. According to the PAAIA (Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans), estimates range from 500,000 to 1,000,000, numbers backed up by Prof. Ronald H. Bayor of the Georgia Institute of Technology as well. *The Atlantic* stated that there are an estimated 1,500,000 Iranians in the United States in 2012. The Iranian interest section in Washington DC claimed to hold passport information for approximately 900,000 Iranians in the U.S. in 2003 (Bozorgmehr, &

Douglas, 2011). According to 2000 U.S. census data, most Iranian immigrants live in a few states: California, New York, Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey, and Texas. Iranian-Americans constitute a relatively large and influential portion of immigrant populations especially in California (Modarresi, 2001). According to Der-Martirosian (2008), “Iranians are one of the most distinctive groups in the U.S. They constitute one of the most numerous new immigrant groups from the Middle East and one of the highest status foreign born groups in the United States. Data from the U.S. census shows that, in year 2000, the family income of Iranian-Americans was more than 38% above the national average, while their per capita income exceeded more than 50% of the national average. Furthermore, the median family income of Iranian-Americans was \$83,290 between 2010-2012. Currently, Iranian-Americans are the most highly educated ethnic group in the United States. U.S. census data indicated that more than 57% of Iranian-Americans held a bachelor degree (in comparison to 24.4% for the rest of the U.S. population), and more than 27% of Iranian-American had a graduate degree (Atoofi, 2011).

**Persian (Farsi) as a heritage language.** Iran is a multiethnic-multilingual country with widespread ethnic-linguistic diversity. Iran, with an estimated 80,358,187 million people, is ethnically, linguistically, and religiously diverse. The official state religion is Shiite Islam and the majority of its population is ethnically Persian. Iran’s official language is Persian (the Persian term for which is Farsi), in which all government business and public instruction is conducted. However, millions of individuals from various ethnic, religious, and linguistic minority backgrounds also reside in Iran. These groups include Azeris, Kurds, Baluchis, Arabs, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, Baha’is,

Sunni Muslims, and others (Hassan, 2007). According to 1999 estimates, 58% of the Iran's population speaks Persian (Farsi) or Persian dialects, 26% Turkish dialects, 9% Kurdish, 2% Luri, 1% Balochi, 1% Arabic, and 2% other. From among various languages in Iran such as Persian, Azeri, Baluchi, and Kurdish, Persian (the Persian term for which is Farsi) is the sole official and national language.

The Iranian languages constitute one of the world's major language families estimated to have between 150 and 200 million native speakers (Windfuhr, 2009). Persian Language, also known as "Farsi", is the most widely spoken member of the Iranian branch of the Indo-Iranian languages, a subfamily of the Indo-European languages. It is the language of Iran (formerly Persia). Persian has been the name of the language used by all native Iranian speakers until the 20th century. In regards to the term "Persian", an explanation is necessary. While the language spoken in Iran has been historically known in the English speaking world as *Persian*, within the last two decades the term *Farsi* has surfaced as an equivalent or even a replacement for the term Persian. Since the latter decades of the 20th century, for political reasons, in English, Farsi has become the name of the Persian language as it is spoken in Iran. Some Iranians in the U.S. use Persian and Farsi interchangeably while others have specific reasons for using each particular terminology.

Persian was historically a more widely understood language in an area ranging from the Middle East to India. It is also widely spoken in Afghanistan known as Dari (دري dari) which was originally a synonym for Farsi but since the latter decades of the 20th century has become the name for the variety of Persian spoken in Afghanistan where

it is one of the two official languages; it is sometimes called Afghan Persian in English. Farsi in an archaic form is called Tajiki (تاجیکی tojikī) and is spoken in Tajikistan and the Pamir Mountain region and Uzbekistan. Total numbers of speakers is high: over 50 million Farsi speakers (about 50% of Iran's population); over 7 million Dari Persian speakers in Afghanistan (25% of the population); and about 2 million Dari Persian speakers in Pakistan. Written in Arabic characters, modern Persian (Farsi) also has many Arabic words and an extensive literature.

In the U.S., Farsi is most often referred to as “Persian”, a term meant to describe the language spoken in Iran. Majority of Iranian-Americans are of Farsi-speaking backgrounds; however, there is also a significant number of Iranian people who do not speak Farsi within the Iranian-American community. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Farsi ranked 18th among the 20 languages frequently spoken in the U.S. households (Shin & Bruno, 2003) Farsi is gaining popularity in the United States because of the need to develop new channels of communication and dialogue between the United States and these nations, therefore, close to 96 U.S. universities are now offering Farsi language courses.

**Iranian-American language maintenance in the U.S.** The Iranian American’s adaptation into the American culture has been complicated, particularly with the long-lasting animosity between the government of Iran and the United States. Before the Iranian revolution of 1978, both in Iran and the United States, proficiency in a foreign language, particularly English or French was valued highly. According to Hoffman (1989):

An American woman living in Iran before the revolution noted the reluctance among Iranians to speak Persian not only with her, but with each other. She writes: We were real amazed at the amount of English spoken in Tehran. It had become, essentially, a bilingual city...I was continuously struck by the extent to which the use of English had taken over [in Tehran], even at events involving all Iranians. On January 25 after attending a faculty party I wrote, "Almost all the conversation during the evening was in English, even though John and I were the only non-Persians there." (p.122)

As illustrated above, many Iranians in the United States in that period preferred to use English instead of Farsi, because speaking English was associated with high status and an indication of being educated abroad. Hoffman (1989) adds that some Iranians would not even admit they were Iranians. "when they met, for example, they would speak English to each other" fearing it might cause "culturally undesirable effects by standing out" too much or "drawing too much attention" to themselves (p.122).

Modarresi (2001) believes that since the original Iranian immigrants were mainly students who did not come to the United States with their families, they were not worried about preserving or transferring their linguistic and cultural heritage. But this mentality started to change in the 1980s as the number of Iranian immigrants to the U.S. increased. As these attitudes changed dramatically in recent years, and Iranians started to speak more Farsi at home, studying Farsi at heritage language schools and listening to Iranian media, have become more popular. Hoffman (1989) illustrates this language mood change:

One Iranian parent, having lived in the United States for a number of years, lamented the fact that she had not taught her son to speak Persian from birth. At the time, she thought, English was "more prestigious," but recently she had begun to regret the fact that her son had no interest in Persian and refused to speak it... A teacher in a Persian language school said, "A few years back, if someone said they were going to send their kid to Persian school, others would laugh. Now they don't." (p.122)

For most Iranians, Farsi is linked to their civilization and their cultural practices. Heritage language teachers pass on more than a language to their students; their interactions with their students are often loaded with morals values, and cultural practices of the heritage culture (Cho et al.,1997) and heritage language learners learn more than phonology, grammar, and spelling and reading in a language classroom. They also learn how a linguistic system works in a particular system and how to follow the norms of their heritage culture (Atoofi, 2011). Iranian-American parents send their children to Persian heritage language classes hoping that through learning Farsi language and interaction with heritage language teachers, their children can become familiar with and use the cultural heritage of their home country. Hoffman (1989) suggests willingness to use Farsi amongst Iranians in the United States can be an indicator of mounting sense of cultural and community identity. Iranians are very proud of their classical and modern literature and most native born Iranians can easily read and understand classical Persian literature which is very rich in terms of use of riddles and proverbs. A survey conducted by the Iranian Studies Group at MIT reported that among Iranians living in the United States,



language, traditions, festivities, and family values were the most important aspects of the home culture (Mostashari, 2004). Similarly when asked what aspects of their home culture they emphasized more when educating their children about Iran, they indicated Farsi language and traditions as their top choices.

According to Atoofi (2011), Persian speaking TV and radio stations as well as Persian internet sites, have played a major role in Farsi language maintenance among Iranian-Americans. Entertainment programs such as shows, music videos, and sitcoms broadcasted mostly from California target Persian speaking audiences all over the world. Other technological advances such as Google Persian translation, online podcasting, and Persian font embedding in social network sites such as Viber, Telegram, Tweeter and Facebook have encouraged many generations of Iranians to connect with one another across the globe using Persian language. At the present time, there are more than two dozen internet sites which offer online Persian language learning without any cost to learners, an invaluable resource for many second generation Iranian-Americans.

Despite these means of maintaining Farsi language, Modarresi (2001) however, mentions that these resources are not strong enough to combat or prevent the forces of Americanization and language shift in second generation Iranian-Americans. He further states that Iranian exiles initial belief of a temporary stay was one of the main reasons why they were not serious about establishing institutions in the early years after their arrival. Iranian-American parents face many challenges in their efforts to teach heritage literacy skills to their children. Iranian-American children have limited opportunities to develop bilingualism in the current U.S. educational system. Therefore, the responsibility

for maintenance and development of the native language is usually left to the family. Regardless of these language maintenance efforts, there is a wide difference in the extent of language maintenance between the first and second generation Iranian-Americans. First generation Iranian-Americans frequently use Farsi as the language of their choice for everyday contact, while in contrast, second generation Iranian-Americans are monolingual speakers. Iranian-American parents rapidly realized that their children do not necessarily acquire the language and follow traditions of their home country. Many Iranian-American families watched their children make American friends, attend American schools, and speak English as their first and sometimes only language (Modarresi, 2001). Some Iranian children born in the United States either consider learning Farsi unnecessary, or they appraise it negatively (Atoofi, 2011). Iranian parents face many challenges in encouraging their children to maintain their heritage language. Parents have to enforce use of Farsi as a language spoken at home (Modarresi, 2001) and struggle with intergenerational conflicts and deal with their children's identity issues (Mahdi, 1998).

Despite increased awareness of the necessity of heritage language maintenance and development, the problem of Iranian heritage loss cannot simply be reversed by the desire of the families and individuals to maintain their heritage language. In order to understand the problem of heritage language in ethnic communities, including the Iranian-American community, it is necessary to examine the issues and challenges that this community faces in maintaining Farsi as their heritage language.

**Iranian-American heritage language education.** Public school support for the

development of less commonly taught heritage languages such as Farsi in K-12 level is rare, and Farsi is typically offered formally only at the university level. Yet, children of Iranian parents who live in major metropolitan areas may benefit from attending organized Farsi language classes and socializing with others like themselves in sizable ethnic communities. Cultural activities and film festivals where Farsi language can be heard and spoken have grown. Mosques and cultural institutions are offering Farsi classes for children. However, these resources are not readily available to most people. Therefore, many Iranian-Americans who speak Farsi have tried to counter balance this language shift and maintain their native language by either teaching literacy skills in Farsi to their children at home or signing up their children for Saturday classes at community programs.

Persian heritage language classes are a recent initiative that first generation Iranian-Americans have started to connect their children, mostly born in the United States, to the home language and culture. Over time Iranians have established various cultural and religious institutions that are considered the most important sources of linguistic and cultural heritage maintenance. In recent years, these centers have sprung up across the United States, from North Carolina to southern California. California claims the largest number of the members of the Iranian immigrants, and is therefore home to the largest number of Persian cultural centers. Better known to the community as "Kanoon" says Foroud Arsanjai, president of the Virginia-based Iranian American Civic Society an organization concentrating on the professional community. After California, the largest numbers of Iranian Americans can be found in the Washington DC

metropolitan areas of Maryland and Virginia. Therefore, the area hosts several Persian cultural centers. Through the promotion of Persian culture, language, literature and arts among the members of the community, they play an important role in maintaining ties between the Iranian immigrants and the homeland. Besides teaching Persian language, these cultural centers have various programs to educate the younger generations in literature, music, dance and other arts. According to Modarresi (2001):

“Persian cultural centers started as impromptu associations set up to address the urgent needs of the consecutive waves of Iranians migrating to the U.S. In the early days, we realized that we needed to help each other for the most trivial issues such as helping immigrants with translating documents or finding doctors, so our organization started on the basis of personal relationships, rather than on a systematic approach” (p.92).

Through the promotion of Persian culture, language, literature and arts among the members of the community these institutions play an important role in maintaining ties between Iranian-American and the homeland. According to Modarresi (2001), these cultural institutions called “Anjomanhaye Farhangi” were established to preserve and transfer the cultural and linguistic heritage to the second generation Iranian-Americans. In general, heritage language education has exists in the form of weekend schools, which are community-based programs that offer language/culture instruction for a few hours per week. Modarresi (2001) identifies three types of these cultural institutions and their role in Persian language maintenance:

1. Sociocultural Groups: Farsi classes offered in Iranian religious and cultural centers. These groups include cultural centers or community groups that organize various programs in celebration of national holidays and cultural events such as Nowruz, Yalda, Mehregan, etc.
2. Religious Centers: Religious centers are among the most important cultural institutions for the observant members of the Muslim Iranian community. These centers aim to not only transfer religious practices to the second generation but also cultural and linguistic values. These centers also offer Farsi classes to members of their communities.
3. Persian Language Instruction: One of the ways of Persian language instruction has been taught is through courses offered by universities. These course and classes are taught at different levels. Those at the university level are geared toward adult learners from different nationalities, not necessarily Iranians.
4. Classes offered outside the university settings are usually aimed toward second generation Iranians. These are classes held at cultural/religious centers or at Persian language schools. They vary in the levels they teach and the materials they use. Some do not even teach literacy and only concentrate on speaking Persian and learning cultural norms (p.107).

In addition to language, Persian community schools may offer cultural activities such as Persian dance, music, art, and sport. However, there are less than a handful of such classes exist and they are not always readily available and accessible in most areas.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed the history of heritage languages in the U.S., the current state of heritage language education, the factors which tend to influence language maintenance and loss, and the importance of heritage language maintenance. Heritage language speakers, mostly immigrants and their descendants are increasing in the U.S. at a time when there is still no nationwide educational support. Maintaining heritage language remains the sole responsibility of immigrant families. Heritage language loss is increasingly seen among second generation immigrants. Immigrant parents generally wish for their children to maintain their heritage language in order to secure their ethnic identity and family ties, as well as to obtain better opportunities in the future. Maintaining heritage language remains the sole responsibility of immigrant families. This chapter also reviewed the history and current state of Farsi as a heritage language in the U.S., as well as maintenance efforts of Iranian-Americans to preserve their heritage language. In an effort to help their children maintain their heritage language, Iranian-American parents utilize multiple strategies, such as talking to their children in the heritage language, teaching it to their children, enrolling their children in heritage language classes, and providing resources. However, there is a shortage of research focusing on Iranian-American immigrants' experiences as they strive to maintain their heritage language. For this reason, this study intended to bring insight on the topic from voices of the Iranian-American immigrant parents residing in the Washington DC metropolitan area. Chapter Three will present the methodology.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

This chapter provides a detailed description of the research design, beginning with the description of the study design and rationale for the methodology and design. Information pertaining to participants, the participant's selection process, research instruments, data collection, and data analysis are followed and a brief summary will conclude the chapter.

#### **Research Questions**

Influenced by previous heritage language researchers and my personal experience, this investigation explored Iranian-American parents' heritage language attitudes and challenges in maintaining Farsi as a heritage language. With this in mind, research questions were formulated to avoid creating tunnel vision, allowing attention to a wide range of data (Maxwell, 2005) by asking the following three questions:

- RQ1. What are the Iranian-American parents' views, motivations and expectations in sending their children to Farsi heritage schools?
- RQ2. What are some efforts and challenges that parents undertake to maintain Farsi heritage language in their children?
- RQ3. What role does the Persian community (Farsi heritage school, etc.) and the larger community play in heritage language development and maintenance?

## **Research Method**

In order to understand the challenges of maintaining heritage language in the ethnic communities, it is necessary to examine the issues that each community faces. Maxwell (2005) stated “your methods are a means to answering your research questions, not a logical transformation of the latter” (p. 92).

The goal of this study was to investigate a social phenomenon and obtain answers to what and how questions rather than to find statistical correlations (Silverman, 2001). In the qualitative research tradition, phenomena in natural settings are investigated to uncover participants’ experiences from their own perspectives. Through inductive inquiry, descriptions, concepts, and abstractions emerge from the collected data, and researchers are concerned with a rich description of the event under study and the research process, rather than focusing merely on the results, deductively supporting a theory, or testing a hypothesis (Merriam, 2001). Because the interest here was to investigate the nature of parents’ experience maintaining Farsi as a heritage language and to capture the diverse aspects of their experience, qualitative methods were used to help gain a deeper understanding about how community of practice (family, instruction, and community) affects Farsi heritage language learning. As Corbin and Strauss (2007) recommended, “qualitative methods can be used to obtain the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods” (p.11). Erickson (1986) also indicated that interpretive methods are particularly appropriate when the nature of the study is an attempt to describe what is happening in a particular place. Therefore, a



qualitative research approach was appropriate because the aim of this study was to seek a deeper understanding of language maintenance from Iranian-American parents' perspectives, investigating and describing their successes and challenges in language maintenance within the contexts of home, heritage school and the heritage language community. To answer the research questions, semi structured, face-to-face interviews, demographic questionnaires, and observations were used for data collection.

### **Interactive Research Design**

To ensure efforts to utilize the most appropriate methods for addressing the research questions, a research design was established to provide the blueprint for collection, measurement, and analysis of data, one that offered the best integration the various components of the study in a coherent and logical manner (De Vaus, 2001); therefore, Maxwell's (2005) interactive research design was adapted. This design is composed of five interconnected areas (see Figure 4) as part of an interacting structure. Components in this design research flow between elements and work together not in a sequential and linear manner, but in an interactive and multi-directional manner. "This design is not sequential; rather it involves an ongoing process that involves 'tacking' back and forth between the different components of the design, assessing the implications of goals, theories, research questions, methods, and validity threats for one another (Maxwell, 2005, p. 3). It involves cycles of reflection and refinement that allows interaction between each areas of the model as the research continues. According to Maxwell (2005), "The activities of collecting and analyzing data, developing and modifying theory, elaborating or refocusing the research questions, and identifying and

addressing validity threats are usually all going on more or less simultaneously, each influencing all of the others (p. 2).”

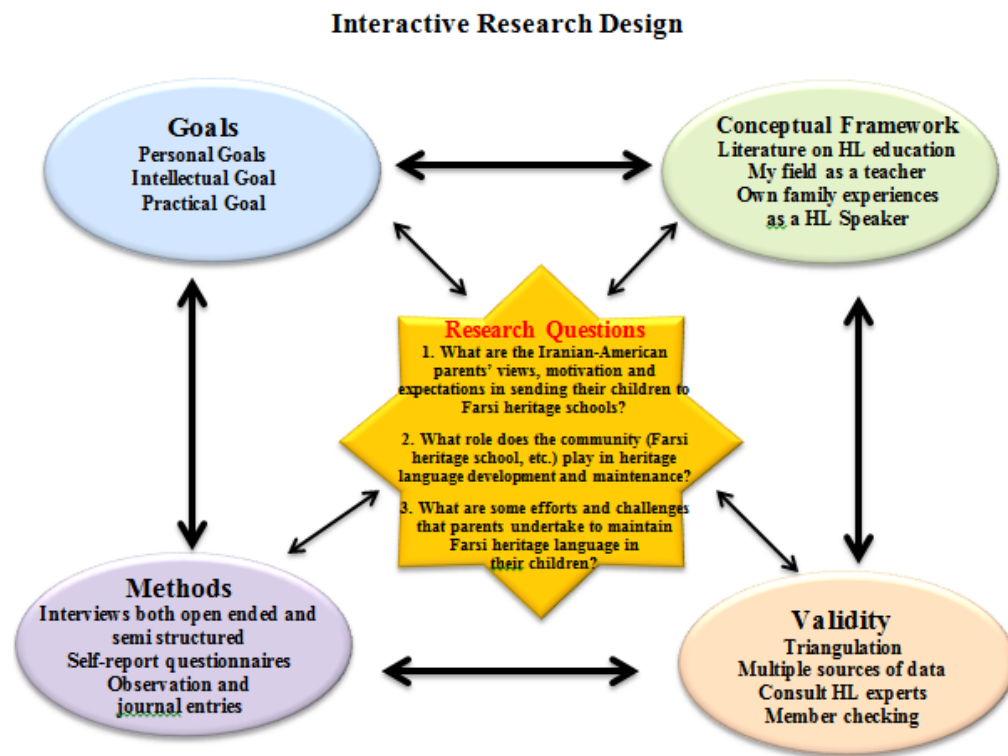


Figure 4. Interactive research design adapted from Maxwell (2005)

## Recruitment

Upon receiving approval letter from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A) from George Mason University, access to the heritage language institutes was sought. First, I visited the School Site #1 (Islamic Education Center (IEC) in Potomac

Maryland) to meet with the principal, explain the general purpose of the study, and seek permission to conduct research in the school. While waiting for permission from School #1, I visited a second school site in Vienna, Virginia (The Vienna School) to meet with the principal. Two weeks after visiting the School Site #2, the principal granted me permission to contact parents and solicit their participation in the study. However, I did not receive permission to conduct observations at School Site #2.

A third school site (Roshd Academy located in Falls Church, Virginia) was contacted. Shortly after, I made an appointment with the principal and visited to school. Unlike School Site #1 and #2, the classes in School Site #3 were held in a public school. Two weeks after my initial visit, I received permission from principals to use the school as a data collection site (see Appendix B). I visited each of school an additional time to meet with parent who had responded to my “call to participate”. During this meeting, my goal was to begin the process of establishing rapport and to allow time for them to pose any questions they have about the goals of my research project and the procedure, questionnaire and interviews. Immediately following the general meeting with parents, I called parents and arranged the time, date, and location for the interviews.

### **Participants**

The participants for this study were 12 Iranian-American parents of students in Farsi heritage language schools in the Washington DC metropolitan area. A purposeful sampling procedure was utilized which “is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2001, p.61). Therefore, this study intentionally

recruited Farsi speaking parents who had children attending heritage language schools in the Washington DC metropolitan area in order to gain insights about Farsi heritage language maintenance. There were two criteria for participant selection. First, the participants were adult Farsi speaking Iranian-Americans; second, they had at least one child currently attending a Farsi heritage language community school. An additional consideration was the site selection, a Farsi heritage language school.

The parent/participants included nine females and three males ranging in age from 32 to 50. Among them, their children had attended three different Farsi heritage schools one in Maryland and two in Northern Virginia. These parents were highly educated; out of the 12 parents, all but one had degrees ranging from bachelors degree to Ph.D.; one parent had an associate degree. More detailed information gathered on the participants will be presented in chapter four.

### **Settings**

Site and participant sampling decisions are an important part of research methodology. Glesne (2011) noted that the selection of a research site was “built into the research problem” (p. 44). In a similar manner, Maxwell (2013) argued that the choice of a case was justified in terms of “the goals of the study and existing theory and research” (p. 78). Therefore it was important to select school sites and participants who were representative and who could provide rich data to effectively address the goals and questions of this research study. Initially, I purposefully identified 10 potential research sites in Persian communities in the Washington DC metropolitan area where Farsi heritage language schools were located. From these 10 schools 5 operate in Virginia and

5 in Maryland. This study was conducted in three Farsi heritage language schools: Islamic Education Center (IEC) in Maryland, the Persian Cultural Center Inc. located in Virginia, and the Roshd Academy, also located in Virginia. These sites were selected due to their relative distance from each other, accessibility and positive response to participating in the project. The three research sites were:

- 1- Islamic Education Center (IEC): The Islamic Education Center (IEC) Incorporation in Potomac, Maryland established in 1998 as a non-profit institution. This center offers Farsi classes on Saturdays for grades K-12<sup>th</sup>.
- 2- Persian Cultural Center Inc.: Iranian Community School in Vienna, VA was founded in 1986. According to their website this school is a non-profit, non-political, educational entity that is dedicated to the language, culture, history, literature, music, and art of Iran for the young and adults.
- 3- Roshd Academy: Located in Falls Church VA, Roshd Academy is a private, educational institution formed in 2004 by a group of professionals with a wide range of backgrounds offering various language courses catered for grades children K-12<sup>th</sup>.

### **Piloting the Instruments**

Pilot interviews were conducted with two subjects prior to conducting the formal parent interviews. The purposes for the pilot test were to clarify procedures, ensure question clarity, and to receive critical feedback about the process from subjects who shared qualifications similar to the parent/participants targeted in the study. Two first-generation Iranian-American mothers were selected both had children that had at one

time attended Farsi heritage schools. Although these participants did not have children at Farsi school at the time of interviews, their participation was meaningful because they shared a similar experience with perspectives participants in the study. The two pilot subjects were interviewed separately. Prior to and at the conclusion of the interview process, they were asked to comment on the questions for any clarification or improvement. Their feedback and suggestions were reviewed and modifications were made to the interview instrument. The interview instrument was also translated to Farsi before the pilot test and verified by another Farsi-speaking colleague. The revised interview protocol was used during the interview process and emphasized key questions relevant to the goals of this study (see Appendix C).

### **Data Collection**

To obtain information from multiple perspectives, this study included self-report questionnaires, interviews, and observations to collect data. Interviews were used to explore the perceptions of Iranian-American parents regarding Farsi heritage language learning and maintenance of their children. An interview guide was designed to address the research questions, which focused on exploring the meaning of the phenomenon and the influence of the events experienced (Maxwell, 2005). Maxwell discussed the significant role interview questions play in a qualitative study. He stated, “Interview questions should be judged not by whether they can be logically derived from your research questions, but by whether they provide the data that will contribute to answering these questions” (p. 236).

## **Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews served as the main source of data for this study.

Interviews facilitate in-depth knowledge of respondents' thoughts and provide the flexibility to present new questions when needed (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Interviews were preferable to written questionnaires because interviews offer flexibility in direction and allow opportunity for clarification and follow-up. That is, participant's responses could inspire additional questions that allow researchers to cover territory not previously anticipated (Davis & Scott, 1995). This data collection tool allowed me to obtain more details about the parent/participants. They were able to expand their responses which provided more insight about their perspectives and feelings towards their children's' Farsi heritage language learning. They were able to share their experiences, expectations, as well as their challenges because this format took on a natural conversational tone that created a level of ease and comfort between participants and researcher. A list of questions was used as prompts to facilitate a conversation. In doing qualitative research, Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg (1992), suggest that the "choice of research practices depends upon the questions that are asked" (p.2).

In this study, the questions were about language perceptions, attitudes, and practices as displayed through explicit talking about language. Knowing the particular sensitivities of the Iranian community I was very careful in designing the interview protocol and took care not to include questions that might intimidate participants or make them feel uneasy. In order to gain a holistic understanding of participants' views, the interview questions were developed under four major topic areas: home language use,

parental attitudes, efforts to maintain the Farsi language, and difficulties in Farsi language maintenance. Parents were asked to provide descriptions regarding their reasons for enrolling their children in a Farsi language program (e.g. why is it important for you that your child/children to go to Farsi school and learn to speak Farsi? What are the observed benefits you see in your children speaking their heritage language?), their experiences regarding difficulties and challenges (e.g. what problems or difficulties have you encountered when you try to teach them Farsi? (e.g., aspects of time, effort, people, place, and resources), their perceptions of their children's experiences with learning Farsi (e.g. what have you done at home to help your child/children in learning Farsi? Are there any reading, visual/audio materials available in Farsi at your house for your children?)

The interviewing approach was a purposeful conversation that enabled me to put the parents at ease and find out how they made meaning of their life experiences. Interviews were conducted in Farsi language. First, the questions were developed in English; those questions were reviewed by two professors in the College of Education and Human Development at George Mason University and pilot tested with two volunteers. Later the questions were translated in Farsi and reviewed by a Persian (Farsi) speaking PhD student for clarity and ease of understanding.



**Interviews process.** Although recruitment began prior to the end of the 2015 school year, data collection did not begin until March of 2016. After obtaining approval for conducting research from the George Mason Human Subjects Review Board, and modifying the interview questions and procedures, I visited schools, met with principals at three heritage school sites and contacted potential parent/participants for an interview. Of a total of 30 parents who were contacted, at the three school sites, I was able to schedule a total of 12 interviews (four interviews from each school site). Each interview began by reviewing the purpose of the study and participants were asked to sign the consent letter (see Appendix D). The letter stated that participation in this research was voluntary, participants could withdraw from the study at any time, and that there would be no direct benefits to individual participants. The letter mentioned that the knowledge gained from this work will contribute to understanding the factors that support heritage literacy development in Iranian-American communities in the U.S.; all information obtained would be strictly confidential; and interviews would be audiotaped for later transcription. Further, participants were given an opportunity to ask questions.

The first four face to face interviews were completed in the Islamic Education Center (IEC) Maryland Farsi School during the first two weeks of data collection. I conducted two interviews per day on two Saturdays in the school cafeteria during the times when the students were in the class. The rest of the eight interviews for parent/participants whose children attended the other two school sites were conducted through Skype since the cafeteria was not available.

Parents were interviewed separately. The interviews ranged from 45 to 70 minutes in length. All interviews started with basic demographic questions. Interviews included questions on language usage and attitudes, the role of the community in teaching and preserving Farsi, and questions on the importance and role of culture in their life and on the process of Farsi language learning. During the interviews general questions addressing the following areas were asked: 1) the background of the family and the time of immigration to the United States; 2) the history of the heritage language learning; 3) language preference at home and in the presence of other Iranians; 4) whether they have visited Iran with their children; and 5) the attitudes of the parents and their children towards learning and speaking Farsi as a heritage language. During each interview, participants were asked to provide examples in order to clarify their answers to each question. Interviews were audio-recorded with a digital voice recorder and at the same time, brief field notes were handwritten. There were no technology-related issues during recording. In an attempt to value participants' heritage language, before each interview, participants were asked if they preferred to have the interview conducted in Farsi or English. At the start of the interview the purpose of the study was briefly repeated. All participants, with exception of one male participant preferred to have the interview conducted in Farsi. During the interview, participants were given much freedom in how they answered the questions. All participants answered every question and many shared personal stories. When necessary, the question sequence was modified, probing questions were posed to examine responses more deeply and elicit richer information. Before ending each interview, the interview guide was reviewed to make sure all questions were

explored. At the completion of each interview a brief descriptive narrative was developed and reflective field notes were taken in more detail. This process also included a memo to note any of my initial reactions to the data. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and then checked using the interview memo and notes taken during the interviews as a way to document if participants emphasized some information more than other information and to take note of obvious reaction to the researcher, welcoming or distancing.

Over the course of the interview period, it became obvious that the same information was repeated across several participant interviews, that is, no new or unique information was expressed by the participants. Seidman (2013) identifies this phenomenon as saturation of information and believes that this is one of the criteria that demonstrate that the researcher has interviewed a sufficient number of participants to reflect the range of participants and sites that make up the population. Thus the researcher is no longer learning anything new. Therefore, after interviewing 12 parents I decided to cease the data collection.

### **Demographic Questionnaire**

Demographic questionnaires (see Appendix E) were given to the participants after the interviews to explore the families' backgrounds. The questionnaire was designed to provide an overall picture of parents' demographic information. This section contained 12 questions mainly about background information regarding basic demographics such as age, gender, language (s) spoken at home, the Farsi proficiency level of each family member as rated by the participant, birth place, educational background, their child's age and length of time receiving Farsi language instruction, etc.

### **School Visits and Classroom Observation**

An observation journal, guided by an observation protocol (see Appendix F) was maintained and served as the third source of data in this study. Although I had planned to observe classes at the three school sites, observations were only conducted at the Islamic heritage school in Maryland, as described earlier. I observed three class sessions of Farsi language instruction and these visits have provided insight about Farsi language curriculum and instruction. A reflective observation journal as well as field notes on interviews in conjunction with other data sources did shed light on instructional practices and cultural activities within the schools. Observations focused on the materials the students studied and teaching and learning activities. Descriptive field notes included accurate physical description of the field, time, date, location of each observation, and activities done in the classrooms.

### **Field Notes**

Field notes were taken during and immediately after each interview. Descriptive field notes included a detailed description of the event (time, date and duration of the interview, and the physical description of the place), reactions and non-verbal behavior of the participants, and any other related activity. Reflective field notes included my reflections on and interpretation of each interview. I typed my descriptive and reflective notes, and later on, organized them in separate files based on emerging themes. This method of data collection enabled me to keep an accurate record of each interview and facilitated the interpretation of the results and analysis of the emerging themes.

## **Data Analysis**

Qualitative research data analysis is an ongoing process that should begin with the collection of the first pieces of data after the first interview or field observation, doing so will provide the researchers with a meaningful direction (Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Maxwell, 2013). The main challenge of qualitative analysis is making sense of a considerable amount of data (Patton, 2002). Therefore, analysis involves carefully reading through raw data and reducing it by separating significant information from irrelevant data, identifying key themes and patterns, and creating an appropriate framework for presenting the data findings. Data for this study was comprised of demographic questionnaires results, interview transcripts, and observation field notes. However, the participant interviews served as the main source of data analysis.

In order to understand parents' experiences in their Farsi heritage maintenance efforts, I analyzed the variety of data that I collected through qualitative analysis. Qualitative data analysis allowed for rich description of the Iranian-American parents and gave voice and meaning to their experiences as I inquired about how Farsi heritage language is developed and maintained. In qualitative studies, data analysis involves "preparing and organizing the data (for example, transcripts and field notes) for analysis, reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 148). According to Creswell (2009), blending data analysis steps "from the specific to the general" and involving "multiple levels of analysis" is the ideal strategy in data analysis for researchers (p. 246). He also suggests a "seven step" method be used in

data analysis involving a “linear, hierarchical approach from the bottom to the top” approach (Creswell, 2009, p.246). Figure 5 shows the complete framework, general procedures, and the steps in data analysis using Creswell's (2009) data analysis process overview (seven boxes on the left hand side of the diagram) as a base. This framework emphasizes the interactive nature of the coding, data reduction, and data presentation processes.

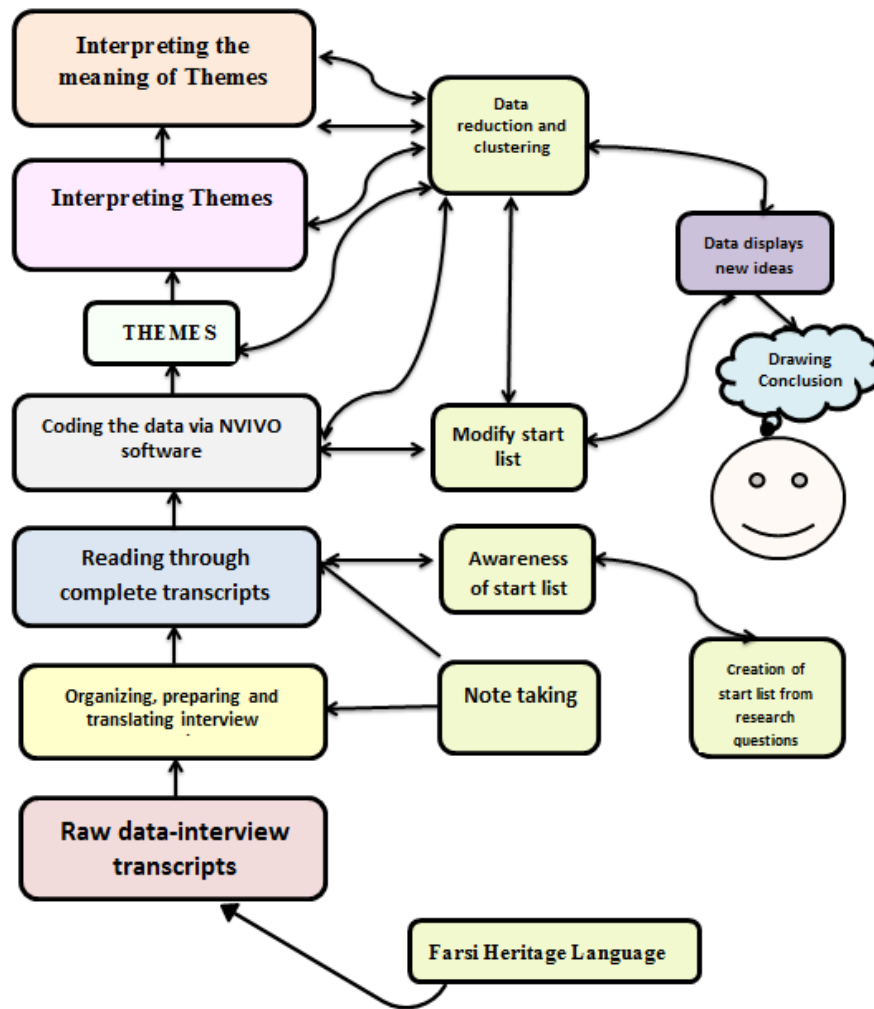


Figure 5. Seven step data analysis overview adapted from Creswell's (2009)

**Step 1.** This step involved translating and transcribing interviews, organizing field data, interview notes, and observations. In this step, I typed up my field notes and responses from the questionnaires. Most of the interviews were done in Farsi. Only one interview was conducted in English at the request of the participant. Audio recording were uploaded into a computer to enable to repeated play of the interviews. This process allowed me to hear the interviews, remember the interviews, and note how participants related their views. Next, the interviews were translated into English and transcribed from audio files into electronic file format for each participant. Translation is an interpretive act, and meaning may get lost in the translation process (Merriam, 2001). Although effort was made to “remain true” to participants’ actual responses, potential translation issues were noted. For example, it was challenging to translate the meaning of metaphors used by participants to express their ideas. Due to the cultural and historical nuances embedded in any language, verbatim translation of the metaphor from language to language are not easily understood in another language. Special care was taken and efforts were made to find comparable meaning for this expression in English language in the translation. This limitation will be addressed within the “limitation section” in chapter five. A qualitative data analysis program (QSR NVivo) was used to assist with organizing and analyzing interviews and field notes. Using this program allowed for to organizing and sorting data, and enabled me to search for information in text and locate all text associated with specific codes. This program also facilitated comparison, consolidation and or expansion of different code information. This process allow examination of content to determine what was learned and what still needed to be discovered and what

points might need elaboration in the follow-up interviews.

**Step 2.** In this step I read and looked at all the data. First, the transcripts were read and re-reading several times in order to obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning (Creswell, 2009). I took note of general ideas that participants were communicating thus creating the big picture or overall impression of information. I took notes on my general thoughts about the data in a memo at this stage. I then started to put together an initial list of possible categories. This step helped me to gain a general sense of the information and provided an opportunity to reflect on its overall meaning. These emerging ideas at this stage were very important and vital to the analytic process as I was able to reflect on the initial themes as the potential information that responded the research questions. This process served as the basis for the analyzing subsequent interview data.

**Step 3.** In order to get a sense of what the initial codes and keywords might look like, I employed the first cycle of analysis using the NVivo software by creating a word cloud to find common words and phrases amongst interviews as illustrated in figure 6. Miles and Huberman (1994) call this beginning list of categories *start list* and suggest that start list consists of beginning categories not a final list (until the research project is completed). The initial start list changes constantly as coding and groupings develop and become evident throughout the coding process that new categories are needed or some categories need to be combined.





*Figure 6.* Word clouds for common words and phrases

**Step 4.** I then started coding the transcripts via NVIVO software line by line. In other words, I read the transcribed interview data set again and again according to the research questions and looked for emerging themes and supporting evidence (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Coding involved the process of organizing data into “chunks” (Creswell, 2005, p.171) and the integration of selected text into segments while examining the similarities and differences and grouping together conceptually similar data in the appropriate code.

Alternatively, sometimes codes grew in a way that resulted in too much data in one code. In this case, I placed the codes into sub-codes in order to better organize the data. As the number of codes grew larger, related codes were collapsed under various categories and themes which were created by looking for certain words, phrases, patterns

of behavior, subjects, ways of thinking, and events (that are) repeated and stand out” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 175).

**Step 5.** This step involved using the coding process to generate and label categories or themes for analysis. In this stage I listed the final codes for each interview under categories pertaining to the research questions, and compared and contrasted with the compatible ones of other cases for a cross-case analysis (Guba, 1990). Once codes were categorized, I compared them to one another to find similarly coded data and further summarized it into sub-categories or consolidate them under an existing category if necessary. At this stage many new categories were discovered and their relationships with sub-categories were examined. Then I listed the emerging themes according to relevant categories. Moreover, I read the notes on the classroom observations several times in an attempt to describe the heritage language program, curriculum, and answer the research questions.

Also at this time I read and reread all the data one more time to make sure that nothing was overlooked and not coded (Maxwell, 2005). I also returned to the transcriptions to see if all the codes and categories were saturated; meaning that all the data were accounted for with no outlying codes or categories and every category was sufficiently explained in depth by the data that supported it. As I read over the data sources again, I realized that the same information was repeated several times, thus I no longer was learning anything new. Seidman (2013) identifies this phenomenon as “saturation of information” and believes that this is one of the criteria that demonstrate that the researcher has gathered enough information to reflect the range of participants

and sites that make up the population.

**Step 6.** This step involved the discussion of how the description and themes are represented in the qualitative narrative (Creswell, 2005). As the process of coding was advancing, pieces of reflective thinking, ideas, theories, and concepts often emerged as I read through the data. I started to write further reflective notes of my reactions and ideas that emerge in memos. Some of my notes suggested new interpretation as well as connections with other data. Next, I looked across the research questions for themes that overlapped with each category to see if there were any relationships that connected patterns or themes (Maxwell, 2005). After conducting a thorough data analysis of the interviews, the larger categories were collapsed into narrower organizational categories, thus identifying seven overarching organizational categories.

**Step 7.** This final step in data analysis involved making an interpretation or meaning of the data (Creswell, 2005). Once I collapsed the categories into themes based upon all data analyzed, I started interpretation of the data by using my personal understanding, review of literature, and my own experiences to draw meaning from the findings. Next, I started writing the results. In my writing, I offered my personal interpretation of the data, explained the framework that describes my results, and reflected on the knowledge gained during the research process.

As I wrote the results, some of the categories shifted and collapsed as I described the themes based on my rereading and constantly “digging back” in all the data. As a result, I reassembled some relationships and connections among the themes. This was an essential stage in the analysis, because the final data analysis resulted in a comprehensible

interpretation of what it means to teach and maintain Farsi heritage language to Iranian-American children based on the parent/participants' perceptions. The following seven themes and their subtheme emerged from the data. Subthemes were assigned categories when needed and some of the categories were also further assigned sub-categories to group like topics or concepts together.

1. Knowing Farsi helps my child: Parents' views on learning Farsi as a heritage language including: (abilities, benefits, attitudes, and connections)
2. There is no end to learning Farsi: Parent's expectations for their children's Farsi language learning including (reading, writing, speaking, and grade level)
3. Sometimes it is hard: Challenges parents face in teaching Farsi language to their children including (characteristics, school, language loss, and resources)
4. We do our best: Parent's efforts and practices in maintaining Farsi heritage language for their children including (language practices, literacy practices, family language policy, spouse's role, teaching culture, and visiting Iran)
5. I like this Farsi school: Farsi school roles in development and maintenance of Farsi (academic, feelings, quality teachers, extracurricular, ideology, parent teacher relationships, socialization, and cultural teaching)
6. Persian community: Various Persian communities and social settings and their effect on Farsi heritage language learning including (friends, mosque, library groups, and public celebrations)

7. Politics change all the time: Social political climate and its effect on Farsi heritage language learning and maintenance.

Altogether, the three research questions generated 7 major themes, 25 sub-themes, 33 categories, and 6 sub-categories. Table 2 shows organization of the data around specific research questions, the emerging themes, subthemes, categories and sub-categories and how they are interconnected together in this study along with the total number of their occurrences in the data. I will discuss the major themes and sub-themes and categories further in the results section of chapter four.

### Themes, Sub-themes, Categories, and Subcategories

	Questions	Themes	Total	Sub-themes	Total	Categories	Total
104	1. What are the Iranian-American parents' views, motivation and expectations in sending their children to Farsi heritage schools?	Knowing Farsi helps children	199	Abilities	20	Reading-writing	13
						Speaking-listening	7
						Academic benefits	15
				Benefits	78	Bilingual benefits	19
						Cognitive benefits	11
						Future benefits	33
				Connections	64	Connection to culture	29
		To Extended family	18				
		Connection to parents	10				
		Religion	6				
		Heritage	24	Heritage identity	15		
				Mother's tongue	9		
				Attitudes	13	Secret language	
		There is no end to Farsi learning	38	Reading	13		
	Writing			3			
	Speaking			4			
	Grade Level			5			
Cultural	7						
Sometimes it is hard	236			Characteristics	71	Individual differences	12
				Community	9	Sibling influence	6
		Language Loss	72	Resistance to school	15		
2. What are some efforts and challenges that parents undertake to maintain Farsi heritage language in their children?				Causes	15		
				Consequences	11		

		Resources	12	Interventions	32
		School Challenges	93	Academic Responsibilities	31
		Language Policies	23	Teacher Problems	44
		Language Practices	286	Literacy (games, books, study)	11
We do a lot to help	311	Spouse's Role	25	Verbal ( movie, speaking at home)	79
		Teaching Culture	17		163
		Visiting Iran	4		
		Facebooks	1		
		Friends	3		
Learning in the Iranian community	40	Library Groups	13		
		Mosque	2		
		Parties	38		
		Public Events	3		
This Farsi school is better	60	Public Schools	4		
		Farsi Schools	143		
Politics is one way one day and another way other days	4				

## **Potential Validity Threats**

This section highlights how the results might be wrong and what other confounding factors might constitute explanations for the results.

**Trustworthiness and consistency.** According to Riessman (1993), validation is “the process through which we make claims for the trustworthiness of our interpretations.” There are a few overarching validity concerns in this study. For example, I might not have developed a clear understanding of the nature of the setting and context in which the phenomena that I am studying is situated in. To enhance trustworthiness, multiple strategies were utilized. First, the interview questions were created to directly answer the research goals. Second, the interview questions were pilot tested with two candidates who shared similar characteristics with the actual participants in order to ensure consistency with the study. Later, suggestions gained from the pilot test were applied to the final questionnaires. Finally, observations, questionnaires, and field notes were utilized to realize triangulation.

**Researcher’s bias in interpreting data.** I believe that researcher bias might be another factor that might have caused me to interpret the results one way or another. Patton (2002) urged researchers to “reflect on, deal with, and report potential sources of bias and error” without ambiguity in their studies (p. 51). Likewise, Maxwell (2013) suggested that researchers should clearly explain their possible assumptions and discuss how they will address this issue in their study.

As a researcher, studying the culture of which I am also a member is not always an easy task; rather, it involves complex and sensitive ethical issues (Saville-Troike,



1996). While it was not possible to completely disregard my biases and perceptual lens; however, by admitting these biases and assumptions, I consciously tried to keep them from affecting this study during data collection and data analysis.

I acknowledge that this was not an easy process, and that my identities as an Iranian-American, a graduate student, and the mother of Farsi heritage speakers may have, in indirect ways, shaped my own interpretations of the data. As a Farsi speaking individual it might have been difficult for me to maintain total objectivity to put aside my own opinions and ideas about what is going on within the research setting. Therefore, I might not have taken my field notes accurately and without bias and might have looked for negative cases or cases that affirm my beliefs. In addition, points that would be significant to my research from an outsider's point of view might be hidden or invisible to me because I may take them for granted. On the other hand there are some advantages to my presence as an insider mainly in terms of understanding emotional and cultural elements that an outsider might not figure out easily. In addition, points that would be significant to my research from an outsider's point of view might be hidden or invisible to me because I may take them for granted. On the other hand there are some advantages to my presence as an insider mainly in terms of understanding emotional and cultural elements that an outsider might not figure out easily. In talking about the advantages of ethnographers working within their own culture, Saville-Troike (1996) remarked:

Combining observation and self-knowledge, the ethnographer can plumb the depths and explore the subtle interconnections of meaning in ways that the outsider could attain only with great difficulty (p. 110).

Finally, my dual position as both insider and outsider has allowed me to construct my own cultural views which are more relevant and authentic in form and content than those written by outsiders. The insider position therefore, can help my study in terms of accuracy and depth. I believe triangulation of multiple sources of data including questionnaires and individual interviews as well as consulting heritage language experts about the results can help me minimize the effects of these threats. Therefore, to remedy these validity threats, I used rich detail in my description of the setting and events in my field notes and avoided any leading adjectives such as “effective” and “ineffective”. To ensure the credibility of the results further, the data was triangulated, that is, multiple sources of data collection were used (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

I employed multiple data sources during data collection, namely classroom observation journals, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and demographic questionnaire. I recorded what I had seen in the classroom and in the school as the observer and kept it as part of my observation journal. This journal helped me understand students’ classroom experiences which served as a source of triangulation of the interview data and the self-report demographic questionnaire. In addition to recording my ongoing reflections, insights, questions, and concerns related to all parts of the research process. These notes helped me with what I should ask in upcoming interviews and additional details of what happened through the data collection processes. During the analysis phase, I compared the interview data with my observations journal data and found many points that were expressed by parents that I could confirm by my own observations. A summary of these observations is provided in chapter four. I also tried to become aware of my own biases

and assumptions and consulted my committee members and other professionals to make sure that the techniques I chose for collecting data were suitable for this research and not just convenient because of my familiarity with that method. I also sought the advice of my professors as professional and my colleagues (member check) to see if the logic in my research also made sense to them.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the study design, methodology, context, the participants' profiles, participant recruitment procedure, data collection, data analysis procedure, the sampling criteria, and ethical considerations. It also addressed issues of validity and reliability as well as the researcher's subjectivity. It further presented the researcher's position within the research and the attempts made to adapt the methodology of the study to conform to Iranian values and traditions. Using a demographic questionnaire, interviews and observations as data collection tools, I analyzed data and derived themes and categories to explore the processes of Farsi heritage language learning for Iranian-American children in Washington DC metropolitan area. These interpretations are presented thematically in the chapter four findings.

## **Chapter Four: Results and Findings**

This chapter brings together the findings of the study based on the data from the interviews, background questionnaires, and classroom observations from participating Iranian-American parents in the Farsi heritage language schools during the summer 2016. The findings of the study are presented in three parts. The first part presents information gathered through demographic questionnaires, information learned through school and class observations will be discussed in the second part, and the third part will reveal information related to the heritage language use, maintenance efforts, and challenges the Iranian-American parents and their children face in their daily lives.

### **Demographic Data**

**Parents.** All parents were bilingual and biliterate in different degrees (see Table 3). All of the men were employed and had stable incomes and professional jobs, whereas four out of nine women were unemployed and one was a college student working on her master's degree in accounting. All parents, except for one who immigrated to the United States 32 years ago, considered themselves very fluent in speaking, writing, and reading Farsi. This is because the majority of these parents received most of their education in Iran. Many parents felt that their Farsi skills are declining over time. The majority of the parents considered themselves either very fluent or fluent in speaking, reading, and

writing English. This is also interesting because while these parents received most of their education in Iran in Farsi, they consider themselves quite fluent in English.

All the parents that I interviewed were in two parent nuclear families with husband and wife living together and having at least one child in grades 1-8. All the parents but one were born in Iran, one parent was born in the U.S. The majority arrived in the U.S. in the early 80s and 90s while in their 20s or 30s. For all families, the grandparents did not live with them, but some came to visit regularly. Every effort was made to ensure that any unique identifying information has been excluded to maintain the confidentiality of the individual participants. Pseudonyms were used for all of the participants.

Table 3

*Participants' Demographic Information*

Name	Sex	Age	Birth	Marital	Education	Employment	Years in US	Language
Negar	F	40	Iran	Married	Masters	Student	2	Farsi
Maryam	F	37	Iran	Married	Bachelor	Housewife	3	Farsi
Afrooz	F	35	Iran	Married	Bachelor	Jewelers	12	Farsi/ English
Frough	F	39	Iran	Married	Bachelor	Housewife	11	Farsi/ English
Salome	F	35	Iran	Married	Master	Housewife	14	Farsi
Mohan	F	43	Iran	Married	Bachelor	Nurse	15	Farsi/ English
Minoo	F	48	Iran	Married	PhD	Physician	15	Farsi
Mahnaz	F	44	Iran	Married	Associate	Housewife	18	Farsi
Farida	F	49	Iran	Married	PhD	Researcher	30	Farsi/ English
Mansoor	M	50	Iran	Married	Bachelor	Nurse	16	Farsi
Kamran	M	32	USA	Married	PhD	Engineer	32	English
Farhad	M	39	Iran	Married	Master		14	Farsi/ English

**Children.** Altogether there were 17 children among 12 participants. Fourteen children of the participants were born in the U.S. and three were born in Iran. Children's age ranged from 5-13. Most of the children of the participant except for two spoke Farsi as their first language. Most of the children were considered to be English proficient. Others were at the moderate, basic, and beginning level (see Table 4). The children had been exposed to the Farsi language mainly at home, with their extended family, through activities within the Iranian community, as well as through media sources e.g., (Iranian satellite TV programs, Iranian local radio, newspapers, magazines, and the internet)

Table 4.

*Participants' Children Demographic Information*

Parent	Sex	Age	Birth	Public	HL	First language	Education	Farsi	Day care
Negar	M	7	Iran	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	Farsi	Moderate	Proficient	None
Maryam	F	9	Iran	4 <sup>th</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Farsi	Proficient	Proficient	None
Afrooz	M	10	US	5 <sup>th</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	Farsi	Proficient	Basic	None
Frough	F	6	US	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	Farsi	Proficient	Basic	2
	F	8	US	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	Farsi	Proficient	Proficient	2
Salome	F	7	US	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	Farsi	Proficient	Moderate	1
	F	5	US	K	K	Farsi	Proficient	Moderate	2
Mohan	F	13	US	7 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	Farsi	Proficient	Proficient	1
	F	13	US	7 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	Farsi	Proficient	Proficient	1
Minoo	F	13	Iran	9 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	Farsi	Proficient	Proficient	None
	F	10	US	6 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	Farsi	Proficient	Proficient	None
Mahnaz	M	8	Iran	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	Farsi	Proficient	Basic	None
Farida	F	9	US	4 <sup>th</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Farsi	Proficient	Moderate	2
Mansoor	F	6	Iran	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	Farsi	Proficient	Basic	None
Kamran	F	8	US	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	English	Proficient	Beginning	3
	M	6		K	K	English	Proficient	Beginning	3
Farhad	F	7	Iran	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	Farsi	Proficient	Moderate	1

### **School Visits and Classroom Observations**

In most schools Persian language classes amounted to no more than one day per week, usually held on Saturdays. It is important to note that I was only able to observe three sessions in two classes in the Maryland school since this school was the only school that allowed me to do any classroom observations. The other two schools were simply places where I met parents and asked them to participate in my study. The first class I observed was at the second and third grade level. I also conducted observations in the second classroom that contained fourth and fifth graders. Each class had an average of 5 students. Classes are usually multi-age and multi-grade, with at least two grade levels per class. The instruction was classical in the sense that class activities were all teacher-centered. For the most part, the students did not play any role in starting discussions, choosing lesson contents, or even making comments. Teachers had complete authority in the way teaching materials were prepared and taught in the class. The heritage teachers in this school used a modified version of the classical method of instruction in their classes. The traditional instruction methods mainly focused on textbook learning. Classes in this setting used Persian books published in Iran after the Revolution. The lessons in this school follow a textbook that is commonly used in elementary schools in Iran. Getting students to learn how to write, read, and converse in Farsi was the ultimate goal. Although the teachers and students incorporated the receptive, oral, and expressive Farsi in classroom conversation to aid in learning both the language and the expected elements of culture that accompany language learning, the emphasis in the classes was on creation of

the written form of Farsi. Classroom activities were primarily teacher-led and emphasized literacy skills; almost all of the activities depended in some way on written Farsi. Students usually start by learning to pronounce the characters in the Farsi alphabet, they then move on to construct words and then sentences. The classes utilized a lecture format and the teacher went through the vocabulary and explained the lessons line by line to the students. Repetition drills were used often both in class and in students' homework assignment. The curriculum focused on literacy, mainly reading and writing. In one of the sessions, students read aloud a paragraph from their handout. They then, wrote words on the board and copied sentences from their textbook into their notebooks. During another class, students read aloud Farsi words that other students had written on the board and answered comprehension questions as their individual work assignments. Finally, they wrote vocabulary on the board and writing vocabulary was again the focus during a quiz. With the exception of a few instances that required the students to respond orally to the teacher's oral cues, all of the teacher-led activities involved some form of written responses.

The class had no group activities, class presentations, role playing sessions, or peer feedback reviews. Occasionally, teachers involved games in their instruction. However, games were only given as a treat at the end of the class time and only if students had fulfilled their learning tasks. As mentioned previously, although the students were separated into two classes based on their grade levels, there still existed a wide range of skills among students in each class. The teachers in this school used a very mixed curriculum in their instruction; consequently, they had to modify their instruction



constantly to fit the learning needs of the students in their heritage language classrooms. Sometimes, the teachers used more advanced students as tutors to help novice students in completing their tasks.

This particular setting had separate religion classes or briefly discussed religious issues during or after the class. The other schools in Virginia are secular and do not teach Islamic or any other ideologies and focus more on the cultural aspects of Persian heritage. For example the other schools in Virginia have music and dance classes along with art and poetry classes instead of religious teachings. Usually once the school was over the parents would stay with their children to attend weekly gatherings for different cultural and religious occasions. The religious teaching at this school was held after lunch but was not mandatory. School was over at 12:00 noon. Some students left the school, while others went to a lunch room. After lunch, the students prayed and the principal would speak to them in the auditorium regarding Islamic teachings and morals. Girls and boys prayed together while the boys stood in front rows and the girls in the back rows and were encouraged to wear a hijab (Islamic head covers for females) during the prayer. Children seemed to enjoy the prayer time and were interested in the activity and learning of the Islamic traditions. Classes in both settings were formal and structured with short breaks between periods. During and between classes, parents and teachers would speak Farsi to the students. The only instances when they would switch to English were when a concept or word was difficult to understand.

## **Findings from Interview Data**

The interviews with the parents focused on parents' perceptions of their children's learning experiences as well as their expectations toward their children in terms of learning Farsi. They talked about reasons they had brought their children to a Farsi school, and the conflicts they may have had with them, if there had been any, when dealing with issues about Farsi learning. I also asked them to describe their children's Farsi exposure in the home environment; how their children studied Farsi at home; and how the parents assisted their children's Farsi learning. My analysis of the interviews reveals that a vast majority of the Iranian-American parents in the study share a strong preference for the transmission of their heritage language to their children, and make efforts to facilitate heritage language maintenance. However, they also reported a variety of challenges. According to the lived experiences and perceptions of Iranian-American parents' regarding heritage language maintenance, these seven themes emerged: 1) knowing Farsi helps my child; 2) there is no end to learning Farsi; 3) sometimes it is hard; 4) we do our best; 5) I like this Farsi school; 6) Persian community; and 7) politics change all the time.

## **Themes and Sub-themes**

As previously mentioned, the findings in this study are organized by each research question. Direct quotes of participants are offered to support the findings. In addition, several tables were created to organize the most important information for each research questions and the corresponding themes. In the following pages, I discuss the seven themes that emerged from data. Each theme encompasses several sub-themes and categories that emerged from the interviews with the parents, the questionnaire, and from

the retrospective observation journal (see figure 7).

RQ1. What are the Iranian-American parents' views, motivations and expectations in sending their children to Farsi heritage schools? The findings pertaining to RQ1 yielded two themes:

Theme one: Knowing Farsi helps my child. Four sub-themes were placed under this theme: 1) Farsi skills, 2) Farsi opens doors of opportunities, 3) children can make connections, and 4) children are proud of themselves.

Theme two: There is no end to learning Farsi. Five sub-themes were placed under this theme: 1) expectations for reading, 2) expectations for writing, 3) expectations for speaking, 4) expectations for cultural learning, and 5) expectations for grade level.

RQ2. What are some efforts and challenges that parents undertake to maintain Farsi heritage language in their children? RQ2 yielded two themes:

Theme three: Sometimes it is hard. Four sub-themes were placed under this theme: 1) children get frustrated; 2) Farsi school has its own problems; 3) Farsi materials are hard to find; and 4) language loss would be a tragedy.

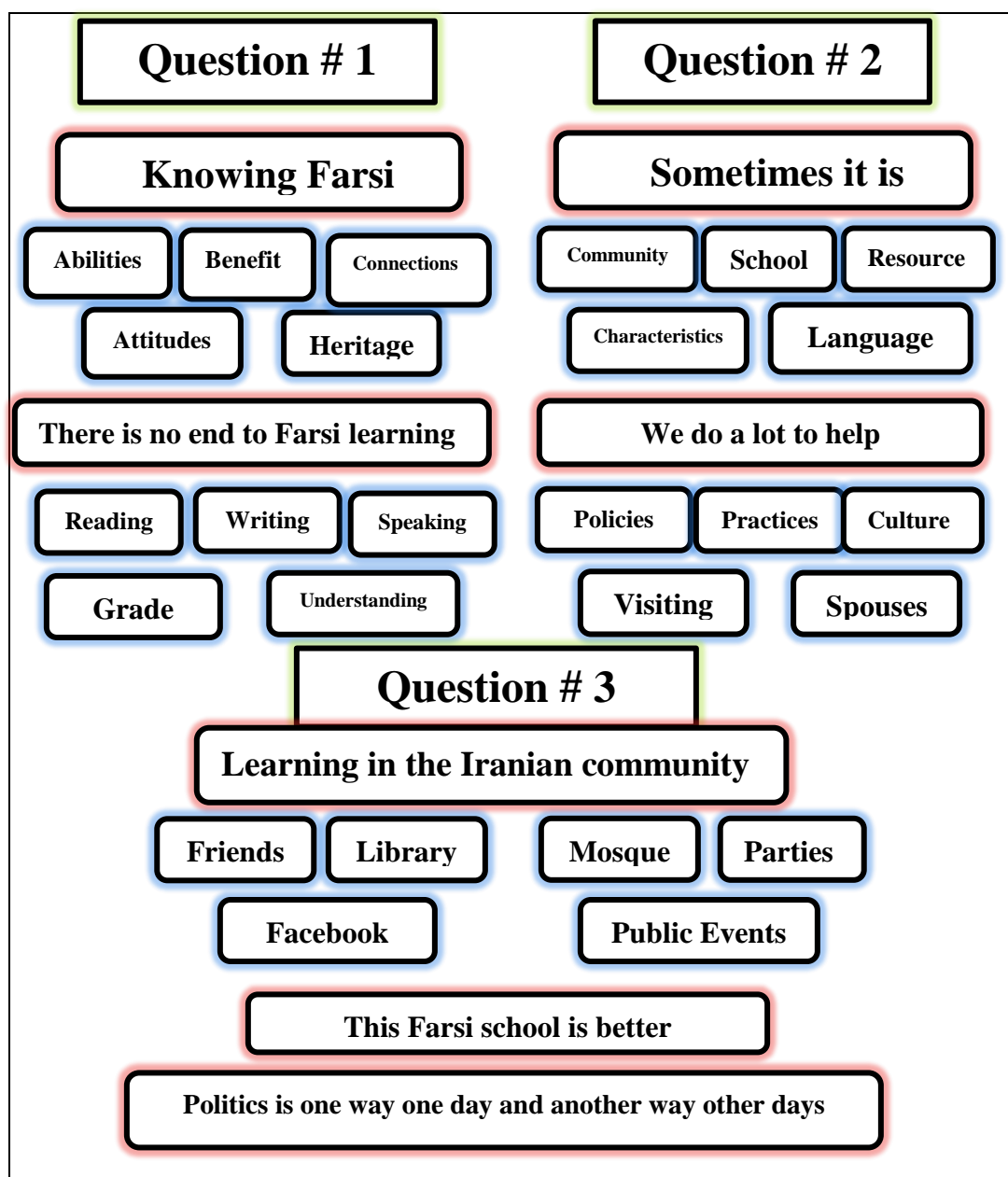
Theme four: We do our best. Five sub-themes were placed under this theme: 1) we have these rules at home; 2) we work with them; 3) talking about Iranian culture; 4) my husband supports me; and 5) visiting Iran.

RQ3. What role does the Persian community (Farsi heritage school, etc.) play in heritage language development and maintenance? Theme Five: I like this Farsi school. The following two sub-themes were placed under this theme:

1) English schools, and 2) Farsi schools. Theme six: Persian community.

The following four sub-themes were placed under this theme: 1) friends, 2)

library group, 3) mosque, and 4) public celebrations. Theme seven: Politics change all the time.



*Figure 7. Seven major themes and their respective sub-themes*

Before we begin reviewing the findings, we must review the participants and their children's language orientation to gain a better understanding of each family's language situation. As stated earlier, the term *first language* in this study is synonymous with *mother tongue* and *heritage language*. That is, first language is one's language at birth, and the one used between parents and children. All participants identified Farsi as their first language or the language they were born into and use to communicate with their family members, including their spouses and children. All participants identified English as another language spoken.

### **Research Question 1**

The overarching research question was "What are the Iranian-American parents' views, motivation and expectations in sending their children to Farsi heritage schools? In order to fully explore this question, it was broken into two sub-questions:

**Sub- question 1:** What are Iranian-American parent's perceptions, attitudes and motivations for teaching Farsi language to their children? The data related to this question yielded the following theme. First theme: Knowing Farsi helps my child. Four sub-themes were identified under this theme: 1) Farsi skills; 2) Farsi opens doors of opportunities; 3) children can make connections; and 4) children are proud of themselves.

**Sub- question 2:** What are parents' expectation regarding their children Farsi language learning? The data related to this question yielded the following theme.

Second theme: There is no end in learning Farsi. Five sub-themes were identified under this theme: 1) expectations for speaking; 2) expectations for reading; 3) expectations for writing; 4) expectations for grade level; and 5) expectations for cultural learning (see figure 9).

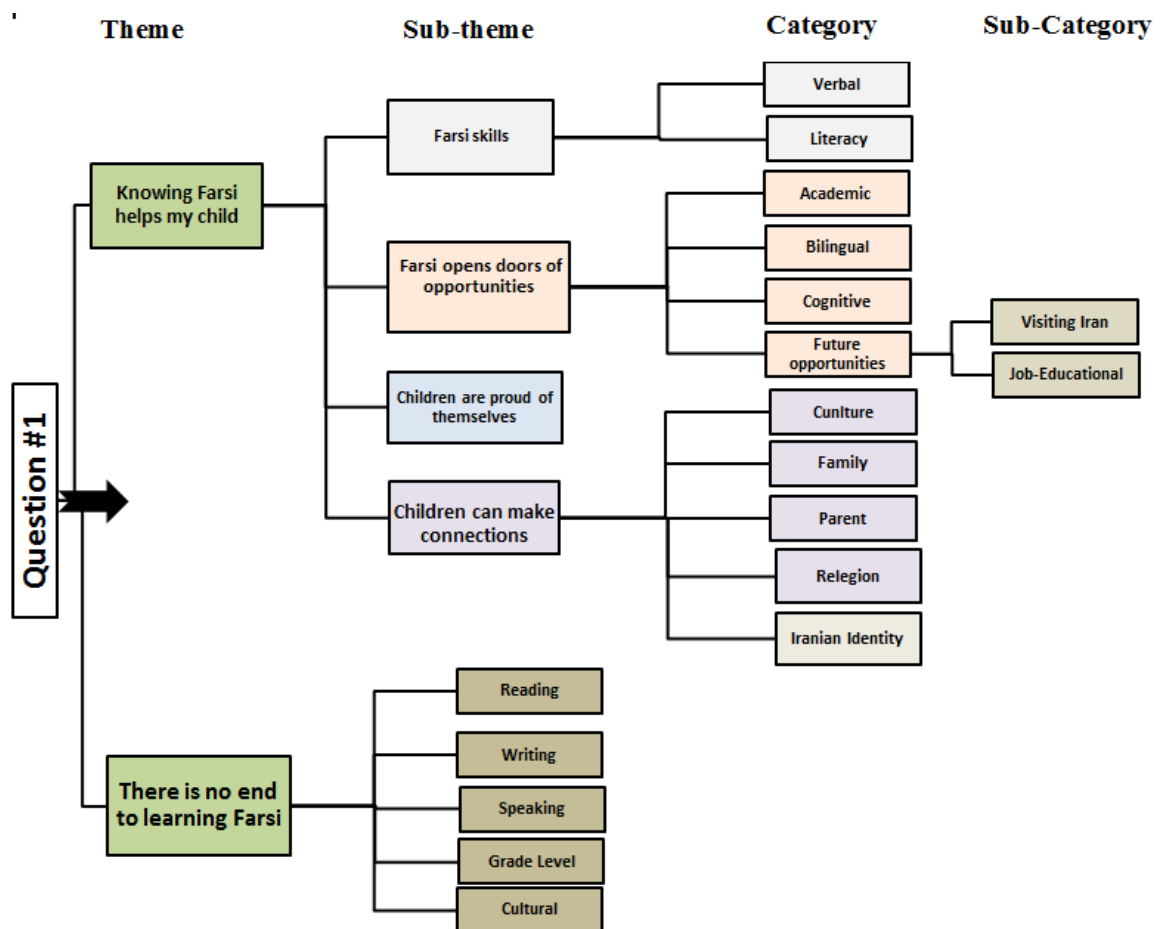


Figure 8. Research question 1 themes, subthemes, and categories

### **Theme One: Knowing Farsi Helps My Child**

This theme reveals Iranian-American parent's perceptions, attitudes and motivations for teaching Farsi language to their children. During the interviews, Iranian-American parents were asked why they wanted their children to learn Farsi and about their views on its benefits. Parents in this study addressed their perceptions of Farsi language learning from multiple perspectives. These perceptions were suggested to have affected their motivation and their emotional response as well as their actions in the Farsi language learning context. Several key areas emerged from the findings that revealed the parents' perceptions about Farsi language learning. A common parents' perspective was that being bilingual is advantageous for their children. Parents in general believed that learning a second language helps their children's cognitive development and opens more doors of opportunity to them. All parents thought that maintaining Farsi heritage language would help their children keep their heritage identity as Iranian-Americans, ensure future economic opportunities, and provide chances to communicate efficiently with extended families and grandparents. Other reasons included access to the rich and vast body of Persian literature and hence help their cultural identity development. The data in this theme was further organized into four sub-themes: 1) Farsi skills; 2) Farsi opens doors of opportunities; 3) children can make connections; and 4) children are proud of themselves.

#### **Farsi Skills**

Majority of the Iranian-American parents reported positive attitudes toward Farsi language learning. Parents wanted their children to have the ability to understand and be understood in verbal communications while speaking and learning their heritage language

at home or in a heritage language school. They believed that with every language the children learn, they become a new person and have access to different “worlds”. Parents also considered developing literacy, learning to read and write in Farsi, as important as speaking it. The perception of abilities sub-theme was further organized under two categories: 1) literacy (reading and writing), and 2) verbal (speaking and understanding).

**Literacy skills.** This category displayed many of the parents’ beliefs and attitudes towards’ their children’s literacy skills in Farsi. Every parent wanted their children to become fluent bilinguals who would have a strong command of both English and Farsi. They indicated that they not only valued the language, but they also wanted their children to be able to read and write in that language. Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, thought that children should be able to read and write in Farsi and supported full Farsi literacy comparable to children in Iran:

Many people even say that writing Farsi is not as important, and the important thing is that the children be able to speak Farsi. It is OK. But I say that my child has to be able to write in Farsi just as she can write in English. Just like a child that is going to school in Iran. It does not make any difference she has to know that much.

Others felt that it was necessary for their children to learn to read and write at the basic level. Mohan, who is a nurse and mother of two believed that learning to speak Farsi happens effortlessly, “Well, they learn speaking naturally because they hear us talking at home.” However, on the other hand, she suggested that literacy skills needed to be taught, “But we wanted them to learn to read and write Farsi so they can read Farsi books and



comprehend them.” Parents exposed their children to large amounts of vocabulary and expressions through various types of literacy involvement (poetry, cultural, and religious texts), which helped them acquire more words and assisted them in their comprehension of reading materials. Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, reiterated other parents’ opinions in regard to literacy skills, “I think the most common thing for reading is newspaper or news on line and whatever somebody is able to read and understand.”

implying that through exposure to the written words, her son would have a more receptive as opposed to productive knowledge of written Farsi. Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, also emphasized the same point of view, “Sometimes we encourage him to read the headlines of some Farsi newspapers that we get from Iranian stores. He becomes very happy when he can read some of them and says: Mom I was able to read it.”

Two main reasons that parents wanted their children to be able to acquire Farsi literacy skills was because they wanted their children to: 1) read and understand their rich Persian heritage literacy such as classic poetry and 2) be able to use their Farsi literacy skill in their day to day interactions when they travel to Iran.

***Persian literature.*** Iranian-American parents mentioned other reasons for wanting their children to be able to read Farsi texts, such as ability to read the rich Persian literature. They wanted to experience the rich literature and arts of Iran in the original language. Iranians traditionally love poetry and most Iranians try writing poetry at least once in their lives. Persian poetry, including that of Hafez, Rumi, Saadi, and many others, captivate readers and scholars around the world. Iranians verse from poets living 600 to 900 years ago and poetry show up in their daily interactions, on TV and radio, and even

during political speeches. Many parents in this study mentioned that they wanted their children to be able to read and understand Persian poetry as a leisure activity. Some parents did not consider English translations of such texts as reliable as the original versions. Mohan, who is a nurse and mother of two, suggested:

So instead of reading a Persian text translated in English, they can read it in Farsi and comprehend it as it is. For example, they can read books, poems or watch movies and they can understand it. That is why this [Farsi language] is necessary for them to learn.

Frough, who is a housewife and mother of two, wanted her daughter to, “read and understand poetry and Iran’s history ...and could read topics in Farsi during her free times and for leisure.” Kamran, who is an engineer and father of two, also stated, “When their Farsi gets really good they can read Persian poetry.” A couple of parents wanted their children to be able to read classical Persian poetry such as *Shahnameh* (the book of kings, see figure 9) which is a national epic of Iran.



*Figure 9. Shahnameh illustration of a historical battle in ancient Persia*

Iranians have always been proud of this book of historical poems, and cherished it by reading the verses and memorizing them, generation after generation. This book narrates and illustrates the mythical and historical events of Iran from the creation of the world up to the country's surrender to Islamic invasion of Iran in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Ferdowsi as a poet refused to give up Persian (Farsi) as a heritage language to the Arabic language of the Arab conquerors. Some experts believe the foremost reason the modern Persian language is more or less the same language as that of Ferdowsi's time more than 1000 years ago is because of works like Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, which have had lasting and profound cultural and linguistic influence (Ramezanzadeh, 2010). In the following verses

Ferdowsi confirms that he refuses to give up Persian as a heritage language in order to revive the language:

بسی رنج بردم در این سال سی	عجم زنده کردم بدین پارسی
نمیرم از این پس که من زنده ام	که تخم سخن را پراکنده ام

I worked hard and endured a lot of pain during these thirty years.

I revived Ajam (Iranians) with the Persian language.

Therefore, I shall not die from now on and I will be alive forever.

Because, I have spread the seeds of this language [Persian/Farsi]. (Davis, 2006 p. 202).

A few of the parents also wanted their children to be able to read and understand *Hafez* poetry book. The works of the 14th Century poet Hafez can be found in almost every Iranian home more than 600 years after his death. In Iran people jokingly say: There are two books in every household; the Quran and Hafez. One is read, and the other is not. According to Wikipedia:

حافظ Hāfez “the memorizer; the (safe) keeper”; 1325–1389. Hafez was a 14th-century poet in Iran. (figure 10) He was a Persian poet who praised the joys of love and wine but also targeted religious hypocrisy. His collected works are regarded as a highpoint of Persian literature and are to be found in the homes of most people in Iran, who learn his poems by heart and still use them as proverbs and sayings. His life and poems have been the subject of much analysis, commentary and interpretation, influencing post-14th century Persian writing more than any other author. (“Hafez”, n.d.para.1).



*Figure 10.* Cover of a Hafez poem book commonly found in Iranian homes

Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, also echoed similar reasoning; however, she believed that although her daughter who has special needs might be able to read poems, she might not be able to understand them like her son does, “I am not expecting her to read *Roomi* and *Hafez*, and understand it. She may read Hafez but she does not understand it.” She was very proud of the fact that her son though, was able to read and understand cultural and religious books as well as poems. She believed that reading such books has helped her son to maintain his heritage culture and ideology. She said:

When my son learned Farsi, it helped him reading books that were cultural or religious. He could read and understand Iranian newspaper. If he heard a poem he could understand it or even if he heard a song he could understand the meaning of it. There are many positive things like the fact that my son can read Hafez poems. It also has helped him with reading the Quran [Islam's holy book] and to keep his religious beliefs here in the U.S.

***Traveling to Iran.*** Some parents who visited Iran regularly; believed learning to read and write in Farsi is a tool that will be valuable for their children when they travel to Iran. Mohan, who is a nurse and mother of two, argued that being able to read in Farsi would make communication and involvement in the Iranian society easier for her children and make them more independent. She stated, “When my children go to Iran for visit they are able to read all the signs by themselves...they will not be confused or lost and they know where they are or they can find their address.” Other parents wanted their children to be literate in various types of online literacy communication tools (e.g., Viber, Telegram, and Facebook) to connect with their extended family and grandparents in Iran and keep the affective relationship between them alive. Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two said, “Sometimes she writes texts to her grandparents or uncles like on Viber or Telegram when it is their birthdays and sends them stickers and writes happy birthday for them in Farsi.”

**Verbal skills.** Another major topic that emerged frequently from the interviews was the need for the parents to be able to verbally communicate with their children. Some Iranian-American parents did not have as much to say about the potential uses of writing

and reading skills, while they believed the children would benefit especially from being able to speak and understand and be understood in their verbal communications. Minoo, who is a physician and mother of three, considered Farsi writing ability less vital and believed that her children's ability to speak Farsi was the main goal of their Farsi education. She also wanted to provide her children the opportunity to connect with other people. She stated:

I am not very concerned about the writing aspect of Farsi language, but speaking is most important to me. Verbal communication is the most important channel of two human's communication. If you want to connect with another human being, you should be able to speak with that person.

Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, believed that the ability to speak and understand Farsi is a tool that helps children in socialization and identity formation while speaking with their family at home. She stressed that her daughter's ability to connect with her father in Farsi is an example of this important tool: "Their Father sometimes speaks Farsi with them. Like he tells her "little mouse" and she tells him "I am not a mouse" and he tells her "I eat you up" and her response (in Farsi) "I am not food." All parents believed that learning the heritage language is highly important for their children. Parents indicated that they not only valued the language, but that they also wanted their children to be Farsi-speaking. Given parents' positive feelings toward Farsi and its maintenance, it was not surprising that the majority of parents reported that they encourage their children to use and study Farsi. Most important reasons specified by parents, were being able to communicate with family and relatives and understanding their

cultural heritage. Afrooz, who is a jeweler and mother of one, wanted her son to appreciate his culture through understanding its poetry, “If he heard a poem he could understand it or even if he heard a song he could understand the meaning of it.”

Iranian-American parents were optimistic about their children’s heritage language learning; however, at the same time, they also wanted their children to learn English. They believed children should be able to speak both languages to be successful in the United States. Examination of the language interactions between children and parents showed that a differential language behavior and attitude existed when parents communicated with children on different subjects at home. Parents sometimes spoke English to their children if they perceived that a concept was difficult to talk about in English. It was commonly believed that it would be much easier for the parents to speak English when they wanted to talk about difficult and “abstract subjects”. Farhad, who is an engineer and father of two, illustrated a situation in which he might have to speak English instead of Farsi to be able to transmit his abstract attitudes and thoughts to his children:

Sometimes, it is easier to speak in English to make sure they understand me... like safety issues and subject matters like math or science, or like if I want to explain to her why there are people in Syria...or other places dying...because these are the things that people talk about in schools these days...believe it or not, nine years olds are talking about what happened in Iraq, or what is ISIS, or what is this...she comes to me and asks me and I have to have answers.

Maryam, who is a housewife and mother of one, also had problems explaining some abstract concepts to her child in Farsi, “There are things in Farsi language such as



idioms that I cannot make my daughter understand in English.” Furthermore, it was important for some parents that their children be able to speak the heritage language with their extended family, siblings, and friends. Mohan, who is a nurse and mother of two, said: “I want them to be able to speak Farsi easily.” She further stated that when children know how to speak their own language, they have a sense of belonging to their culture and would be happier:

So they are happy and they laugh when they can watch Farsi programs and understand it and can read a book and comprehend it. So they are happy about it. Especially funny movies that we watch from YouTube and online. They like it a lot.

A few parents believed that they would be ashamed of themselves, if as an Iranian in the U.S. their children did not know how to speak their own language. Minoo, who is a physician and mother of three, encouraged her children to maintain their language, to communicate in Farsi even in public places and remember and appreciate who they are:

The first thing that I noticed in the U.S. was the fact that many of the Iranian children could not speak Farsi. It is a shame. It was important for me that my children are able to speak Farsi everywhere, to understand, and be able to respond.

### **Farsi Opens Doors of Opportunities**

Iranian-American parents in this study held the belief that bilingual skills have academic, bilingual, and cognitive benefits for their children. Further, parents pointed to the positive impact of bilingualism on their children’s future jobs and academic success; and thus, they attempted to encourage their children to make active use of their ethnic

language, especially at home. Parents believed that speaking Farsi would open more doors of opportunities for their children and would enable them to connect with people. “Farsi opens doors of opportunities” sub-theme is divided into four categories: 1) academic benefits, 2) bilingual benefits, 3) cognitive benefits, and 4) future benefits.

**Academic benefits.** Some of the Iranian-American parents held the belief that learning Farsi heritage language opens more doors of opportunity and academic benefits for their children and helps them in gaining educational achievement. Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, believed that learning Farsi at the advanced level helped her son who is a lawyer in excelling in both high school and college. She indicated:

One of the main things was that when my son finished the middle school here in the Islamic school, they did not offer full 12 years program at that time, so either we had to home school or we had to come up with other solutions. The principal wrote a recommendation, and he took the SAT and he did so well in SAT, that he was able to go to college without the high school diploma. So he jumped high school...so he skipped the four years of high school.

Farida later indicated that when children are able to communicate using their own language, they have advantages in achieving academic success that will eventually lead to a promising career. Later, she added that even in college her son was able to benefit from learning Farsi. She said that her son’s Farsi level was so advanced that the college that he was attending had to come up with new ways to measure his Farsi language skills since they had no such tests that could test the language at his level.

But what was actually important for me was my son's test at Georgetown. Since they did not have anything at his level prepared so they brought a Farsi newspaper from town for him to read as a test. Maybe he was one of the very first people testing out for Farsi language.

Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two, had a similar thought and said, "Her teacher (her older 8 year old daughter) tells me that she is one of the best students in her class in English language arts subject." She also believed that her younger daughter, who was only four, was similarly benefiting academically from learning Farsi. She shared, "Anybody that meets my four year old daughter whether in Farsi school or English school says that she has great language skills and that she has vast vocabulary ability. I think this is because she is bilingual." The question regarding the relationship between first language and academic success, created confusion among some of the participants. The biggest barrier to their understanding seemed to be associated with the reality that they had not seen or heard of any U.S. public schools that provided regular classes conducted in the Farsi language. Therefore, although all parents believed that learning Farsi was definitely advantageous for their children, not all parents believed that it could directly affect their academic progress in public schools and showed conflicting opinions on their thoughts. Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, stated:

I am not so sure about the benefits of learning Farsi in my son's future educational and employment achievement...I do not believe learning Farsi can be beneficial in learning English...if they learned Spanish that would be better for their future here.

Frough, who is a housewife and mother of two, also held similar beliefs. When asked if she thought that learning Farsi might also help her child in learning English or other subjects in public school she said, “It might, it might. They also might not even use it at English school.” Some even believed that learning Farsi might even delay learning English in public schools to some degree. Kamran, who is an engineer and father of two, stated:

I do not believe learning Farsi can be beneficial in learning English. They have to learn English at school obviously because they live in America and the language is English and so they won’t miss any success in America.

Additionally, other parents reported that their children’s public school teachers were very supportive of their children Farsi learning and encouraged them to continue their heritage language teaching to their children. Maryam, who is a housewife and mother of one, stated, “When her teacher found out that she goes to Farsi school on Saturdays; she became very happy and encouraged us to continue sending her to learn a second language.” Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two, even checked with her daughter’s public school teacher, fearing learning Farsi might hinder her progress in English language. She said:

Many times, I stay in contact with her English school teacher to see if I am putting too much pressure on her. But the teacher is always satisfied with her progress at her public school and always encourages me to continue teaching her Farsi and says that it would be beneficial for her.

**Bilingual benefits.** Bilingualism has positive outcomes both in terms of cognitive abilities and in terms of assimilation of immigrants into the host society. Most of the study participants perceived that being bilingual was a positive, important, and useful capability. The study participants were in agreement with the idea that being bilingual would make their children more valuable on the global job market, as well as allowing them to tailor their services to the local ethnic community if they chose.

The majority of the Iranian-American parents in this study discussed the bilingual benefits and the importance of bilingualism or the pathways for children to develop their first and possibly second language. Parents expressed this belief on several occasions. Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, believed that being bilingual is beneficial as a skill and that, “another language is always a plus an advantage that you cannot deny. A person that has a degree and knows another language is at an advantage to a person that knows only one language.” Farhad, who is an engineer and father of two, proclaimed that bilingual ability in this regard, would result in his daughter’s successful bilingual and bicultural ability in different linguistic or cultural contexts. He alleged:

Having this ability to speak in two languages especially Farsi would make her a better understanding individual who can learn about problems of individuals living overseas. Because they would be able to listen to reports and news and articles and everything else that is produced not only by U.S. agencies reporters but also by overseas people.

Minoo, who is a physician and mother of three, believed that learning a new language and understanding it, expands a person’s cultural awareness, “if we learn another

language, that person's language is another culture." Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, had a more practical goal for language learning in mind. She believed that with every language the children learn they find access to a new world and become a new person:

The new language is a new life...I mean when we know a language we become familiar with its culture and civilization therefore we not only teach a second language to our child we also encourage him to learn a third and fourth language. For example, he [her son] likes German language. My husband is very goal oriented and thinks about our son's future. Therefore, he likes for him to learn Chinese language since he believes that China is a growing economy and the future of the world will depend on China in his opinion. And the way that this is going he has to learn Chinese.

Some parents believed that providing opportunities for their children to enhance their bilingual ability while practicing their mother tongue helps their children by opening more doors of opportunity for them. Frough, who is a housewife and mother of two, said:

It [bilingual ability] could be beneficial for them here. At least they have learned a language besides English...they might not even use it at English school. But at least they have a second way they can improve their mother tongue.

Mansoor, who is a nurse and father of two, believed learning a new language is comparable to learning a new culture, "I think that if you learn another language like Farsi, German, Spanish, or Polish does not matter, you are opening your mind to another culture." Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two, looked at heritage language

ability as an economical opportunity that she should take advantage of. She explained, “Although, it was hard from the beginning because they did not want to learn a second language; however, it is like a free language school.” Salome added, “So they know two languages and if they learn Spanish that they teach in school then they know three languages.” Maryam, who is a housewife and mother of one, wished, “At the moment I wish I had learned more languages in my childhood. Why not?”

**Cognitive benefits.** Krashen et al. (1998) maintained that heritage languages are priceless resources which can play a vital role for the members of ethnic communities in terms of cognitive, academic, cultural, and career opportunities they provide. Lee (2000) states that bilingual children have more than two words for a thing or a concept, thus, have diverse spectrum of conceptualizing the world. Accordingly, these children are more flexible and creative in thinking than monolingual children, and achieve intellectual development more than or at least the equal level, compared with monolingual children. Several study participants seemed to agree with this view and expressed that maintaining Farsi language is advantageous for their children, particularly in terms of its intellectual benefits. Iranian-American parents in general believed that learning a second language helps their children’s cognitive development and opens more doors of opportunity to them. Some parents even believed that learning Farsi can positively affect their children’s cognitive growth. Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, has a daughter with special needs and believed that her daughter’s disability decreased tremendously as a result of learning two languages. She explained:

My daughter would use pronouns incorrectly because of the problems in her speech. She would use the same pronoun that she heard from me. With the disability that she has this is normal...Like if I tell her “Do you want water?” She would answer, “Do you want water?” She does the same thing and has the same problem in English. So this problem she had was not due to bilingualism. She had a functional problem and had the same problem in both languages. That is why we caught up with Farsi.

Farida suggested that her daughter’s exposure to the heritage language during childhood had provided her substantial cognitive benefits. She seemed to think that the reason her daughter had made such progress in her language skills despite her disability was due to the fact that she was bilingual. She explained:

Till five years of age she would not use complete sentences...all of a sudden she started making progress in both languages. So I think the fact that she is a bilingual person helped her learn both languages in an unexpected way...Even her doctors were surprised by her progress and did not expect this much jump...So I think learning Farsi helped her with learning English as well.

The perceived cognitive and academic advantages of bilingualism are among instrumental gains that could be achieved through heritage language maintenance. Minoo, who is a physician and mother of three, shared the same idea and stated that being bilingual helps children’s cognitive development and can actually change their IQ:

Experts say children that know several languages have higher IQ and their brains develop better and higher. It would be beneficial for the children in the sense that



their brain gets stimulated. I believe that these children's brain makes more dendrite connections.

Krashen et al. (1998) alleged that if children were bilingual and spoke both English and another language well; they could pick up subsequent languages more easily. Afrooz, who is a jeweler and mother of one, seemed to be aware of such research and said that knowing two or more languages sharpens thinking skills and helps children achieve success. She explained, "Children have great ability to learn even four languages at the same time at age four. So we should not let these abilities go to waste and we need to use them." Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two, suggested that bilingual children have greater cognitive and psychological skills compared to monolingual children:

I mean, compared to monolingual children, bilingual children will be more mature." I mean that ...obviously her left and right brain get stimulated and work at the same time and more by learning a new language. I think it has a positive effect on children's intelligence.

In addition, the study's participants were aware of research showing the benefits of bilingualism for the children's intellectual development. Kamran, who is an engineer and father of two, cited the brain research studies as well and had a similar belief:

If you are bilingual, like the more languages you know the better it is. So learning a second or third language can help the children to be better in any other area as well. When you exercise you not only can run better but also you can climb a tree better.

Farhad, who is an engineer and father of two, had a similar point of view and

maintained that learning more than one language had sharpened his daughter's thinking skills; positively affected her vocabulary; and helped her achieve academic success. He also suggested that her early bilingual skills had transferred to biliteracy abilities and reading skills across two languages:

So basically, the main thing is that my older daughter started reading in English when she was two and a half years old. She knew her alphabet by age two. So she was amazing and she started learning Farsi alphabet around age four. She is able to read although she has slowed down and her speed is not what it used to be. But she is able to read the first grade materials, but not at the same rate that she reads English books.

**Future opportunities.** The ethnic communities across the U.S. have one thing in common, collectively; they all want a better future for their children. When children speak their own language and maintain their culture, they are likely to have more job opportunities and gain respect from their ethnic community and the community at large. There is a significant amount of research representing a strong relationship between heritage language learning and instrumental factors such as a desire to get a better job or to meet a particular academic or job-related requirement (McKay & Wong, 2000). Heritage language learners' bilingual skills can vastly contribute to their future goals. According to Iranian-American parents, maintaining Farsi language could result in more job and schooling opportunities for their children. Almost every parent in this study acknowledged the instrumental value of learning Farsi. Parents believed that their children's knowledge of Farsi can help them find decent jobs; would look good on college

application; and could ultimately help them in their future career. Parents believed that potential future jobs for their children could include working as translators in international organizations, or as instructors in various academic settings. The “future benefits” category is further divided into two sub-categories: 1) job-educational benefits, and 2) visiting-moving to Iran.

***Job-educational.*** Iranian-American parents agreed that when children are able to communicate using their own language, they have advantages in achieving academic success that will lead to promising future careers. They believed that by learning Farsi as a heritage language, their children could be more valuable on the job market, partly because Farsi has been named one of the critical languages in which the U.S. government needs fluent communicators. They realized that there would be a unique Farsi speaking market for them if they chose to serve the Iranian community in their future careers. Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, cited several future benefits for using the Farsi heritage language with her children and thought that it should be maintained. She reported that her son’s proficiency in Farsi resulted in advancement of his future career goals:

When he went to Georgetown to study law, they had requirements for foreign language proficiency. He passed the test for foreign language proficiency for Farsi and they accepted him. They also accepted two courses of Farsi from him and this was both money and time saving for him.

She also suggested that someone who becomes monolingual in the dominant language by forgetting the heritage language will not enjoy the same advantages in the U.S. and global job market as one who is proficient in both the heritage language and the

dominant language. She later explained that maintenance of Farsi language has been useful in facilitating her sons' family in communication, improving job opportunities, and assuring a bright future:

Although his [her son] wife is American, she can speak Farsi very well. She works in a hospital, and when they have Farsi speaking patients they call her. I have seen what a good effect it has on the patients when they see that there is a lady that can speak Farsi with them. And they say the ICU is getting better than before because of her.

This study also found that Iranian-American parents consider language to be a tool that may lead not only to greater success in school, but also in the job market; reflecting their understanding of the positive outcomes of bilingualism in today's globalized economy. In other words, the more languages they knew the more opportunities they would have. Farhad, who is an engineer and father of two, believed that Farsi as a heritage language is a tool that can be developed and used by speakers of that language in their future careers, "In my experience, a bilingual person is able to prove himself to the potential employer or recruiter better." He explained:

So basically, that is one thing (Farsi) that I want to protect and preserve for my children. The other, I would say less sentimental but more practical issue, is that in today's world I bet the future is going to be even more competitive in highly competitive job market. Having being equipped with another language is always a plus an advantage that you cannot deny. A person that has a degree and knows another language is at an advantage to a person that knows only one language.

He added:

Most postgraduate schools expect you to know a second language specially if you go for PhD. And you have to have a good command of a second language. And for a second language it is good to know and be able to read and write in Farsi.

Mohan, who is a nurse and mother of two, believed that being bilingual in Farsi would make her daughter more valuable on the job market. She hypothesized that it is possible that her daughter might be able to use her Farsi language skill in future jobs: “Also, if one of my children wants to be a dentist for example, and if she has a patient that speaks Farsi, then they can make connection with each other easier.” She used her own job as a nurse to exemplify this possible situation:

We have some patients in the hospital that are old Iranians and do not know English very well or at all. They always need Farsi speaking nurses who can speak with them and connect with them. So it is very beneficial that children know a second language for future job advancements.

Farhad, who is an engineer and father of two, predicted that his efforts to teach heritage language to his children will bear fruit in the future and although, his children might not realize it now, they will appreciate it later, “I am sure they will thank us in the future for our efforts. Because they can learn better when they are younger.”

***Visiting/returning to Iran.*** Iranian-American parents also maintained that frequent contact with other family members from their country of origin, Iran, may be helpful for their children to be motivated in learning their heritage language. Furthermore, they deemed it highly important to preserve Farsi while living in the U.S. Also, there was a

desire to return to Iran among some Iranian-American families as they still wished to move back to Iran one day. Therefore, they wanted to make sure that their children received at least some preliminary education in Farsi. Some parents mentioned that one cannot predict the future and maybe one day they have to go back to Iran. So they argued that their children must learn Farsi. Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, reasoned:

Maybe a person might feel that he/she may not find the values that he/she is looking for here in the U.S. and he/she may have to return to Iran. Therefore, it is useful for the person to be familiar with Iranian culture, so in case that person returns to Iran, she/he can also be successful there. You cannot predict the future and we cannot for sure say that we are here, then everything is done with and we don't need anything else.

Similar to transnational families that move back and forth between two societies, some of the Iranian-American parents in this study predicted the possibility that they might return to Iran one day. Maryam, who is a housewife and mother of one, said: "My kid grew up in a traditional and religious environment. I like to go back and forth between here and Iran. I do not like to belong to here altogether." Minoo, who is a physician and mother of three, also suggested:

If they want to live in Iran, so they have to go to school like others. Maybe one day, one day we may have to return to Iran. Then I have to be regretful that why I did not teach this heritage language (Farsi) to my child.

Mansoor, who is a nurse and father of two, talked about the high cost of college education in the U.S. and anticipated that his daughters might have to go to Iran for continuing education if they cannot afford to send them to college in the U.S.:

But, if they want to go to college in Iran for example; why not? College is free in Iran. If they want to go to college in Iran, why not? I am just guessing. Some people send their kids to Germany to go to college. Why? Because the college over there is free. Here, Bernie Sanders wants to make the college free. Can he do that? Of course not! People want to send their kids outside of the country to get a free college. So this could be one of the benefits of learning Farsi.

Kamran, who is an engineer and father of two, asserted that if we want the Farsi language to persist at least through the second generation, we need to keep transnational ties (i.e., contact with extended family back in Iran and regular visits):

They can communicate with their aunts and uncles and grandmother. When they go to that country [Iran], they don't have that much problem. They can find addresses; they can find everything.

Further, some parents were concerned about their children's inability to speak Farsi when they return to their motherland. Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two, said that using the heritage language can help the youth learn the traditional way of life so that in case they go back home to Iran, the children would not feel alienated from the native culture:

My uncle has two kids. They are grownups now they are in the United States, they don't know Farsi...But both of them they are in college and both of them are asking

their dad they want to learn Farsi at this age. They want to go to Iran to see their grandfather and their grandmother, and the entire family members that are over there. They are 23 and 25 years old. At this age, they got to a point that they want to learn Farsi and their mother tongue.

Parents believed that being able to read and write in Farsi is as important as speaking it. They believed that it would help their children to better communicate with family and to “survive” when traveling to Iran, so they would not be dependent on anyone’s help. Maryam, who is a housewife and mother of one, said:

So when she is in Iran and she hears some words, then she does not think what this word is and be confused. So this would help her not be confused if she reads a word on the streets like signs and understand the meaning of it.

### **Children Can Make Connections**

Iranian-Americans, who had immigrated to the U.S. in their early adulthoods and spent most of their lives in Iran, felt a strong connection to their motherland. When asked parents whether they thought of speaking Farsi as an advantage, all parents answered yes. They believed that learning Farsi has opened more doors of opportunity and has enabled their children to have additional connections to their families and learn about more cultures. They asserted that people can better communicate their feelings with others through language. This sub-theme was further divided into five categories: 1) connection to culture, 2) connection to parents, 3) connection to extended family, 4) connection to Iranian identity, and 5) connection to religion.

**Connection to culture.** The “culture” topic in this study came up in many



different parts of the interviews and was one of the richest themes in regards to the number of codes and depth of thoughts. Farhad, who is an engineer and father of two, suggested that Farsi heritage language played a significant role in cultural identity maintenance. He believed that the most important function of language was to facilitate the acquisition of an intercultural frame of reference rather than fully assimilating into the dominant group:

And also this particular language [Farsi] is not exclusively a method of communication in my opinion. It mostly carries generations upon generations of culture and literature and as Dr. Dehbashi [famous Iranian scholar and linguist] said “literary humanism” can be found in Persian and such languages which have thousands upon thousands of years, at least 2000 years, of literature and literacy background.

In sum, the parental views pointed to the connection-building function of Farsi language. Farsi learning in parent’s views provided the children with the necessary background in terms of Persian language and culture, so they would not forget them. The majority of parents argued that the Farsi heritage school connects the Iranian-American children to their heritage, especially via teaching of Farsi language and the social and cultural ways of Iran. Therefore, the school increases the children's awareness of the importance of their heritage culture. This connection is not static, but dynamic. The students carry their heritage knowledge back and forth whenever they travel between both countries, developing this knowledge more each time. Among many Iranian-American participants, Afrooz, who is a jeweler and mother of one, made an effort to instruct her

child with language and customs and viewed Farsi language as an intellectual and a cultural medium via which certain values, wisdom and knowledge are transmitted to future generations. She believed that if her child did not know Farsi, he would definitely miss out on parts of his culture:

Although schools here teach them many things, but we wanted him to know that there is also a place that holds a different culture and that they are related to it. We wanted him to learn about the customs of their heritage culture and be proud of it.

Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, had the same point of view, “There are things that we want our children to learn from our culture that I believe is more effective if they are communicated and transferred through our own Farsi language, than with English language.” Parents seemed to believe that heritage culture and heritage language acquisition are fundamentally linked concepts and if one loses the heritage language, his/her heritage culture or heritage identity will be lost as well. Kamran, who is an engineer and father of two, said, “Because Farsi language is sort of part of our culture and it is important for them (his children) to learn our culture. It is very important for me that my child knows about our traditions and everything else in Farsi.” Minoo, who is a physician and mother of three, was in agreement with this assessment and believed that there are many things that can be done to support Iranian-American children as they become “American” without forcing them to lose their Iranian identity:

Acquiring our own culture was very important to me...I did not want my children to be 100% American. I wanted them to be aware of their own Iranian culture... We come from that culture, and I liked my children to remain Iranian.

Children acquire culture-specific behavior about what is considered normal or abnormal behavior within their ethnic community. For example, showing respect through an appropriate form of language is very important in Iranian values. Several of the study participants seemed to believe that language and language socialization have a lot to do with the way different cultures feel and express their emotions. For instance, different forms of language use related to intimacy, respect, and social politeness among children and adults demonstrate acceptable form of cultural behavior. Mohan, who is a nurse and mother of two, encouraged maintenance of traditional values and behaviors and wanted her children to behave in certain ways that were demonstrative of them being Iranian:

For example, we are not like Americans that their kids tell their mom “shot up!”

We see that these sorts of things are not in our values. We [Iranians] are different than them. They will not have this behavior with us. The way that we were brought up...they will have that kind of upbringing. So I think we can better teach our kids about our culture if they speak our language.

Some parents said that they were not familiar with the ethical values of the U.S. society; therefore, viewed language as a tool to teach morals to their children. Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, emphasized that learning a language does not solely involve the language; it also involves the transfer of a whole set of cultural values which she was familiar with and did not want her child to lose:

For example, I am not familiar with these people’s (U.S.) culture and I do not know what constitutes their culture. Maybe they have similar values and even more. But I do not know about it. Because I was not brought up in their

environment. But I have learned about our culture's good and bad from experience and trial and error; therefore, this is my responsibility to transfer all these to my son.

Emphasizing that language also had an active role and was seen as a tool for transferring cultural, religious, and moral values which in turn reinforces the children's Iranian identity. Another parent, Afrooz, who is a jeweler and mother of one, also touched upon the importance of Farsi language as a tool for transferring cultural heritage to the second generation Iranian-Americans and influencing them in their ethnic identity formation:

So, cultural values are important to me. Values such as keeping their uprightness, know where is Iran? Know where their roots are from? Know who were his family? How they were? He learns many things from them. Respecting elders, respecting others, and if the children learn these behaviors from us it can continue to their own generation.

Mahnaz, who is a house wife and mother of one, warned about the dangers of language assimilation which she believed result in cultural dominant of the host society, "When your children do not connect with their heritage culture, little by little they forget their roots and they might get lost in the dominant culture." She further stated that when children know how to speak their own language, they find a sense of belonging to their culture:

Because I want him to know the meaning of family, elders, respect, traditions, occasions, they need to know these things. If they do not know these things it is like they do not know anything.

**Connection to parents.** When heritage language is not maintained, children and their parents cannot communicate with each other effortlessly (Wong Fillmore, 1991). Therefore, family relationships and children's identity formation could be negatively affected resulting in the loss of the heritage language that in turn can damage emotional connections between children and their parents. Immigrant parents generally wish for their children to maintain their heritage language in order to secure their ethnic identity and family ties. A major theme that emerged over and over from the interviews was the need for the parents to be able to communicate with their children. It was commonly perceived that it would be much easier for the children to learn Farsi than for the parents specially the ones that recently migrated to the U.S. to learn to speak English. Several of the study participants voiced their frustration in trying to communicate with their children in English. Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two admitted, "I could not make connection with my child in English. I feel like I cannot make the connection that I want with my child. I have deeper connection with him when I speak Farsi." Afrooz, who is a jeweler and mother of one similarly commented, "Farsi language is a tool that can connect me to my child."

Others felt that it was necessary for their child to learn Farsi so they could communicate with each other better. They often mentioned that since Farsi is their own native language it would be easier for them to communicate with their child in that

language rather than in English. Farhad, who is an engineer and father of two, was among the many parents who emphasized this in his response:

What we are doing in my opinion or my family is doing is giving the tool that can be developed and can be used in the future of that helps our children to communicate and stay connected with our parents and ourselves.

To have a better sense of language usage and how they make emotional connection among this group, I also asked the parents about the language that they expressed their emotions. They all mentioned that they expressed their emotions in Farsi much easier. Mahnaz, who is a housewife and mother of one, admitted, “When I call him I speak Farsi with him I feel closer to him when I do that.” Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two, also agreed:

Being bilingual in general is beneficial but specially speaking Farsi because of personal reasons. Connection with parents at home from my experience is better, even with me although, I speak English but I still feel the emotional connection that is better between us when we speak Farsi. What you say you can feel it. But when you speak in English, I kind of feel like something is between us that prevents the meanings to go through.

Every ethnic minority strives to maintain and develop its heritage language as a means of communication, keeping family relations and cultural strength, as well as identity and identity development. However, parents can be discouraged when their children begin to use more English at home and, eventually English becomes the dominant language. Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, seemed to know that without

the family support, heritage language preservation can fail. She talked about some people that consistently used the dominant language with parents, siblings, and friends at home and in the larger community, “I have even seen children that do not speak Farsi sometimes they do not communicate with their parents as well. Even many children who know the language are not matched with their parents.”

Minoo, who is a physician and mother of three, believed that immigrant parents should use their heritage language when speaking with their children at home and encourage them as much as they can, so families can establish feelings or attachment to Farsi language. She declared, “They should learn that by keeping the connection with their heritage that they can have the warmth of the family establishment.”

**Connection to extended family.** Although most Iranian-American individuals have been living in the U.S. for decades, the majority still might have many family members in Iran and still wish to visit Iran and keep contact with them regularly. Study participants seemed to perceive that learning Farsi is highly important for their children and some parents even attached some sentimental value to their believes. Parents viewed the ability to communicate with family and relatives as the most important value in this regard. They focused on the necessity of their children knowing their original roots and language, so they are able to remain in contact with relatives in Iran who do not speak English. Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, who herself, grew up in a bilingual Turkish-Farsi family had this explanation:

My child knows that her grandparents do not speak English that is why she speaks Farsi to them. Just as when we were children and we knew that our grandparents

cannot speak Farsi and we had to speak Turkish with them. This is the exact same thing. I feel that my daughter is picking up Turkish because she hears her grandparents speak it at home. I have kept my Turkish speaking friends and have not forgotten how to speak Turkish.

Iranian-Americans value extended family relationships, especially, the relationship with grandparents. All parents expressed hope for their children to be able to communicate with their immediate family members as well as extended family, such as grandparents and cousins. Afrooz, who is a jeweler and mother of one, also went on to say:

But I think now if she wants to go to Iran she can speak Farsi with her cousins, grandparents, and friends and family. She can use her Farsi words instead of remaining quiet and not be able to connect to others.

Frough, who is a housewife and mother of two, had a positive attitude towards the transmission and maintenance of her heritage language in order to enable her children to communicate with grandparents and extended family, “If they want to go back to Iran to see their extended family and be able to connect with them and understand them.” Some parents kept regular contact with their extended family back in Iran. Even if they could not visit regularly they would at least call their relatives in Iran weekly or semi-weekly and encouraged their children to join the conversation with their grandparents or aunts and uncles through long distance communication devices. Maryam, who is a housewife and mother of one, stated:

We have constant contact with my family back in Iran. This is very important. I am always in contact with them and my daughter talks to them with phone as well.



She talks Farsi with them of course. This is very important to me. They are very happy they she can speak Farsi to them.

With a sense of strong family ties, communication in the heritage language can help the children to interact with elders and grandparents. Mohan, who is a nurse and mother of two, also indicated:

When my father calls they talk to him and they speak Farsi. Because I told them that my father does not know English so they speak perfect Farsi to him without using English words in their conversation. My dad likes it so much that they speak Farsi so well and do not use even one English word in their sentences, because my father learned French instead of learning English as a second language back in Iran. And I do not expect more than this from my children. My father has never come to the U.S. and they only have phone conversation.

Sometimes technology development assisted parents in their efforts to encourage their children to interact with their extended family and maintains contacts with people from their cultural backgrounds. Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, also expressed hope for her son to be able to communicate with his immediate family members as well as extended family, such as grandparents and cousins. She used social media to advance her goal:

Children learn many of their disciplines and rules in their lives from these relationships. Many times when we are talking with my parents or my husband's parents through phone or internet, I make sure that I push him to talk to them and keeps this connection although he might want to play at that time. Even if it is only

long distance verbal connection. She later added: Sometimes I encourage him to text his extended family like his aunts and uncles in Iran in Farsi in social networks like Telegram and Viber. He types words like: Hi how are you? Where is momoni [grandma]? He uses words that he has learned at Farsi school.

Mansoor, who is a nurse and father of two, emphasized the importance of the heritage language as a connection-builder and its role in filling the generation gap between his own, his parents', and children's' generation. He reported that he uses Farsi most of the times when talking with family members, especially children, parents, grandparents, and extended family. It did not matter when, where, or about what they were speaking, he wanted his children to be able to at least converse in the same language with their relatives in order to communicate and tighten relationships between parents, grandparents and children. He described:

There is a gap or I would say a lack of communication or lack of connection between older generations and the current generation, and that is not necessarily because of incapability of communicating in a certain language. This gap was created about 20-25 years ago due to the advances in technology. This entire technology thing is separating our kids from our generation and our parents.

Additionally, parents wished for their children to learn Farsi in order to be independent in their communication with other Iranians, especially the extended family in Iran, and to facilitate their Iranian identity development. They believed that it would help them to better communicate with family and to “survive” when traveling to Iran. Minoo, who is a physician and mother of three, commented on this:

If they could not learn their language they could not connect with people when they go back to Iran for a visit. For example, they could not function in that atmosphere, go shopping, go outside of the house independently without getting lost and could not connect with their relatives back in Iran and could not understand the culture.

All parents believed that learning Farsi as a common language is highly important for their children. The most important reasons were being able to communicate with family and relatives, and understanding their cultural heritage. Farhad, who is an engineer and father of two, recalled that one of the main reasons her daughter is able to speak Farsi so well is because she had to converse with her grandmother daily who came and visited from Iran and did not know how to speak English:

But I think the most important thing that helped my kids in learning Farsi was my mother in law who lived with us for 10 months and due to her inability to communicate to my older daughter and she wanted to help her out in many different manners. In order to help her out, she had to communicate with her and therefore she started speaking Farsi, completely Farsi and dropped English entirely and only spoke Farsi with her.

**Connection to Iranian identity.** Ethnic identity refers to a sense of membership in an ethnic group and the feelings and attitudes associated with that membership (Phinney, 1990). Farsi heritage language among Iranians in the United States has played a prominent role in promoting identification with Iranian culture. Farida, who is a cancer researcher

and mother of two, explained that her son has discovered his sense of self-identity as a result of exposure to his heritage culture and language. She reported:

I asked my son. You did not go to high school. [He skipped high school] How are you doing in college? He told me; one thing I have learned is that I have a sense of self-identity. And I know who I am and I know what I want to do with my life. I think that was a big lesson he got and a big reward that I received.

Farida also wanted her daughter to identify herself as Iranian as well, and not lose her Iranian identity. Though, she had some uncertainty about the success of her ambition. Having a developmental disability, her daughter struggled to internalize all the cultural values and concepts that she was trying to instill in her. She went on to explain:

So if I could give that to my daughter too that would be great. Now she is to a point with her own ideas, she thinks people with blond hair are so beautiful; she used to have very very light hair when she was young. Now she says why my hair changed? I tell her it is not about that... it is about how big your heart is... so we are trying to teach that to her...I do not know if I will become successful. So self-identity is important. So when they have a confidence about who they are and what kind of culture they are from, I think the rest should be easy.

According to Waters (1994), parents who valued their own language and culture tended to raise children who were proud of and maintained that language and culture which in turn, influenced the children's perception of their ethnic identity. Parents viewed heritage language as a tool for transferring cultural heritage to their children and influencing their ethnic identity formation by connecting them to ancestral background.

Frough, who is a housewife and mother of two, wanted to teach her children about their heritage roots and believed that any investment into a heritage language is also an investment into identity and culture. She emphasized her point with this comment:

But we wanted our kids to know where our roots are from. Where is their homeland? Where is their heritage from? Who are their ancestors? What is their culture? What does Iran have? How is it? At least if they are not connecting to anywhere... at least they know about it...I want my kids to have some sort of believes so they would be connected to their roots so they have something to hold onto.

She believed that her daughters are as much enthusiastic about learning their identity as she is about teaching it. She remembered when they were reviewing old family pictures with her daughters. Her daughters were curious about the circumstances that their mom and dad met; the country they were born in; and where they grew up. She recalls:

They used to ask us “Where were you born?” When their dad would say we were born in Iran. They would say: “Ohh, so then you were born in Iran...did you meet dad there? Did you marry each other there? How come we were not there?” They wanted to be there. That is how they realize that “here” is different than “there”... and they have an extra place beside “here” that they belong to.

Mansoor, who is a nurse and father of two, believed that children feel a strong connection with their ethnic group and once they find out about it, they might become proud of their ethnic identity. He used this example to make his point:

Look at African-American people here in the US. Some of them are looking for their DNA to find out where their heritage came from. They want to know: are they coming from Kenya, Ghana, or Sierra Leone. See how deep this is? Heritage goes into generations upon generations.

Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two, voiced her opinions about what it meant to be an Iranian mother, demonstrating that the issue of language maintenance for the next generation was tied to Iranian identity maintenance.

I mean this is not just a language for children. It is their identity. I did not want my child to be confused and feel lost here. I came to the U.S. when I was 29 years old...so I am not an American mother, I am an Iranian mother like it or not. I personally have a good feeling about being an immigrant. I know all the positive and negative things about being an immigrant. I believe my child senses my feeling towards my culture and identity and self identifies with it.

Mohan, who is a nurse and mother of two, talked about what it means for her children to identify themselves with their heritage culture. She stated:

I am happy with who I am. And my children although they are little now ... they know the language, being Iranian means their grandparents, Nowruz [Iranian new year], gifts that they receive from family in Iran ... now this is what they know about their identity these tangible things. When they grow up they will identify themselves with this Iranian identity in other ways.

Minoo, who is a physician and mother of three, believed that heritage language is the expression of the close relationship of mother and the child, and that speaking a

language other than the mother language may prevent her from building a close relationship with her child. She said, “When your children do not connect with their heritage culture, little by little they forget their roots and they might get lost in the dominant culture. In my opinion people should be connected to their roots.”

Mahnaz, who is a house wife and mother of one, explained the reason she was teaching the heritage language to her child, was that she wanted to teach moral values to her which in turn reinforced her Iranian identity.

The important thing for me is for my child to be able to keep his connection to Iran, since all of our roots are in Iran, and keeping this connection is very important for me. My child has to learn the Farsi language. As I told you, learning Farsi helps children to keep their identity and this is very important because children should know that their life has many dimensions.

Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, had recently moved to the U.S. and her son has strong patriotic feelings towards his heritage country. She recalled an instance where her son felt great pride in his heritage culture. She remembered:

We wanted to sign our son up for kindergarten and all of a sudden in one of these schools they had displayed various countries flag including Iran’s flag. My son became so happy because he felt that he is part of this school family and it encouraged him a lot. Unfortunately we could not go to this school because we got home in another school district and that school did not have Iran’s flag in play. We always are on the look for a sign of familiarity in our environment a sign of belonging.

**Connection to religion.** Religion practicing parents generally viewed religious teachings as an important aspect of their children's moral upbringing. They viewed religion as a medium through which their children received ethical and moral education. They often complained about the lack of any moral, not necessarily religious, teachings in the American education system and thought it was necessary for their children to learn at least the basics of Islam. Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, illustrates this when she talks about the role that heritage language plays in her son's life:

For my son, when he learned Farsi it helped him reading books that were cultural or religious. He could read and understand Iranian newspaper. It also has helped him with reading the Quran [Islam's holy book]. It also has helped him to keep his believes here the U.S.

Frough, who is a housewife and mother of two, believed that public schools in the U.S. do not teach opposing points of view on political and religious matters and she was not happy with that. She believed that the Islamic school can provide a balance in her children's point of view about Islam and Iran:

I would not mind if my kids learn new topics. I do not think what they learn in public schools here is all that there is to learn. There is much more things to learn about other places (like their heritage country or religion). They will decide with their own mind what is right and what is wrong. Are the things that they say here are correct? Or the things they say there (Iran)? This helps them to have a better view of the world and have an open mind and decide for themselves which one is correct. I want to open their mind so they can decide for themselves.



Maryam, who is a housewife and mother of one, believed that by teaching Farsi language to her child she can talk about topics such as her religion or culture in her mother tongue since this was a language that she was more comfortable with. She said, “I rather my child know Farsi language so I can talk to her about our religion, believes, culture and other thing that I cannot explain to her fully in English.” Mahnaz, who is a housewife and mother of one, supposed that changing one’s environment should not necessarily change his/her views about the world, “Just because one’s environment has changed that does not mean that the person should turn his/her back on their cultural, religious, and linguistic heritage.” Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, suggested that one way she chose to ensure that her children preserve their Islamic values is bringing them to the mosque school:

We have the support of this community in any shape and form; I mean this mosque community. But the problem is that our culture is an Islamic culture. Many of families that are from Iran and visit here they say in our opinion this is not a mosque, this is a cultural center. This center is Islamic but they teach culture as well. I believe it is culture that supports and backs religion.

Frough, who is a housewife and mother of two, described some of the processes the school uses to instill Islamic values alongside heritage language teaching in children:

Other schools only teach the academic stuff and some cultural topics like celebrations...but religious stuff is not taught at those schools. Because they have short school days...so they only use their time for teaching school subjects. But here (Islamic school) they have longer school day and therefore they have time to

teach cultural believes and religious practices such as praying (Namoz). Or the time that they have after lunch and kids play together or do their homework or learn about cultural believes that kids learn in public schools in Iran too. So these kinds of subjects are taught after morning lessons and lunch and noon time pray.

As I mentioned before the parents who were from secular schools did not talk about religions in their remarks about the heritage language. They mainly pointed to cultural values of the heritage language learning. Surprisingly, some of the parents in the Islamic school did not consider learning Farsi as a way of learning religious teachings. For example, two of the parents from the Islamic school opposed the Islamic teaching that was going on in the school and reported that many parents broke up with the school last year and founded a new school because they did not like the religious teaching of this Islamic school. For example, Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, was more interested in the Farsi language teaching aspects of the Islamic school, “Here this mosque is doing good work, but even this school has its own problem. I only keep my relationship with the school for Farsi learning benefits that it provides for my child.” Farhad, who is an engineer and father of two, agreed with Negar and believed that school should keep religious and Farsi teaching separate so children’s of families who are not interested in the religious or ideological teaching of the school are not forced to sit through them. He talked about “institutionalization of children” that he believed is going on in the Islamic school.

You know how they talk about “institutionalization of children”. We were told that they were not going to teach religion. That is why they have two separate sessions. ...The afternoon sessions teach religious studies. Also because they are using

books which are printed in Iran and are up to date so there are a lot of things that are regarding Khomeini (the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the leader of the 1979 Iranian Revolution). So I and a lot of families are reluctant to use these books. But I have seen in some cases that even their teachers have said that let skip this part because it is just propaganda. That is how it is from the very beginning but now I mean if she (the teacher) wants to cover her hair that's her choice as long as they do not tell my wife or my children to cover theirs, I would not mind.

He continued:

As I said as long as no one asks our family or families like us to do thing against our will, it is our decision, I do not mind it. I have friends that constantly go to the mosque and friends that go with me to the bar.

### **Children are Proud of Themselves**

It is the responsibility of parents and the Iranian-American community to create an environment that results in children feeling comfortable and feeling a strong connection with their ethnic group and becoming proud of their ethnic identity and their native language. A supportive family environment can help children build positive sense of self in the native language and culture. The more parents encourage their children to learn the language, and the more second-generation Iranians are exposed to their parental native language, the more likely they are to identify themselves as Iranian-American and be proud of their ancestry. Although the scope of this study did not include a question about children's point of view on heritage language learning, the parents' interviews and observation findings revealed some telling accounts regarding children's attitudes toward

Farsi language learning. According to most of the parents in my study, majority of the children considered English as their primary language; therefore Farsi was considered a second language for them. Most parents in this study revealed that their children in general viewed Farsi language learning as a positive experience and were proud of their ability to speak two languages. Because of the feedback they receive from others and the realization of their abilities, they felt encouraged and enthusiastic. Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, said:

He is very happy that he has learned Farsi and he thinks that he has achieved something more compared to his friends...For example, we were in a Persian gathering...My son was able to read a Farsi sentence in that party and his friend was not able to read it. This made him feel like a winner. He came to me and happily told me: Mom I was able to read this sentence and my friend could not. ... He gets so proud of himself when we go to parties and he compares himself with his peers at the party, and observes that he can read Farsi and others cannot. He thinks as though he has a winning card in his hands.

Mohan, who is a nurse and mother of two, also indicated the same, "They are also happy that they learned Farsi and I think they will be even happier in the future when they realize how useful and beneficial it has been for them." Frough, who is a housewife and mother of two, revealed that first she was unsure about her children's ability and the desire to learn Farsi. However, she later realized, they not only are able to learn the language, but also are very happy about it:

At first I was worried that they might not want or even can learn the language. But then I saw that my older daughter had interest in learning the language. She would look ahead in her Farsi book and was interested to know what the next lesson was, and would find new words on her own.

She later added, “My kids were always interested and they wanted to get there faster all the time.” Farhad, who is an engineer and father of two, recalled one incident where his four years old daughter eagerly wanted to learn Farsi in anticipation that she was going to take a trip to Iran for vacation:

My four years old daughter is very reluctant to speak Farsi. But since she knew she was going to Iran, to my surprise, she started speaking Farsi with us... she was like...What is blue in Fars? What is dress in Farsi? What is kabob in Farsi? So, because she likes kabob.

Mahnaz, who is a house wife and mother of one, also talked about her son’s enthusiasm to go to Farsi school even during summer months that the school was not in session, “When Farsi School was over for the summer he was very upset and was telling me I wish I could still go to school.” Interestingly, some children viewed Farsi as a “secret” language that would enable them to freely talk about subjects in public that they did not want others to understand. Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, revealed that her children feel so proud of themselves because they can do something that others cannot do, “They do not get upset when we talk Farsi to them in English school. They think about it as an advantage that they can speak a secret language that others

cannot understand.” Farhad, who is an engineer and father of two, also stressed the same point:

Interestingly...she would say: “Daddy please don’t say it in English ...say it in Farsi, so no one else would understand...and she did not want others to understand that she was being corrected...a few months ago, my wife and kids were walking outside in the mall and my wife was making a comment about something and my daughter was like “Mom! In Farsi!” She wanted to talk in a language that no one could understand.

Afroz, who is a jeweler and mother of one, had the same experience:

Or when we go to restaurant they (her child and her husband) are self-cautious about some silly stuff that we might be talking about and they do not want the next table to hear, then they say talk in Farsi and they like it because they can complain or say something without others understanding it.

In general, children were not shy and felt comfortable using their Farsi language around other people. Frough, who is a housewife and mother of two, explained:

My children feel very comfortable speaking Farsi outside of the home. Although my children are normally shy, but they do not feel embarrassed when they are speaking their own language outside of home. They were always comfortable

### **Theme Two: There is no End to Learning Farsi**

This theme revealed expectations that Iranian-American parents have for their children’s Farsi learning. Expectations held by parents have the power to shape learning and the perceived value of learning. Research has shown that parental expectations for

children's academic achievement can positively affect their educational outcomes.

However, it is important for parents to re-evaluate what matters for their children and what their expectations are for them. Parents should talk to each other and their children to express their thoughts and feelings towards heritage language maintenance. So, what are the desired behaviors? What are parents' values and expectations for their children as they continue to learn Farsi heritage language? What are short term and long term educational and cultural goals that parents have for them in Farsi schools?

Expectations, most frequently referenced in relation to learning outcomes, revealed Iranian-American parents' expectations regarding their children's Farsi language learning and what they wanted to accomplish and how far they wanted them to progress. When parents talked about Farsi language and what they wanted their children to be able to do with Farsi, they inevitably talked about skills, behaviors, and values. Overall, the overriding goal of the parents was for the children to identify with being Iranian through learning skills such as: being able to speak, read and write, and to hold the same cultural values as their parents. When Iranian-Americans parents in this study were asked about their expectations for Farsi learning and how much knowledge and use of Farsi language they felt could be expected from their children and how far they wished their children to continue learning Farsi; they differed in their point of views. Some parents wanted their children to at least be able to speak and understand Farsi in order to communicate with other Iranians, so they can tighten their relationships between parents, grandparents and siblings. Some did not have any particular expectations, believing that it should be up to their children how far they want to advance in Farsi language learning. Others wanted

their children to read and write well enough to be able to use the Farsi language in communication and future educational plans. The data in this theme was further organized into five sub-themes: 1) expectations for speaking, 2) expectations for reading, 3) expectations for writing, 4) expectations for grade level, and 5) expectations for cultural learning.

### **Expectations for Speaking**

All parents thought that learning Farsi is highly important for their children and had various expectations for their children in regards to speaking Farsi. Some parents were interested in language production and expected their children to answer in Farsi every time they spoke to them, while others had different expectations and were satisfied if their children comprehended the language. Additionally, some parents had an academic orientation towards their expected goals. They maintained an exact long term goal and expected their children to reach a specific level in Farsi speaking. They focused on how well they wanted their children to speak Farsi. For example, Farhad, who is an engineer and father of two, wanted his daughter to reach a high proficiency level, “I want to see her in advanced high in hopefully superior in speaking.” Likewise, Frough, who is a housewife and mother of two, held very high long-term expectations for her children with regard to Farsi language production, “I would like for them to be able to speak and read fluently.” Similarly, Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, had a very high expectation for her son and said, “I want him to be able to speak like children that are born in Iran (native like fluency), but I know that might not be possible, he might have an accent while speaking Farsi.” Afrooz, who is a jeweler and mother of one, expected her



son to speak Farsi in order to communicate effectively with family and relatives in the U.S. and in Iran, and believed that it was his most important goal:

I want him to be able to speak with me and his father in Farsi. When my mom or his aunts come to visit from Iran, they want to speak Farsi to him. When he comes to store, some of the Iranian customers talk to him in Farsi. It makes them very happy.

The rest of the parents, on the other hand, did not consider Farsi literacy as imperative and only concentrated on speaking Farsi and learning cultural norms. They had a more general and unspecified expectation that was less academically oriented. They said that the essential issue for them is that their child can speak Farsi at home and with the relatives, and siblings and focused more on how often and in what circumstances they wanted their children to speak Farsi. Minoo, who is a physician and mother of three, also expressed the same goal, “I am not very concerned about the writing aspect of Farsi language, but speaking is most important to me.” For Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, the ability to connect with family and friends was one of important reasons for why she expected her child to be able to speak Farsi:

Many people even say that writing Farsi is not as important and the important thing is that the children be able to speak Farsi. It is ok with me. It is important because they can learn their motherland’s language, culture, and religion. They can communicate with their family and relatives and keep the emotional relationship between them alive.

Understanding spoken Farsi was more important for other parents. They were more concerned about comprehension than production of the Farsi language. For example Mahnaz, who is a housewife and mother of one, had revealed during the interview that, although she wants her child to speak only Farsi at home, she does not wish to push him too much because she understands that speaking only Farsi is challenging for him. Mahnaz self-negotiated her expectations for her son and although she said that she always spoke Farsi to him, she did not expect him to answer back in Farsi all the time. It seemed that comprehension was more important and immediate short-term goal for her than production. She said, “I negotiated with myself that I should just expect him to speak if he can. The most important issue to me is that my child knows Farsi and understands when we talk to him.”

### **Expectations for Reading**

In general, Farsi heritage speakers have better oral skills (speaking/understanding) than written skills (writing/reading). Therefore, more children are able to comprehend and speak the language than those who can read it. Parent participants highlighted the importance of developing literacy (reading and writing) skills in a heritage language, alongside maintaining oral skills. Parents had much to say about their expectations about their children's reading skills in Farsi. They reiterated that being able to read in Farsi is as important as speaking it. Parents' expectations regarding Farsi reading language skills of their children varied. Some Iranian-American parents wanted their children to be able to read Persian literature and poems that teach morals. Some expected their children to read magazines, books, and religious scripture in Farsi. Others wanted their children be able to

have access to online news materials from multiple sources in Farsi. Mohan who is a nurse and mother of two, said, “So instead of reading a Persian text translated in English, they can read it in Farsi and comprehend it as it is.” Other parents, who regularly read books to their children, expected that they pick up the habit and read independently and wanted their children to read story books several times a week. Maryam, who is a housewife and mother of one, said, “The more the better. Cultural, social and religious books, the more the better.” Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, had high expectations for her daughter’s’ reading ability. She said, “For learning language my expectation would be if she opens a newspaper in Farsi she would be able to read it.”

Some parents had advanced reading expectations for their children and wanted them to be able to read news on line from multiple sources so they are not limited to a narrow point of view of the world. Farhad, who is an engineer and father of two, also had high expectations for her daughters’ reading skills. He wanted his older daughter who was in second grade Farsi class to be able to read the news from multiple sources such as newspaper or on line articles so they can be exposed to diverse points of views in the world:

Well, actually I would love to see her somewhere in advanced low to middle in writing and reading. I don’t expect her to read poetry, I would love to see it, but I do not expect her to be able to do it. I would love to see my daughter be able to read Farsi articles both those published inside Iran and by those Iranians who live outside of Iran. My expectation would be something on the nature of being able to read newspapers. Daily news, Kihan [Iranian newspaper], BBC Farsi and so on.

Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, wanted her daughter who has developmental disability to read and understand Iranian newspapers on line:

I think the most common thing for reading is newspaper or news on line and whatever somebody can read and understand...I am not expecting her to read *Roomi* and *Hafez* [Iranian Poets] and understand it. She may read Hafez but she does not understand it.

Together with news, Persian literature and poetry were other texts that Iranian-American parents stressed that they expected or wished their children could read and understand. Frough, who is a housewife and mother of two, wanted her daughters to read and understand poetry, Persian history, and Persian literature fluently:

Like, they could understand poetry, understand *Shahnameh* [the book of kings a national epic of Iran], so, if they could read poetry and Iran's history and my daughter could be engaged and read about these topics in Farsi during her free times for leisure, that would be my ultimate goal.

Kamran, who is an engineer and father of two, agreed "Well, they learn speaking naturally because they hear us talking at home. But we wanted them to learn to read and write in Farsi too. And when their Farsi gets really good, they can read Persian poetry." Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two, wanted her children to be able to read fluently and be able to maintain their reading skills in the future.

As far as reading we expect them to read fluently. Although they still have problem with reading sometimes even now that they have gone to school for eight

years. I mean one of them can read well but another one still has problem reading some words.

### **Expectations for Writing**

Not many Iranian-American parents had specific expectations for their children's ability to write in Farsi. Generally speaking, they wanted their children to be able to write in Farsi as much as they can satisfy their needs. Minoo, who is a physician and mother of three, wanted her children to be able to write at the advanced level comparable to school children in Iran. She is considering sending her children to Iran to complete their college education.

I want them to be able to read and write as much as they can and meet their day to day needs. So if they ever needed to live in Iran even for a short time... they can be literate in Farsi. So if they finish this school they will be able to read and write when they finish a few grades... They might even want to go to college in Iran. Why not? They have good colleges there and it is free. I became a physician in Iran. They have competitive colleges in Iran and some of their graduates come to U.S. to John Hopkins for their residency.

Maryam, who is a housewife and mother of one, said, "She should learn Farsi to the extent so she could at least read and write fully to the best possible extent." Some parents had more explicit expectations regarding their children's' Farsi writing skills.

Mohan, who is a nurse and mother of two, said:

I do not want them to have a perfect handwriting. My children's handwriting in English is good. But their hand writing in Farsi is not very good. We do not care as

much. As long as their handwriting is as such that can be legible it is enough for us. But we remind them to write legibly.

Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, believed, “Well, they learn speaking naturally because they hear us talking at home. But we wanted them to learn to read and write in Farsi too.”

Afrooz, who is a jeweler and mother of one, communicated, “I say that my child has to be able to write in Farsi just as he can write in English. Just like a child that is going to school in Iran....he has to know that much.

### **Expectations for Grade Level**

What do parents want their children to accomplish? How far do they want them to progress? What is the end goal? These are some of the questions I asked parents to find out their expectations for grade level they wished their child to complete in Farsi. Iranian-American parents in this study had several responses that varied from a few grades to college degree; although, they were disappointed that opportunities for higher grades were not presented in the Farsi school. Frough, who is a housewife and mother of two, responded, “I wanted my children go to higher grades, but they do not have higher grades here and the kids cannot continue their education beyond fifth grade.” Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two, wanted the same thing:

I know it would be hard since here (Farsi school) they only have Farsi classes up to a limited grade (5th grade) and if they could find a way to continue teaching children beyond grade five, this would help the kids. I wish they could.

Farhad, who is an engineer and father of two, had similar concerns, “So this might not happen because this Farsi school goes to seventh or 8th grade. She might not get to the level that I want [advance level]. But as long as she gets to advanced low, it would make me happy.”

Maryam, who is a housewife and mother of one, had the highest expectation as far as grade level for her son, “Hopefully as much as me (bachelor degree). Yes, why not! I would love for her to learn Farsi as much as I know Farsi.” Mohan, who is a nurse and mother of two, also had high aspirations, “I would like if they even could study Farsi at the higher level like high school or college. The more they can learn the better it is.”

### **Expectations for Cultural Learning**

Cultural heritage implies a sense of belonging and a shared bond to a certain community. It represents literary traditions, oral history, performing arts, social practices, traditions, and knowledge and skills. Enthusiasm among Iranian-Americans to use Farsi can be an indication of a growing sense of cultural and community identity. Certainly, for at least some Iranian-Americans use of Farsi is also a way to gain access to a heritage that was previously hidden behind the desire to adapt to Western culture. However, among Iranian-Americans, prestige, social status, and modernism are no longer associated with foreign or American language and culture, but with becoming and remaining dedicated to one’s cultural character and heritage (Hoffman, 1989).

The leading expectations of the parents in this study were for the children to identify themselves with being from Iranian heritage and learn the Farsi language. Parents’ expectations were characterized by their desire for their children to participate in Iranian

cultural celebrations and acceptance of certain cultural values associated with such participation, and at the same time, by resistance to identification with American culture at the level of cultural identity. The subject of culture in this research, was widely discussed and brought up in the interviews and it covered not just one, but four different categories. It showed up in the categories such as benefit of heritage language, parent's expectations, schools' teaching, and parents' maintenance efforts.

Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, wanted her daughter to learn about and connect to her culture, social values, and customs. However, she was worried that her disability might prevent her from ability to understand and maintain her cultural identity in a sustainable manner: "But again, what I am so concern, is how she could understand these values of her culture and be able to keep them." Frough, who is a housewife and mother of two, expected her daughters feel a sense of unity and belonging to their heritage culture to better understand previous Iranian generations of poets, scholars, and the history of where they come from, "know about poets from Iran, this is very valuable, to know Iran's history, know that this is our history, these are our poets, know our scholars." Mahnaz, who is a house wife and mother of one, expected her son to accept and be proud of his linguistic heritage and at the same time, resist to identification with American culture at the level of cultural identity. Mahnaz was worried that some children might view their own culture and language inferior to a person that does not speak the language, and this might cause them to refrain from speaking it:

I hope all of the children be proud of their language and culture...and not be embarrassed by it. I know some children that do not want to speak their language



(Farsi) in front of Americans...they think it is bad to speak Farsi in front of others that do not speak it. I have seen such a thing...and this shows how some people can have no connection to their own culture. But in my opinion, language and culture for every nation is like a “precious stone” that might be different for every nation. The stone of this country might be this color and the others are other color. So everybody should cherish their own culture and language.

Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two, believed that cultural heritage has passed down to us from our parents and Iranian-American children should preserve their roots and pass it on to the next generation, otherwise, it might be lost, “When your children do not connect with their heritage culture, little by little they forget their roots and they might get lost in the dominant culture. In my opinion, people should be connected to their roots.” Kamran, who is an engineer and father of two, revealed how he attempts to instill cultural values in his son by exposing him to heritage ceremonies in order to combat cultural identity loss:

This is very important for me that my child know what culture and traditions we have. Sometimes I even go to religious ceremonies with my child, although I am not particularly a religious person myself, just so my child know where his roots are and prevent him from losing his identity when he grows up.

### **Research Question 2**

As previously mentioned, Iranian-American parents consider maintaining their cultural values and language to be very important. Despite the positive views from the parents, the study revealed that they also face enormous challenges that are beyond their

control. Despite these challenges, Iranian-American parents put great efforts into helping their children maintain their heritage language.

The purpose of RQ2 was to explore what parents do to maintain Farsi language learning in their children. Further, this question also asked parents to share the challenges they have experienced in maintaining Farsi heritage language. In order to fully explore this question, it was broken into two sub-questions:

**Sub- question 1:** What are some efforts and practices that parents assume in maintaining Farsi heritage language in their children? The data to this question yielded the fourth theme.

Theme three: We do our best. Five sub-themes were identified under this theme: 1) language practices, 2) language policies, 3) spouse's role, 4) cultural teaching, and 5) visiting Iran (see figure 11).

**Sub- question 2:** What are some challenges that parents face in maintaining Farsi heritage language in their children? The data to this question yielded the third theme.

Theme four: Sometimes it is hard. Four sub-themes were identified under this theme: 1) children get frustrated; 2) language loss would be a tragedy; 3) Farsi school has its own problems, and 4) resources.

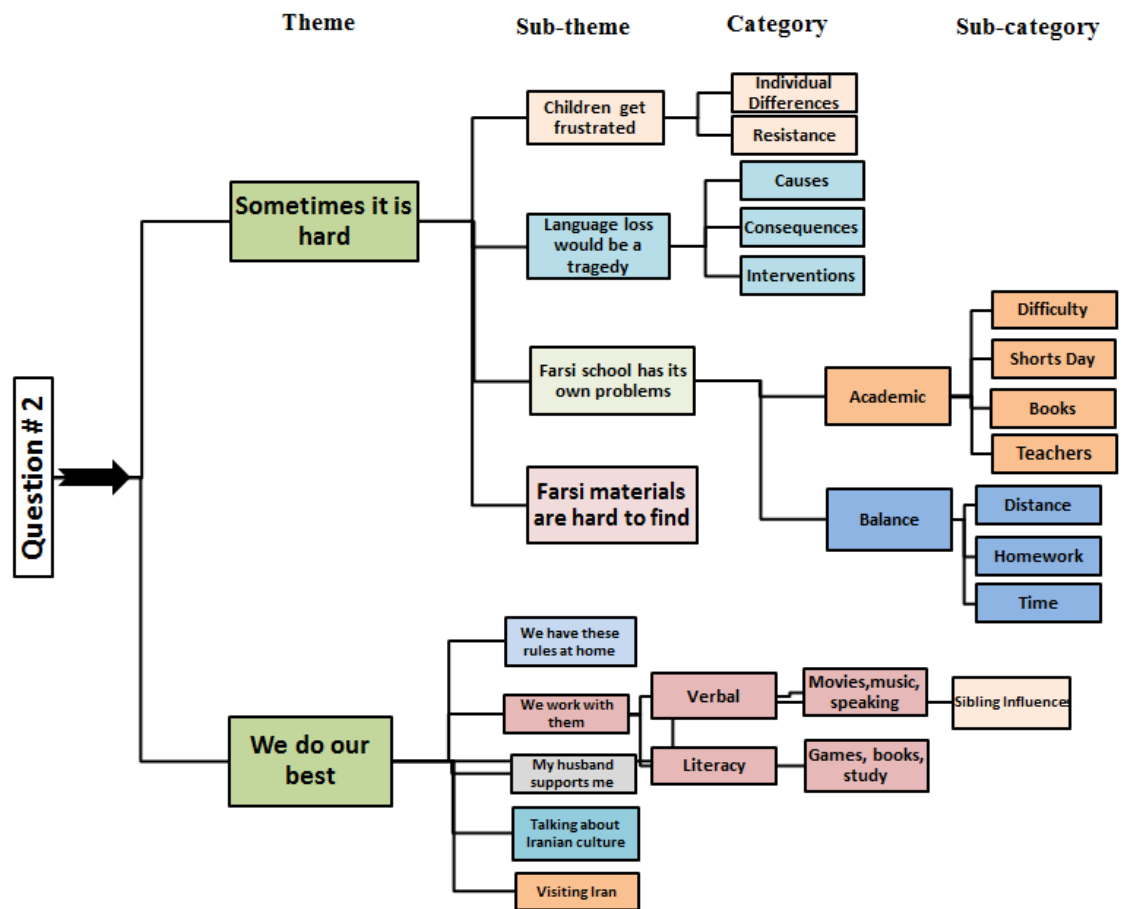


Figure 11. Research question 2 themes, subthemes, and categories.

### Theme Three: We Do Our Best

This Theme reveals efforts and practices that parents assume in maintaining Farsi heritage language in their children. Parents are an integral part of the success of a heritage language school and of the maintenance of their children's heritage languages. Immigrant parents generally wish for their children to maintain their heritage language in order to secure their ethnic identity and family ties, as well as to obtain better opportunities in the future. Analysis of the parent interviews revealed that a vast majority of the Iranian-

American parents in the study shared a strong preference for the transmission of their heritage language to their children, and made efforts to facilitate heritage language maintenance. Considering the importance of preserving their heritage language, what specific strategies do these families employ? The practices reflected in theme four reflects the Iranian-American maintenance efforts and struggles in preserving their ethnic language and identity. I have further categorized these findings under the following five sub-themes: 1) we work with them; 2) we have these rules at home; 3) my husband supports me; 4) talking about Iranian culture; and 5) visiting Iran.

### **We Work with Them**

Iranian American parents' positive attitude toward Farsi was evident in their engagement in language practices that promote Farsi maintenance. Language practices sub-theme was further divided into two categories: 1) verbal and 2) literacy maintenance efforts.

**Verbal practices.** Parents employed various verbal strategies and practices to facilitate Heritage language maintenance for their children by various means. They tried to speak Farsi at home whenever possible, encouraged their children to speak Farsi with siblings and other family members inside and outside of home, and exposed their children to the language by arranging Farsi cartoons and movies to watch at home. Also parents gave up their time, energy, and money to make sure their children find ample opportunities to learn the Farsi language by registering and taking them to Farsi schools in their community. This category was further divided into three sub-categories: 1) Speaking Farsi at home, 2) speaking Farsi in public and 3) Farsi movies.

*Speaking Farsi at home.* Controlling the children's language use at home was among the most important mechanisms parents used in order to ensure Farsi language retention among their children. Aside from some parents who spoke English with each other occasionally, most parents reported that they always try to speak Farsi at home with their children. Most Iranian-American parents started speaking Farsi from the time their children were born, so for these children Farsi was their first language and English which they learned later in life, was considered their second language. However, few parents did not start speaking Farsi with their children until later in life. Parents who were working had no choice but to enroll their children in daycare and since they were worried that their children might not be able to communicate their needs in daycare, they spoke English at home first and later added Farsi as a second language. Parents also reported that sometimes they use English words or whole sentences in their conversation, especially when they talk about topics or things that are hard for children to understand in Farsi. For example, Maryam, who is a housewife and mother of one, shared this observation:

Sometimes she does not know the idioms and phrases like “mosahebeh” (similar). She was asking me what is “mosahebeh”? So I have to tell her in English sometimes. Sometimes I ask her words that I don't know in English and she is helping us with English.

Parents also said that their children sometimes mixed Farsi and English in their conversation. Some parents who enrolled their children in daycare after they learned Farsi as their first language, observed that their children learned English right away, although,

one parent delightfully observed that her daughter tried to speak Farsi with her English teacher at school. Mohan, who is a nurse and mother of two, recalled:

Eventually, they learned English from the environment and English TV. So, when they went to daycare they learned more English. Some of their teachers in daycare were saying that they say some things in another language (Farsi) that we do not understand.

A few parents talked about instances that they had to speak Farsi with their children. This was especially true when they wanted to speak about school subjects that were less concrete or difficult to talk about in Farsi. Parents felt that they need to talk about these subjects in English because they were important and they wanted to make sure that their children understand them. Farhad, who is an engineer and father of two, explained:

If I want to ask “how was your day?” or “how is your friend doing” which is a concrete matter, we use Farsi. But when you go higher than concrete matter, that is when I cannot explain it in Farsi, like political matters or social matters, and then I talk to her in English, because she does not have the word bank to understand these subjects. She does have the Farsi vocabularies too, but in English she has bigger word choice. So, I choose the language according to the situation.

Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, talked about a similar experience when her son switched to English to talk about school subjects:

He has started speaking English to me recently. For example, when he wants to talk about what happened in school or what they talked about in school? Because I

think he is more comfortable to talk about them in English because that is how he learned these subjects. He does not like to switch and explain them to me in Farsi.

Negar also shared that her son made fun of her American accent and that made her feel a bit embarrassed and uncomfortable:

I understand English very well and I am getting my master degree here. Therefore I do not come up short in English language. But sometimes he (her son) criticizes me for my accent and says “mom say this word this way”. But I tell him “you should be aware that I am studying at college here and I can speak English as well as you. But you should know that my accent is from Iran.”

According to parents, children’s pattern of language use varied, depending on whom they were speaking to. Children mostly spoke Farsi with their parents and grandparents, particularly with their mothers. The language of their choice, however, was English when they were speaking with their siblings. Below is an account of some of these various patterns of language use at home

*With parents.* Iranian-American parents said that they always spoke Farsi to their children. They believed that with discipline and persistence, they will be able to establish Farsi language habits in their children. Minoo, who is a physician and mother of three, said “We did not experience any problems, because we were speaking Farsi at home.” Maryam, who is a housewife and mother of one, said she is “serious about using Farsi language” with her children. Few other parents believed that establishing good Farsi habits is not difficult if they start early and continue using Farsi their children will naturally get used to it. Kamran, who is an engineer and father of two, on the other hand, did not speak

Farsi to his children early in their life, therefore, had problem establishing these habits and now regretted it. He stated that he should have started talking Farsi to his children from the beginning, “I think number one would be that parents should speak Farsi to them by the time they are born. That is the time to start speaking to them.” The pattern of language use also differed, depending on how long the parents had resided in the U.S. Some fathers who had spent more time than their wives’ in the U.S., tended to speak English with their children more often. Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two, explained, “Because my husband has spent most of his life here in the U.S. so he is more comfortable speaking English with them.” Some Parents always spoke Farsi to each other and to their children, while others occasionally mixed English words or sentences in their conversations, depending on the subject or the circumstances of the conversation. Occasionally, parents would remind each other to speak Farsi to their children. This happened more often with fathers forgetting to speak Farsi and mothers reminding them to do so. Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, said:

My husband also forgets to speak Farsi to the children and I have to keep reminding him to speak Farsi with the children...Sometimes I want to post signs on the wall that remind him to speak Farsi...For example, even when he tries to speak Farsi with them, he substitutes some words that he thinks children do not understand.

*With siblings.* Children reinforced each other’s language use. Younger children learned to speak Farsi or English from their interactions with their siblings. “She learned to speak Farsi from her sister and from TV”, said Mansoor. Parents remarked that their



children mostly spoke English with each other at home. Masood continued, “They are still talking in English with each other when they are playing. They were always speaking together in English. I cannot do anything about that.” Parents believed the children are more “comfortable” speaking English with each other. Farida said, “If they want to speak Farsi so they do it. I have seen that within their own friends they speak English even if their friends understand Farsi. But when they talk with the grownups, they speak Farsi maybe out of respect, I think.” When parents reminded the children to speak Farsi; they usually complied, but sometimes inserted and substituted English words in their Farsi conversation and vice versa. Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, talked about how his son gradually started to speak more and more English with his Iranian friends as he entered school age, “At first children used to speak more Farsi with each other, but little by little Farsi speaking is fading among the children and they speak more English as they go to school.” Some parents believed that speaking English is inevitable, and naturally happens between their children; therefore, they chose not to interfere, and allow their children to freely use the language of their choice. Frough, who is a housewife and mother of two, wanted to observe her daughters’ independence by not interfering in their privacy:

So when they come from school and are tired and want to play with each other, I leave it up to them if they want to speak Farsi or English. This is the privacy time between two sisters and I respect their privacy when they are together, so I do not interfere in their conversations.

***Speaking Farsi in public.*** Iranian-American parents’ attitude towards public Farsi

speaking, seem to directly affect children's attitudes and behavior as well. Some parents limited their Farsi language use to private spaces where they felt no worry about making others uncomfortable, while others did not hesitate to speak Farsi with their children in public places. Children followed their parents' pattern of language use; therefore, some felt shy or self-cautious about speaking Farsi in public places, while others did not.

Maryam, who is a housewife and mother of one, stated that she always speaks Farsi to her son in public places and her son also feels comfortable using Farsi in public places, "I personally speak Farsi to him all the time. Whether it is in store, school, or in the playground. Even, if there are other people around. We speak Farsi even when are waiting at the school bus stop." However, for other parents the decision to use or not use Farsi in public was a simple matter of politeness. These parents were sensitive to the various contexts in which one language or the other would be more appropriate. They did not want to be seen rude for speaking a foreign language in the English-dominated public spaces. They generally spoke the dominant language in order to make the most people around them feel comfortable. Mohan, who is a nurse and mother of two, stated:

We speak English outside of the home since it is more polite and draws less attention to us so others do not think: What are these people talking about?...We are worried that others might say: What kind of language is this?...So, when we go to a movie or restaurant we do not speak Farsi as much because other people think we are talking about them and that is not polite. Iranians in my opinion are very polite and are very cautious and do not want to hurt other people. Sometimes,

people look at us with curiosity when we speak Farsi. Sometimes, we bring level of our voice low.

Mansoor, who is a nurse and father of two, believed that the decision to speak or not speak Farsi in public, for some people, is a social-political matter. He argued, that Iranian-American people who do not speak Farsi in public, because it makes them be negatively perceived and labeled as “terrorists” by others:

When I am talking to them outside and everywhere I talk to them Farsi I don’t hesitate to speak Farsi. Some people they are shy to speak Farsi because of negative things. People might think that just because they speak Farsi, they’re terrorists.

Minoo, who is a physician and mother of three, seemed to feel safer when she blended with the crowd and did not draw attention to herself by speaking Farsi. She said:

As you know they say: “If you do not want to stand out in a crowd, act like others.” It seems to me that they themselves choose to speak English automatically. So when they are in an English speaking environment, they automatically speak English and I do not bother them.

Sometimes children or parents used Farsi in public to protect the privacy of their conversations. Children viewed it as a secret language. Mohan, who is a nurse and mother of two, said “Sometimes, they tell me to speak Farsi when we are outside of the home and we are talking about things that they do not want others to understand. They think they are speaking in a secret language.”

***Farsi movies.*** Watching Farsi cartoons and children's movies was another strategy parents used to maintain children's Farsi heritage language. Iranian-American parents believed that watching movie to learn a language helps children to consolidate language that they have been learning at home. For example, if they learned a word in a textbook and heard it later in a movie, that might help it to stick. Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two, described: "They can review the vocabularies from school or learn new vocabularies that they do not have in their Farsi book and they can hear and learn it from these movies." Movies also motivate children to keep learning and teach them about culture of the language they are learning. Not only that, they will probably continue to watch movies, which will increase their exposure to the Farsi heritage language. Parents subscribed to Iranian TV satellite, purchased CDs of Farsi cartoons and movies and downloaded Persian programs and music on their iPads to reinforce the usage of Farsi language in their children. Afrooz, who is a jeweler and mother of one, explains her methods:

We also have another TV that has Iranian satellite. We watch Iranian channels. I always turn it on. And I might not even be watching it and be in the kitchen but I think if even the TV can be heard by my daughter she can become familiar with the words when people are talking and she can see this culture.

Farhad, who is an engineer and father of two, also used Farsi TV shows broadcasted from Iran or Los Angeles for his children. However, he was concern because of some of the inappropriate behaviors he did not approve of that are broadcasted on Iranian channels:

When my daughter was born and was about two years old, we started watching a lot of Iranian TV series you know...shows such as kids shows...kolah ghermezi and ...in order to familiarize her with Persian culture and that is when I noticed that a lot of inappropriate things happening in Iranian TV broadcasting.

Frough, who is a housewife and mother of two, described her husband's efforts to encourage their children to continue watching Farsi movies, even after they lost interest:

He would always find Farsi programs from internet, so the kids could watch it.

They even would watch it together. Sometimes the kids would even leave the room and stop watching the Farsi cartoon, but my husband would continue watching the program himself so the kids would come back again and watch the cartoon with him.

**Literacy practices.** Reading and writing skills have traditionally been considered as basic prerequisites for full participation in society. Iranian-American parents in this study employed many heritage language literacy strategies for giving their children the tools to develop biliteracy. These strategies involved literacy events or activities where reading or writing played a role and usually involved a written text or texts central to the activity. Parents read story books to their children, encouraged them to read sentences and signs in Farsi, played Farsi phonics game with children, and helped their children study at home. Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, had tried many of these strategies:

Another thing I do is whenever we want to go shopping I ask my son to make a list of what we are going to buy in Farsi on his white board. So he can practice what he

has learned at school. Sometimes we encourage him to read the headlines of some Farsi newspapers that we get from Iranian stores. He becomes very happy when he can read some of them and says: mom I was able to read it. Sometimes I encourage him to text his extended family like his aunt in Iran in Farsi in social networks like telegram and viber. He types words like: hi how are you, where is momoni (grandma)? He uses words that he has learned at school. This section covers some of these strategies.

***Study at home.*** Many Iranian-American parents said that they started literacy practices at home before they send their children to Farsi school. They made some progress in teaching alphabet and letter sounds, but they did not have much success teaching their children to read sentences. So, they decided to send their children to Farsi school. Practices at home involved phonics cards for Frough, who is a housewife and mother of two:

Even before my older daughter went to Farsi school, I started teaching Farsi alphabet to her. I would write it down and she would practice them. So we started at home. She takes different cards and puts them together and makes words with them...I saw that my older daughter had interest to learn them and her younger sister would watch her and was interested as well.

Literacy practices at home continued after children attended Farsi school. Parents said they practice Farsi with the children every day. Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, said, “We had made a log entry for him and he would write what had happened that day in 3 to 4 sentences.” Children read books with parents and completed

their homework with the help of their parents who assisted them with spelling and reading. Minoo, who is a physician and mother of three, said: “Whenever they had Farsi homework I would turn the TV off and would say that now we have Farsi homework and you have to do it.” Kamran, who is an engineer and father of two, explained the process, “By helping them I make sure I give the dictation and the spelling and make sure she reads with me for the fluency so I could correct her mistakes. Then I check on her homework. Many parents said that they usually sit by their children to encourage and help them to complete their homework. Even siblings helped each other in their Farsi learning by studying together. Minoo, who is a physician and mother of three, said:

For homework I would help her with spelling worksheets. She wanted me to always be on her side when she is doing her homework. They usually study Farsi reading assignments at home while completing their writing assignments. They also help each other in the Farsi homework. One of my daughter’s is stronger in Farsi and helps her sister with her studying.

Mohan, who is a nurse and mother of two, explained that sometimes studying Farsi at home becomes challenging:

After they would complete their English homework they would refuse to do their Farsi homework and would say we are tired now. Then their homework Farsi would be left for the end of the week. So, we had to balance it so Thursdays and Fridays were hard for us because we had to complete both English and Farsi homework. But we would give important and priority to English.

**Books.** Parents believed that reading Farsi books benefits children by helping them master the language, obtain communication skills, and become closer to their parents. Almost all Iranian-American parents had read story books to their children. However, shortage of Farsi children books made it difficult for some to continue reading books with their children regularly. Therefore, parents came up with many good ideas to overcome the Farsi book shortage. Parents made their own book clubs. Mahnaz, who is a house wife and mother of one, said:

We have children's book club and traded books with Farsi speaking friends. We have 10 books right now. We read it then we give it back and get another 10. It is a small family library... There are books I brought from Iran... and share it with a group of friends. We do book swaps.

All Iranian-American parents acknowledged that resources for heritage language retention are very limited. Faced with the challenge of shortage of resources, parents came up with creative ways to find Farsi reading materials from various sources. Some parents even printed books from the internet, ordered books on line or asked friends and family to bring Farsi books for them from Iran. Mohan, who is a nurse and mother of two said:

One of my husband's friends that had gone to Iran brought books for us. There were very good books and we read these Farsi books to them. There is even a Farsi encyclopedia that we have that our older daughter marks special parts of the book that she likes us to read those parts to her at night.

Parents, however, eventually watched their children lose the interest in reading books as they grew older. Mohan explained:



When they were little and would listen to me more they would read the books that our relatives would bring from Iran. These books had large fonts and were easy to read. But as they grew up they lost their interest to read books. They used to read books, but they do not listen any more, they say we do not want to read anymore, we like it but we do not want to do it. I have lost control over them.

### **We have These Rules at Home**

Where does the family fit into language policy? Family plays an important role in maintenance of heritage language. Iranian-American parents in this study provided details on their effort and management strategies to actively interfere with their children's language use at home such as: putting pressure on them to use more Farsi, nagged them for switching to English, and corrected their mistakes in Farsi as reported in their remarks. Surprisingly, when asked whether they had special policies or rules for language use; most parents reported that they did not have any special language policies in their home because speaking Farsi happened naturally at home. Kamran, who is an engineer and father of two, said, "No we don't have rules. But I think that would be a good idea." Maryam also said, "No. We do not have such rule. Everything happens normally." However, when asked what they do to encourage the continued use of Farsi language, they listed many rules and conditions. So it seems like they were subconsciously subscribing to many rules and policies that they did not know they have. In regards to what kind of language policies parents have at home, Farhad, who is an engineer and father of two, replied:

As far as policy goes we did not have one. We had a certain policy we were only speaking to her in Farsi. No special policy, just normal as you go. I felt that was a

resistance was being built in my daughter...So we get to the point that we say let see where and when she wants to speak Farsi...If she reads one or two stories from “me and my father” book then we would take her to her favorite store or Disney store.

Mansoor, who is a nurse and father of two, also believed that his family does not need any specific rules or policies and that speaking Farsi was “norm” in his family. Still, he laid out some specific rules as he described instances that when his children would speak English, he would refuse to answer back to them until they said it in Farsi, “When they talk to me in English I do not answer them or I translate it in Farsi and ask them do you mean this? And they say yes dad.” Minoo, who is a physician and mother of three, had the same rule in her family:

Sometimes when my daughter speak to us in English, my husband would say do not answer her and try to make her respond in Farsi. When she would speak English like asking ...mom where is “such and such”? My husband would say do not answer her until she speaks Farsi with you.

Although in general parents believed that they do not need to impose any rules and regulations on their children’s language use because, “it comes naturally”, they thought they could influence their children’s language habits and practices by incentivizing and reminding them. Giving incentives and reminders was seen as a form of rule-setting for language use by parents. Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, replied, “Sometimes I have to remind her like: “You got to do this to get that thing or before we go out.” So I have to put incentives you know give incentives for doing her Farsi work.” By

encouraging children to reply in Farsi, indirectly, language management in Iranian-American families was established and language use was decided. When asked if parents insisted on speaking Farsi at home and what kind of incentives they provided for their children when they comply, Mansoor responded:

I have collected lots of things that they like, but I don't show it to them. But their mom gives it to them when they do good things like doing their Farsi homework. One time, they found the treasure box. So I hid them, so they cannot find it anymore. They know if they are doing good things like doing their homework or talking in Farsi, I give them the presents to encourage them to speak Farsi.

Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, also stressed that they do not have any special rules and policies at home, "because he always spoke Farsi at home... it happens naturally...we do not have any special policies." Although Negar did not have any particular language policies in her own family, she had observed other Iranian-American families set rules for their children's Farsi language use and enforced them by establishing consequences for English use. She said:

However, I have seen in my circle of friends that their children who are born here want to speak English all the time...their parents keep reminding them to speak Farsi. When they speak English, some of their parents may even fine them like, "now you have to do this chore for me" or "buy me this or that since you spoke English"...I remember one of my friends was telling her child "Since you spoke English then you cannot have your iPad today"... "You spoke too much English today." She took away what he cared about (his iPad) saying "since I wanted you

to speak Farsi when we are with our friends and you did not do it, therefore, you should not play with your iPad today.”

The most interesting rule described by parents was presented by Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two. She said that in her family they turn language policy into a fun game play where whoever spoke English first this is what happens to them:

So I said: from now on, anyone of us spoke English to the other one, the other person can sprinkle water on her. Therefore, we made it like a game and indeed, for some times we would sprinkle water on each other. Sometimes, I would say some English words when I was speaking to her on purpose, so she could retaliate as well and be even with me.

Another fun rule Salome talked was about Farsi speaking policies in her Farsi class in the library. Parents came up with a warning for speaking English that would not make their children feel bad about being corrected. She described the situation in the Farsi learning group in the library:

One of the moms said I tell my children...you are acting like a “Farangi” (Foreigner) again [when her child used English instead of Farsi]...then we thought what to do to make it feel like a game and not cause a bad feeling for the children while they take the message. So we removed the word “Farangi” and then we thought “Tootfarangi” (in Farsi “Strawberry” translated word for word is “Foreign Berry”) instead. So now anybody who speaks English in our group of 10-12 children in the class, we call him/her “Hey you Tootfarangi” (Hey you strawberry)...so we do not want them to have a negative feeling about speaking

Farsi or English. So at the same time that it is a game, but it also could be a warning for them as well.

### **My Husband Supports Me**

With regard to children's heritage language education development, fathers' conversations with their children at an early age resulted to children's development of language skills. Most parents in this study articulated that they are always on the “same page” and do not disagree with each other on the heritage language maintenance issues. However, findings from the interviews revealed that a gender difference existed between mothers and fathers in regards to division of responsibilities. While parents equally believed in the importance of Farsi language maintenance, their efforts to reach this goal were not equally divided among them. Sometimes, fathers had left the responsibility of day to day maintenance efforts to the mothers. Also a clear division of tasks was observed in most families, especially, in the families that English or Farsi language skills were not equally spread between the parents. Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two, said:

My husband reads English stories to them. I read Farsi stories to them. I am responsible for their Farsi language skills and my husband is responsible for their English language. Since his English language skills are very good. And my children need to learn advanced English vocabularies; I mean vocabularies that go beyond ordinary conversations.

Farhad, who is an engineer and father of two, confirmed that his wife “does more” for their children’s language maintenance. Additionally, he reasoned that since his English is better than his wife, they divide their parenting responsibilities according to their skills:

Now my wife does it more for reading Farsi. Because I have to work with them for more difficult subject matters in her English school in her day school so when it comes to geometry or any kind of that nature I have to help her out, but my wife would do Farsi writing.

Kamran, who is an engineer and father of two, on the other hand, did more to help his children in their Farsi language than his wife did for another reason:

We want them to learn and we speak Farsi to them as much as we can and we are on the same page. She cannot read and write in Farsi so I work with them for reading or writing. I was 10 when I came here. My wife is from Afghanistan she left when she was one year's old and lived in Germany and in America. She never went to Farsi school but I did.

Mansoor, who is a nurse and father of two, also said that his wife mainly takes the responsibility of working with their children upon herself. He explained, "Their mom reads Farsi books to them, but I do not have much time when I come from work. So I don't have time but their mom works with them a lot. When I come home, she is sitting around the table and working with them. She is more disciplined." Aside from this observation, fathers were generally supportive of their wives efforts. For example, although the responsibility of homework and other Farsi assignments was mainly by mothers, a few mothers said that many times their husbands drove their children to Farsi school on Saturdays. This was because some mothers had little children at home and they could not take them to school, or because the school was far way and fathers felt more comfortable driving long distances. One mother even said that she always worked on

Saturdays so her husband would take the children to school. Mohan, who is a nurse and mother of two, was appreciative of her husband's sacrifices to give up his Saturdays for their children. She said, "His friends would tell him you are working 5 days a week and spend all your free time on weekends on your children...when do you have time for yourself? He is really an ideal father." From all the parents I interviewed, Maryam, who is a housewife and mother of one, was the only one that said that her husband disagrees with her and does not want their daughter go to Farsi school. He did not think that learning Farsi was important for her and said "since she does not have plans to return to Iran she should not learn Farsi." Maryam said that his position on this subject makes it very hard for her to help her daughter with Farsi since she does not receive any support from him. It seemed; however, that her husband's opposition to Farsi learning might be more as a result of his negative view about the political-Islamic environment of this particular Farsi school, than the Farsi language learning itself:

My husband does not want her to learn Farsi nor does he ever want to go back to Iran...Although he might be happy now that she can read Farsi books now, but he also says "it is not necessary to learn Farsi." He believes that this will put pressure on the child. He does not participate in any of the ceremonies and programs here. This makes it very hard for me. Because I have to do all the work related to Farsi school...My husband never helps her with the home work because he does not agree with her coming here, and anything I did in these two years I did it by myself. I ask him: why? My husband does not agree with the environment in this

school. He is opposed to the environment (Islamic) of this school. However, he is very happy that he can read Farsi now.

### **Talking about Iranian Culture**

For most Iranian-American parents, however, Farsi is not only a means of communication, but also a window for their children to become aware of their cultural values and practices of their heritage background. The results of this study revealed that parents realized that language, culture, and tradition are the foundation of a strong family and that in order to preserve their heritage language, culture, and identity; they must maintain their heritage language at home. Iranian-American parents not only talked to their children about various Persian ceremonies, but also took their children to the public ceremonies celebrating Persian New Year (Nowruz, see figure 13) or other occasions. Mahnaz, who is a housewife and mother of one, helped his son to connect with his cultural heritage by engaging him in community organized Persian cultural heritage events. She said, “Taking him to some cultural gatherings helps with culture but not with language.” She gave some specific examples of these celebrations:

Yes we talk to them about *Yalda*, *Nowruz*, *Mehregan*, *Sizdeh bedar* and other holidays, mostly about Nowruz. We make the *Haft Seen* and we teach them what everything on haft seen table means and we help them decorate it. They get money for *Eydi* [money as gift for Nowruz given to the children] every year.

It is necessary to give a short description of each of these Persian ceremonies to help readers understand the terminology, phrases, and context in which Iranian-American parents talked about them.



1- Nowruz (New Day) is the name of the Iranian New Year. It has been celebrated for over 3,000 years in the Balkans, the Black Sea Basin, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Western Asia. Nowruz is the day of the vernal equinox, and marks the beginning of spring in the Northern Hemisphere. It usually occurs on March 21.



*Figure 12.* Painting of Shah Abbas II and the courtiers celebrating Nowruz

2- Haft Seen (Persian: هفت سین – Haft Sin); (Seven S's) is the traditional table setting of Nowruz in Iran as seen in figure 12. Typically, before the arrival of Nowruz, family members gather around a table, with the Haft Seen set on it, and await the exact moment of the March equinox to celebrate the New Year. At that time, the New Year gifts are exchanged. The setting includes seven items starting with the letter S or seen (س) in the Persian alphabet. The items include: 1- Greenery (سبزه – sabze): Wheat, barley or lentil

sprouts grown in a dish,. 2- Samanu (سمنو – samanū): A sweet pudding made from germinated wheat, 3- The dried fruit of the oleaster tree (سنجد – senjed), 4- Garlic (سیر – sir), 5- Apples (سیب – sib), 6- Sumac berries (سماق – somāq), and 7-Vinegar (سرکه – serke).



*Figure 13.* Table set with Haft-Seen items at a 2008 White House ceremony for Nowruz

3- Festival of Charshanbe Suri: Charshanbe Suri (Persian: چارشنبه سوری) is an introduction to the New Year (figure 13). In Iran, it is celebrated on the eve of the last Wednesday before Nowruz. It is usually celebrated in the evening, and is observed by people making bonfires and jumping over them, as well as setting off fireworks and sparklers.



*Figure 14.* Charshanbe Suri in New York City, March 2016

4- Yaldā Night: Shab-e Yalda ("Yalda night" Persian: شب یلدا) is a festival celebrated on the longest and darkest night of the year that is, in the night of the Northern Hemisphere's winter solstice. By calendar, this corresponds to the night of December 20/21. The longest and darkest night of the year is a time when friends and family gather together to eat, drink and read poetry (especially Hafez) until well after midnight. Fruits and nuts are eaten and pomegranates and watermelons are particularly significant (figure 14). The red color in these fruits symbolizes the crimson hues of dawn and glow of life. The poems of Divan-e Hafez, which can be found in the bookcases of most Iranian families, are intermingled with peoples' life and are read or recited during various occasions like this festival and at Nowruz.



*Figure 15. Yalda table setting with dried and fresh fruit and nuts*

5- Sizdeh Bedar: (Persian: سیزدهبدر – Sizdebedar) is an Iranian festival held annually on the thirteenth day of Farvardin (the first month of the Iranian calendar), during which people spend time picnicking outdoors (Figure 15). It is an official holiday in Iran, known as the Nature Day (روز طبیعت – Ruz e Tabiat). Lie of the Thirteen (دروغ سیزده – Doruq e Sizda') is the Iranian version of the prank-playing April Fools' Day which is observed on the first or second day of April in Iran, on the day of Sizdah Be-dar. A ritual performed at the end of the picnic is to throw away the greenery (سبزه – Sabze) collected for Haft-Seen, the customary setting of Nowruz in Iran. Touching someone else's greenery on this day or bringing it back home is considered a bad luck. It is also customary for young single people, especially young girls, to tie the leaves of the greenery before discarding it, expressing a wish to find a partner.





*Figure 16. Persians (Iranians) in Holland Celebrating Sizdeh-Bedar*

Mansoor, who is a nurse and father of two, talked about celebrating “Sizdebedar” with his family by going to picnic outdoors: “Even for Sizdebedar we and several other families rented several cabins in the Shenandoah and spend time with each other in the nature,. There were a lot of kids there and they spent three nights over there.” Frough, who is a housewife and mother of two, also talked about Charshanbe Suri celebration with her children which consisted of lighting fire outdoor and jumping over it:

Sometimes for “Charshanbe Suri” we talk to the kids...and would say...“Today is the last Wednesday of the year. Iranians always celebrate this day. We celebrated this day even when we were in Iran. We would celebrate by jumping over the fire and would recite this chant: I give you (the fire) my yellowness (sign of sickness) in exchange for your redness (sign of health). At first this was strange for them, but after we repeated this (jumping over the fire and chanting the song); it became

normal for them and they learned that Iranians have this tradition of jumping over the fire on the last Wednesday of the year. This stuck in their mind...and since we repeated it every year, it stayed in their mind and I think they will never forget it.

Maryam, who is a housewife and mother of one, went a step further and not only taught her daughter about these Persian celebrations, but also arranged a show and tell table in her daughter's public school where she and her daughter setup the Haft Seen table and described the setting and it's meanings to the children at public school.

We used posters about Nowruz, Persian potteries, Samovar [Russian tea maker], Varsho dishes, Silver dishes from Isfahan, and Khatam products from Isfahan. We took three types of Iranian traditional dishes such as Osh, Dolma, and Halva.

People liked it a lot. Everybody liked the dishes and artifacts and posters and all the presentation. We even had a picture of president Obama with Haft Seen tradition setting in white house. My daughter and I wore traditional clothes.

Iranian-American parents were not discriminatory in their choice of holiday celebrations. They celebrated all the American holidays as well. All parents said that they also celebrate Christmas and even set the tree and decorate it and exchange gifts. They also celebrate American New Year. They said they "will celebrate anything that feels good and makes us happy." Afrooz, who is a jeweler and mother of one said:

We also celebrate some of the Christmas like we set the Christmas tree and decorate it with kids. We put socks for him. We get gifts for him and put in the sock and tell him that Papa Noel (Santa Clause name in Iran) brought you this. So

we celebrate both but he knows that Eyd is our celebration. He should know his identity and his originality.

Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, wanted her son's heritage identity be recognized at his public school; so she wrote to the teacher:

So I wrote his teacher and explained that tomorrow is our New Year celebration and I sent pictures from "*Haft Seen*" to explain to her about our ceremony. I asked the teacher to acknowledge that tomorrow is my son's New Year celebration... You won't believe me his teacher thanked me a lot and was happy that I informed him about this. My son did not know and thought that his teacher did it by himself. He was telling me: "Mom my teacher knows about our Eyd and knows what Haft Seen is." I think this was biggest gift for him that his teacher knows about this. So if they have such schools it is very good.

### **Visiting Iran**

Regular travel to Iran and keeping family ties with relatives and extended family were among the other mechanisms parents used to preserve the Farsi language. Iranian-American parents encouraged their children to use heritage language at conversational level as much as possible. Therefore, maintaining frequent contact with family members from the country of origin or visiting the heritage country was viewed as a helpful means in maintaining the heritage language. Annual or biannual visits to Iran were a common practice. Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two, said, "I try to take my children to Iran at least every two years so they can meet our family and reinforce their Farsi language." These visits allowed children to keep a close contact with their homeland and

relatives back home. Children enjoyed visiting their aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. Moreover, such close mutual relationships provided them an excellent opportunity to practice their heritage language. Mansoor, who is a nurse and father of two, explained this:

Some people send their kids to Iran in the summer to stay with grandparents and learn Farsi very well there. Some people send their kids for 2 to 3 months in the summer and by the time their kids come back they speak Farsi very very well.... When the kids come back from Iran, they say we want to go back to Iran... They like it there very much. Because the family environment is very warm and close there. Here [U.S.], no one comes to your house on regular basis. But over there in Iran you see that as you are sitting at home uncles and aunts come to visit you unannounced. There are always family members around. They just ring the bell and come in. they don't call one week before and make arrangements to come and visit. They just show up. Kids like that.

Minoo, who is a physician and mother of three, and had recently, came back from visiting Iran talked about the social relationship that her children build in Iran. She drew attention to the stark difference between the social culture in Iran and in the U.S. she said:

And when they come back they like to go back and repeat this pleasant experience. My sister in-law and her family took the kids to the mountains in Iran. They went up the mountain and came back and saw so many people on the way dancing and singing in the mountain and interact with each other. People are happy that they are away from the city and they express themselves freely in the mountains. This



culture...Here, (in the U.S.) people do not talk with each other on the street or even neighbors do not talk to neighbors. But over there, people talk to you even if they do not know you and they are nice and social...Kids were saying “how come people here [Iran] are this way and that way?” and they were surprised. They liked it and said people are so close to each other here.

#### **Theme Four: Sometimes it is Hard**

This theme reveals challenges parents face in their efforts to maintain the Farsi heritage language. Many may blame immigrant families for not actively maintaining their own language. However, without formal and direct instruction, the development of verbal and literacy skills in the heritage language would be minimal at best. Research shows that immigrant families face many challenges in maintaining their heritage language (Zhang & Slaughter- Defoe, 2009). Parents often encountered problems and challenges when assisting their children in maintaining the Farsi heritage language. Although ethnic families put forth the best efforts to maintain their language, with the chaotic life of the twenty first century, and the unique cultural, social, political, economic, linguistic, and educational challenges immigrants face, it is unfair to put too much blame on the parents. Despite the fact that parents try very hard to keep their cultural values and the amount of time and efforts they spend, they face enormous challenges, which they feel are beyond their control. This study attempted to find out about the challenges and difficulties that Iranian-Americans face in maintaining Farsi language and Iranian culture by asking the following question:

Based on the interviews from the respondents, I observed that most of these challenges are brought about by several factors that have affected the maintenance of children's heritage language. Enormous amount of rich data resulted from this inquiry; therefore, the data in this theme was further into five sub-themes: 1) characteristics, 2) language loss, 3) school challenges, and 4) resources.

### **Children Get Frustrated**

**Individual differences.** Some parents struggled to motivate their children to regularly attend Farsi heritage language school or encourage them to complete their assignments. A couple of parents, particularly the ones that had more than one child, attributed this challenge to different characteristics that each child had. For some of these parents the difference in attitudes in their children towards heritage language was frustrating. Sometimes they had to push one child to get ready and go to heritage school, while the other child was more than happy and eager to go. Minoo, who is a physician and mother of three, illustrates this stark difference in her remarks:

My older daughter's Farsi is very advanced to the point that when she went to public school, her teacher's thought that she was born in Iran because her Farsi was so good. However, this was not the case with my younger daughter or my youngest son. My youngest one never had a problem because he saw that my daughters speak Farsi. My older daughter was not like this but my younger daughter would complain about going to Farsi school.

Salome, who is a housewife and had two children, saw the difference in attitude towards learning the Farsi language in her daughters and was puzzled:

At first I was worried that she might not want or can learn the language. But then I saw that my older daughter had interest in learning the language. Although my older daughter takes her learning seriously since she is interested in learning. She would look ahead in her Farsi book and was interested to know what the next lesson was and would find new words on her own...My younger girl was not interested and would complain when we wanted to go to school on Saturday mornings. She wanted to sleep more or watch TV or play with her friends in the neighborhood...It was tug of war all the time.

Other times the difference between the children was due to their different abilities to learn the heritage language due to age or aptitude differences. Parents reported that sometimes the child that has less ability compares him/herself with his/her brother and sister and becomes disappointed and frustrated. Frough, who is a housewife and mother of two, reported:

I think for my younger daughter it might be harder since she has to learn both languages letter sounds and new word making in English and Farsi at the same time. It might be harder for her and she may have to try harder to learn both at the same time. So she might have to try harder to compete with her older sister.

Likewise, Kamran, who is an engineer and father of two, stated, "My daughter enjoys it. My son gets frustrated by it sometimes. He does not understand as much." Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two, offered this explanation for these differences:

It also matters in what age group they are. For example, individual differences are also important in their interest to speak Farsi or not or socialize or not. It could also be because they might be shy.

**Resistance to school.** Obviously, the greater burden of language maintenance is on parents. As mentioned before, one of the challenges some parents in this study faced in their heritage language maintenance efforts was children's lack of willingness to attend heritage school. Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, talked about her struggles to convince her daughter to attend Farsi school, "Yes. She does. She complains. She says this is the last time that I go to Farsi school." Iranian-American parents felt as if they were swimming against the current, as in some situations, they had to force their children to attend heritage school or speak Farsi when they were reluctant to do so. Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two, had to push her daughter to go to the Farsi library group, since she was in charge of the group and had to go herself, therefore, she could not leave her daughter at home:

Sometimes I would get tired of her complaining and would say, ok do not go to school...Sometimes she does not feel like going to school or she is tired, but I have to take her when we go to library group and cannot leave her at home.

At times, parents felt that there was a tug-of-war between them as they were trying their best to encourage their children to resist the urge to give up. Farhad, who is an engineer and father of two, remembered this struggle between him and his younger daughter and how sometimes, to win control of the situation, they had to push her against her will:

I felt that was a resistance was being built in my daughter. We were trying to tell her to do this (speak Farsi) and she was like constantly, I don't want to do that, I don't want to do that.

Children complained about Farsi school for two main reasons. The common concern among children was that they had to give up their Saturday in order to attend the school. Mahnaz, who is a house wife and mother of one, recalled "So, he not only was losing his day off on Saturdays, but also, he had to wake up early to go to school on Saturday. He did not like that." Mohan, who is a nurse and mother of two, had the same problem. Her two daughters were twin and they preferred to stay home and play with each other than going to school on the day off:

So they were feeling that instead of going to school, they could be at home and play with each other. So school was not as interesting for them, if they could play with each other at home. While other kids might be more interested to go, if they want to find friends at Farsi school, they could go and see them every Saturday.

Minoo, who is a physician and mother of three, shared the same challenge:

My older daughter was not like this but my younger daughter would complain about going to Farsi school. There were a lot of problems. She would say: "I am losing my day off"... "I now only have one day off from school."

Children's other complain was about the overwhelming amount of homework they had to complete both in the Farsi and regular school. Mohan who is a nurse and mother of two, stated, "My older daughter never had to go to a weekend school before the Farsi school. At first she liked the school a lot but after the school became regular and they

started giving them homework, sometimes she would complain.” Afrooz, who is a jeweler and mother of one, said that his son too, was struggling to complete his overwhelming assignments from both schools, “but also he had to spend an hour each day at home to complete his Farsi home work. So this was an extra work that he had to complete so this was the second problem we had.” Mohan, who is a nurse and mother of two, recalled that battle:

When they started going to 7<sup>th</sup> grade and they had their homework from both schools; they were complaining that all of their peers have two days off and they have to go to Farsi school till 3:00 pm, and only have Sundays off. So, we always had constant battle with them and they even said that they do not want to go to eight grade Farsi school next year.

### **Farsi School has its Own Problems**

Heritage language schools are an important vehicle for preserving and passing on linguistic and cultural legacies of ethnic communities. These schools serve as an important community resource to the parents who might not have adequate knowledge or resources to homeschool their children in heritage language. Therefore, they send their children to Farsi schools in hopes that such schools could do what they could not do at home. Farsi heritage schools provide settings where children can learn Farsi in a more serious environment. Iranian-American parents who had tried homeschooling said that Saturday schools provided a more organized manner of teaching. However, the Farsi heritage schools present their own set of unique challenges for parents. In this section, I intend to offer an overview of the parents’ view on the role of heritage language schools, and more

specifically, Farsi schools played in teaching and preserving Farsi heritage language. This section of the interview revealed a lot of shortcomings and weaknesses that were related to heritage schools. Parents' interview revealed a lot of shortcomings and weaknesses that were related to heritage schools including outdated teaching methods, shortage of Farsi books and materials, difficulty balancing responsibilities at home, extra time and energy needed to complete the Farsi homework, difficulty learning Farsi, short school day, and teacher problems among other things. The school challenges sub-theme was further divided into two categories: 1) academic challenges and 2) balancing responsibilities.

**Academic challenges.** Academic challenges involved several topics that were related to the shortcomings of heritage school and the problems and challenges that parents face in their effort to teach Farsi to their children. These included difficulty learning Farsi, complicated cursive handwriting, short school day, instructional books, teaching methods, and teacher characteristics.

***Difficulty learning Farsi.*** Although parents did not comment on any major difficulties in the children's learning process, many often mentioned their child's lack of Farsi vocabulary (word bank) which made it difficult for children to comprehend read materials. Grammar, sentence order, and Farsi alphabet were among other challenges mentioned by parents. For example, Farhad, who is an engineer and father of two, talked about how Farsi grammar and sentence order which is totally different than English made it difficult and confusing for her daughter to write correct sentences in Farsi:

Another thing is that in Farsi we say the order of the sentences differently. Like we might say "I to the house went." But in English we bring the subject then the verb.

“I went to the house.” So sometimes she makes mistake in making her sentences. Like she would write if she was writing in English. So order of the sentences is still hard and like English she still brings the verb at the beginning.

Mansoor, who is a nurse and father of two, shared his troubles with translating words from Farsi to English and vice versa because her daughter’s did not have adequate vocabulary knowledge in Farsi:

And sometimes I forget some meanings of words...and I don’t know. She reads it in her book and she asks me what this is? and I cannot translate it ...you know... some words in Farsi cannot easily be translated to English...because they do not know that many words in Farsi I have to translate the words in English.

Written (formal) Farsi is the language used in books, newspapers, TV news broadcasts, poems, formal speeches, etc. It is the standard form of the language. Colloquial (spoken) Farsi is used in everyday conversations. Sometimes Farsi heritage language learners become confused with these two forms of language and since children hear the informal or the conversational form at home every day, when it comes to writing, they confuse the two forms and use the informal Farsi in their writing instead of the formal one. Afrooz, who is a jeweler and mother of one, believed that teaching proverbs and using informal use of Farsi in writing instead of the formal was a challenge for her son:

Idioms and proverbs are hard for him. Also, when he wants to write, he uses informal Farsi words that we use in our conversations in his writing. Like, he would write “Mikham” میخوام instead of “Mikhaham” میخواهم in his writing. Then, I



explain to him that in writing we do not use the same words that we use in talking.

We write different words when we write.

Minoo, who is a physician and mother of three, had the same problem:

The grammar is the hardest...sometimes they ask me questions about the grammar...I tell them they just have to memorize that. Sometimes in English you say “I am going” right? They tell me “I going am” something like that. I say it’s not correct...I just tell them “you have to just memorize that.”

Farsi alphabet is another source of confusion for children. In Farsi language there are several forms of one letter. So several letters have one sound. Children usually get confused over the different versions of “S”s (س- ص- ث), “T”s (ط - ت), “Z”s (ذ - ز), and other Farsi letters that sound the same but are written differently. Still, parents did not seem to view these as serious learning obstacles. They believed that practice makes perfect, and that if children reviewed and memorized their various use, over time they would learn them. Frough, who is a housewife and mother of two, explained this:

Some of the Farsi letters sound the same. For example, we have one sound for (S) but there are several letters for that sound. They sound exactly the same but they are written differently and this makes it very difficult for them. For example, she sees a word that has the sound (S) but is written in a different form (س- ص- ث). For example (سیب - Seeb - apple) and (سریا Soraya – a girl name) they both start with the sound “S” but one is written by (س) and another one is written by (ث) and it is hard for them (the children) to decide which word is written by (س) and which one by (ث), and it causes difficulty in their learning.

Minoo, who is a physician and mother of three, had a disagreement with her children's teacher who seemed to be strict in her teaching philosophy and would not realize the special needs of heritage language learners. She had a detailed explanation for this for her daughter's teacher who was harsh on correcting their spelling mistakes with a red pen:

I had to remind her teacher that we have too many (S's) and (Z's) in Farsi. This makes the children confused...I told her that these are Arabic words that are inserted in Farsi...Arabic letters like S (ص) and Z (ض) (She did not know it)... I told her that in Farsi we did not have this many Ss' and Zs...I told her this makes it hard for the children in second grade to learn...So because Arabic language has been inserted in Farsi language, we have too many Ss and Zs now. Even our writing system is Arabic. It is not Farsi...I learned it when I visited a museum...I knew that Farsi writing was different before, but I saw the Farsi writing in the museum...have you seen Indian writing? It looked like that...I am not saying it is that (Indian writing), but looked like it.

She had a detailed explanation for her belief:

Arabs have many different letters because they pronounce one sound from many different part of their mouth like the back of their throat. Like, when they say (AAAli) stressed from back of the throat. We say (Ali)...in a different way. So, the Arabic speaking children do not get confused when spelling Arabic words because they know their different sounds that are represented by multiple forms of the same alphabet letter (Z or S or G or..). But for Iranian children who are Farsi speaking,

the fact that many of the alphabet letters have the same sounds is confusing, I mean, they sound the same but are written in different ways...unless they repeat it so many times and learn it over time.

Minoo, who is a physician and mother of three, talked about the difficulty of Farsi handwriting, “In second grade, they start the cursive writing. So I feel like the curriculum needs to be modified to fit the needs of people who are outside of Iran and perhaps their level of understanding the language is low.”

**Short school day.** Many heritage language programs identify limited instructional time as a major challenge. While some community based schools operate on an after school schedule during weekdays, I noticed that most Iranian heritage schools in Washington DC metropolitan area are open only on weekends for two to four hours. Some schools were committed to finish one grade in each year comparable to Iran’s education system. Some of the schools even provided degrees to students for each grade completed which is accepted in Iran’s education system.

Iranian-American parents believed that short school day that results in condense curriculum, makes it hard for their children to learn what Iranian children learn through school year. Parents thought that once a week Farsi does not provide enough time for children to learn the important concepts or complete their assignments. Kamran, who is an engineer and father of two, complained that although once a week Saturday Farsi schools are short; however, they still command lots of homework which makes it hard for his children to complete their assignments:

The Farsi school is once a week for two hours. So, during these two hours they give a lot of homework's which goes all the way to next week...therefore it is very condense and they do not have enough time to learn the concepts. Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two, also admitted that limited time to complete assignments are among consequences of short school day, "In Iran students have a lot of time to study while they are learning it throughout the school day, while my son has limited time to learn the same subject."

**Books.** Another challenge in learning and teaching Farsi mentioned by parents for Farsi heritage instruction is lack of suitable textbooks and instructional materials. The lack of adequate textbooks and instructional materials based on recent methods of foreign language teaching has always been an issue for teaching Farsi as a foreign language. However, materials for heritage students are even less available (Sedighi, 2010). As a result, many teachers had to settle down with the use of old Iranian textbooks published before Iranian Islamic Revolution (1978-1979) and supplement their instruction with new textbooks when the content was deemed to be free from any controversy. In terms of the materials used at Persian heritage schools, Modarresi (2001) mentions three sources:

a) the textbooks published in Iran after the 1979 revolution; b) the textbooks published and used in Iran before the revolution; and c) materials prepared or selected by Persian language instructors in the U.S. (2001, p.107).

Some heritage schools in my study use the textbooks published in Iran after the 1979 revolution that are taught to grade schools in Iran due to lack of appropriate material. Although these textbooks may fulfill some instructional needs; however, since heritage

students are clearly different from native Farsi learners of the language in Iran, such textbooks cannot possibly provide best results and often require extra effort by the teachers and parents to modify the content for the children in the U.S. According to Atoofi (2011), the school textbooks in post-revolutionary Iran are filled with ideologies of the Islamic government (see figure 17) in Iran.



*Figure 17.* A family dinner table in first grade Farsi books (pre-Islamic revolution at left, and the post Islamic revolution at right).

Some of the parents believed that the Iranian government attempts to indoctrinate Iranian children into its ideologies through school textbooks. Mahnaz, who is a house wife and mother of one, said:

So I feel like the curriculum needs to be modified to fit the needs of people who are outside of Iran. So they can understand the language. Farsi language when it is written it is very hard. These books are good for Iran...I like the older books

better.

Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, claimed that Farsi books have changed which makes it harder for her to help her child since she is not familiar with the content:

Also it has been many years that we learned this subject ourselves. My daughter's school uses the same book for her that my son used 20 years ago. And it has been a while that I studies the book and is unfamiliar for me. This book has changed a lot. All of the writing and prints are cursive and that makes it hard or my child to read it. Every sentence that my child reads I have to help her with. I also have to translate the sentences for her word by word and sometimes some funny things also happen when I do this because these kids know more English than Farsi.

Frough, who is a housewife and mother of two, also talked about handwriting difficulties:

These vocabularies are so difficult in Nastaliq handwriting...[نستعلیق, Formal and artistic cursive hand writing and one of the main calligraphic hand writing used in writing the Persian script, as seen in the example in figure 18] it is very very difficult sometimes they have to look twice in the new books that they are using.

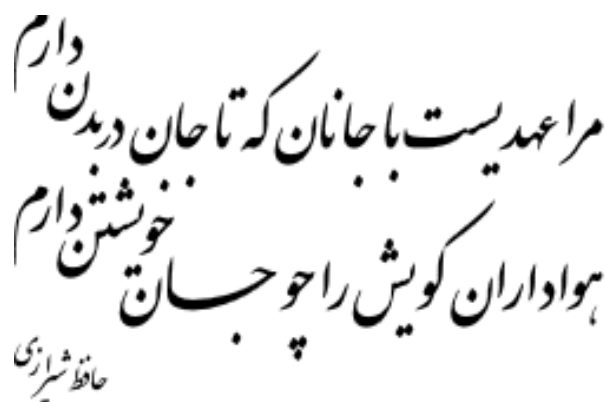


Figure 18. Nastaliq hand writing from Iran

Maryam, who is a housewife and mother of one, also had concern with new text format that was in cursive handwriting style:

In the new books they use the writing is now cursive. And sometimes she has problem reading some letters such as Mim (M) or Heh (H) she gets in difficulties but she asks me and I help her...it is very hard for me to understand that why books have changed so much? The handwriting has changed the print has changed. These books come from Iran so all these changes are made there. They want to force children to learn cursive since typing is always in standard letters. But this makes it harder for children since they start with standard letters and in second grade they switch to cursive reading and writing. That is why people's handwriting in Iran did not have a rule and everybody wrote cursive the way they wanted by just giving curves to their letters.

Farhad, who is an engineer and father of two, also criticized the book that school used in the Farsi school curriculum:

I mentioned in one or two occasion the book that they chose for my child was horrible it was a ridiculous book attempt of the writer who wanted to rhyme without the proficiency in writing poems. So basically that person was trying to write poetry for children using words that were extremely difficult to understand for children. I told the teachers did you even look at these books did you see what is this book before you assigning it to the child?

***Teacher problems.*** Iranian-American parents also voiced a few criticisms about teachers in Farsi schools, which reflected other difficulties and challenges they face in their Farsi maintenance efforts. On one hand, the parents complained about the lack of creative teaching on the other hand, they believed that many of these teachers are not regular school teachers and lack professional training in teaching languages. Therefore, they are not able to prepare suitable materials for the Iranian-American children. Most often, their teachers and administrators were volunteers and not trained language teachers. Parents also were concerned about teacher mobility and the fact that teachers frequently traveled to Iran and as a result, their children's education becomes interrupted. Others believed teachers fail to motivate children to learn; their teaching methods are outdated; and some were also worried that teachers were too strict in their assessment practices.

Frough, who is a housewife and mother of two, voiced her concern that teacher mobility in Farsi school interrupted her child's alphabet learning and made it hard for her child to have continuity in her Farsi learning:

Another point is that although the teachers are very good here, but the problem is that many of the teachers travel back to Iran frequently and the school faces with



shortage of teachers. For example, my younger daughter's teacher had to go back to Iran since her mother was sick, so my daughter could not learn her alphabet completely; I, myself had to teach her. I had to follow my older daughter's teaching methods and finish teaching her the alphabet by myself. The new teacher is teaching in much lower level that my daughter was before her teacher moved and that caused her to be in a lower level.

Mahnaz, who is a house wife and mother of one, had the same problem with teacher mobility and reported that although her son now has a new teacher, her teaching methods are different than the previous teacher and her son becomes confuse as a result of it:

Now the other teacher that has replaced her does not teach with the same methods. Also, I have heard in many instances from others, that teachers do not work well with students and do not make the children interested in learning. They are not enthusiastic and the students lose interest in learning Farsi.

Kamran, who is an engineer and father of two, on the other hand, believed that teachers in his son's school are kind and have well intentions; however, he also believed that they lack basic teacher training and teaching skills necessary to teach a foreign or a heritage language”

I think the teachers were nice and they had a genuine interest in Farsi teaching to the kids. However, the teachers did not have the training like the public schools to be a teacher. I mean, I do not know that, but, my impression was that they were Iranians that live in America that wanted to teach Farsi to the kids... I don't think

they had training in teaching or formal training in education or a bachelor or a master degree. For example, sometimes kids if they stray away from the curriculum, the teachers in public school are trained how to get the kids back on task...I think in Farsi school that was lacking and they do not have a formal education thing.

Minoo, who is a physician and mother of three, was not happy with her children's Farsi school teacher and believed that she was old school and corrected and assessed children harshly, which in return caused her child to be disappointed and discouraged with her Farsi school. She had a meeting with the teacher and communicated her concerns:

You know...She was very hard in correcting their spelling and would red mark their every mistake. I told her "Our goal is to teach our kids Farsi reading and writing. You (the teacher) shouldn't be thinking that they are here to learn all of the Farsi language phonemical details as if they are in college." I told her: "your job is to encourage the children to learn Farsi. If you make it so hard on them... they do not need to get a degree in Farsi literature to hang it on the wall...I criticized her and told her that she should not give them grades at all...I told her when you give children extra work it seems like you are punishing them for learning Farsi not encouraging them.

***Teaching methods.*** Iranian-American parents generally believed that Farsi schools follow a teacher-centered education method. In a teacher centered method the teacher talks, while the students exclusively listen during activities, students work alone, and collaboration is discouraged. Students in this method are viewed as empty containers and

their primary role is to passively receive information (via lectures and direct instruction). In this model, teaching and assessment are viewed as end goal and students' learning is measured through objectively scored tests and assessments. Iranian-American parents in this study thought that teachers lecture the students all the time, put too much emphasis on assessment, and fail to encourage children to actively engage in learning activities. In Farsi schools teachers usually expected too much from children and stressed memorization as a method of learning. Afrooz, who is a jeweler and mother of one, believed that her son had to work hard on spelling test, while in English public schools, "children do not have to be tested all the time, especially in elementary grades." Maryam, who is a housewife and mother of one, also attributed this discrepancy to the difference between Iranian teaching system in Iran and the public teaching system in the U.S. Kamran, who is an engineer and father of two, echoed this same idea:

His first teacher was a really good teacher. But she expected too much from the children. In English (public) school, they are not very strict about completing such and such homework at home...whatever they completed at school is enough.

When they come home they play more and have fun. But in Farsi school, educational system is sheet work base. Solving too many problems and doing too many home works. So, the difference in the educational system is very obvious. In our system, studying is stressed and lots of homework is stressed.

Maryam, who is a housewife and mother of one, believed that this method of teacher centered instruction is passed down from generation to generation in Iranian education system and we follow it unconsciously:

In Iranian educational system teachers push the students to the limits by giving a lot of home works and paper works...Even as children ourselves, we remember that our parents pushed us to excel in our school. So, we learned that as parents we push our children to do their homework and we need to check them all the time.

Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, compared the U.S. teachers with Iranian teachers and stressed their lack of knowledge about modern teaching methods:

Education system in the U.S. is very different. They do not push children very much. What children learn and practice at home is enough for them. I feel like... one time I went to my sons' school and asked the teacher what references you recommend that I use, so my child can learn the subject better. She was shocked and said "what references? Only school exercises are enough.

Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, believed that this difference in educational system is due to cultural differences and the way we view role of teachers and students in the learning process. She stressed that in Farsi school teachers are "strict" as oppose to U.S. schools where teachers are more "liberal." She claimed this discrepancy is confusing to her son:

This different in teaching style is confusing for my son. He was asking me "why in Farsi school they teach us with this manner and in my regular school another way?" Like teachers say if you like you can do this or that...their system is very relaxed but ours is very strict.

**Balancing responsibilities.** Parents play a significant role in facilitating children's

heritage language maintenance and development in the home setting by employing a variety of strategies and resources. Farsi language schools are not solely responsible for the maintenance of the Farsi language. Parents also need to do their part and support schools by following up on children's progress, making sure they complete their home works, and bring them to school regularly on Saturdays. However, Iranian-American parents confronted with the amount of day to day responsibilities in their lives, felt overwhelmed with the burden of extra work Farsi school expected from them. Parents reported that because children attended formal school on weekdays and Farsi school on Saturdays, this busy schedule left them little or no time to participate in any other extracurricular, sport, or leisure activities. They often had to modify or prioritize these activities as a result of time constraints. This generated some negative emotional responses in their children. In the following, I present parents' description of their busy schedule, their overwhelming responsibilities, and their concern about time. I divided the data pertaining to this category into three sub-categories that covered topics such as: 1) time, 2) distance, and 3) homework.

***Time.*** Parents face various challenges in their efforts to support their children's language growth. Juggling their busy work schedules while also trying to accommodate one or more children's after-school and weekend schedules may leave very little time to facilitate their children's participation in heritage language classes. Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, said that they had to sacrifice some quality family times since they could not go anywhere on Friday nights because her children always had Farsi homework. Afrooz, who is a jeweler and mother of one, also had to give up her family

Saturdays and miss on social events such as parties or picnics on their day off. She said that instead, she had to take her children to school and “sacrifice” her time and energy. When asked what is the hardest thing she had to face in teaching Farsi to her children, Mohan, who is a nurse and mother of two, responded, “The time. The time is the hardest thing. We come home and we have dinner. Then we have to do homework with them and by the time we are done, they have to go to bed.” Kamran, who is an engineer and father of two, had the same complain and believed one of the main reasons his children are not exposed to Farsi is lack of time:

The most difficult thing is time. We work till five and we get home by 6 or 6:30 and we go to bed by 8:30. So we are only there 3 hours of a day with them. They are at school most of the time speaking English. The most time they can get speaking Farsi is like an hour a day. Time is the most difficulty.

Frough, who is a housewife and mother of two, talked about extra responsibilities she has at home in addition to helping her children with their Farsi homework, “So, I was busy too, and had work to do, cook food, clean the house and my children wanted me to sit by their sides and explain the Farsi homework for them.”

***Distance.*** A couple of parents in my study complained about the long distance they had to travel to get to Farsi school, particularly the ones that chose to send their children to Islamic school in Maryland and had to drive two hours across state lines. Frough, who is a housewife and mother of two, said that it was very hard on her, since she would leave home at 9:00 am and would stay in school till 4:00 pm and get home at 6:00 pm. Minoo, who is a physician and mother of three, had the same difficulty:

As for Farsi school the problem that we had was that the Farsi school was too far from us. The biggest problem was the distance. Anyhow the traveling time and distance would really make them tired...They would go to school at 9 in the morning and come back home at 3:30 in the afternoon. .. So the children would get tired.

Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, said:

Another difficulty is that it is hard for me to drive him every Saturday to Maryland. As I told you before the long distance is very important. It takes about an hour or so to get there, and also to come back, and by the time we come back we have lost our Saturday.

***Homework.*** The relationship between home and school is important. If parents want their children to achieve academic success, they must become involved in the educational process. Parents often become involved in their children's education through homework. The most critical question about homework is: How much homework should students do? Almost all parents in this study were challenged by the amount of homework their children had to complete from Farsi school. They said that the Farsi school teachers gave too much homework that had to be finished during the week. Children therefore, had a hard time completing two sets of home works every night. This often caused a lot of stress and anxiety among children.

Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, reported that she did not have enough time to help her son with homework because, as a college student herself, she had

to study for her own tests. Other parents said that their children were less sure about their own ability to complete their homework independently and wanted the parents to sit by them even though they could complete their homework by themselves. Mansoor, who is a nurse and father of two, talked about her daughter's anxiety regarding completing her homework, "She struggles sometimes. She has Thursday and Friday nightmares because she constantly has to sit and do all the homework for Saturday morning. But when it's getting done it's getting done. I am not really worried about it." According to the parents, tired children coming from public school were reluctant to complete their homework and would postpone it and do it at the last possible night. Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, recalled one time that her son was so upset because he had not finished his Farsi homework:

Many times my son did not finish his Farsi homework earlier and he had to do it the night before school while he also had English homework as well. I remember one time he had so much homework to do on Friday for Saturday that he was crying fearing he might not finish it. Since he is the kind of child that always finishes his homework he was saying: mom I do not want to go to Farsi school tomorrow. I have not finished my Farsi homework yet. Then he finished the homework anyway but under a lot of stress and pressure.

Farzaneh had the same experience:

I still have to force them to complete their Farsi homework. They complete their Farsi homework at the last minute on Friday, while they can finish it during the



week. Sometimes they even complete their homework at the way to school since the school is about 45 minutes' drive from us.

Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, had to explain to her son why he had to do two sets of homework. Her son did not want to complete his Farsi home work when she asked him why he would not complete his homework, this was his response:

He would tell me that I have asked the two Iranian boys in my class, and none of them go to Farsi school and do not have this much extra schoolwork. So, I should not have it either. So he basically was comparing himself to the other kids and why they do not have to do this extra home work.

### **Language Loss would be a Tragedy**

Language loss is an important issue to heritage language communities around the world and is increasingly seen among second generation immigrants in the United States. Loss of heritage languages negatively impacts both the language minority groups and the dominant language groups concurrently. Heritage languages in the U.S. provide many economic, security, and social benefits. Further, when ethnic communities lose their ability to communicate effectively with their family and community, they face consequences at the personal, familial, and social level. Loss of the heritage language results in communication rifts between family members and may also cause a great sense of cultural loss for the individual (Hinton, 2001).

In general, maintaining heritage languages in the U.S. is a challenge. One clear fact that this study revealed is, that no Iranian-American parent wished that their children would lose their heritage language. Still, findings from this study revealed that Iranian-

American parents worry about their children losing their ability to speak their heritage language. When asked about the heritage language loss; parents stressed various reasons for the basis of language loss. Iranian-American Parents believed that their children begin to lose their heritage language when they go through American public schools and start using the dominant language. As a result many immigrant children lose their heritage language by shifting their first language to English. In this section we review some of the reasons parents think their children might lose their heritage language. Next we look at some consequences of heritage language loss and interventions parent communicated in their interviews.

**Causes.** Not surprisingly, most parents believed that since English is the primary language of instruction to the children from both academic and social/functional standpoint, and they spend most of their time in school speaking predominantly English, children eventually start losing their heritage language. Iranian-American parents identified the influences in the environment such as, regular school system, TV, lack of exposure in the family, siblings, and peer pressure as roots of language loss. Some working parents had to send their children to daycare. These parents saw the language shift from Farsi to English faster than parents who stayed home and only sent their children to school when they were at pre-school age. But even these parents stated that although their children began learning Farsi at home prior to attending regular school, as soon as they entered formal or regular school system and were exposed to English language, they began to use the dominant language. Afrooz, who is a jeweler and mother of one, believed that learning home language would be harder for her son as he grows up

and gets exposed more and more to English speaking environments such as school, social and news media, TV, and internet. Frough, who is a housewife and mother of two, reported that although it was relatively easy to maintain the heritage language while her children were young; however, when they entered school, they felt a lot of peer pressure and just caved in. She described the process:

They used to speak Farsi to each other when they were younger. But when my older daughter started going to kindergarten and learned English, she started speaking English to her sister and that is how they got used to speaking English at home. That is why they speak English to each other even now.

Afroz, who is a jeweler and mother of one, was concerned about the lack of exposure to Farsi language in the larger community and believed that a language shift to English would happen quite soon if the pattern continues:

Another thing that can have an effect on learning Farsi is that because children are not in a Farsi speaking environment they do not hear Farsi conversation and Farsi words as much. In Iran, kids hear everybody and all their neighbors speak Farsi.

She then compared the Iranian-American community in Washington DC metropolitan area with Los Angeles where more than 500,000 Iranians live.

If you go to Persian markets in LA, they speak Farsi and there are a lot of Iranians that speak Farsi outside of the home. I knew a lady in Los Angeles that was living there for 10-15 years and still spoke Farsi all the time and did not even have to learn English because she did not need it much. But in our community Persian stores are scarce and speaking in the community helps a lot.

Disappointed with the difficulty and challenges that maintaining heritage language presented them, parents sometimes felt defeated and wanted to give up the fight. Maryam, who is a housewife and mother of one, argued that because speaking English happens naturally and the existing environment works against the Farsi heritage language, then, she cannot force her child too much, “So we get to the point that we say let see where and when she wants to speak Farsi.” She compared this loss to swimming against the current which takes a lot of energy and makes it very hard to seriously stay focused on language maintenance. She was afraid that it was inevitable that language loss will happen in the future. She explained:

Because, it (speaking English) happens naturally, and we cannot force them too much. Your children will eventually speak English. There is no way around it. So we leave them alone in those times. So this environment exists. It makes it hard to stay serious about this topic. It is very hard. It is like you are swimming against the current. It takes a lot of energy.

Mohan, who is a nurse and mother of two, blamed lack of exposure to Farsi at home and believed that their busy schedule prevented them from practicing with their children regularly:

But if the language is not used in family from the beginning or if it gets interrupted in the middle...but since sometimes I was busy and could not practice every day for different reasons with her sometimes and this would cause her to forget the learning that happened before and we had to start it from beginning.

Mansoor had a more social and historical opinion about the lack of exposure to Farsi language in some group of Iranian-American who came to the U.S. long time ago. He believed, Iranians that came to the U.S. right after the Islamic Revolution of 1978, were reluctant to speak Farsi to their children at home or in public places fearing public backlash due to standing animosity between Iran and the U.S. Mansoor, however, was optimistic about the future of Farsi heritage language as he observed that more and more Iranian-Americans are comfortable with their ethnic identity and are not afraid to show it. He explained:

This is the kind of things that I think that people that came 40 years ago and the situation with Islamic revolution and America was bad. People did not want to identify themselves with that regime as Persian so they refrain to speak Farsi in the public or with their kids and or identify themselves as Persian. And later on more people came to the United States so people felt more comfortable as the tensions cooled off. So you probably can see more Iranians try to have festivals and ceremonies in public but back then they were trying to hide. And I remember when census was going on I saw on YouTube that some Iranian were saying they are Italian or Spanish or other things. So people are self-cautious about what they are doing. They have to trust themselves they have to.

**Consequences.** As for consequences of not speaking the heritage language, parents believed that when a person loses the ability to speak his/her own language, this individual will have also lost his or her own cultural identity. Some parents even went further and exclaimed that they would be ashamed of themselves if their children could

not speak their language. They argued that, just as every parent want to transfer their DNA to their children, they prefer to transfer their language to them to make them a better person for their society. Other parents called the prospect of losing the heritage language as a tragedy and said that they would be very upset if their children did not speak Farsi and believed that they would lose a good chance to learn about valuable things such as their language and heritage. Mahnaz, who is a house wife and mother of one, was afraid that if her son lost the ability to speak Farsi, he might not be able to connect with her and understand her as well when they were communicating in their mother tongue.

I remember that I was trying to use these phrases and proverbs with my son when I was playing tennis with him. For example, when he threw a foul ball at me I told him: My dear you sent me after black peas!” I meant you throw it so far that I have to go far far away to catch it. He was so confused about this statement and was saying: mom what is black peas? I do not see a black pea here? I explained to him that it means you sent me after a task so as I am busy doing it you can do something else yourself.

Mansoor, who is a nurse and father of two, gave examples of lost opportunities and inability of children to make connection with relative and extended family resulting from language loss:

One time he took him (his nephew) to Iran. He could not speak read or write.. he could not do anything...he could not speak with his grandparents in Iran....It is like you are going to a very dark cage. You don't know your way and you don't have

any flash light you cannot find your way out. My brother now wishes he talked Farsi with his kids. He always wishes he did it.

He added in his opinion many of the Iranian children who grew up in families that refrained from speaking Farsi to their children for fear of acquiring an accent or backlash from the society, grew up wishing they could speak their heritage language, and in some cases, tried to learn the language by signing up in Farsi classes in their colleges if they offer the class. He remarked:

Because I have observed that when immigrant's children grow up they become so interested to revitalize their heritage language...I have seen and heard when these children (immigrants) grow up and want to learn their language. I know many Iranian friends that their children go to George Mason and sign up for Farsi classes there because they want to learn their ancestor's language. They say...blood draws you in.

**Interventions.** In order to reverse the trend of language shift and loss, parents planned and used various remedies, so their heritage language might have a chance of surviving. Iranian-American parents were aware that they might not be able to fully preserve their heritage language for their future generation; however, they stressed that even if only a portion of their language is reserved and spoken, that is better than losing it altogether. Iranian-American parents employed many strategies and resources to prevent heritage language loss in their children. Some solutions involved spending time, money, and resources to combat the development of the language loss. Some parents worked with the children on their Farsi homework assignments, signed them up for Farsi classes, and

encourage them to speak Farsi at home. Others controlled the amount of English TV their children watch and tried to expose them to Farsi speaking movies and cartoons. Minoo, who is a physician and mother of three, talked about some of the strategies she used to fight the language loss in her children:

Sometime we stress that they only watch Farsi movies and cartoons then they won't forget their Farsi vocabularies...we are spending 1000 dollars a year for Farsi class. We can skip one dinner or lunch outside and spend it on Farsi school why not? I would say it is a month that would be a couple of Shamshiry (Kabob restaurant) or Alborz (Kabob restaurant) less...I can cook it at home and spend it on my children education that would go a long way.

Others believed in encouraging their children to use the language rather than pushing them would work better. Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two, cautioned, "we have to be careful not to stress them about their identity and language, I make sure not to say Farsi all the time." She went on to explain:

You have to encourage them to learn the language. You are not supposed to force them, or they will reject it. It is not a good way. Encouraging is one of the best ways by giving them good examples and telling them good things about the language. Then they will get enthusiastic to learn this language.

Others stressed the importance of early intervention by choosing their direction and by speaking Farsi with the children at a very young age, so they can adopt it. Other resolutions involved sending the children to visit friends and family in Iran in order to keep the connection and reinforce the language. Strategies such as reading Farsi story



books to children, socializing with other Iranian people, reminding children to speak Farsi when they spoke English, keeping connection with grandparent through phone and video contacts, and learning from experiences of other parents were among other remedies suggested by parents. Some parents even tried to bribe their children and offered some incentives in order to encourage speaking the heritage language or completing their Farsi assignments. Mohan, who is a nurse and mother of two, described a situation where her husband would incentivize their children for following their directions:

Most of the times my husband takes them to school since I am working. My husband would tell my kids if you go to school on Saturday then I will take you anywhere you want on Sunday and I will be at your service all day. Or I will take all your friends to school as much as the car can fit. So bring your friends along and I will take you and your friends to see a new movie after the school. He would encourage his children this way. Or he tells them after you come from Farsi school I will take you to a restaurant.

### **Farsi Materials are Hard to Find**

Immigrant families with more resources and supports appear to be more successful in raising children who are balanced bilinguals. Shortage or lack of Farsi teaching materials and resources were among other challenges parents faced in maintaining Farsi language. Iranian-American parents revealed that story and instructional books were not available at book stores and if they wanted to obtain reading materials in Farsi they had to order them on line from California or New York. From time to time, relatives would bring these materials for them when they came for a visit from Iran. Occasionally, parents had to

search the internet in hopes of finding some practice sheets, stories, or children programing. Farsi movies and cartoons were scarce and parents had to obtain them from other states or from Iran if they wanted their children to watch Farsi programming. A couple of parents said when they go to Iran; they stock up and bring back a luggage full of books and CDs for their children. Some even made Farsi book reading clubs so they could share and swap books with other parents and friends. Few parents wished that they had some sort of Farsi broadcasting on TV or internet. Some mentioned a few broadcasted programs from Los Angeles. However, these programs were geared towards older audience and were political or entertaining in nature. Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two, talked about her frustration regarding shortage of Farsi teaching and reinforcing materials:

Overall, I think there is not much out there for children as far as resources for Iranian culture and traditions. So, I personally do not know many easily accessible resources geared toward children. There might be some out there but I do not know them. I think in states such as California there is much more resources for children to learn Farsi. Although here are a lots of Farsi schools in Virginia... but I have not seen many other resources around me.

### **Research Question 3**

The overarching research question three was “What role does the Persian community (Farsi heritage school, community centers, etc.) play in heritage language development and maintenance?”

The purpose of RQ3 was to explore the role that community plays in maintaining Farsi language learning. Data yielded the next three themes in this study (see figure 19):

Theme five: I like this Farsi school: Two sub-themes were identified under this theme including: 1) English schools; and 2) Farsi schools.

Theme six: Persian community. Four sub-themes were identified under this theme including: 1) friends; 2) library group; 3) mosque; and 4) public celebrations.

Theme seven: Politics change all the time. This theme had no sub-themes.

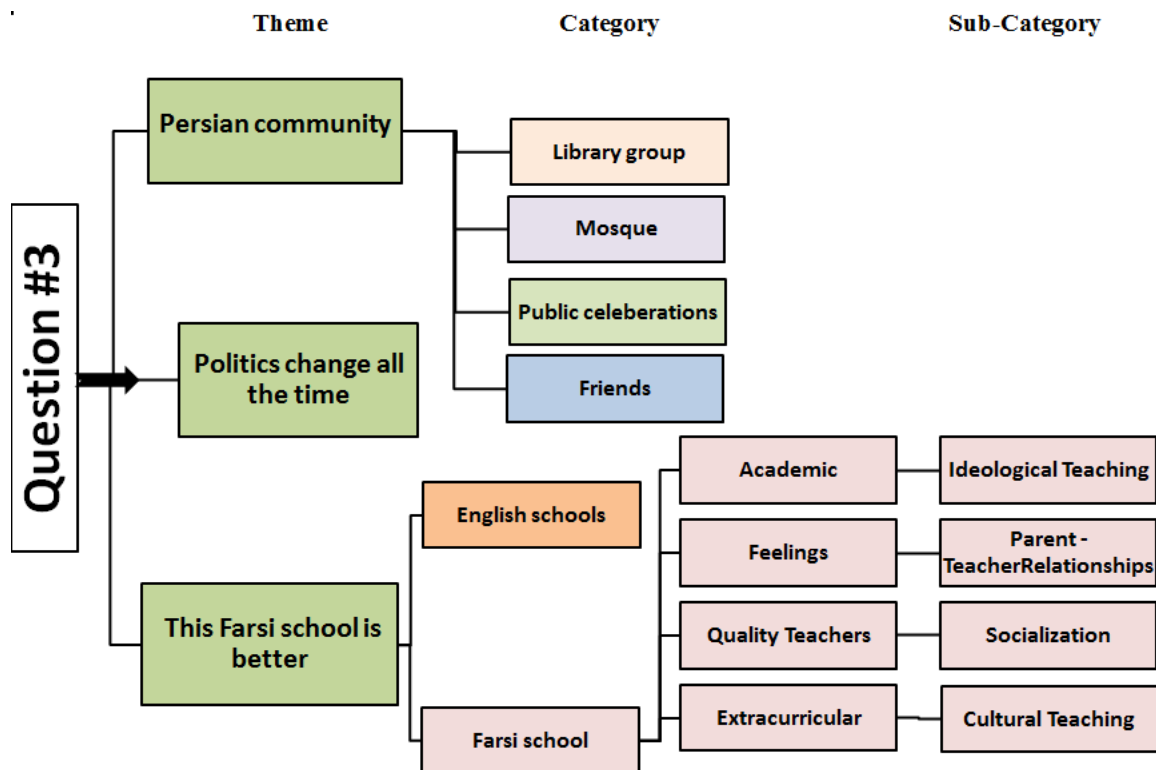


Figure 19. Research question 3 themes, subthemes, and categories

### **Theme Five: I Like This Farsi School**

This theme reveals parent's view about the role that heritage schools play in preserving Farsi language. The data in this theme was further organized into two sub-themes: 1) English schools; and 2) Farsi schools.

#### **Farsi Schools**

Heritage Language schools are community based education centers that are set up to promote heritage language and cultural learning. Heritage language programs usually are set up as after school or weekend programs. There are some differences between teaching in a heritage language program and in a public school language program. Heritage language teachers have to face the challenges of short instructional time as they are trying to increase language skills while seeing the students only a few times a week. Students in Farsi heritage language programs often received more homework, but this was mostly due to the nature of the programs, since the students only received few hours of instruction per week. However, despite these challenges, Iranian-American parents knew the importance of placing their children in this learning environment and made the extra effort to get them there every Saturday. Parents in this study believed that the main role of heritage language schools was to teach children their heritage language. In summary, parents believed that Farsi heritage language schools perform valuable linguistic and cultural role in Iranian-American multilingual community. While they recognized that their children would not become fully proficient in their heritage language by studying it two hours per week, they believed that the school at least provided an environment for children to learn the language systematically and made learning the heritage language part

of a routine. Parents also believed that Farsi heritage language schools perform an important role in creating a sense of cultural pride and identity. These two roles complement and reinforce each other. When asked parents what was the deciding factor in choosing a Farsi language school for their children; parents offered various reasons. Parents talked about varied aspects of heritage schools that appealed to them. These characteristics were later placed under eight categories: 1) academic quality, 2) children's feelings, 3) quality teachers, 4) extracurricular activities, 5) ideological teaching, 6) cultural teaching, 7) socialization, and 8) parents-teacher relationship.

**Academic quality.** Parents emphasized that they did not have the skills, time, and patience to teach Farsi literacy at home. According to parents, spoken Farsi as home language only helped their children's spoken skills in the language. Their literacy skills in Farsi, however, were left behind without the support of a school environment. The schools provided settings where children can learn Farsi in a more serious environment. When asked parents what was their reason for choosing their particular Farsi school; most parents in secular and non-Islamic school said they preferred this school because they provided a variety of cultural subjects including dance and music. Also the school was conveniently close to them and they liked the quality of their teaching. Farhad, who is an engineer and father of two, said, "Although I did not choose them because of these cultural teachings only; I chose them because they were more academic compared to other schools and read more books."

Most parents in the Islamic school had many reasons for why they chose this school for their children. Their main reason, however, was that this school (Islamic

school) had excellent academic program; provided degrees when children finish each grade which were accepted in Iran; had Islamic ideological teaching and completed one grade in one year. Maryam, who is a housewife and mother of one, who used to take her son to the secular school in Virginia, had this to say about these two schools:

She also did not learn Farsi there (secular school) very well. Because, the school always had observances and ceremonies, more than they had teaching. So, although, they finished their book, she did not learn as much as she is learning here. This new school uses Iran's book for their curriculum. But the other school was using whatever book that was Farsi but was not an official first grade book. And also at the end of the year they gave an unofficial paper to us for completing first grade and it was mostly serving as encouragement rather than a real transcripts or diploma. But this new school gives a diploma for each grade that is equivalent to the diploma that children get in Iran.

Frough, who is a housewife and mother of two, drove two hours back and forth every day from Virginia to Maryland to bring her children to this school, and had this to say about it:

I know some people that sent their kids to three other schools before this school. And although they learned a lot of Farsi there, but they still brought their kids here because they say that this school is better.

The main reason parents liked this school was because the school would give official diploma to children once they finished each grade. This was important for some parents that predicted that they might send their children to Iran to complete their higher

education. They believed that higher education in Iran is not only free, but also one of the best especially in science and medical field. Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, said, “Second, this school gives degree when you finish each grade and this degree is accepted in Iran too, in case if somebody wants to go back to Iran and continue their education .” Mohan, who is a nurse and mother of two, also liked the academic superiority of this school, “I was looking for an academic school. I did not want a school that cuts a grade in two years and teaches one half in one year, and the other one in another year.”

In sum, parents liked the secular Farsi school because they would teach cultural lessons as well as academic ones, and also because the school was close to them. Parents, on the other hand, chose the Islamic school because the school had superior academic qualities; would give official diploma accepted in Iran, and would finish one grade in one year.

**Children’s feelings.** Most parents said that their children were motivated and liked their Farsi school. Iranian-American parents who had tried homeschooling mentioned that Farsi Saturday schools provided a more organized manner of teaching and the fact that other students with similar backgrounds (i.e., other second-generation Iranian children) attend the schools, would make the children a bit more eager to learn Farsi. According to parents, children made Iranian friends in Farsi school; liked the environment; and had lots of fun participating in extracurricular ceremonies. Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two, explained, “She has also found many Iranian friends and they go to school together. Specially, she has one Iranian friend that they are in contact with each other all the time.” Afrooz, who is a jeweler and mother of one, said:

But he likes it here a lot. And if some days I tell him let's not go today I am busy he gets upset. He likes this environment a lot and he has a lot of fun here. He participates in all of the ceremonies and concerts and all the other fun extracurricular activities they have. He never complains about coming on Saturday mornings.

Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, said that her son was upset because Farsi school was closed for the summer. She said, "When Farsi school was over for the summer he was very upset and was telling me "I wish I could still go to school."

**Quality teachers.** Parents in general were happy with the Farsi school teachers and many of them said that their children liked their teacher a lot. In parents' views their children learned better in the school environment as a result of special love and respect they had for their teachers. They also believed that the teacher were a big motivating force who encouraged their children into learning and attending the Farsi school, "I believe that his teacher played a big role in him by keeping him motivated for learning." Farhad, who is an engineer and father of two, believed that the teachers' in her daughters' Farsi school had good credentials and were very qualified to teach the Farsi class:

The teachers in this school have different degrees in various areas. They were talking about them in their biographies, and some of them went back to Iran and learned how to teach Farsi and came back here to teach. This is good, since if somebody goes to Iran and learns how to teach, they probably work with correct methods and in appropriate way with the kids.

Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two, talked about a teacher that herself



learned Farsi as a heritage learner and now is teaching the children:

The teachers in this school are professional language teachers. For example, the first grade teacher in this school learned Farsi herself when she was in fifth grade. So, she was in the situation that these kids are. Farsi has been her second language. Therefore, she understands the challenges that these children have. She would tell us not to be hard on your children about learning Farsi.

Parents were saying that teachers encourage their children by giving them toys or stickers or just by offering verbal praises. In general, parents in all three schools believed that teachers worked hard and spend a lot of time and energy sincerely and treat the children with respect. The one obvious difference parents noticed between secular and non-secular schools was the dress codes for the teachers. Teachers in Islamic school wore hijab (Islamic head cover), while the non-Islamic school teachers wore western clothing. Mohan who is a nurse and mother of two, said:

The other school personnel had hijab and the new school personnel do not have hijab, and are wearing fashionable clothes as if they are going to parties...but their behavior towards us was the same. The other school personnel dress simply and conservatively and the personnel in the new school were very fashionable.

However, they both were kind and we felt comfortable with them.

Finally, Mahnaz, who is a house wife and mother of one, talked about her child's attachment to her Farsi teacher, "But now that the summer has started he misses the Farsi school and keeps saying that I want to go see my teacher, he even asks me "mom can I fail this grade so I can repeat it again with the same teacher?"

**Extracurricular activities.** Extracurricular activities in Farsi schools involved those that fell outside the realm of normal curriculum and was performed by students. These included national, cultural, and religious observances and ceremonies. Aside from teaching Farsi, schools would educate the children about different national holidays and would hold celebrations for events such as Nowruz, Yalda, and Mehregan. Iranian-American parents believed that these extracurricular activities encouraged children to put their Farsi skills at use and show it off. This encouraged the children to want to learn more Farsi. Often children would perform a short program, such as reciting a poem, for the parents at different cultural and religious celebrations at school. The applause they received motivated them to excel in their Farsi language learning and not be scared or ashamed of using it. Aside from putting their language skills to use, the children are also exposed to the cultural traditions of the Iranian community. While most parents said that they occasionally participate in the extracurricular activities in their Farsi school, other parents said that the school “never ask us” to help and therefore parents did not know how to help. Still, many parents participated and helped with these activities especially for New Year’s celebrations and end of the year party. Mohan who is a nurse and mother of two, explained:

We participate in celebrations such as Eyd Nowruz and usually children have performance. They had to stay at school long hours during celebration times and practice their act so they could get perfect at it...So they would stay after 3:00 pm to play Santoor [an Indian musical instrument like a dulcimer] or practice their role in the act and they also had to practice at home for their role. We had to help them

practice recite their songs and practice their role in the act.

Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two, also mentioned that she would like to help but the school does not ask her to help, “A few times yes... but they do not usually ask parents to participate much.” Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, agreed, “I do get involved with her regular school but with this school I never get involved I do not know how to help.” One of the parents believed that not having a PTA (parent teacher associations) in the Farsi school might be the reason Farsi schools face the lack of parental involvement.

In Iran, we had PTA. The school administers were all coming together with parents. But this school is only two hours per week it is not a real school per say. It is like taking your kids to a music school.

**Ideological teaching.** Parents who were attending Islamic Farsi school talked about the role that the Farsi school played in preserving Islamic culture. Some parents liked that their children are connected to the ideological roots so that they “have something to hold on to.” Maryam, who is a housewife and mother of one, talked about her daughter’s interest in learning about Islamic ideology in the school:

I am religious sometimes. But she likes it a lot and shows interest to religious topics. The first year she went to a Farsi school that was not religious and she could tell the difference. But now she is interested in hijab. She likes religious stories. Of course she does not wear hijab in the public schools. Basically, she likes the Persian and religious environment here. Sometimes she insists on wearing hijab herself. Sometimes she asks me to adjust my hijab.

Frough, who is a housewife and mother of two, also said, “I chose this school because this school is ideological and religious as well. Because, I wanted her to have the same ideology that I have; because in the other school she did not learn any ideology.”

Mohan who is a nurse and mother of two, talked about the religious practices in the school:

They also teach religion alongside Farsi. Like, they learned how to pray at the school. However, the school was open and they even had Zoroastrian [one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions. It was founded by the Prophet Zoroaster in ancient Iran approximately 3500 years ago] students and they were free to attend the school. At noon academic teaching was over and children would eat lunch and then whoever wanted could stay for religion teachings. I mean this was how it was. Students did not have to be Muslim to attend school.

Not all the parents or the children liked the Islamic ideology of the school. Some girls specially protested the fact that they had to wear hijab after they turned 9 years old which is considered the age of puberty for girls in Islam. Minoo, who is a physician and mother of three, talked about her daughter's view on this, “My daughters only went to this school up to 4th grade. Because after the 4th grade girls had to wear head scarf (hijab) but my daughters did not like that too much.”

**Parent-teacher relationships.** Parents are an integral part of the success of heritage language school and of the maintenance of their children's heritage languages. The parent-teacher relationship is dramatically different than it was in years past. More parents than ever before are involved in their children's' academics, not to mention general

school operations. Iranian-American parents stated that their relationship with Farsi school teachers is very good and that teachers respected parents. Teachers followed up with parents and inform them about children's progress; informed them about activities they need to work on and reminded parents about exams. Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, said:

The teacher had made a group for informing parents and would follow up with parents and inform them what practices and activities children needed to complete at home. Or remind parents about exams and how parents should help their children at home.

Some teachers said to be open to new ideas and follow up on the concerns parent may have. Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, talked about her relationships with school administrators and teachers:

It is very good especially with the new administrator director I have a good relationship with her and then she listens and whatever things that we bring up as concerns she follows up. The director is very much open minded if you have suggestions she takes it in and she tries to follow up and I have had my concerns. My daughter because the way she talks [due to her disability] she cannot defend herself she could get bullied easily and I have taken that concern so many times to her. She always takes care of us.

Afroz, who is a jeweler and mother of one, describes a situation where she was able to actively engage in her son's class and the teacher welcomed that:

I also had a good relationship with the teacher, as I would sit in the class and observe the class. Sometimes, I would ask questions about what to do at home to help our kids learn Farsi better. They were open to our questions. The people that I came to know in this school were approachable people and liked to be in contact with parents. Their classroom door was always open and welcoming. My friend used to go to her son's Farsi class all the time and take extra materials to class to facilitate children's learning or she would design Farsi games and take it to class for the students. The Farsi class teacher was so open to her new Ideas and did not get upset with her or telling her that you are interfering in my teaching.

**Socialization.** Heritage language schools perform important roles in heritage speaking individual's' lives beyond language teaching and learning. Iranian-American Parents believed that another function of Farsi heritage language schools is to provide an occasion for socializing and group involvement among Iranian-Americans. Parents and children in heritage schools were given opportunities to interact with those with similar backgrounds, which enhanced their ethnic pride. According to parents, children and adults in Farsi schools can socialize regularly with people of their own ethnic background. Parents sustained their social relationships with their Iranian-American friends outside of the school. This was particularly important for parents who were new comers to their community and did not know many other Iranians to socialize with. Maryam, who is a housewife and mother of one, believed that Farsi school provided an opportunity for her daughter to socialize with Iranian-American-children:

She has also found many Iranian friends and they go to school together specially, one Iranian friend that they are in contact with each other all the time. This environment is very helpful. But the bigger society unfortunately, I do not have much relationship with so I do not know. Everything is here. And any friend I have found is from here.

Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, said:

Sometimes we go to outside ceremonies but since they have ceremonies in here for all the occasions, I do not see or feel a need to go. But since her dad does not help I do everything here. Any friends I have are from here. That is why I do not feel any need to go outside of here. I don't know any place besides here. I mostly get the Farsi materials that I need from here. I do not know any other sources besides here.

Some parents who traveled long distances to come to their Farsi school, stayed for the entire school day in the pray room and seized this opportunity to study, pray, or socialize with their friend they made in this school. Afrooz, who is a jeweler and mother of one said:

Last year I signed him up for an Islamic class here. And I also had made some friends in this school so I preferred him to go to this school, so I can visit with my friend as well. Parents can visit each other while the students are studying in the class.

**Cultural teaching.** Heritage language programs do not solely teach language, they also put a high value on identity and culture; for many students, this serves as a bridge between generations as they come to realize just how different their parents' or

grandparents' lives were from their own and make an effort to learn about these differences. This was often a key outcome for many parents, they wanted their children to have a real understanding and focus on family life and history. Iranian-American parents thought that their Farsi heritage schools helped their children to build and maintain their heritage cultural connection. Some parents believed heritage schools teach traditions and cultural elements of the Persian heritage to their children. Others talked about special holidays and religious practices that schools observed. Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, said, "Also this Farsi school celebrates cultural and religious ceremonies; children sing songs at this was very important for me that my son be familiar with this culture and religion." Mohan who is a nurse and mother of two, talked about some of the programs such as folk dance and cultural traditions her daughter's secular Farsi school was offering:

The other school is more cultural and not religious. For example they have dance as one of their lessons, the other school was Islamic and of course did not have dance lessons. They teach various Iranian folkloric dances. However, you have to pay extra for dance lessons. Their Farsi lessons end at 12:00 pm and anybody that wished can stay for dance and other cultural lessons and programs that are extra and they pay more for it.

Afrooz, who is a jeweler and mother of one, admitted that her son is learning about cultural lessons that even she had forgotten over the years and that was exciting to her:

Ever since we came here to this school they observe and teach him all of the ceremonies and cultural and religious observance that I might have even forgotten



myself. Like about Nowruz, Yalda, and Mehregan and...They would talk about this celebration for them.

### **English Schools**

Considering the needs of the nation to critical languages, some public schools in the U.S. are making efforts to include critical languages within their foreign language offerings. According to Pufahl et.al (2001), critical foreign languages such as Arabic, Chinese, and Russian are taught at varying degrees in public schools in the U.S. Some of the parents in this study believed that if public schools offered Farsi as a foreign/heritage language, it could greatly benefit the Iranian-American communities across the U.S. Parents believed if such programs existed, it could help their children not only learn their own heritage language as a subject, but it could also make the children more motivated and inspired when they realize that they are not treated “as strangers by the bigger society” because of their heritage nationality and language. Persian (Farsi), however, is not taught in public schools despite its categorization as a critical need language. Although Farsi is offered at many two years, four years, or graduate colleges across the U.S.; K-12 education has not adopted Farsi as a foreign/heritage language. Mansoor, who is a nurse and father of two, expressed his regret that his daughters could not freely express their language and their heritage in the dominant culture settings such as public schools. They only way children could learn their language is through heritage schools or colleges:

Well in American school they can talk about their culture they can talk about their heritage, I think that is the only thing. In college they may go to Farsi literature

school. There are schools like this in California. They have Farsi literature in Stanford. They have language classes for Farsi here in GMU.

Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, also believed that Iranian-American community is at disadvantage compared to Chinese or Arabic community since they have the benefit of learning their heritage language in public schools; and their children could not:

Languages such as Chinese and some other languages like Arabic, Spanish or Korean are taught in public schools as a second language and you can choose it as a subject. It would be nice if they had Farsi that kids could elect as a subject. We are such a big community, except that Americans do not know that we are such a big community and we are so educated and versed in education...I mean more work need to be done so they know.

Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, believed that there is power in numbers. She suspected that the reason Farsi is not taught in public schools is because Americans do not know that there are large pockets of Iranian-Americans across the U.S. who speak Farsi. She blamed this on Iranian-Americans who try to hide their identity and do not identify themselves with their heritage nationality or language. She supposed that this might be due to some negative views that the U.S. society has against politics of Iran, so they do not want to identify or associate themselves with the “axes of evil” nationality or language. She believed some Iranian-Americans purposefully hid their heritage background in the 2010 U.S. census:

It was an effort in Persian community to participate in census 2010 they were asking not to simply say I am white...but say I am Iranian so they can get a lot of our locations...but unfortunately people only say I am white. There is even a YouTube video that is very funny and this guy was trying to say he was Italian...it was so funny...you know...unfortunately, it happens. I guess when there is more of us it is easier to be proud. But when you are singled out...it is harder.

### **Theme Six: Persian Community**

Another way of developing and maintaining a heritage language is to utilize ethnic community resources such as cultural centers, language classes offered through mosques, private schools, and community centers. Although not all of the parents were aware of such resources, some talked about the availability of such community resources and said that they knew other parents who are very involved in such communities. Some parents said they wished they were closer to these resources so they could benefit from it regularly. Interview with parents revealed the role that Iranian-American community plays in preserving Farsi heritage language. The data in this theme was further organized into four sub-themes: 1) friends, 2) mosques, 3) library groups, and 4) public celebrations.

#### **Friends**

Another strategy for transmitting Farsi heritage language is through interaction with ethnic friends who come from the same country. Often Iranian-Americans built friendships with other families, exchanged visits and celebrate holidays together. These interactions provide opportunities for children to play with other children who speak the same heritage language. Farhad, who is an engineer and father of two, said:

The way we overcame this issue was by finding or surrounding ourselves by selecting people which had similar characteristics to our family. So most of our friends now have one or two child between the ages 3 to 12. So, they are Iranians and I would say 90% of them speak Farsi at home just like us. So they have similarities. I have a friend a friend who has a wife that was born here but she speaks Farsi like you and I. So, she would try to speak Farsi to her kids and her children also speak Farsi. That's the way we try to be a community.

For some Iranian-American families the community also included events or gatherings at their Iranian friends' houses (usually both religious and cultural gatherings) which was a good incentive and reason for their children to put their Farsi language skills to use. Farhad, who is an engineer and father of two said:

So the problem was there were not a huge number of people gathering or talking in the community. That's why most of these gatherings started from family gathering. Myself, my sisters, and my mother, we are 20 people we get together. We got couple of family friends and they have couple of family friends and that is how the parties grow and we get to know each other.

Parents believed that in these parties and gatherings children could see other children like themselves and relate to them. Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, said:

I go to visit friends that I like to have connections with. Especially, if they have a boy or a child that is the same age as my son so he can make relationship with

them. Because it is very important for me that my son has connection with Iranian society so he can practice his language and speak with other children.

However, exposures to such environments were usually limited to three to four hours in the weekends. Parents stated that children's use of Farsi in these settings are limited to their conversations with elder Iranians, but when talking amongst themselves or with other children they would switch back to English. Mansoor, who is a nurse and father of two, stated:

Although kids might speak English to each other in these parties but when they want to speak to grownups they speak Farsi like: "Aunty, can I have some water."

So even if they do not speak they hear their others speak with each other and they pick up many words they have not heard before like about politics, weather. They hear a set of words in their own family, and in these gatherings they hear other words... like my son asks me what did this man say? I did not understand and when I explain it to him; he says: Mom, how come we don't use that word in our family?

A number of the Iranian-American participants reported having developed extensive connections with ethnic friends. In general, the participants commented that interaction with others from the same country of origin provided opportunities to maintain their heritage language, although as the children aged they were more likely to speak English with each other. Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two, explained:

My children look forward to these parties and like to go. I know some of my friend's children that cannot speak Farsi well and speak English frequently, and

they do not want to go to these parties, because they cannot connect with others and get bored. On the other hand I have seen children who can speak well especially older ones can connect with others and engage themselves in conversations in these parties.

### **Mosques**

Mosques also play an important role in the Iranian American community and in preserving Farsi heritage language. Iranian-American parents agreed that the existence of a supportive community such as mosques encourages the children to put to use their language skills and connect with their cultural heritage. Negar, who is a college student and mother of one, said, “Here, this mosque is doing good work, but even that has its own problem. I only keep my relationship with the school for Farsi learning benefits that it provides for my child.” Farida, who is a cancer researcher and mother of two, believed that mosques play a dual role as they spread the Islamic culture and they also help with preserving the heritage language.

But the problem is that our culture is Islamic. Many of my families that are from Iran and visit here they say in our opinion this is not a mosque, this is a cultural center and a school. This center is Islamic but they teach culture and Farsi as well. I believe it is culture that supports and backs religion. We have the support of this community in any shape and form. I mean this mosque community.

### **Library Groups**

Some parents decided to organize groups and Facebook pages to invite other parents to join each other in a public places such as library once or twice a week and teach

Farsi to their children. These groups not only taught Farsi, but also celebrated ceremonies and occasions, organized workshops, and planned summer field trips. Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two, organized a Farsi library group in her neighborhood. She talked about her experience:

I felt the need to have a group that teaches Farsi to children so I started this story time at the library herself. Then the group grew bigger and bigger by word of mouth...we met more people at the community and told everybody that we have a program at this library. Some would come and go, some stayed. The people that stayed make up the group now which is fantastic. See the group that we created has been welcomed by many parents and they want us to share our experience with them so they can create the same library Farsi study groups in their community. We were happy to share our experiences with them.

She also talked about an action-packed summer workshop experience last summer:

For example, last summer we organized a workshop for summer. We arranged a field trip to an Iranian rug store in the community and took the children to the rug store. So imagine, 12-13 children were running and climbing rugs in this store and the rug store owner gentleman was so cool about it. He told them stories about rugs and the history of it.

### **Public Events**

Many community-based schools work alongside the public and private school system with little or no recognition, support, or articulation. Because the majority of Farsi heritage language programs were initiated by community based grassroots efforts, they

often had very little public visibility. Public Iranian-American events and cultural gatherings and celebrations can bring awareness, attentions, and support to the importance of Farsi heritage language. This topic came up in conversation with Mansoor, who is a nurse and father of two, as he talked about the role Iranian-American community plays in maintaining Farsi language.

Every year there is Charshanbe Soori festival in museum of Freer Gallery of Art and they celebrate Nowruz. They set up haft seen. They have concerts they have lots of things for Iranian culture. The head of the museum is Iranian and she is very eager to show others the Iranian culture. People go and take pictures with various Iranian folkloric dresses. There are lots of reading things there. They have Kheimeh Shab Bazi (Iranian traditional. marionette theatre), Shahnameh khani (reading poems from Shahnameh to children). For Nowruz they have free movies. They have a big screen computer Shahnameh. Hafez is out there you can scroll page to page. It's definitely good to see that.

### **Theme Seven: Politics Change All The Time**

In order to transfer heritage culture to the second generation Iranian-Americans, it is necessary to encourage them to develop a heritage identity. However, such an identity cannot develop in the absence of a clear definition of Iranian culture and its structural elements in the U.S. society. As a result of decades of political turmoil and hostility between the United States and Islamic Republic government in Iran, some Iranian-American immigrants feel that they are being viewed in a negative light in the U.S. Subsequently, some second-generation Iranian-Americans have come to have a less



favorable view of their ancestral land and its cultural dynamics. Some Iranian-American parents talked about the social-political atmosphere in the Persian and larger community and how these circumstances affect Farsi maintenance and development. Farhad, who is an engineer and father of two, talked about how political unrest in Iran forced many Iranians to migrate to the U.S. and become a minority language group in the dominant society:

Well, my cousins came here at the beginning of revolution and they all spoke Farsi. People came here because of the after math of the revolution like the hostage situation. I have been here for less than 20 years. My understanding is that people came here after the revolution spoke English more than Farsi not because they did not want to speak Farsi it was because there were not enough people here to speak English with. My immediate family like my uncle that came here in 1990's was telling me when I told people that I am from Iran they were like: "where is Iran?" They did not even know where Iran is. Until he had to tell them that it is a country south of Russia. They were like OK. We know where Russia is.

Farhad suggested that even in different language contexts, similar political, economic and social considerations seem to impact people's language decisions in different ways. He went on to explain why his uncle's children did not learn Farsi. He said:

My uncle married an American lady. Another friend came here in 1990s and he married an Iranian lady. My uncle kids speak English and do not understand Farsi at all. My other friend's kids speak Farsi because they had an Iranian mother.

When you have both parents who speak Farsi it is much easier to develop Farsi language in children. When you have a situation when one of the parents specially mother speaking English that is a situation that children do not speak Farsi.

Maryam, who is a housewife and mother of one, reasoned the same thoughts:

This is the kind of things that I think that people that came 40 years ago when the situation with Islamic revolution and America was bad. People did not want to identify themselves with that regime as Iranians, so they refrain to speak Farsi in the public or with their kids and or identify themselves as Iranian. And later on more people came to the United States, so people felt more comfortable as the tensions cooled off. So you probably see more Iranians try to have festivals and ceremonies in public but back then they were trying to hide. And I remember, when census was going on I saw on YouTube that some Iranian were saying they are Italian or Spanish or other things. So people are self-cautious about what they are doing. They have to trust themselves they have to.

Finally, Salome, who is a housewife and mother of two, talked about the effect of politics in her and her child's language attitude and use. She believed that politics' climate affects the parents feeling about their identity and then they transfer these feelings to their children.

I personally have a good feeling about being an immigrant...I believe my child senses my feeling towards my culture and identity and self identifies with it. My husband and I talk a lot about these things (politics) at home. But I believe that politics does not change my feeling towards my identity. You know what I mean...

politics change all the time...politics is one way one day and another way. I just hope that political matters of the day do not change my children's views about themselves in a negative way and they have a good feeling about their days.

### **Triangulation of Observational Journal and Interviews**

This study also offered observation data from three visits and two classroom observations conducted in one of the schools. Although the observations were limited and may have not fully detected normal behaviors and interactions in the classrooms, they still corroborated some key ideas, topics, and patterns revealed by parents' interviews. In this section I highlight some of the data in my observation journal which later was confirmed by parent's interviews.

- 1- Parents in this study were concerned that teaching techniques in the schools were outdated and teachers did not have modern pedagogical tools to teach language to their children. Some of the parents wished the Farsi teachers in heritage schools trained in effective teaching methodology and classroom management strategies used by teachers in public schools. Parents also said that sometimes teachers were rigid in their grading and stressed too much on accuracy, for example, on spelling tests. When I visited the classrooms, I also had the same kind of view about the quality of teaching in the school that I observed. In my observation journal, I mentioned that for the most part, the students did not play any role in starting discussions, choosing lesson contents, or even making comments. Teachers had complete authority in the way teaching materials were prepared and taught in the class. Lectures were the main part of the class and repetition drills were used often

both in class and in students' homework assignment and the focus of the curriculum was around reading and writing. The class had no group activities, class presentations, role playing sessions, or peer feedback reviews.

- 2- Parents in their interviews said that the same books that are used to teach children in Iran who grow up with the Farsi language were also used to teach Farsi as a foreign language to their children who were born in the U.S. Therefore, parents believed that these books were not suitable for their children and needed to be adjusted for content and delivery for the unique needs of the Iranian-American children. I also observed that the books that the school used in their classroom were Persian books published in Iran after the Revolution and were shipped from and taught in public schools in Iran. The pictures in the books were not representative of children's lives in the U.S. (as seen in figure 17). The handwriting used in books was the old fashion Nastaliq (cursive) which was hard for parents to read and produce, who themselves grew up reading and writing non-cursive handwriting in Iran. The stories and the contents of the books were also familiar for children who grew up in Iran and knew about social and political topics (like Iran and Iraq war) presented in the books.
- 3- Parents in Islamic schools stressed about the religious and Islamic values of Farsi learning along with cultural values of related to it. Mothers who brought their children to this school were wearing hijab either by their own choice or to observe the Islamic culture of the school. Still some parents in this school did not care much for the imposed Islamic teaching of this school and believed that their

children are being institutionalized to believe the Islamic regime propaganda.

Other parents said that their children, especially girls, were not happy that they had to wear hijab after age of nine and did not want to go to school because of that. I observed that this particular school had separate religion classes or briefly discussed religious issues during or after the class. Girls and boys prayed together while the boys stood in front rows and the girls in the back rows and were encouraged to wear hijab (Islamic head covers for females) during the pray. Often girls were encouraged to cover their hair if it was peeping from under their head covers by the teachers and the principal. Usually once the school was over the parents would stay with their children to attend weekly gatherings for different cultural and religious occasions. I also observed that the other schools in Virginia were secular and did not teach Islamic or any other ideologies and focus more on the cultural aspects of Persian heritage language. For example the other schools at Virginia had music and dance classes along with art and poetry classes instead of religious teachings. Parents who brought their children to these schools dressed in western clothing and stressed more on cultural values of learning Farsi language as opposed to religious values related to learning Farsi.

- 4- Parents also talked about the long distance they have to travel from Virginia on Saturdays to get to the school in Maryland. Three parents who made this trip every week were saying that their children sometimes complain that they lose their whole Saturday by traveling to school every week. By the time the children got home it was almost 6:00 pm and they were too tired to do any other activities for

the remaining of the day. I traveled with one of the parents to this school 4 times and I could see that it was a whole day event stretching from 8:00 am in the morning to 6:00 pm in the afternoon. Imagining that the parents and children had to go through this for the whole school year made it clear to me why children and parents were feeling overwhelmed sometimes.

## **Summary**

This study collected data from interviews and observations in order to answer the research inquiries regarding Iranian-American parents' views on maintaining Farsi as a heritage language; expectations that they have for their children in regards to Farsi language learning; their efforts in maintaining the language; challenges they face in their efforts to preserve the language; and the role of Farsi heritage schools and Iranian community in maintaining the Farsi heritage language. Results from the interviews and observations revealed that parents' attitudes towards their children's Farsi language maintenance are very positive. All Iranian-American parents believed that being bilingual in general is advantageous for their children. Learning how to read and write (literacy) as well as speaking and understanding Farsi was considered important skills. The ability to speak another language was perceived to enable speakers of that language to become a new person and have access to different "worlds." Parents wanted their children to be able to verbally communicate with them, their siblings, their friends, and their extended family in the U.S. and in Iran either through long distance means or when they meet them face to face in Iran. Every parent wanted their children to be able to read and understand

traditional Persian literature such as poetry, historic, and political text in Farsi and considered the English translated of such texts “as not reliable as the original versions.”

Parents also held the belief that bilingual skills have various academic, cognitive, and future benefits for their children. Learning Farsi as a heritage and critical need language was perceived by parents to be “valuable for the job market” in opening “doors of opportunity” and academic benefits for children and helping them gain “educational achievements”. Some believed that learning Farsi has positive affect on their children’s “cognitive growth” and makes them “smarter”. In regards to the role that heritage language played in cultural identity and ideological identity, participants’ opinions were divided. Most parents had a strong desire to transmit their values and culture to their children and believed that maintaining Farsi is the way to connect their children to their cultural identity. Others, who tended to be more traditional and attached to the Iranian/Islamic norms, saw Farsi language as a “doorway” through which they could transfer their ideological and religious believes to their children. The second most important reason for heritage language maintenance was for family communication. All parents wished their children to be able to communicate not only with their immediate family members but also other family members, such as grandparents and cousins in Iran. According to parents, children generally felt “happy” about their capability to speak and understand Farsi and were “proud” of their ability to know two languages. Some children even viewed Farsi as a “secret language” within the family and were happy that no one else could understand it.

Iranian-American parents in this study thought that learning Farsi is highly important for their children and had various expectations for their children in regards to reading, writing, speaking, understanding, highest grade level completed, and cultural learning. For some parents comprehension in Farsi was satisfactory, while others were more interested in language production and expected their children to answer in Farsi when they spoke to them. Parents expected their children to be able to read Persian literature and poems, magazines, books, and religious scripture to learn about heritage morals in Farsi. However, not many Iranian-American parents had specific expectations for their children's ability to write in Farsi and believed "as much as they can meet their day to day needs" would be enough. Additionally, some parents had an academic orientation towards their expected Farsi grade level goals that varied from a few grades to college degree. Certainly, for at least some Iranian-Americans use of Farsi was also a way to gain access to their cultural and community identity through their participation in Iranian cultural celebrations and acceptance of certain heritage values.

Participants also revealed their efforts to help their children maintain heritage language. Indeed, all the parents had created a favorable environment to enable their children to access their culture or cultural products and to motivate them to learn or develop their heritage language at home on a long-term basis from an early age. All participants spoke Farsi to their children at home and at the community. Although some parents used English words in their speech, they always spoke Farsi unless when they wanted to talk about abstract topics or things that were hard for children to understand such as idioms. Often children talked more Farsi to their parents and more English to their



siblings. Parents in this study also employed many heritage language literacy strategies for developing biliteracy in their children. They helped their children study at home; complete their homework; and read Farsi story books or played Farsi phonics games. Most parents tried to preserve their heritage language by modifying their children's language environment and by choosing the home language to communicate with. They consciously or unconsciously set up rules and perimeters for speaking Farsi inside or outside their home. Although Iranian-American mothers took the most responsibility in teaching Farsi to their children, all fathers except for one were supportive of their wife's efforts and helped as much as they could. Some parents wanted their children to be proud of their culture and not be "ashamed" of identifying with it. Iranian-American parents in this study talked about various ways they shared their family's cultural values, beliefs, and understanding with their children through cultural celebrations and by exposing their children to Iranian traditions such as Nowruz, Yalda, Sizdebedar, and Charshanbe Soori.

Although, some parents felt confident in their children's future heritage language maintenance, others were discouraged because they witnessed language shift in their children (Farsi to English) when they started kindergarten. Parents were struggling with some school challenges that hindered their efforts in Farsi language maintenance. They reported that their children were struggling with the amount of Farsi homework they were receiving from their heritage school in addition to the home work they needed to complete for their English school. They also commented about the difficulty in learning to read and write in Farsi, short instructional day at Farsi school, complexity of Farsi books, shortage of learning materials in Farsi and outdated teaching methods used in Farsi schools. Parents

also were challenged by the amount of day to day responsibilities in their lives, busy schedules, and long distance drive to Farsi school on Saturdays that left them little or no time to help their children with their Farsi learning and homework. However, despite these challenges, Iranian-American parents knew the importance of placing their children in this learning environment and made the extra effort to get them there every Saturday. Parents talked about varied aspects of heritage schools that appealed to them such as teacher quality, academic superiority of the school, children's positive feelings towards their teachers, and cultural, ideological and social benefits that Farsi school provided for them and their children. Although most participants believed that the responsibility of teaching heritage language lies with the parents, all of them wished for more outside-the-home heritage language speaking opportunities as well as a larger Persian population in their community in order for their children to succeed in maintaining the language. Parents engaged their children in many social activities in the community such as building relationships with and visiting other Iranian-American families, visiting mosques and cultural centers, organizing library groups and children playdate, and attending Persian public event and celebrations. The conclusion drawn from the findings is contained in Chapter 5, including recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion, Conclusion, and Implications**

The issue of heritage language maintenance has become a concern among immigrant families in the United States because children do not maintain their heritage language as the English language takes over (Guardado, 2002; Wong Fillmore, 1991). Iranian-American immigrant families also encounter challenging situations where the use of their home language fades as their children begin schooling. This study had three goals: 1) Tap into Iranian-American parents' attitudes, opinions, and behaviors in regards to Farsi language maintenance, 2) Reveal and discuss the challenges parents face in their efforts to prevent Farsi language loss and maintain the heritage language in their children, 3) Understand parents' critical reflections in regards to the role of culture and heritage community in their children's Farsi language learning.

In this chapter, I revisit the subjects of Iranian-American parents' view on heritage language development and maintenance, language ideology, language use, family language policy, Persian heritage community, Farsi heritage language schools, and the heritage identity formation of second generation Iranian-American children. The discussion section reveals how Iranian-American parents view and maintain Farsi language; and discusses the challenges they face in their efforts to sustain their children's use of the heritage language. In the second section, I analyze the limitations of the study. In the final section, I discuss the implications drawn from this study and offer

recommendations for heritage language learners and their families, heritage language educators, and researchers. This study drew on the data, literature review, and theoretical framework to answer the following questions:

1. What are the Iranian-American parents' views, motivations and expectations in sending their children to Farsi heritage schools?
2. What are some efforts and challenges that parents undertake to maintain Farsi heritage language in their children?
3. What role does the Persian community (Farsi heritage school, etc.) and the larger community plays in heritage language development and maintenance?

Data for this study was collected from semi-structured interviews with Iranian-American parents, demographic questionnaires, and classroom and school observations. Data analysis was through an open coding and seven step technique by Creswell (2009) articulated in chapter three.

1. Knowing Farsi helps my child: Parents' views on learning Farsi as a heritage language (abilities, benefits, attitudes, and connections).
2. There is no end to learning Farsi: Parent's expectations for their children's Farsi language learning (reading, writing, speaking, and grade level).
3. Sometimes it is hard: Challenges parents face in teaching Farsi language to their children (characteristics, school, language loss, and resources).

4. We do our best: Parent's efforts and practices in maintaining Farsi heritage language for their children (language practices, literacy practices, family language policy, spouse's role, teaching culture, and visiting Iran).
5. I like this Farsi school: Farsi school roles in development and maintenance of Farsi (academic, feelings, quality teachers, extracurricular activities, ideology, parent teacher relationships, socialization, and cultural teaching).
6. Persian community: Various Persian communities and social settings and their effect on Farsi heritage language learning (friends, mosque, library groups, and public celebrations).
7. Politics change all the time: Social political climate and its effect on Farsi heritage language learning and maintenance.

This chapter revisits the major findings of this study and discusses them more deeply using the Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory and the literature review presented in chapter two. The application of ecology framework as a holistic theoretical approach is crucial in understanding the dynamics of immigrants' heritage language development and maintenance. Since the Ecological Theory emphasizes the connections between organisms and their environments, it presents the development process that takes place among these relationships. Therefore, the ecological framework in this study provides a perspective that is useful for conceptualizing, gathering, and organizing data about Farsi heritage language development and maintenance and from the various environments in which the second generation Iranian-American children function. The interconnections of environments (e.g., family, Farsi heritage school, and Persian

community) in which a child interacts, affect the child as part of those environments. This in turn, influences the child's heritage language development and performance in the heritage school as well as in the Persian community. In this study, which focused on the child and their family's perception and involvement in their heritage language learning success, the child needed to be studied as he or she related to the family environment and the family needed to be studied as it related to the Farsi language teachers and Farsi heritage school where the child attended.

### **Themes as Applied to Bronfenbrenner's Theory**

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) is divided into five types of environmental systems: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem (see figure 20). Each of these systems identifies fundamentals, characteristics, and commonalties that dynamically shape human development. Together, these five categories of environmental experiences create one complete ecological model. While each environmental system explains the development context of Farsi language learning clearly, the first three systemic structures (microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem) are the closest to Iranian-American immigrant unique life conditions. Bronfenbrenner's ecological contexts provide a framework of premises for what takes place within an average Iranian-American household (microsystem), the forces in the larger social system in which the family functions (exosystem), and the interaction of these settings with one another (mesosystem), resulting in the overriding heritage and cultural beliefs and values that influence the three systems (macrosystem) and ultimately

impact the Farsi language learning of children. Next, I present each of the five categories with discussion of significant findings resulted from the data of this study.

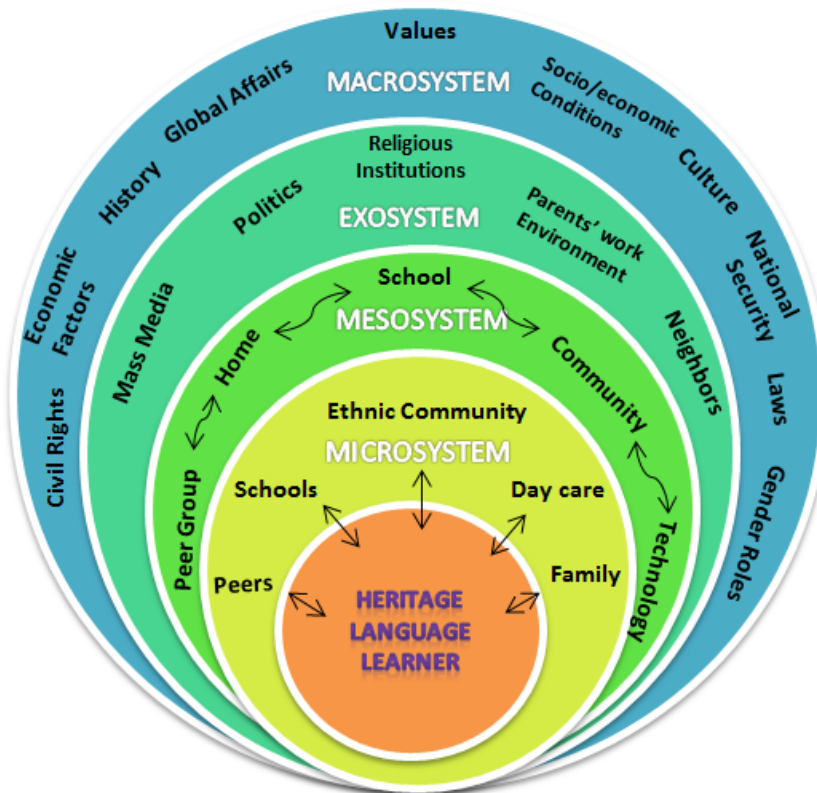


Figure 20. Heritage language learners' ecological system

### Microsystem

The *microsystem* is the immediate environment of the individual, which includes the family members, neighborhoods, peers and school, etc. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Children live in microsystem settings, and this is where development occurs. Iranian-American children experienced their day-to-day reality and immediate socialization

through their family circle. Analysis of the microsystem for this study includes the various elements in Iranian-American children's life (e.g. family attitudes towards Farsi language maintenance, family patterns of home Farsi language use, influence of peers in developing Farsi heritage language, and connections to Persian mass media, etc.)

**Family attitudes towards Farsi language maintenance.** Research studies have revealed that children's attitude toward a language can affect their outcome in learning that language and is likely to influence their learning strategy use. Stressing the social nature of language, (Vygotsky, 2012), claimed that family interactions and negotiations play an important role on producing significant input for children acquiring the mother language. Family as a social institution provides opportunities for immigrant children to learn how to navigate and fit into host society. Allard and Landry (1992) believed positive attitudes toward a target language such as a heritage language results in a higher likelihood of success in learning that language, on the other hand, negative attitudes would lead to a lack of learning. Children may grow up learning their heritage language at home, and then when they start school, they are suddenly told to use English only. However, immigrant parents' attitudes and behaviors toward the heritage language can have a strong impact on heritage language maintenance in their children. The families in this study had clear sets of beliefs about language, bilingualism, and language acquisition, and these beliefs were supportive of language maintenance. Iranian-American parents in this study offered various perceptions and views regarding the benefits and use of Farsi heritage language. Parents in this study reported positive attitudes toward Farsi language learning. They wanted their children to have the ability to understand and be understood in both the



verbal and written communications in Farsi language. For example, they wanted their children to be able to read Farsi texts such as Persian literature (poems and historic texts). In general, parents viewed the bilingual ability of their children positively. The terms *bilingual* or *bilingualism* have been defined in different ways by researchers:

These terms refer to the ability of native-like control of two or more languages, the ability to produce meaningful utterance in two languages, the command of at least one language skill (e.g., reading, writing, speaking, or listening) in another language, or the alternative use of several languages, or refers to the people who use two or more languages (or dialects) in their everyday life (Tokuhaman-Espinosa, 2003, xii).

Bilingual ability provides heritage speakers academic benefits for both subject learning and English acquisition and development. Krashen et al. (1998) argue, “subject matter knowledge gained in the first language makes English input more comprehensible, and literacy developed in the first language facilitates literacy development in English” (p. 11). A common perspective among Iranian-American parents in this study was that Farsi language learning is advantageous for their children academic, cognitive, and career goals. In particular, parents believed that speaking Farsi would open more doors of opportunities for their children and would enable them to connect with more people and learn about more cultures in the world. They also viewed the Farsi heritage language or the “mother tongue” as a connection builder that would enable their children to better connect with their heritage culture, heritage identity, their parents, their extended family back in Iran, and their religion. Chamot and Kupper (1989) reported that motivation along with

attitudes also plays a significant role in the choice of language learning strategies and successful language learning. According to parents, children generally felt “happy” about their capability to speak and understand Farsi and were “proud” of their ability to know two languages. Some children even viewed Farsi as a “secret language” within the family and were happy that no one else could understand it.

Iranian-American families had high educational inspiration for their children. Parental expectations not only influence academic outcomes of the children, but also their self-concept. Iranian-Americans in this study differed in their point of views regarding how much they expected their children to progress in Farsi. Some parents wanted their children to at least be able to speak and understand Farsi in order to communicate with other Iranians such as parents, grandparents and siblings. Others wanted their children to read and write well enough to be able to use the Farsi language in communication and future educational plans.

**Family patterns of home Farsi language.** Most parents spoke Farsi with each other and with their children at home. However, at times this pattern was broken and parents switched back to English when they wanted to explain abstract topics to their children. According to Ramezanzadeh (2010), some parents of Farsi heritage language students abandoned Farsi use even in the home fearing that their children would do poorly in American society if they spoke Farsi at home. Similarly, some of the Iranian-American parents in this study revealed that they sometimes spoke English to their children especially when they were teaching an academic subject to their children. Parents did not want to jeopardize their children’s academic progress in public schools. This

inconsistency in language maintenance efforts among Iranian-American families causes a major challenge for Farsi language schools and teachers in their efforts to teach the language. Sedighi (2010) lists various proficiency backgrounds in students as one of the most challenging features of teaching Farsi to Iranian-American second generation language learners. She states:

The biggest challenge for teaching heritage Persian is the fact that students have different backgrounds with respect to their Persian language skills. This is due to the fact that some use Persian regularly at home; some only speak it minimally with grandparents and relatives; some are only exposed to Iranian television; some explore Persian websites on the internet and so on and so forth (p. 688).

**Influence of peers in developing Farsi heritage language.** Additionally, as the children get older, the number of their microsystems also expands (Paat, 2013). Second to the family, peers represent another microsystem and a different way through which immigrant children are socialized. Peer groups can be an important source of social support for the immigrant children. According to Waters, (1994), close ties with immigrant peers may strengthen their ethnic identity while regular contact with local peers builds up their national identity. Children in this study socialized with their siblings and peers at home, in Farsi schools or in parties and Persian social gatherings. They often used English with their siblings and peers at these settings and switched back to Farsi when talking to parents or grownup. The pattern of family language use was also different depending on where the Farsi speaking was taking place. Some children wanted their parents to only speak Farsi with them in public to protect the privacy of their

conversations and saw Farsi language as an asset and were happy that they were able to speak a “secret language”.

On the other hand, for some Iranian-American children peer pressure was a source of heritage language loss. Language loss is an important issue to heritage language communities around the world and is increasingly seen among second generation immigrants in the United States. Loss of heritage languages negatively impacts both the language minority groups and the dominant language groups concurrently. When ethnic communities lose their ability to communicate effectively with their family and community, they face consequences at the personal, familial, and social level. Loss of the heritage language results in communication rifts between family members and may also cause a great sense of cultural loss for the individual (Hinton, 2001).

Iranian-American parents in this study also viewed the prospect of losing the heritage language as a “tragedy” and said that they would be very “upset” if their children did not speak Farsi. Parents believed that by losing Farsi their children lose a good chance to learn about valuable things such as their cultural heritage. They identified the influences in the environment such as, regular school system, TV, lack of exposure in the family, siblings, and peer pressure as roots of language loss. In some cases Iranian-American children chose not to speak their heritage language in public because they felt unsafe and subjected to ridicule, discrimination, and harassment from their peers. This is especially true if they have a thick accent (Peguro, 2008). For example, in a Korean heritage language maintenance study, Korean-American immigrant students viewed themselves as easily influenced by peers and refused to speak Korean in front of other students stating

that they “ feel embarrassed to be different” (Park, 2007, p. 127). Similarly to this study, some of the Iranian-American children sometimes felt embarrassed or self-cautious when their parents spoke Farsi to them in public places. Usually children followed their parents’ pattern of language use; therefore, some felt shy or self-cautious about speaking Farsi in public places, while others did not. Parents also sometimes spoke English in public to make people around them feel comfortable and to be polite to others. Iranian-American children in Ramezanzadeh’s (2010) study felt the same way:

Iranian-American boys grow up thinking there is something wrong with them if they speak Farsi – they must be terrorists, barbarians or haters. The way peers, teachers and strangers treat them if they speak Farsi in public – as subordinate, diminished and even valueless – creates a dissonance that makes them uncomfortable performing the Iranian aspect of their identity in public. (p. 203)

Whatever the basis of microsystem might be whether family or peers, not all microsystems are identical as the influence of one may outweigh the others. For example, the effect that family has may surpass the influence of peers or vice versa, depending upon the developmental levels of the children.

**Connections to Persian mass media.** In a study of Chinese immigrant youth language use, Wong and Lopez (2000) claimed that advanced technology made it easier for Chinese immigrant families to come in contact with Chinese TV programs, newspapers, websites, and other media from their home county. Thus, it might help Chinese-American children to have "a sense of a broader Chinese language culture," and they "may be less likely to feel that native language maintenance is a family idiosyncrasy

or an isolating experience" (p. 289). Connection to Persian mass media was another element in Iranian-American children microsystem. According to Atoofi (2011), Persian speaking TV and radio stations as well as Persian internet sites, have played a major role in Farsi language maintenance among Iranian-Americans. Entertainment programs such as shows, music videos, and sitcoms broadcasted mostly from California target Persian speaking audiences all over the world. In Iranian-American in this study, features of the connection to Persian mass media, for example, ranged from the number of television sets in the home, to parental and sibling models of media use, to family rules about media use and parents' encouragement and orchestration of their children's involvement in activities related to media use. Parents organized various activities such as showing videos or television channels in Farsi. They encouraged their children to watch Farsi movies and cartoons and at times limited the amount of English TV their children watched. Parents believed that watching Farsi movies helps children to learn Farsi and consolidate language that they have learned at home. Parents subscribed to Iranian TV satellite, purchased CD's of Farsi cartoons and movies and downloaded Persian programs and music on their iPads to reinforce the usage of Farsi language in their children. Persian internet sites have also played a major role in Farsi language maintenance. Technological advances such as Google Persian translation, online podcasting, and Persian font embedding in social network sites such as Viber, Telegram, Tweeter and Facebook have encouraged many generations of Iranians to connect with one another across the globe using Persian language. At the present time, there are more than two dozen internet sites which offer online Persian language learning without any cost to learners, an invaluable resource for

many second generation Iranian-Americans (Atoofi, 2011). Parents in this study encouraged their children to use various types of on line literacy communication tools (e.g., Viber, Telegram, and Facebook) to connect with their extended family and grandparents in Iran and keep the affective relationship between them alive by texting them messages such as wishing their relatives “happy birthday” in Farsi.

### **Mesosystem**

The *mesosystem*, which is the next ecological context, consists of a network of microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This ecological setting that functions as a linkage between two lower-level ecological settings can jointly influence immigrant children’s social outcome in the host society. In this case, the mesosystem in the model represents the connections among two or more environments in which immigrant children are active participants. For example, using Bronfenbrenner’s definition of an environment, the various Farsi school activities could be seen as having two or more microsystems. Analysis of the mesosystem for this study includes the various elements related to family and peers of Iranian-American children (e.g., cross relationships between the Iranian-American family and their children’s peers, family and dynamics of teaching in Farsi schools, extracurricular activity and family and Persian ethnic community).

**Cross relationships between family and peers.** Each developing Iranian-American child interacts with his or her family and establishes relationships with adults and peers, both linguistically and socially, in the play arena, in school, in child-care situations and in religious institutions. The mesosystem involves two microsystems in interaction with one another and refers to connection between children’s everyday

contexts such as the interactions between the children's family and their peers. In this study, this connection was evident in the interaction between the parents and child's peers. Parents positively affected their children's heritage language development by encouraging and providing opportunities for their children to interact with other Persian peers in various ways such as taking them to Farsi speaking groups in the library; establishing Farsi children play groups; visiting Persian friends' homes or Persian parties; and attending community cultural celebrations. Some parents regularly traveled to Iran and encouraged their children to use heritage language in their conversations with cousins and Persian peers as much as possible. Others used visits or movie night with Persian peers as incentives to encourage their children to complete their Farsi school assignments.

**Family and dynamics of teaching in Farsi schools.** Dynamics of heritage language teaching in Farsi schools was additional component of the microsystem. Farsi schools played an important role in heritage language development and use through modeling and explicit instruction. They provided an environment for children to learn the language systematically and made learning the heritage language part of a routine. Most parents said that their children were motivated and liked their Farsi school and teachers. Children made Iranian friends in Farsi school, liked the school environment, and had lots of fun participating in extracurricular ceremonies. Iranian-American parents talked about varied aspects of heritage schools that appealed to them and made them choose that particular school over others. These characteristics were academic quality of the schools' curriculum, children's positive feelings towards their teachers, quality of Farsi teachers,



extracurricular activities, ideological and religious teaching, cultural teaching, socialization opportunities and parents-teacher relationships.

One reason why the mesosystem is important in children's development is because youth may experience similar, or quite different and even contradictory socialization experiences, in different microsystem settings. However, because the children are connected through more than one aspect of the microsystem to the elements in the mesosystem, it should be expected that those connections will be very strong. Therefore, it is less likely that a disrupted connection with one element in the microsystem, such as a disagreement with the family, would cause the children to lose benefits from the elements in the mesosystem, such as school problems, because there is still at least one other direct connection in the microsystem.

One such source of problem that Iranian-American youth had to deal with was conflicting values and rules for behavior from home environment and school environment such as challenges they faced regarding Farsi heritage school. The educational aspiration is a key element in immigrant children's success in the mainstream American school system (Fuligni, Witkow, & Garcia, 2005). Children in this study were expected to perform well in their Farsi language education by earning good grades and completing their Farsi homework. At the same time, Iranian-American parents like other immigrant families hold similarly high expectations for their children to succeed in the American school system. This caused a lot of stress for children who were expected to perform well in both English schools and Farsi heritage schools. Children often complained about the overwhelming amount of homework they had to complete both in Farsi and English

school. Other school challenges involved several topics that were related to the shortcomings of heritage school and the problems and challenges that parents and children faced in their effort to maintain Farsi heritage language. These included: outdated teaching methods, shortage of Farsi books and materials, difficulty balancing responsibilities at home, extra time and energy needed to complete the Farsi homework, difficulty learning Farsi, short school day, complicated cursive handwriting, and teacher turnover among other things. Results of classroom observations verified what parents told me about challenges parents face regarding Farsi heritage language school. Based on my observations in Farsi heritage school I learned that Persian classes amounted to no more than one day class per week, teacher turnover was high in the school, teachers used outdated Persian books published in Iran after the Revolution, and that class activities were all teacher-centered and no group activities were observed in the class. The traditional instruction methods mainly focused on textbook learning.

Despite these challenges, for the most part, parents of immigrants strive to create opportunities for their children to use and maintain heritage language in schools and within the community (Garcia, Zakharia, & Otcu, 2013). Parents usually try to preserve their heritage language by modifying their children's language environment and by choosing the home language to communicate with the next generation. Patterns of home Farsi language in Iranian-American families revealed that parents controlled the children's language use at home in order to ensure language retention in various ways. However, when the home language is different than the dominant language, a home language policy becomes necessary. Spolsky and Hult (2010) identify three elements within the language

policy model: language ideology, language practices and language management. This study covered Farsi language ideology by examining Iranian-American families' beliefs and attitudes towards Farsi as a heritage language which encompassed their cultural and identity beliefs and practices. We also examined the second element of family language policy; language practices, which refers to the extent to which a language is used with family members. Parents comprehensively expressed the ways in which they use the Farsi language in various situations and what they do (verbal and literacy practices) to maintain the heritage language in their children. The third element, the language management, refers to choices Iranian-American parents make in relation to language use at home. This includes rules they set up for their family in regards to language use at home or in public, the decisions family make in regards to use of language with the extended family and establishing laws for ensuring the family language policies within each family. Such efforts can be observed in Iranian-American parents desire to maintain the Farsi heritage language in their children by establishing "*Farsi only*" family policy that applied to everybody at home (Shirazi & Borjian, 2013). Similarly, parents in this study used whatever means possible to encourage use of Farsi by their children (e.g. corrective feedback, persuasion, explanation or even financial penalties etc.). Parents provided details on their effort and management strategies to actively interfere with their children's language use at home such as: putting pressure on them to use more Farsi, nagged them for switching to English, and corrected their mistakes in Farsi.

**Extracurricular activities.** Extracurricular activities in Farsi school also involved the interaction between family and school. Most of these activities were coordinated by

Farsi school and occasionally aided by parents. These included national, cultural, and religious observances and ceremonies. Iranian-American parents believed that participating in these extracurricular events such as Nowruz, Yalda, and Mehregan encouraged children to put their Farsi skills at use and show it off.

**Family and Persian ethnic community connection.** There is no doubt that Iranian-American parents made great efforts to speak their heritage language and teach it to their children at home. However, it was concluded that parental efforts were not the sole factor in their children's success; a linguistic community played an important role as well. Parents believed that the larger Iranian-American community plays an important part in providing Farsi language resources and encouraging the language preservation. Mokhtari (2007), studied language learning strategies and beliefs of college students learning Farsi and found that students were highly motivated to learn Farsi:

This shows that students were motivated to learn Farsi more for social interaction rather than academic purposes or better job opportunities. This study found that not only learning context influenced the beliefs of the students but also societal trends in language learning regarding the advantages of Farsi fluency was influential too. (p.135).

For the parents to be successful in their efforts to preserve their heritage language, the efforts needed to begin within the community itself. For example, several parents reported additional resources within the Iranian-American community which allow their children to practice their heritage language. Parents talked about various community resources such as Persian dance and music classes, Persian cultural festivals, Farsi library

groups, local Persian mosque, Persian cultural community centers, and the circle of Iranian friends they socialized with, Farsi speaking Facebook groups, book signing opportunities for children with Farsi book authors, children play groups, and Farsi speaking nannies and childcare providers that provided children additional opportunities to practice their heritage language. Parents in this study identified several resources available to their children in Persian community. This included: Persian friends, Farsi library groups, Persian mosques, and public celebrations.

### **Exosystem**

The *exosystem*, which incorporates remote social settings in which the individual may not be directly involved, but which indirectly impacts him. The exosystem consists of children's neighborhood, support network, and the broader society (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Social settings and their interactions can have a direct effect on heritage language development and maintenance. Analysis of exosystem in this study includes (relationships with extended family and parental support).

**Relationships with extended family.** Although most Iranian-American individuals have been living in the U.S. for decades, majority still might have many family members in Iran and still wish to visit Iran and keep contact with them regularly. The ability to speak the heritage language was very important for parents because it allows the children to communicate with their grandparents and extended family. Parents seemed to perceive that learning Farsi is highly important for their children and some parents even attached some sentimental value to their beliefs. Parents viewed the ability to communicate with family and relatives specially grandparents as the most important value

in this regard. They focused on the necessity of children's knowing their original roots and language, so they are able to remain in contact with relatives in Iran who do not speak English. Modarresi (2001) emphasizes the role that grandparents play in teaching Farsi and guarding its maintenance. He also underlines the important role that keeping contact with people back home plays in the process of language maintenance. Unfortunately many Iranian-American families either don't have extended families in the U.S. or their relatives are spread all over the United States. Therefore, many Iranian-American families might find it hard to maintain connection with their extended family. As a result, Iranian-American parents used many communication tools (e.g., Viber, Telegram, and Facebook) to connect with their extended family and grandparents in Iran and keep the affective relationship between them alive.

**Parental support.** Parental involvement is of the most important in determining the amount of student achievement that will occur. Parental involvement in activities such as helping with homework or attending parent-teacher conferences impact student's achievement. Many researchers believe that parent involvement positively affects student achievement. Ho Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) found that parent involvement with their children in the home was most strongly related to increased math and reading achievement and that parental organization attendance and volunteering were somehow associated with increased student achievement. The perceived value of education can reflect actual parental opinions about education and that perception can improve or hinder academic skills and, in turn, improve or hinder school performance. Iranian-American parents in this study believed that the importance placed on education by them closely relates to their

children academic success. For positive results to occur, parents believed they must encourage their children to work with them to increase their Farsi learning abilities. Language practices involved many approaches and practices to help or encourage children to speak and understand Farsi. Iranian-American parents in this study employed many heritage language literacy strategies for giving their children the tools to develop biliteracy. These strategies involved literacy events or activities where reading or writing played a role and usually involved a written text or texts central to the activity. Parents read story books to their children, encouraged them to read sentences and signs in Farsi, played Farsi phonics games with them, and helped their children study at home. Parents reported speaking Farsi language at home with each other and with their children. They also read children's books in Farsi language; tell bed time stories from their culture and show videos with cartoons from Iran. They also arrange trips for their children to Iran. The participants also report that having grandparents present in the household helps a lot with the transmission of the heritage language to their children.

### **Macrosystem**

The *macrosystem* is broadly defined as the large overarching set of social values, cultural beliefs, political ideologies, customs, and laws that incorporate the microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Analysis of mesosystem in this study includes (Iranian-American family's connections to cultural and religious institutions, etc.).

**Family's connections to cultural and religious institutions.** Heritage language learning does not exclusively include language, it also involves the transfer of a whole set

of cultural, moral, and spiritual values. Krashen et al. (1998) explain that speaking in the heritage language means providing a strong bond and enriching the connection between children, parents, and the heritage culture. Krashen et al. (1998) also argue that using the heritage language enables strong family communication among members of an ethnic group. If we consider language as a social practice, culture becomes the very core of language teaching objective. Cultural learning and language learning are intertwined in a sense that proficiency in a language results in cultural awareness of that language; subsequently, cultural awareness in a language supports the proficiency of that language. When parents choose the language that is comfortable to them, their parenting also seems to benefit from it as well as allowing their heritage language and culture to be transferred to their children. Saville-Troike (1996) indicated that family members' attitudes toward heritage language and culture, as well as language itself, are important in spreading and maintaining cultural identity. As stated earlier, Iranian-American parents have a strong desire to transfer their values and culture to their children. In case of Iranian-American immigrants in the U.S., a survey conducted by the Iranian Studies Group at MIT (Mostashari, 2004), indicated that Iranians view language, traditions, festivities, and family values as the most important aspects of their home culture. Although Iranian-Americans have shown a high tendency to assimilate to the U.S. society's values in the areas such as education, finance, and management (Barati- Marnani, 1981), they have exhibited resistance to change the central values of their heritage culture. According to Atoofi (2011) some of the behaviors that illustrate core characteristics of Iranian people can be described as follows:



Iranian Americans have shown much resistance to change the core values of their home culture. The adherence to the core values of the home culture can be seen in the way Iranian American socialize their children to live in America. For instance, most Iranian American parents encourage their children to marry solely an Iranian, to respect culture-specific codes of formality with a higher status person, and to behave modestly in public (p.39).

Waters (1994) pointed out that the ways second generation ethnic minority people define themselves depends on how powerfully their parents emphasize their cultural heritage. According to Waters, parents who value their own language and culture are more likely to raise children who are proud of their heritage language and maintain their language and culture which in turn, influence the children's perception of their ethnic identity. Iranian-American parents have a strong desire to transmit their values and culture to their children. A harmonious relation exists between language and culture and heritage language is symbolically linked to its heritage culture. For most Iranian-American parents, however, Farsi is not only a means of communication, but also a window for their children to become aware of their cultural values and practices of their heritage background. The results of this study revealed that parents realized that language, culture, and tradition are the foundation of a strong family and that in order to preserve their heritage language, culture, and identity; they must maintain their heritage language at home. Some parents wanted their children to be proud of their culture and not be "ashamed" of identifying with it. Iranian-American parents in this study talked about various ways they shared their family cultural values, beliefs and understanding with their children. They believed if their

children lose their connection with their ancestral culture, little by little they will forget their roots and might get lost in the dominant culture. Some watched a lot of Farsi movies and Iranian children TV series broadcasting From Iran through satellite to familiarize them with the culture of their heritage ancestry.

Given the current state of Iranian affairs in the U.S., and the negative stigma related to being Islamic or Iranian these days; my study did not overtly ask questions pertaining to religious and ideological stances of participants, fearing it might discourage Iranian-American parents from comfortably speaking about their views due to the sensitivity of the topic. However, parent's views on the topic of relation between heritage language and religion showed up by itself in various conversations, noticeably more from the participants from the Islamic school. Iranian-Americans make up a diverse religious group. Although 98% of Iranians in Iran are Muslims, only 50% of Iranian-Americans identify themselves as Muslim. While, more than 21% of Iranian-Americans identify themselves as spiritual or without any organized religion, about 17% categorize themselves as either atheists or agnostics. Baha'is, Christians, Jewish, and Zorastherians make up the other religious groups of Iranian-Americans in the U.S. (Mostashari, 2004).

According to (Moeini-Meybodi, 2014), Iranian parents as a whole in the U.S., do not try seriously to discuss or transmit religion. Disappointed with the religious government in Iran, most Iranian immigrants emphasized culture more than religion in their children's socialization. Parents' desire for transferring their heritage language to their children is presented in their efforts to educate their children about their culture by taking them to Iran, reading magazines, books, and performing religious duties, attending

language lessons, and family interactions in the United States (Mahdi, 1998). Iranian-American parents in Moeini-Meybodi (2014) study identified themselves as either practicing Muslims or non-practicing Muslims. She observed that Iranian-American parents who identify themselves as practicing Muslims tend to slightly differ in the way they view the importance of Farsi heritage language. Moeini-Meybodi (2014) argues that this difference is due to the degree they identify themselves as being religious or non-religious and the extent to which they are willing to assimilate to the American culture. Practicing families in her observation tend to be more traditional and attach to the Iranian/Islamic cultural norms. The semi-non practicing families tend to want to blend more into American society, for example, they would not have religious markers (e.g., the Islamic head covering for women) that practicing families do.

Mahdi, (1998) argues that these subtle differences are highlighted in the way these two different groups of Iranian-Americans think about the importance of learning Farsi. The non-practicing group view Farsi heritage necessary for communicating with family, get college credits, and learn about their culture. On the other hand, for the practicing families learning Farsi means something beyond communication and college, it means a doorway through which they could transfer a whole set of cultural and religious norms.

Responses of parents in my study also slightly differed, depending on whether they are taking their children to Islamic school for Farsi classes or they choose secular Farsi heritage language schools. Parent's responses shed light on two different approaches to the reasoning behind why they think it is necessary for their children to learn Farsi. In other words, parents who took their children to Islamic school seemed to be more religious

(some wore hijab even outside of mosque) and talked more about Islamic values as oppose to the other parents who took their children to secular Farsi heritage schools. This noticeable difference was very telling and expected since some of these parents drove two hours every Saturday back and forth from Virginia which basically took their whole Saturday to bring their children to this particular school in Maryland. This showed me that these parents were very motivated to go to this specific school because of their Islamic views and teachings, whereas, the secular school parents took their children to the heritage school that was closest and convenient to them. The Islamic school parents saw the role of heritage language as a tool to preserve their religion views in their daily life. On the other hand, the topic of religion did not come up in the conversations that I had with secular school parents. I assume from my observations, that the lack of focus on religion indicated that perhaps some participants did not find their religion to be an important determining factor as to who they were or their Iranian Identity.

### **Chronosystem**

The last layer, chronosystem, illustrates how immigrant children's outcomes are also influenced by the historical period and the era in which they develop and mature (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This includes the interaction of ecological systems over time as Mahatma Ghandi states: "The future will depend on what we do in the present." The chronosystem, in particular, emphasizes life transitions and individual changes through time (e.g., immigrant children's transition to adulthood, timing of migration, national and political climate impact, mobile technology, etc.)

**National and political climate impact.** Heritage language maintenance and development does not happen in a vacuum in any given society. The social and political climate of any host society has a direct effect on how the minority languages are viewed and treated. The support for minority language education around the worldwide either increases or decreases with each change in the political events around the world. More in depth studies are needed in order to understand how various social and political climates affect heritage language use and development. Dicker (2003) claims that qualitative research can play an important role in understanding the “social, political, cultural, and linguistic environments in which bilingual education programs are implemented as well as the educational effectiveness of bilingual education” (p. 372). Attitudes towards heritage languages vary in host countries depending on their particular social and political context and different views towards these languages and its role in the host countries.

Iranian-Americans face the backlash of negative politics between Iran and the United States, particularly after 9/11 tragedy. Iran was once again linked to terrorism and it changed American discourse towards Muslim Middle Easterners, including Arabs and Iranians. One particular example of this system affecting Farsi language teaching and maintenance was illustrated by Najafi (2009). In her examination of the state of the maintenance of Farsi language among Iranians in the United State, she discovered that Persian reading proficiency in Iranian families in her study fell to the lowest level in the years 1980 and 1990 which were years immediately after the revolution of 1979 in Iran. Najafi (2009) believes this shift in language maintenance was due to political and societal changes of the era:

This is possibly due to several reasons. First, the years of 1980s are the years immediately after the revolution as well as the Iran-Iraq war. Obviously, many Iranians had no desire to visit Iran. Second, in these years many Iranians had a feeling of temporality, and they were just waiting for the situation to settle down in Iran to go back to Iran. Therefore, there were no organized communities, organizations, or Persian classes at that time. Third, it was only in 1990s that the members of the Iranian community realized that although the war in Iran had ended, they were not going back to Iran. Consequently, the years of 1990s became the years of building organizations and Persian classes. These political and social factors are possibly some of the reasons why the decades of 1980s and 1990s mark the lowest percentages of children with Persian reading skills (p.107).

Also whether a society that immigrant child live in is supportive of multiculturalism or not, can result in marginalization or assimilation in the larger society. If the host society is open to the ideas of multiculturalism, the immigrant children's integration is likely. On the other hand, if the society is not welcoming ethnic heritage maintenance, separation can lead to segregation in the mainstream society (Berry, 2005). The immigrant children's assimilation outcomes are shaped by these societal influences and by the degree to which they choose to maintain or discard their own culture and mainstream norms. Ramezanzadeh's study (2010) found the following:

Persian heritage language college students faced many external factors operating against them when learning or using Farsi. For most, Farsi was the language of home and family, a language blended with English into a personal shorthand, but

rarely if ever used outside of the house, and certainly not in formal situations. Farsi had become a language in hiding – a veiled language (p. 201).

As a result of decades of political turmoil and hostility between the United States and Islamic Republic government in Iran, some Iranian-American immigrants feel that they are being viewed in a negative light in the U.S. Subsequently, some second-generation Iranian-Americans have come to have a less favorable view of their ancestral land and its cultural dynamics.

### **Implications**

This study explored the experiences of Iranian-American immigrant parents in helping their children to develop and maintain their heritage languages through heritage language schools. The findings of this study highlight a number of important aspects concerning family language maintenance and shift. The first is that bilingual parents certainly engage in language maintenance, planning, and develop family language policies. However, the heritage language maintenance in the U.S. is like swimming against the current. This study found that as a less commonly taught language, the home and Farsi heritage school are the main and sometimes the only places where Iranian-American can learn and use Farsi. This finding raises important implications for Iranian-American families, heritage language educators, and educational program designers, who should recognize that heritage language maintenance is “not just an individual process, [but] it is a societal process that is influenced by multiple factors at the personal, educational, and societal levels” (Lee & Oxelson, 2006, p. 455). However, the responsibility of heritage language maintenance continues to fall upon individuals and

predominantly for immigrant families that live in the area where heritage language resources or community support are scarce. The findings provide a better understanding of how minority language families face challenges in terms of language choices and maintenance, and how they negotiate their ethnic identities through heritage language programs. This study provides readers an overview of the complexity of heritage language maintenance issues, not only in heritage language schools, but also at home, in public, and social settings. As Wong Fillmore (2000) advised, educators should have an understanding of their immigrant students' backgrounds as well as the challenges they face in an English-dominant environment. In addition, parents, educators, and community leaders should work together to create ways to raise heritage language awareness within the classroom and community. This study also has several implications for researchers in the field of language acquisition and bilingual education. This study will also add to the literature in language maintenance studies.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this research as well as on suggestions from participants, the following list outlines how this study may be of benefit to heritage language parents, members from community heritage language schools, and policy makers.

**For minority parents.** It is important that immigrant parents understand the challenges and difficulties they may encounter in their efforts to maintain and develop heritage language to their future generations. Parents should be aware that they may be discouraged by these challenges, for example they might be disappointed when their children start using English at home after they enter public schools. However, it is



important for them to promote and support heritage language at home and in the community. Immigrant parents should use their heritage language when speaking with their children at home and encourage them as much as they can. Parents should talk to each other and their children to express their thoughts and feelings towards heritage language maintenance. As seen in this study's findings, when an immigrant child is supported at home and at school with positive heritage language learning opportunities, language maintenance stands a better chance of success. Thus, parents should consider expanding communication with their children's teachers in public schools to seek ways of introducing and celebrating their cultural heritage in class together. Applying these suggestions would generate a better support for minority language parents for heritage language maintenance issues.

**For educators.** Educators should try to learn about their minority students' heritage language and culture. They need to find ways to get to know and communicate with immigrant parents and encourage the maintenance of heritage language in the children. Educators should also understand that immigrant children might feel embarrassment towards their heritage language and culture and avoid using it because they do not want to "stand out" and be perceived as "different" from the mainstream society (Wong Fillmore, 2000). Educators should help immigrant children be positive towards speaking and learning heritage language by showing interest in their heritage and encouraging them to speak their heritage language. Also higher education institutions should cooperate with heritage communities allowing transferring Farsi course credits from heritage schools to the public education system. Further, heritage language teachers

need to be trained in effective language teaching methods. Therefore, heritage language schools should engage in teacher training programs that include knowledge of heritage language specific learning styles and strategies, motivation issues, and effective teaching methods.

**Community leaders.** Community leaders should also work closely with the community members to consider and plan various heritage celebration opportunities or events. The findings of this study suggest that the Iranian-American parents responded very positively towards community-level opportunities to share their heritage language, culture, and food if opportunities are offered. It is important that heritage language speaker youth experience positive heritage participation in their community as they prepare themselves to become the future community leaders.

### **Additional Limitations**

There were a number of limitations to this study that should be noticed. First, there were a limited number of participants (12) who were all similar in socio-economic and educational backgrounds (well-educated, middle- and upper-middle-class Iranians). Therefore the results might not be generalizable to other U.S. immigrant groups. It is recommended that future research consider including a larger number of families as well as including families of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Also children's attitudes were not studied in this study. It is helpful that children's perceptions should also be studied to provide a wider angle on the understanding of immigrant families' heritage language situations. Finally, geographical distance made communication and scheduling

of interviews difficult. A majority of the interviews were conducted by Skype, and it is clear that in-person interviews might have generated more detailed and interesting results.

### **Final Thoughts**

Over time, heritage languages and cultures are either maintained or lost, and my reason to study Farsi heritage language was not just for my own personal interest, but also for interest I have in gaining a deeper understanding of minority language rights in this multi-lingual and multicultural society. Parents can make a difference in their children's heritage language development and maintenance; however, U.S. society profoundly challenges minority language maintenance by the strong dominance of English language. Ethnic identity forms under the influence of the society. If society does not support multilingualism and multiculturalism maintaining heritage language and heritage identity would be challenging at best. As Fishman said, the efforts need to begin within the community itself. More education on how heritage languages are developed and how bilinguals can function in both communities would be a good beginning point.

## Appendix A



### Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

Research Hall, 4400 University Drive, MS 6D5, Fairfax, Virginia 22030  
Phone: 703-993-5445; Fax: 703-993-9590

DATE: April 1, 2016

TO: Joseph Maxwell, PhD  
FROM: George Mason University IRB

Project Title: [884314-1] "Maintaining Persian as a Heritage Language: Exploring Parents' Perceptions, Attitudes and Efforts"

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: April 1, 2016

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category #2

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Office of Research Integrity & Assurance (ORIA) has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

Please remember that all research must be conducted as described in the submitted materials.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be submitted to the ORIA prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

If you have any questions, please contact Katherine Brooks at (703) 993-4121 or [kbrook14@gmu.edu](mailto:kbrook14@gmu.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within George Mason University IRB's records.

## Appendix B



### PRINCIPALS CONSENT LETTER

Please read the informed consent form and print a copy for your records.

**Title of the Study:** “Maintaining Persian as a Heritage Language in the United States: Exploring Persian Parents’ Perceptions, Attitudes and Efforts”.

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Joseph Maxwell Professor of Research methodology

**Investigator:** Maryam Salahshoor; Doctoral Student at George Mason University  
Multicultural and Multilingual Department

**Advisor/Chair:** Dr. Marjorie Hall Haley Professor, Department of Multicultural and Multilingual Education George Mason University

Dear Heritage Language School Principal:

You are invited to participate in a study titled “Maintaining Persian as a Heritage Language in the United States: Exploring Persian Parents’ Perceptions, Attitudes and Efforts” conducted by Maryam Salahshoor, doctoral student at George Mason University, Fairfax, VA, in the (Multicultural and Multilingual Education Program). The goal of this study is to understand how parents at Farsi heritage schools in Northern Virginia view, and support heritage literacy development in the Farsi language learners attending these schools. If your permission is granted, parents will be directly contacted by Maryam to explain the study and ask for their agreement in completing the questionnaire. Volunteers then will be asked to participate in a 50 to 60 minute interview with the researcher if they wished. No costs will be acquired by either your school/center or the individual participants.

## **DIRECTION**

If you agree for your school to participate in this study, please provide your name and your email in the space provided at the bottom of this form. Maryam Salahshoor then will arrange with you a way to contact the parents and informing them about the research (e-mails sent through school or Maryam Salahshoor directly).

## **PARTICIPATION**

Participation in this research is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.

## **BENEFITS**

There are no benefits to you as a participant. However, knowledge gained from this work will contribute to our understanding of the factors that support heritage literacy development of the children, which is the first step towards improvement of the meaningful practices that heritage language educators can use to help the children develop heritage literacy. Families who participate in the study may benefit by understanding better their motives and goals relative to the Farsi heritage language learning and by expanding their collection of successful approaches to maintaining their heritage culture and language. Results of this work will also be valuable for the Farsi schools as well as for other communities and educators who work with bilingual children.

## **RISK**

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Results of this study will remain absolutely confidential and anonymous. Should this study be published, only pooled results will be documented. All information obtained will be strictly confidential and used only for the purpose of this research, as authorized by George Mason University, although results may ultimately be presented in formats other than the dissertation, such as journal articles or conferences. Data will be securely stored on a laptop computer as well as on an external hard drive in the Principal investigator's office. Only Maryam Salahshoor will have access to this data and will translate and transcribe the data at the end of each session. No names or identifying markers will be used. Later audio recordings will be deleted.

## CONTACT

This research is being conducted by Maryam Salahshoor, Doctoral Candidate Multicultural and Multilingual Education department at George Mason University. Maryam Salahshoor may be reached at (571-222-7140) email: [msalahsh@gmu.edu](mailto:msalahsh@gmu.edu) for questions or to report a research-related problem. You can also contact my faculty advisor's Dr. Marjorie Hall Haley Professor of Multicultural and Multilingual Education, George Mason University; Phone: (703) 993-8710.

Fax: (703) 993-4370, email: [mhaley@gmu.edu](mailto:mhaley@gmu.edu) or Dr. Joseph Maxwell Professor of Research methodology e.mail: [jmaxwell@gmu.edu](mailto:jmaxwell@gmu.edu) George Mason University Phone: (703) 993-2119 (Principal investigator). You may contact the George Mason University Office of Research Integrity & Assurance at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research. This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

## CONSENT

I have read this form, all of my questions have been answered by the research staff, and I give Maryam Salahshoor, a Doctoral Student at George Mason University, Fairfax, VA, permission to conduct survey for the purpose of gathering and reporting information regarding the factors that contribute to the successful operation of heritage language schools to participate in this study.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C



### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### Overall Purpose

The purpose of this interview is to investigate the beliefs, practices, and challenges faced by Iranian American parents living in the Washington, DC metropolitan area in developing and maintaining Farsi as a heritage language in their children.

**The open-ended questions listed below are guiding questions for the interview.**

**Introductory Remarks:** Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. This interview will probably take about 50-60 minutes to complete. I would like to talk with you about your thoughts on your Farsi school and ask you about some of the literacy practice and activities I have been able to observe in your Farsi school. This interview will be confidential. I will not identify you by name in any reports or in any conversations with other people. There is no right or wrong answers and you can refuse to participate at any time without consequence.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Introductions and presentation of the Informed Consent form.

[Interviewer: Briefly review points from the Informed Consent. Check if the interviewee is comfortable with the audio recorder. If not, just take notes.]

#### Parents Interview Questions

##### Home Maintenance Effort Questions:

1- Why is it important for you that your child/children learn to speak Farsi?



Prompts: (What are the observed benefits you see in your kinds' speaking their heritage language? Would you be concerned if your child/children never learned to speak the heritage language? Why?)

2- What you have done at home to help your child/children in learning Farsi? (e.g. Are there any reading, visual/audio materials available in Farsi at your house for your children?)

Prompts: (Do you give any incentives? Do you have any language policies at home?) Please give some examples)

3- Specifically, in what situations do you use the heritage language with your child/children? (Prompts: What about at home, or in the community?)

4. What problems or difficulties have you encountered when you try to teach them Farsi? (For example, aspects of time, effort, people, place, resources)

Prompt: What solutions have you tried?

5. What do you think parents can do if their children are losing their heritage language?

6- Do you have community support for your child/children heritage language learning?

Prompt: If so, what access do you have? If not, what else would you like to see?

7- How do you or children feel about speaking Farsi outside of home and in the community? Prompt: Do they feel comfortable? Why and why not?

### **Farsi School Questions**

8- What are your main reasons for choosing to send your child/children to this Farsi school?

(Prompts: What do you think is the most important: culture heritage, family values, self-identity, or what?)

9- What is your expectation for your children's learning in this Farsi school?

(Prompts: their effort and time spent on this subject, their language proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking)

10- Do your child/children sometimes resist going to Farsi school?

Prompt: If yes, what are the reasons they gave for not wanting to learn Farsi? How do you persuade or encourage them?

11. How do your children usually study Farsi at home?

Prompt: Do you study with them? Do you need to force them to do so, or do they make themselves study?

12. Do you give your children extra materials to study in Farsi?

Prompt: If so, what is their attitude toward the extra school work?

13. How do you balance students' regular school work, extra-curricular activities, and Farsi language learning?

Prompt: What is your order of priority for these for your children?

14- What is your relationship with teachers and administration in Farsi school?

15. What is the extent of your involvement with the school extracurricular activities?

16. Would you like to add any more comments to this interview?

Thanks for your participation.

## Appendix D



### PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

#### CONSENT FORM

Please read the informed consent form and print a copy for your records.

**Title of the Study:** “Maintaining Persian as a Heritage Language in the United States: Exploring Persian Parents’ Perceptions, Attitudes and Efforts”.

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Joseph Maxwell Professor of Research methodology

**Investigator:** Maryam Salahshoor; Doctoral Student at George Mason University  
Multicultural and Multilingual Department

**Advisor/Chair:** Dr. Marjorie Hall Haley; Professor at Department of Multicultural and Multilingual Education George Mason University

Dear participants:

You are invited to participate in a research study focusing on the parents’, teachers’ and principals’ perspectives towards children’s Farsi learning. You were selected to be a possible participant because you have a children studying in a Farsi program or are teachers or principals at a Farsi school. The title of this study is: “Maintaining Persian as a Heritage Language in the United States: Exploring Persian Parents’ Perceptions, Attitudes and Efforts” conducted by Maryam Salahshoor, doctoral student at George Mason University, Fairfax, VA, in the (Multicultural and Multilingual Education Program). The goal of this study is to understand how parents at Farsi heritage schools in Northern Virginia view, and support heritage literacy development in the Farsi language learners attending these schools.

## **DIRECTION**

If you agree to participate in this study, please provide your name and your email in the space provided at the bottom of this form. This will allow Maryam Salahshoor to be able to schedule and conduct an individual interview with you. These interviews will be in Farsi and will be audio recorded; however, they will be immediately translated and transcribed and written up by Maryam Salahshoor then deleted. The interviews will take place in a public place (library, school, coffee shops. etc.) of your choice and during a mutually agreed time.

If you would like to participate in this study, please provide your name and email below.

## **PARTICIPATION**

Participation in this research is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.

## **BENEFITS**

There are no benefits to you as a participant. However, knowledge gained from this work will contribute to our understanding of the factors that support heritage literacy development of the children, which is the first step towards improvement of the meaningful practices that heritage language educators can use to help the children develop heritage literacy. Families who participate in the study may benefit by understanding better their motives and goals relative to the Farsi heritage literacy learning and by expanding their collection of successful approaches to maintaining their heritage culture and language. Results of this work will also be valuable for the Farsi schools as well as for other communities and educators who work with bilingual children.

## **RISK**

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The survey results will be pooled for the thesis project and individual results of this study will remain confidential. Should this study be published, only pooled results will be documented. All information obtained will be strictly confidential and used only for the

purpose of this research, as authorized by George Mason University, although results may ultimately be presented in formats other than the dissertation, such as journal articles or conferences. Data will be securely stored on a laptop computer as well as on an external hard drive in the Principal investigator's office. Only Maryam Salahshoor will have access to the data and will translate and transcribe the data at the end of each session. No names or identifying markers will be used. Later audio recordings will be deleted.

## **CONTACT**

This research is being conducted by Maryam Salahshoor, Doctoral Candidate Multicultural and Multilingual Education department at George Mason University. Maryam Salahshoor may be reached at (571-222-7140) email: msalahsh@gmu.edu for questions or to report a research-related problem. You can also contact my faculty advisor's Dr. Marjorie Hall Haley Professor of Multicultural and Multilingual Education, George Mason University; Phone: (703) 993-8710.

Fax: (703) 993-4370, email: mhaley@gmu.edu or Dr. Joseph Maxwell Professor of Research methodology e.mail: jmaxwell@gmu.edu George Mason University Phone: (703) 993-2119 (Principal investigator). You may contact the George Mason University Office of Research Integrity & Assurance at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research. This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

## **CONSENT**

I have read this form, all of my questions have been answered by the research staff, and I give Maryam Salahshoor, a Doctoral Student at George Mason University, Fairfax, VA, permission to conduct survey for the purpose of gathering and reporting information regarding the factors that contribute to the successful operation of heritage language schools to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Signature

Your e.mail -----

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to audio taping

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not agree to audio taping

## Appendix E

### Parents' Demographic Questionnaire

---

**DIRECTIONS:** Please respond to the following questions that appear below with sincerity. Please note that there is no right or wrong answer. Thank you.

#### **I. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

Choose the appropriate answer:

1. The person who is filling out this form is the child or children's:

☐Mother      ☐Father      ☐Grandparent   ☐Other (specify):-----

2. Name of your child (ern) Heritage Language school \_\_\_\_\_

3. Your age is:

4. Were you born in Iran?

☐Yes      ☐No

5. How old were you when you came to the U.S.?

----- Years old

6. What other language(s) beside Farsi is spoken in your family? (Check all that apply)

☐ English   ☐Turkish   ☐Kurdish      ☐Arabic      ☐Other----- (please indicate)

7. Your highest education level is:

☐Elementary   ☐High school   ☐College: bachelor's

☐College: graduate (master's/doctorate)

8. Your spouse's highest education level is:

☐Elementary   ☐High school   ☐College: bachelor's

☐College: graduate (master's/doctorate)

9. What is the highest educational level you completed in Iran?

☐Elementary ☐High school ☐College: bachelor's

☐College: graduate (master's/doctorate)

10 -What is the highest educational level your spouse completed in Iran?

☐Elementary ☐High school ☐College: bachelor's

☐College: graduate (master's/doctorate)

11. Please answer the following questions about your children who attend Farsi school:

(Place of birth, in what grade they are in public schools, in what grade they are in Farsi school, how many years they have attended Farsi school, and how many years they have gone to American daycare)

Child (ern) in Farsi school	Sex	Place of Birth	Grade in Public schools	Grade in Farsi schools	Years in Farsi school	Years in daycare
Child 1						
Child 2						
Child 3						
Child 4						

12. Do you work outside of home?

☐No ☐Yes ☐Full-time ☐Part-time

13. How often your children visit their grandparents? ☐Always ☐Often ☐  
Sometimes ☐Rarely ☐Never

## Appendix F

### FARSI LANGUAGE IN-CLASS TEACHING OBSERVATION

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Students \_\_\_\_\_ Students Age Range \_\_\_\_\_ Boys \_\_\_\_\_ Girls \_\_\_\_\_

---Reading aloud      ---Discussion      -----Scaffolding  
 ---Independent reading      ---Writing      -----  
 ---Conferencing      ---Explicit teaching of grammar      -----

Activities	Time spent	Materials used	Technology	Concepts involved	Scaffolding	Processes	Grouping
	procedural activity academic activity	chalkboard, teacher-made handouts, textbook,	--overhead ---projector ---computer ----	1- 2- 3-	Modeling Individual Guided	Reading Listening Writing Speaking	Entire class Small group Partners Individual
				1- 2- 3-	Modeling Individual Guided	Reading Listening Writing Speaking	Entire class Small group Partners Individual
				1- 2- 3-	Modeling Individual Guided	Reading Listening Writing Speaking	Entire class Small group Partners Individual
Student Behaviors	---students interact with each other around content  ---students interact with each other around non-academic or procedural issues			most students are  ---off task  ---on ask	----students are hesitant to enter into the discussion/activity ----students actively and enthusiastically participate in the discussion/activity		
Teacher Role	---source of knowledge  ---facilitator		---questions/comments seek memory/ seek facts ---questions/comments seek comprehension		Materials: ---prescribed program ---compiled by teacher		

Description of the classroom:|

Assessment strategies used:

Comments:



## References

- Allard, R. & R. Landry. 1992. Ethnolinguistic vitality beliefs and language maintenance and loss. In W. Fase, K. Jaspaert & S. Kroon (Eds.), *Maintenance and loss of minority languages*, (pp. 173–195). Amsterdam: John Benjamins. doi:10.1075/sibil.1.14.
- Atoofi, S. (2011). *Emotions in the classroom: Teachers' and students' affective practices in a Persian heritage language classroom in Los Angeles* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of California, Los Angeles.
- Baker, C. (2011). *Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism* (Vol. 79). Tonawanda, NY: Multilingual Matters.
- Baldwin-Edwards, M. (2008). Towards a theory of illegal migration: Historical and structural components. *Third World Quarterly*, 29 (7), 1449-1459. doi: 10.1080/01436590802386690.
- Bankston III, C. L., & Zhou, M. (1995). Effects of minority-language literacy on the academic achievement of Vietnamese youths in New Orleans. *Sociology of Education*, 1-17. doi: 10.2307/2112760.
- Barati-Marnani, A. (1981). *Assimilation of Iranian immigrants in southern California*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). United States International University, San Diego.
- Barnard, F. M. (Ed.). (1969). *Social and political culture*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Becker, D. J. (2013). *Parents' attitudes toward their children's heritage language maintenance: The case of Korean immigrant parents in West Michigan*. Retrieved from Grand Valley State University: <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1058&context=theses>
- Berns, R. M. (2006) *Child, family, school, community: Socialization and support*, (7th ed.) Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Berry, J. W. (2005). Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29 (6), 697-712. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.07.013

- Bozorgmehr, M., & Douglas, D. (2011). Success (ion): second-generation Iranian Americans. *Iranian Studies*, 44 (1), 3-24. doi:10.1080/00210862.2011.524047.
- Bradunas, E. (1988). *Ethnic heritage and language schools in America*. Washington, DC: Library of Congress.
- Brecht, R.D. and Ingold, C.W. (1998) *Tapping a national resource: Heritage languages in the United States*. Washington, DC: National Foreign Language Center Occasional Paper (NFLC).
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1990). Discovering what families do. In D. G. Blankenhorn, S. Bayme, & J. B. Elshtain (Eds.), *Rebuilding the nest: A new commitment to the American family* (pp. 27–38). Milwaukee, WI: Family Service America.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005). *Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives on human development*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Campbell, R., & Peyton, J. K. (1998). Heritage language students: A valuable language resource. *Eric Review*, 6 (1), 31–35.
- Carreira, M. (2004). Seeking explanatory adequacy: A dual approach to understanding the term. *Heritage Language Journal*, 2(1), 1-25.
- Carter, R. T. & Qureshi, A. (1995). A typology of philosophical assumptions in multicultural counseling and training. In J. G. Ponterotto, J. M. Casas, L. A. Suzuki, and C. M. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural counseling* (pp. 239-262). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Chao, T. H. (1997). Overview. In X. Wang (Ed.), *A view from within: A case study of Chinese heritage community language schools in the United States* (pp. 7-13). Washington, DC: National Foreign Language Center.
- Chamot, A. U., & Kupper, L. (1989). Learning strategies in foreign language instruction. *Foreign Language Annals*, 22 (1), 13-22. doi:10.1111/j.1944-9720.1989.tb03138.x.
- Chan, W.V Chin, K. N., & Suthiwan, T. (Eds.). (2011). *Foreign language teaching in Asia and beyond: current perspectives and future directions* (Vol. 3). Boston: Walter de Gruyter.
- Cho, G. (2000). The role of heritage language in social interactions and relationships: Reflections from a language minority group. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 24(4),

333-348. doi:10.1080/15235882.2000.10162773.

- Cho, G., Cho, K. S., & Tse, L. (1997). Why ethnic minorities want to develop their heritage language: The case of Korean-Americans. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 10 (2), 106-112. doi: 10.1080/07908319709525244.
- Cohen, D., & Crabtree, B. (2006). *Qualitative research guidelines project*. Princeton: NJ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.
- Colombi, C. & Roca, A. (2003). *Mi lengua: Spanish as a heritage language in the United States*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Compton, C. (2001). Heritage language communities and schools: Challenges and recommendations. In J. K. Peyton, D. A. Ranard, & Scott McGinnis (Eds.), *Heritage languages in America: Preserving a national resource* (pp. 145-166). Washington, DC & McHenry, IL: Center for Applied Linguistics & Delta Systems.
- Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, J. M. (2007). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Council of Europe (1996). *Modern languages. Learning, teaching, assessment: A common European framework of reference*. Strasbourg : France
- Crawford, J. (1995). Endangered native American languages: What is to be done, and why? *Bilingual Research Journal*, 19 (1), 17-38.
- Creswell, J. W. (2005). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2007). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Cummins, J. (1991). Interdependence of first- and second language proficiency in bilingual children. In E. Bialystok (Ed.), *Language processing in bilingual children* (pp. 70-89). Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, power and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Cummins, J. (2005). A proposal for action: Strategies for recognizing heritage language

- competence as a learning resource within the mainstream classroom. *The Modern Language Journal*, 89, 585-592.
- Cummins, J., & Swain, M. (2014). *Bilingualism in education: Aspects of theory, research and practice*. London: Routledge.
- Cunningham, T. H., & Graham, C. (2000). Increasing native English vocabulary recognition through Spanish immersion: Cognate transfer from foreign to first language. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 92(1), 37- 49.
- Daha, M. (2011). Contextual factors contributing to ethnic identity development of second-generation Iranian American adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Research* 26 (5), 43-569. doi: 10.1177/0743558411402335.
- Davis, P., & Scott, A. (1995). The effect of interviewer variance on domain comparisons. *Survey Methodology*, 21, 99-106.
- Davis, D. (2006). *Shahnameh: The Persian book of kings by Abolqasem Ferdowsi*. New York: Viking.
- Der-Martirosian, C. (2008). *Iranian immigrants in Los Angeles: the role of networks and economic integration*. Los Angeles: LFP Scholarly Publishing.
- De Vaus, D. (2001). *Research design in social research*. London: Sage.
- Dicker, S. J. (2003). *Languages in America: A pluralist view*. Clevedon, U.K.: Multilingual Matters.
- Draper, J. B., & Hicks, J. H. (2000). Where we've been: What we've learned. In J. B. Webb & B. L. Miller (Eds.), *Teaching heritage language learners: Voices from the classroom* (pp. 15-35). Yonkers, NY: American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.
- Erickson, F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In M. C. Wittrock (Ed.) (pp. 119-161). *Handbook of research on teaching* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: MacMillan.
- Fan, S. (2002). *Exploring how cultural identity influences the academic achievement patterns of Chinese American college students: The stories of Chinese in Houston* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), University of Texas: Austin, TX.
- Fase, W., Japaert, K. and Kroon, S. (Eds.) (1992). *Maintenance and loss of minority languages*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

- Fuligni, A. J., Witkow, M., & Garcia, C. (2005). Ethnic identity and the academic adjustment of adolescents from Mexican, Chinese, and European backgrounds. *Developmental psychology*, 41(5), 799.
- Fishman, J. A. (1980). Minority language maintenance and the ethnic mother tongue school. *Modern Language Journal*, 64(2), 167-172. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-4781.1980.tb05180.x.
- Fishman, J. A. (2001). 300-plus years of heritage language education in the United States. In J.K. Peyton, D.A. Ranard, & S. McGinnis (Eds.), *Heritage languages in America: Preserving a national resource* (pp. 29–36). McHenry, IL: Centre for Applied Linguistics.
- Fishman, J. A. (2006). Three hundred-plus years of heritage language education in the United States. In J. K. Peyton, D. A. Ranard, & S. McGinnis (Eds.), *Heritage languages in America: Preserving a national resource* (pp. 81–99). Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems.
- Gambhir, S. (2002). Truly less commonly taught languages and heritage language learners in the United States. In Peyton, J.K., S. McGinnis, & D. Ranard (Eds.) *Heritage Languages in America: Preserving a Natural Resource* (p. 207-228). Illinois: Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems.
- Gambino, C. P., Acosta, Y. D., & Grieco, E. M. (2014). *English-speaking ability of the foreign-born population in the United States: 2012*. Washington, DC.: U.S. Census Bureau.
- Garcia, O., Zakharia, Z., & Otcu, B. (2013). *Bilingual community education for American children: Beyond heritage languages in a global city*. Bristol, Buffalo: Multilingual Matters
- Gay, L. R., Mills, G. E., & Airasian, P. (2003). *Educational research: Competencies for analysis and application* (7th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.
- Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. New York, NY: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Grant, R. A., & Lee, I. (2009). The ideal English speaker: A juxtaposition of globalization and language policy in South Korea and racialized language attitudes in the United States. In R. Kubota & A. Lin (Eds.), *Race, culture, and identities in second language education: Exploring critically engaged practice* (pp. 44-63). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Grant, R. & Salahshoor, M. (2012). Pedagogical diversity and the need for

- contextually responsive teacher education in the U.S. In B. Shaklee and S. Baily (Eds.) *Internationalizing teacher education in the U.S.* (pp. 205-220). Lanham, MD: Rowan and Little.
- Gregory, E. and Kelly, C. (1992) Bilingualism and assessment. In Blenkin, G. M. & Kelly, A.V. (Eds.), *Assessment in early childhood education* (pp. 144-162). London: Paul Chapman.
- Griffith, T. (2004). Readers respond to Julian Edge's "Imperial troopers and servants of the lord". *TESOL Quarterly*, 38 (4), 714-716. doi: 10.2307/3588288
- Guardado, M. (2002). Loss and maintenance of first language skills: Case studies of Hispanic families in Vancouver. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 58 (3), 341–363. doi:10.3138/cmlr.58.3.341
- Guba, E. G. (1990). The alternative paradigm dialog. In E. G. Guba (Ed.), *The paradigm dialog* (pp. 17-27). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Hafez. (n.d.). In Wikipedia. Retrieved February 10, 2017, from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hafez>
- Haley, M. H., & Alsweel, R. A. (2012). Bridging instructional gaps in preparing to teach millennial language learners. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 2(5), 865-876.
- Haley, M. H., & Ferro, M. S. (2011). Understanding the perceptions of Arabic and Chinese teachers toward transitioning into US schools. *Foreign Language Annals*, 44(2), 289-307. doi: 10.1111/j.1944-9720.2011.01136.x.
- Haley, M. H., Steeley, S. L., & Salahshoor, M. (2013). Connecting twenty-first century skills and world language practices: A case study with teachers of critical need languages. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 3(6), 865-876.
- Hashimoto, K., & Lee, J. S. (2011). Heritage-language literacy practices: A case study of three Japanese American families. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 34 (2), 161-184. doi: 10.1080/15235882.2011.597821.
- Hassan, H. D. (2007). *Iran: Ethnic and religious minorities*. CRS Report for Congress, Public Broadcasting, Boston: MA.
- Haynes, S. W. (2010). *Unfinished revolution: The early American republic in a British world*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/khs.2012.0007>.

- Hinton, L. (2001). Involuntary language loss among immigrants: Asian-American linguistic autobiographies. In J. E. Alatis & A. H. Tan (Eds.), *Georgetown University round table on languages and linguistics: Language in our time* (pp. 203-252). Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.
- Hoffman, D. M. (1989). Language and culture acquisition among Iranians in the United States. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 20 (2), 118-132. doi: 10.1525/aeq.1989.20.2.05x0843k.
- Ho Sui-Chu, E., & Willms, J. (1996). Effects of parental involvement on eighth-grade achievement. *Sociology of Education*, 69, 126-141.
- Hornberger, N. H. (2003). Afterword: Ecology and ideology in multilingual classrooms. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 6 (3), 296-302. doi: 10.1080/13670050308667787.
- Hornberger, N. H., & Wang, S. C. (2008). Who are our heritage language learners? Identity and biliteracy in heritage language education in the United States. In D. M. Brinton, O. Kagan, & S. Bauckus (Eds.), *Heritage language education: A new field emerging* (pp. 3-38). New York: Routledge.
- Hu, Y. (2006). *Biliteracy maintenance and bicultural identity development: Chinese heritage language school communities in southern California*. (Unpublished Ed.D. dissertation) Texas A&M University - Kingsville, Texas.
- Kagan, O., & Dillon, K. (2004). Heritage speakers' potential for high level language proficiency. In H. Byrnes & H. Maxim (Eds.), *Advanced foreign language learning: A challenge to college programs*. (pp.99-112). Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Kagan, O. (2005). In support of a proficiency-based definition of heritage language learners: The case of Russian. *The International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 8 (2), 213-221. doi: 10.1080/13670050508668608.
- Kelleher, A. (2010). What is a heritage language program? *Heritage Briefs*, 3, 1-4.
- Kenyatta, M., & Tai, R. H. (1997). Introduction to the symposium: Ethnicity and education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 67(2), vii-ix.
- Key Competencies (2002). *Survey 5*. Brussels: Eurydice, European Unit.
- King, K., A. (2000). Language ideologies and heritage language education. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 3, 167-184. doi: 10.1080/13670050008667705.

- Klein, J.I., Rice, C. & Levy, J. (2012). *U.S. Education reform and national security council on foreign relations*. Washington, DC: Council on Foreign Relations.
- Kloss, H. (1966). Types of multilingual communities: A discussion of ten variables. *Sociological Inquiry*, 36 (2), 135-145. doi: 10.1111/j.1475-682X.1966.tb00621.x.
- Kloss, H. (1998). *The American bilingual tradition*. McHenry, IL: Center for Applied Linguistics. doi: 10.1080/15235882.2000.10162780
- Kondo-Brown, K. (2003). Heritage language instruction for post-secondary students from immigrant backgrounds. *Heritage Language Journal*, 1(1), 1-25.
- Krashen, S. D., Tse, L. & McQuillan, J. (Eds.). (1998). *Heritage language development*. Culver City, CA: Language Education Associates.
- Lantolf, J. P., & Sunderman, G. (2001). The struggle for a place in the sun: Rationalizing foreign language study in the twentieth century. *The Modern Language Journal*, 85(1), 5-25. doi: 10.1111/0026-7902.00094.
- Lee, M. S. (2000). Bilingualism. In D. J. Lee (Eds.), *Studies on Korean in community schools* (pp. 25-51). University of Hawai'i at Manoa: Second language teaching and curriculum center.
- Lee, J., & Oxelson, E. (2006). "It's not my job": K-12 teacher attitudes toward students' heritage language maintenance. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 30 (2), 453-477.
- Lisbon Council, (2000). *Presidency conclusions: Lisbon European Council 23 and 24 March 2000*. Brussels, Belgium: Enterprise Publications.
- Macnamara, J. (1967). The bilingual's linguistic performance: A psychological overview. *Journal of Social Issues*, 23 (2), 58-77. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.1967.tb00576.x.
- Mahdi, A. A. (1998). Ethnic identity among second-generation Iranians in the United States. *Iranian Studies*, 31(1), 77-95. doi: 10.1080/00210869808701897.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Merriam, S. B. (2001). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education:*



*Revised and expanded from case study research.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

- Merino, B. J., Trueba, H. T., & Samaniego, F. A. (1993). Towards a framework for the study of the maintenance of the home language in language minority students. In B. J. Merino, H. T. Trueba, & F. A. Samaniego (Eds.), *Language and culture in learning: Teaching Spanish to native speakers of Spanish* (pp. 5-25). Washington DC, London: The Flamer Press.
- McCarty, T.L. (2002). *A place to be Navajo: Rough rock and the struggle for self-determination in indigenous schooling*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. doi: [10.5860/CHOICE.40-1684](https://doi.org/10.5860/CHOICE.40-1684).
- McKay, S. L., & Wong, S. L. C. (2000). *New immigrants in the United States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Moeini-Meybodi, M. (2014). *Ethnic language maintenance: A case study of second-generation Iranian Americans in the northeastern states* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). New York, NY: City University of New York.
- Mobasher, M. M. (2012). *Iranians in Texas: Migration, politics, and ethnic identity*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Modarresi, Y. (2001). The Iranian community in the United States and the maintenance of Persian. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 148, 93-115.
- Mokhtari, A. (2007). *Language learning strategies and beliefs about language learning: A study of university students of Persian in the United States*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Austin, TX: The University of Texas.
- Mostashari, A. (2004). *Factsheet on Iranian–American community. Iranian studies research group*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Mu, G. M. (2015). A meta-analysis of the correlation between heritage language and ethnic identity. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 36 (3), 239-254. doi: 10.1080/01434632.2014.909446
- Najafi, H. (2009). *Language maintenance and shift among Iranians residing in the United States*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Arizona State University. Tempe, Arizona

- National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (NSFLEP). (1996). Standards for foreign language learning: Preparing for the 21st century. Yonkers, N.Y.: ACTFL.
- Nelson, C., Treichler, P., & Grossberg, L. (1992). Cultural studies. In L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, & P. Treichler (Eds.), *Cultural studies* (pp. 1–16). New York: Routledge.
- Oestreicher, J. P. (1974). The early teaching of a modern language. *Review of the Council for Cultural Cooperation of the Council of Europe*, 24, 9-16.
- Oh, J. S., & Fuligni, A. J. (2010). The role of heritage language development in the ethnic identity and family relationships of adolescents from immigrant backgrounds. *Social Development*, 19 (1), 202-220. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9507.2008.00530.x.
- Ovissi, M. (1995). Chaos. *Chanteh*, 9-10.
- Paat, Y. F. (2013). Working with immigrant children and their families: An application of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 23 (8), 954-966. doi: 10.1080/10911359.2013.800007.
- Park, C. Y. (2007). *Maintaining Korean as a heritage language*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Arizona State University. Tempe, Arizona.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Peguro, A. A. (2008). The victimization and vulnerabilities of immigrant children: The importance of English proficiency. *Agenda for social justice: Solutions*, 1-7.
- Peyton, J. K., Ranard, D.A., & McGinnis, S. (Eds.), (2001). *Heritage Languages in America: Blueprint for the future*. Washington, DC & McHenry, IL: The Center for Applied Linguistics & Delta Systems.
- Phinney, J. S. (1990). Ethnic identity in adolescents and adults: Review of research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 108 (3), 499-514. doi: 10.1037/0033-2909.108.3.499.
- Pierson, L. L. (2007). Communicating ethnicity: A phenomenological analysis of constructed identity. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln.
- Pufahl, I., Rhodes, N. C., & Christian, D. (2001). Foreign language teaching: What the United States can learn from other countries. *Foreign Language Annals*, 34 (3), 281-83. doi: 10.1111/j.1944-9720.2001.tb02415.x.
- Ramezanzadeh, F. S. (2010). *Unveiling the veiled and veiling the unveiled: Revealing the*

- underlying linguistic ideologies and their impact on Persian language loss and maintenance among second-generation Iranian-American college students.* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The University of Utah. Salt Lake City, Utah.
- Richey, R. (2007). The foreign language assistance program (FLAP). *Learning Languages*, 13 (1), 19-21.
- Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative analysis*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Rosenthal, D. A., & Feldman, S. S. (1992). The nature and stability of ethnic identity in Chinese youth effects of length of residence in two cultural contexts. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 23 (2), 214-227. doi:10.1177/0022022192232006.
- Rotheram, M. J., & Phinney, J. S. (1987). Introduction: Definitions and perspectives in the study of children's ethnic socialization. In M. J. Rotheram & J. S. Phinney (Eds.), *Children's ethnic socialization: Pluralism and development* (pp. 10-28). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ryan, C. (2013). *Language use in the United States: 2011 American community survey reports*. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.
- Sampat, P. (2001). Last Words: The Extinction of languages around the world. *World Watch*, 14 (3), 34-37.
- Saville-Troike, M. (1996). The ethnography of communication. In McKay, Sandra and Nancy Hornberger (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and language teaching*. (pp. 351-382). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sedighi, A. (2010). Teaching Persian to heritage speakers. *Iranian Studies*, 43 (5), 683-697. doi: 10.1080/00210862.2010.518033.
- Seidman, I. E. (2013). *Interviewing as qualitative research*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Shin, H. B., & Bruno, R. (2003). *Language use and English-speaking ability: 2000. Census 2000 brief, C2KBR-29*. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.
- Shirazi, R., & Borjian, M. (2013). Persian bilingual and community education among Iranian-Americans in New York city. In Garcia, O., Zakharia, Z., & Otcu, B. (Eds.), *Bilingual community education and multilingualism: Beyond heritage languages in a global city*. (pp.154-158). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Silverman, D., 2001. *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analyzing talk, text and interaction*. London: Sage.

- Sodowsky, G. R., Kwan, K. K., & Pannu, R. (1995). Ethnic identity of Asians in the United States. In J. G. Ponterotto, J. M., Casas, L. A. Suzuki, & C. M. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural counseling* (pp. 123-154). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Spolsky, B., & Hult, F. M. (2010). *The handbook of educational linguistics*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Taha, T. A. (2007). Arabic as "a critical-need" foreign language in post-9/11 era: A study of students' attitudes and motivation. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 34 (3), 150-160.
- Taylor, P., Lopez, M. H., Martínez, J. H., & Velasco, G. (2012). *When labels don't fit: Hispanics and their views of identity*. Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center.
- Tokuhamu-Espinosa, T. (2003). *The multilingual mind: issues discussed by, for, and about people living with many languages*. London :Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Torbat, A. E. (2002). The brain drain from Iran to the United States. *The Middle East Journal*, 56 (2), 272-295.
- Tse, L. (1999). Finding a place to be: Ethnic identity exploration of Asian Americans. *Adolescence*, 34, 121-138.
- Tse, L. (2001). *Why don't they learn English? Separating fact from fallacy in the U.S. language debates*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- UCLA Steering Committee. (2000). Heritage language research priorities conference report. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 24 (4), 475-488. doi: 10.1080/15235882.2000.10162779
- Valdes, G. (2001). Heritage language students: Profiles and possibilities. In J.K. Peyton, D. Ranard, & S. McGinnis (Eds.), *Heritage languages in America: Preserving a national resource* (pp. 37-77). McHenry, IL and Washington, DC: Delta Systems and Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Valdes, G., Fishman, J., Chavez, R., & Perez, W. (2006). *Developing minority language resources: The case of Spanish in California*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Van Deusen-Scholl, N. (2003). Toward a definition of heritage language: Sociopolitical and pedagogical considerations. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 2 (3), 211-230. doi: 10.1207/S15327701JLIE0203\_4.

- Veltman, C. (2000). The American linguistic mosaic: Understanding language shift in the United States. In S. Lee McKay & S. L. C. Wong (Eds.), *New immigrants in the United States* (pp. 58-94). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Von Humboldt, W. F. (1963). *Humanist without portfolio: An anthology of the writings of Wilhelm von Humboldt*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Vygotsky, L. 2012. *Thought and language*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Waters, M. C. (1994). Ethnic and racial identities of second generation black immigrants in New York City. *International Migration Review*, 28 (4), 795–820.
- Wang, L. & Higgins, L.T. (2008). Mandarin teaching in the UK in 2007: A brief report of teachers' and learners' views. *Language Learning Journal*, 36 (1), 91-96. doi: 10.1080/09571730801988504
- Wang, Y. (2009). Language, parents' involvement, and social justice: The fight for maintaining minority home language. *Multicultural Education*, 16 (4), 13-18.
- Webb, J.B. & Miller, B.L. (2000). *Teaching heritage language learners: Voices from the classroom*. Yonkers, NY: ACTFL.
- Wiley, T. G. (1996). *Literacy and language diversity in the United States*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Wiley, T. G. (2001). On defining heritage languages and their speakers. In J. Peyton, D. Ranard, Q S. McGinnis (Eds.), *Heritage languages in America: Preserving a national resource* (pp. 29-36). Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems.
- Wiley, T. G., & Wright, W. E. (2004). Against the undertow: Language-minority education policy and politics in the “age of accountability”. *Educational Policy*, 18 (1), 142-168. doi: 10.1177/0895904803260030.
- Wiley, T. G., Moore, S., & Fee, M. (2012). A “languages for jobs” initiative: Policy innovation memorandum. New York, NY: Council on Foreign Relations.
- Windfuhr, G. (Ed.). (2009). *The Iranian languages*. London: Curzon.
- Wong Fillmore, L. (1991). When learning a second language means losing the first. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 6 (3), 323-346. doi:10.1016/S0885-2006(05)80059-6.

- Wong Fillmore, L. (2000). Loss of family languages: Should educators be concerned? *Theory into Practice* 39 (4), 203-10.
- Wong, S. C., Lopez, M. G. (2000). English language learners of Chinese background. In S. L. McKay & S. C. Wong (Eds.), *New immigrants in the United States: Readings for second language educators* (pp. 236-305). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Wright, T.J., & Leung, P. (1993). *Meeting the unique needs of minorities with disabilities: A report to the President and the Congress*. Washington, DC: National Council on Disability.
- Zhang, D, & Slaughter-Defoe, Diana T. (2009). Language attitudes and heritage language maintenance among Chinese immigrant families in the USA. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 22 (2), 77-93. doi:10.1080/07908310902935940.

## **Biography**

Maryam Salahshoor graduated from Fairfax High School, Fairfax, Virginia, in 1983. She received her Bachelor of Arts from George Mason University in 1987. She was employed as a teacher in Fairfax County for two years and received her Master of Arts in English from George Mason University in 1987.