

Community Based Heritage Language Program Profile Khayam Persian School Foundation

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Grades:

PreK-K

1-5/6

Languages/Dialects taught: **Persian** (Farsi)

Program Description

Purposes and goals of the program: To teach Iranian-American children the elements of the Persian language: speaking, comprehension, reading, and writing.

Type of program

- Partial immersion
- Before or after school program
- Extracurricular club

Our classes are held after school at public schools.

Program mission statement: To bring young Iranian-Americans closer to their rich heritage and culture by way of learning their heritage language.

The program was founded in 1982 by individuals and the president of the program.

Parents' expectations for the program: For their children to learn to speak the language and learn more about Persian culture.

Staff's expectations for the program: For children to learn to speak, read, and write in Persian. We are a non-religious and non-political organization.

Students

First-generation immigrants: 5%

Second-generation immigrants: 93%

Children of interethnic marriages: 2%

Countries of origin: Iran, China, Mexico, USA
Total student enrollment: 50 (in 3 locations)

Methods of Identifying a Heritage Speaker: The program identifies who is a heritage speaker through oral interviews with children assessing their responses. Interview questions include: How old are you? Where were you born? How many brothers/sisters do you have?

Percentage of students who complete the program: 5% approximately

Possible reasons for not completing the program: our classes compete with many other after-school activities, such as sports and other extra-curricular programs. Parents also say that the homework load given by the children's schools is another major factor in the students not continuing to attend our classes.

Students' attitudes toward the language varieties they speak: Mostly good. Usually after the age of 12, students don't like to continue coming to our classes.

Teachers/Administrators/Staff

Number of staff in program: 5

Languages in which staff members are proficient: Persian (native speakers), English (proficiency varies)

Credentials

Instructors do not have US certification

Teacher certification: Elementary and high school teaching certification from Iran
BA in Economics, Business Education, Adult Literacy Education

Professional development opportunities teachers have: Gaining experience working with bilingual children. Participation in creating new curricula tailored for heritage language learners and testing this curricula in the classroom setting.

Professional development opportunities teachers need: To learn curriculum building for heritage language learners and how to engage the interest of second-generation students to learn and speak the language of their heritage.

Instruction

Total student contact hours: 2

Times per week: 1

Student Grouping: Students are grouped by age and proficiency. Students with 2 to 3 years of age difference are grouped together, but they are also grouped by their proficiency level.

The time devoted to language teaching is 90% and 10% for culture (no religion teaching).

Language Skills

Heritage Skills

- Listening
- Speaking
- Reading
- Writing
- Students learn conversation skills through conversational role playing.

Levels of language proficiency students reach by the end of the program: an elementary level of speaking, writing, and reading. Improved vocabulary, everyday simple conversation and sentence formation.

Culture

Culture taught

- History
- Festivals
- Customs
- Traditions/beliefs
- Folktales
- Arts and crafts
- Dances
- Songs
- Social and cultural norms
- Cultural appropriateness
- Literature
- Poetry

Methodologies

We have a standard classroom atmosphere (5-8 children per teacher). Student participation is heavily encouraged (e.g., demonstrating their writing abilities on the chalkboard). Weekly dictations are given to students and used by instructors to give individual feedback. Students work in pairs for conversational exercises.

Materials

Textbook: *Persian Textbook for the Very Beginner* (called "Katabe avvale dabestaan"). Published in Iran before 1979, reprinted in USA in 1983 by Ketab Corporation, Los Angeles, CA.

Other materials: Posters, crossword puzzles, written exercises and worksheets (created by our teachers): coloring and drawing the letters of the alphabet with the purpose of learning vowels and letters.

Technology used in the program: White and Chalk boards are used for demonstrating writing. Props are used (e.g., fruits) for reference to words and their meanings. A computer is sometimes used for showing instructional DVDs and children's films.

Assessment

- Weekly quizzes
- Teacher observations

Students receive a certificate for completing each proficiency level (i.e., each grade level), which is recognized by the school system as meeting a language requirement.

Articulation

Home-school connections: The program encourages parents to help in their children's classrooms; also, encourages parent participation by asking a different parent to provide break-time snacks during each session.

Opportunities students have for using the language and developing cultural knowledge outside the program: Students can participate in special cultural festivals (e.g., the Persian New Year festivities and Festival of Autumn customs), theatrical plays, group singing, and other community activities.

What the Program has in Place

Financial support: Students pay tuition. No other entities provide support for this program.

Kinds of assistance or collaboration you would like to receive for the program from other entities: We need assistance for improving teaching methods and providing teacher training. We also need lessons that make learning fun, and in general, need to find ways of motivating children to learn and parents to encourage learning. Importantly, we need to find ways of standardizing teaching methods so that the same standard of teaching can be applied in other parts of the US and around the world.

Research on the program: We are actively planning a research program but are in need of expert guidance to make development of appropriate curricula more efficient. We are very interested in collaborating with academic researchers to determine more effective ways of teaching to increase awareness among families and the community about the importance of heritage language learning.

Special Challenges and Comments

Challenges that your program has experienced: The biggest challenges we face are motivating Iranian-American parents to bring their children to language classes and maintaining children's interest.

Additional support you wish to receive: We would like education researchers to help us build better curricula that's appropriate for second generation heritage language learners. We would also like support to apply research to create new educational materials that our students can use with enthusiasm and be excited to learn. Lastly, we'd like support (possibly from teacher education program) to help in training teachers to use the newly developed teaching techniques.

Additional comments: We have found that kids who speak Persian at an early age at home tend to learn reading and writing more easily and are more likely to continue attending our classes. We believe that we need to inform many members of our community to dispel some of the existing myths about second language learning in children. Many believe that learning two languages at once slows language learning in children. Others believe that children don't need to learn their mother tongue because they have settled in the US with no plans of returning to Iran.