

Middlesex University
Institute for Work-Based Learning

Module Code: **DPS5360**

Programme Title: Doctor in Professional Studies (*Muslim Cultures: Promoting Muslim Contributions to Intercultural Knowledge*)

Project title: Language and Culture
The importance of Cultural Language to enhance the teaching and learning of Persian language in a Persian Heritage Language school

A research project submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the Degree of the Doctorate in Professional Studies

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Date of Submission: **25/12/2021**

Word count: 64252(excl. references and appendices)

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank several people who have played a part in bringing this project to completion. First of all, I would like to express my special thanks of gratitude to the children and staff of IRIS School, and particularly the children who participated in the focus groups. I would also like to extend my deepest gratitude to teachers who were part of this journey from the start. An enormous thank-you goes to the School Governors, who welcomed me with open arms and gave me the freedom to get on with the research. This project would not have materialised without their participation, support and, most of all, willingness to step into the unknown. I dedicate this project to them.

I owe huge thanks to my project adviser, Dr Mehmatali Dikerdem, for his constant support and faith. He encouraged me to look beyond the confines of my subject area and nurtured the literary and creative side within me. I gratefully acknowledge several other colleagues and friends who have helped and guided me along the way: my education consultant, Dr Dave Hill, for his wise counsel, no-nonsense approach and practical advice; my dear friend and colleague, Dr Mesbah, for his unstinting support and for helping me to think strategically; and Dr Reza, for enhancing the Persian aspects of the project and for sharing his wealth of knowledge and experience. I am also deeply grateful to Dr Jahangir, the Principal of Islamic College, and members of the College Board of Governors for giving me the gift of a five-month sabbatical to write up the project. I would also like to thank Mr Sajad Al-Hairi, a teacher at IRIS, for his assistance in preparing the electronic questionnaire that was presented to students. He is the IT teacher thus I delegated the responsibility of the data collection to him.

Last but not least, I must express my deepest love and gratitude to my family, first, to my wife, Maryam, my constant companion and sounding board. Throughout these five-and-a-half years, her patience and support have been rock solid, especially towards the final stages. She is one in a million. I would like to thank my sons, Ali and Amir Ali, who helped me a lot in collecting data, despite their busy schedules, they gave me different ideas in making this project unique.

ABSTRACT

This research project tries to investigate how the integration of culture and language or Cultural Language can enhance the teaching and learning of the Persian language in a Persian Heritage Language school. Furthermore, it aims to investigate the relationship between Persian Heritage Language and its effect on conserving the cultural awareness of the second and third-generation Muslim Persian - British in London. In this project, I attempt to propose a new framework with a 'cultural syllabus' to be incorporated into language education to develop, preserve, and revitalize Persian language skills amongst the future Persian generation living abroad. In another word, my research is aiming to link the teaching of cultural matters with the Persian language to impact positively on the children's general attainment in the Persian language.

To do this, I started to conduct a participatory action research project through the lens of ethnography. I employed four main types of research methods and techniques: classroom observations, focus groups, feedback interviews or conversations and reflection sheets.

Three groups of participants took part in this research. The main participants of the investigation were a group of 75 Persian-English bilinguals (boys 35 and girls 40; mean age: 10.3) who have been living in the UK for different lengths of time (mean: 6.9 years). The second group consisted of 5 monolingual Persian teachers in the UK. The third group of participants were sixteen Persian parents who were born in Persia and immigrated to the UK at different ages.

The main areas of impact found in data extended to (a) teachers' personal and professional development; and (b) impact on learners, parents, and the educational environment. In the light of the findings from this project, I found that cultural and Islamic elements with the Persian language should not remain separate entities and insisted that their integration can contribute towards a holistic approach to the teaching and learning of the Persian language. Hence, this research has given important support for the positive impact of cultural familiarity in the culturally-oriented syllabus for language learning enhancement in heritage language contexts. Furthermore, I found that heritage schools like IRIS School allow children a safe haven for exploring cultural and linguistic awareness.

"Language is the road map of a culture. It tells you where its people come from and where they are going."

Rita Mae Brown

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to introduce the reader to the broad rationale for pursuing this project and give the reader a context for understanding my motivations and reasons for embarking on this research. It outlines and identifies significant episodes along my professional journey as a teacher and an educator in language education that has influenced and informed the development and consolidation of this investigation. In this chapter, I also aim to elaborate on the context in which this research has evolved and make explicit the assumptions held in that context. In addition, I aim to introduce the reader to my personal and professional interest in pursuing this particular research project. The project aim is in line with my project title which is the importance of Cultural Language to enhance the teaching and learning of Persian Language in a Persian heritage school. The chapter ends by providing the reader with a brief insight into the forthcoming chapters.

1.2 The Research Background

Although Persian language instruction has been facing a demand outside Persia by Persian families, little research has been conducted and few findings are available on heritage education. The Persian language has always been associated with the accomplishments of ancient Persian culture. However, according to Najafi, H. (2009) an oral language might get transferred to the third generation but, as for most immigrant languages, the literate language will die after the second generation. As the result, the third generations of Persian immigrants may lose their parental and heritage language.

Similarly, Mokhatebi-Ardakani, M. (2014) reports on the challenges and issues indicated by school principals, teachers, heritage learners, and their parents. The result shows that the unplanned curriculum, lack of parental involvement, learners' language proficiency diversity, and lack of professional teachers are some of the challenges. These issues and concerns make the importance of focusing on Persian teaching and learning as a heritage language.

On the other hand, many other cultures with a long history of immigration have already identified this problem and have taken prompt and appropriate action to preserve the heritage language of their future generations to keep their heritage language, traditions, and culture alive. For instance, within Greek, Spanish, Turkish, Arabic, and Chinese communities, parents send their children to a complementary school with the general aim of teaching their younger generations their 'native' languages and cultures. However, this issue has not received sufficient attention amongst Persian families, and policymakers.

My project then is an attempt to research teaching the Persian language to students with Persian backgrounds or second-generation Persians who have been raised outside Persia. In Sedighi's (2010) words, this is an 'underlying foundation for the research within the field of teaching Persian to heritage Persian speakers'. I hope that this project will bring more attention to the promotion of a stronger educational system and the implementation of a suitable language policy on preserving and revitalizing the Persian language amongst the new generation of Persians living abroad.

Furthermore, my passion for taking care of my heritage language and culture grew into an idea to make a journey of exploring how Persian language learners and teachers deal with the Persian language. Interestingly, when I started to think of the issue of Persian language education, I heard about the heritage language for the first time. Historically, according to Cummins, J. (2005) the term "heritage language" has been used in educational contexts since the 1990s. According to Cho, Shin and Krashen (2004) 'heritage languages' are spoken by the children of immigrants. Thus, in this context, Persian is the heritage language of Persian immigrants who had left Persia due to different reasons. Although they are far from Persia, they care about their language, culture, and history.

For the sake of clarity, I consider the term "heritage language" as a language that a child has been exposed to at home and "heritage learners" are mainly second and third-generation Persians living abroad. On the other hand, a native speaker is someone who has received his school degree in the homeland. Therefore, heritage learners are different from both native speakers of Persian and foreign learners of Persian on the ground that heritage language speakers feel a cultural or family connection to their home language.

Overall, my research project tries to investigate the integration of culture and language or Cultural Language to enhance the teaching and learning of the Persian language in Persian Heritage Language Schools. This investigation is based upon my personal professional experience as the head of such an institution in London. Furthermore, it aims to investigate the relationship between Persian Heritage Language and its effect on conserving the cultural awareness of the second and third-generation Muslim Persian - British in London. In this project, I attempt to propose a new framework with a 'cultural syllabus' to be incorporated into language education to develop, preserve, and revitalize Persian language skills

amongst the future Persian generation living abroad. I believe that this initiative plays a crucial role in language heritage language maintenance and has significant short- and long-term effects for our children who are far from Persia. I have used the designation “our” to denote and foreground my insider researcher positionality as a professional within the community concerned.

I have to add that in traditional ways to teach Persian, teachers tend to focus on the language itself but ignore its cultural context and underpinnings especially the pressure of school entrance examinations, exam-oriented teaching is dominant and culture teaching is excluded. As a result, it has been observed that many learners who learn Persian as a heritage language are severely deficient in cultural knowledge, although they got high scores in exams. This is a quote from a Persian heritage learner:

I remember my pain when trying to acquire Persian. I remember how passionately I loved to learn Persian, my mother tongue. However, I did not like the Persian classes held within Persian formal schooling, because the system was not devised for sharing everyday life and concerns in the language: rather, it was learning about the language instead of learning the language and its culture.

As cultural competence is an integral part of language competence, so it is of great importance to offer students cultural teaching as well. This project illustrates the influence of cultural familiarity and knowledge on language teaching in a heritage language school.

My decision to examine Persian language learning and maintenance through this research project has been based on my own personal, and professional interests. According to Maxwell (2005), the goals of a study include motives, desires, and purposes. I describe my personal, academic, and professional backgrounds related to this research and demonstrate how they have shaped and inspired this project.

My interest in the topic of heritage language learning and maintenance is a personal issue for me and is rooted in my own identity as a Persian speaker. I chose this topic because I believe that settlers 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 identities in their adopted countries.

As a researcher, I would like to help fill the gap in heritage language research by examining the challenges related to developing and maintaining Persian as a heritage language in the UK within the context of community-based schools.

As an educator, I believe the knowledge gained from this research will contribute to our understanding of the factors that support the heritage development of second and third-generation children. In addition, on a personal level, conducting this research has helped me gain a better professional understanding of how to

support parents seeking to maintain Persian as a heritage language for their children in the institution I am associated with.

In this section, I describe my personal, academic, and professional backgrounds related to this research and demonstrate how they have shaped and inspired this project.

1.3 Start a new journey in my life

Before starting my DProf, I repeatedly encountered parents whose children could not speak Persian well, coming to register their children in The Educational and Cultural Centre of Iran (known as IRI School). Seeing these young children made me wonder how these Persian parents could help their children acquire Persian, and enable them to communicate with their grandparents and other relatives when visiting Persia. I asked myself these questions: Are parents aware of the role they can play in raising their children bilingually? Do parents use Persian at home? Do children lose their heritage language the longer they live in the host country?

On the one hand, many families were in interaction with people and organisations from the same ethnic and cultural background, and they were expected to use Persian there. On the other hand, there were expectations from mainstream English language institutions. I found that even though most parents found these facts intuitively true, they did not know steps they could take to nurture bilingualism within their households.

However, as an educator, I have also long known about the many benefits of maintaining a child's heritage language. There are three references for making this assumption. They stem from Krashen's theory of educational advancement (Krashen, 1996). Lee theorises cultural awareness (e.g., closeness to the culture of the heritage language (Lee, 2002), whilst Fanton discusses professional opportunities (e.g., increased job competitiveness (Fanton, 2017).

All these questions pushed me to start reading about bilingual children in immigrant families. Through my readings, I came across the notions of "language shift" "first language attrition" in Schmid (2011) language maintenance among second and third-generation children (Backus, 2013; Eversteijn, 2011) Therefore, as I have always wanted to find the answers to my questions and as the best way is to research the problems that you are interested in, I began a qualitative investigation to the situation of heritage language learners. Therefore, I set up a project that looked at how the integration of culture with language would impact positively teaching and learning Persian in Heritage Schools. I hope that the findings of this research will help Persian language policymakers as they plan services for children and families. In addition, I was

particularly interested to know the impact of parental attitudes on Persian language acquisition, maintenance, and use in the UK for Persian children. This is how I started my DProf.

I first engaged myself in reflective learning when I became a work-based learner in January 2012 at the Work-Based Learning Institute at Middlesex University. Work-based learning institute aims to be developmental for the practitioner and reflective learning which is seen as consciously thinking about and analysing what one has done is an integral part of it.

To undergo a reflective review of my previous learning, I started to identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities I have acquired during the years. Although I knew I had worked and studied consistently all my life, I had never really realised what and how much I had done and had learned. When I went through my previous learning and I recorded what I had previously done, and what I have gained in terms of knowledge, skills, and experiences, I realised how that formed a solid background for my practice-based doctoral research project, and it was only then that I realised the benefit of such an activity.

I reflected on key learning points in my career, previous studies and twenty-nine years of experience in language teaching, teacher training, school management, and involvement in various projects.

I specifically sought a professional doctorate where I would be able to offer transformation in my area of expertise within my organisation, to which I have been loyal for almost twenty years. I wish to grow professionally, see new directions and revisions for future career paths and choices. This programme allowed me to do so. I have particularly enjoyed Middlesex's program and their support, and now see how each element of the programme contributed and shaped this project. The cohesive formation of this DProf programme consists of the following courses; or modules. DPS 4520 Review of Professional learning (20 credits) reviewed my professional journey reflecting on practice, organisational environment, appraisal of self, and acknowledging my professional development. It compelled me to critically look backwards and at the same time see new paths ahead. This element of the programme allowed me to consolidate what I could bring from my professional background and what I was hoping to achieve at a DProf level by initiating a new direction in theological practice and education. WBS 4825/4840 'Research Methodologies' (60 credits) explored research design options that ultimately provided choices for investigation. DPS 4521 'Programme Planning and Rationale' (20 credits) helped crystallize, focus and shape this project. It pushed me to find, network, and negotiate with relevant institutions and individuals, and to identify resources that were essential for the completion of DPS 5260 'Thesis' (260 credits), in which I explored how the lived experiences of clergywomen inform theological education of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. All these components of the programme come together and fulfil DPS 5360 Doctorate in Professional Studies.

1.3.1 My Educational Background

As part of the taught modules in the DProf Programme, I reflected in-depth about my personal and professional journey both before embarking on the doctorate. In effect, the DProf programme consists of a research project which builds upon a successful prior learning claim at Level 8. Given that the reader may not have had access to these previous assignments, I consider it useful to briefly highlight the critical incidents that led me to a professional doctorate in teaching and my professional interest in choosing this research project.

At this point, as the researcher, I would like to briefly introduce myself and my background as well as indicate my personal context in conducting this research. Apart from English, I can speak Persian. This has been advantageous, for example, when interviewing parents at the Persian School. I come from two related academic and professional backgrounds, language learning and language teaching. My academic background, in the sense of formal taught courses, spans twenty years. I undertook my first English Translation undergraduate degree at Allameh University (Tehran, Persia) eighteen years ago and more recently, graduated from University for Teacher Education (Tehran, Persia) with a MA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in 1993. My professional work-based learning experience spans twenty-nine years. I have a broad range of professional experience ranging from project management, including identifying, developing and leading organisational change, to facilitating learning and development of individuals, teams and organisations. As previously mentioned, my multilingual background has provided me with opportunities to communicate with people of different backgrounds. Added to my training in education and my teaching experiences, my current status as a researcher, therefore, made me understand classroom pedagogy especially that relating to the teaching of language. Persian has always been inextricably linked to my Persian identity. I developed a sense of who I was, what my values were and why I had such a deep commitment to Persia and the Iranian people. With this close link with Iran, Persian was very much part of my daily diet. It probably was one of the most profound experiences of my life in Iran. It shaped who I was. I was on a clear trajectory – to Persia.

1.3.2 My Professional Background

I came to live in England in 2006 armed with two things: an MA in education and my mother tongue Persian. My job in London was to work in The Educational and Cultural Centre of Iran which operates as a Persian Supplementary school. It is a non-profit and voluntary based organization, organized by the Persian community in which I taught Persian to young children. This Persian school is regarded as a community language complementary school. The main aim of the school is to provide Persian language courses to second and third-generation Persian - speaking children. The school was established in London

in 1997 as parents felt their children were starting to lose contact with their heritage language and culture. Many children start attending these schools from a young age and continue until completing their Persian A-Level. Most of the children are British born. These schools have had the freedom to develop their curriculum, syllabuses and examinations. However, complementary schools may use national examinations to measure language proficiency and enter their students for higher-level qualifications in Persian.

An insight I gleaned during my fifteen years in school was that children in the school had great difficulty in pronouncing some Persian sounds. I found that, although the first generation uses the heritage language fluently and, in all domains, the second generation have extremely limited abilities in their heritage language and display imperfect learning of language systems because of insufficient input. As a result, they can understand the Persian language and may speak it to some degree, but English is the language with which they are most comfortable. Their spoken language is restricted to the home and those who can write tend to write the way they speak. My initial observations are that from a syntactic point of the view, conversational speech is paratactic, characterized by a loose stringing together of phrases without connectives. Moreover, speakers in conversation depend on paralinguistic cues like prosody, pauses, gesture, and facial expression to convey and monitor information exchange.

In addition to mastery of grammar and spelling, familiarity with morphological and orthographic rules of the heritage language is required to produce written texts. A key issue in this regard is discourse cohesion. Those with little background in writing and limited reading skills do not have a grasp of complex sentence structure in the heritage language. They must expand their lexical knowledge to include rhetorical organizers, logical connectors, and temporal markers that are used to organize the discourse structure to mark semantic relationships between clauses. To mark intersentential semantic relations such as contrast and juxtaposition in the heritage language, students need to know syntactic and lexical devices. In sum, the language of immigrant children reflects an ongoing process of language shift, a shift from the heritage language to the language of the host country.

I felt like a fish out of water for most of this initial period of teaching and more so, I was frustrated with the standards of Persian I witnessed and the resistance of the children to learning Persian. I was initially struck by how little these children in this country knew about Persian and its culture. However, throughout these past years, I have kept on with my Persian teaching be it with young, older children or adults, in formal or informal settings. It has been my mainstay, my constant companion. Not only did I teach Persian, but also, I started studying the pedagogy of Persian, and I began to see Persian in the context of second language learning and then in the context of Modern Foreign Languages as part of the national curriculum. I began to realise that if one were to be a good Persian teacher it wasn't enough to just know Persian and to know

how to teach, one also had to understand theories of language acquisition. It was also at this time that I was introduced to Dr Stephen Krashen. He changed my whole concept of language learning and to this day I still draw upon his teaching in my teaching and training. I will turn to him fully in the next chapter.

Therefore, I decided to take advantage of Middlesex University to pursue doctoral studies and I put the importance of preserving immigrant languages for cultural awareness as the basis of research for my Doctorate in Professional Studies (DProf). I hope that it inspires motivation among educators, researchers, and heritage language speakers, their families, and the Iranian community to engage in the vital task of preserving our national linguistic resource. It is vital as it connects our children with their culture and history.

1.4 Research Motivation

My motivation for carrying out this study stems from my own experience of teaching at a Persian school. This research project relates directly to the specific needs of Persian Heritage Language education in the Persian Community School in London in which I work. Persian complementary schools in Britain should provide an opportunity for children to sustain their heritage language, and offer a new opportunity for learning Persian, a language that is connected to them through history and cultural exchanges.

The relationship between culture and language has always held great fascination for me. I felt that learners would have a deeper understanding of what they were reading in the Persian Language if they could relate it to something closer to culture. So, for most of my years of teaching Persian, be it literature or Modern, I would always endeavour, where possible, to make links to both culture and language. I believe that understanding cultural background and connecting that background to the students in the classroom creates a rich learning environment in which the teacher and students value each other.

However, I found our students struggling with the Persian language, and cultural understanding. As a teacher, this placed me in a unique position to understand and find out.

From a theoretical perspective, I draw on research regarding second and foreign language acquisition and suggest that the Persian Language cannot be separated from its religious, cultural and historic framework. That is, while Persian is taught in the United Kingdom as a Modern Foreign Language, I propose that we are teaching a cultural language. This term more aptly describes a modern living language bound up in a particular religion, culture and history. Using religion, culture and history as the route to link the Persian Language, my research demonstrate that this integration can enhance the teaching and learning of Persian. My case study shows that schools and teachers who choose to integrate religion, culture and history and

Persian language can successfully embrace educational change, a process that will require them to confront their belief systems as well as accept new teaching approaches and materials.

Therefore, I choose to examine the interrelationship between cultural contextualisation/ underpinnings and heritage language learning among members of the second-generation Iranian ethnic group in London through a community-based heritage language school to enhance and improve teaching and learning the Persian language.

1.5 Rationale for this project

In recent decades, as van de Vijver&Phalet(2004) state, migration has become prominent and presumably permanent in many parts of the world. Due to different reasons, many people in the world, whether by choice, necessity, or coercion, are born in one country and move to another during their lifetime. I have first-hand experience of being a migrant. I studied in Persia and came to the UK in 2007. The decision to leave one's country of origin and move to another often brings disconnection from familiar social institutions and cultural practices, separation from family members, and isolation from sources of support in one's new homeland (Suárez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002).

In most cases, migrants find it difficult to preserve their heritage languages for their children, although, they generally want their children to maintain these. At first, it was individual families or communities that were responsible for the maintenance of their heritage languages in the past. This is true because years ago, there was no Persian heritage school in London. However, as time passed, linguists and language educators have emphasised the importance and value of heritage language maintenance not only as a personal resource; but also as a societal and national resource (Brecht & Ingold, 1998; Brecht& Walton, 1993). Through the teachers who volunteered to start the school, I have found many similarities with what Brecht & Ingold describe. Thus, to preserve this resource, we need to better understand the factors and conditions that lead to the maintenance or shift of heritage languages.

My doctoral project is an effort in this direction. I hope that its contribution will be that, by studying the language situation of an immigrant group (Iranians in London), which very few studies have previously focused upon, will broaden our understanding and knowledge of language maintenance and shift phenomena specific to this minority group in London to promote the psychological and social well-being of them. Thus, I choose to examine the interrelationship between heritage language and cultural underpinnings among members of the second-generation Iranian ethnic group in London to explain language maintenance and shift among them.

1.6 Research Site

I begin this section by providing my readers with the socio-cultural context of the teaching and learning of Persian in the United Kingdom. Next, The Educational and Cultural Centre of (Iran (IRI School) will be put centre stage as the case study of this research project. It is important to state that there is no one standard Persian curriculum that all Persian schools follow. Even within each type of school, there are an array of teaching approaches and emphases. In some schools in the UK, Persian is taught under the supervision of the Iranian Ministry of Education and some others under Islamic or Iranian Cultural Centres. The topics that are taught in latter schools cover aspects from the Quran, the Iranian festivals, religious events, Islamic values and ethics, and Islamic prayers. In contrast to this, in other schools, the Persian language is taken as a modern foreign language in the English curriculum as well. There are numerous curricula on offer that have been written in Persia, the United States, Sweden and the UK. Whichever Persian curriculum is used in these schools, it needs to incorporate the learning outcomes prescribed by the Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) framework available in the English curriculum. The Persian language is therefore subject to Ofsted inspections just like any other MFL being taught in schools. The topics that are normally covered in this curriculum include, ‘who am I?’, ‘my family’, the weather, Persian months, numbers, ‘where I live’, age, birthdays, food and drink. These schools teach the Persian alphabet including letters and vowels, plus the reading and writing of modern texts. As the children get older, they will also learn modern Persian script and children from an early age can construct and say simple sentences in Persian. Therefore, in most cases, the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking are taught.

I as the headteacher of a complementary Persian school, am convinced that one contributing factor for the underperformance in Persian attainment is due to the separation made between language and the cultural context in which language emerged and is practised. This separation permeates the very core of the teaching and learning of Persian in schools to the detriment of progress and achievement. Important pedagogic opportunities to enrich and deepen the learners’ understanding of Persian and impact positively on their general Persian competence are being missed. Not only does this separation impact the learners but on the teachers as well. Integrating these two areas will bring about collaborative planning across the departments which will increase the teachers’, and thus the learners’, knowledge and confidence in the Persian Language. I argued that this separation has been in existence for years and has developed because of the different religious, historical and political influences that existed in the different periods and contexts of Iranian people. My research project challenges this state of separateness. My pedagogic intervention is an attempt to enhance the teaching and learning of Persian by integrating them.

My research specifically focuses on creating links between them for both teacher and learner. This inquiry has been framed as a case study in IRIS School where I undertook an action research project with students who were studying in Year five and Year six, these students have already passed basic stages of the Persian language. Another very important goal of this study was to encourage and support the teachers to plan collaboratively to encourage this integration.

1.6.1 The Educational and Cultural Centre of Iran (IRI School)

The Persian School where the present research was conducted is called the Educational and Cultural Centre of Iran (IRI School) and is located in the London Borough of Brent. This complementary school operates on Sundays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. from September to June and opened its doors in 1997. Children aged 6 to 16 from first and second-generation Persian families are placed in classrooms based on their proficiency in the Persian language. It has approximately 320 children on its roll annually, including a reception. The curriculum is the same as the current one implemented in the elementary schools in Iran. The textbooks are imported from Iran, and the school teaches all subjects covered in the textbooks. The school operates completely voluntarily through donations from parents and philanthropists.

In this part of my research, I will describe the structure of the education system in Iran and accordingly in IRIS School which is divided into five cycles namely, pre-school, primary, middle, and secondary. Elementary education is mandatory under the Iranian constitution, and in general, education is free of charge, though, private schools authorized by law are allowed to charge tuition fees. The school system is under the jurisdiction of the Iranian Ministry of Education. The structure of the educational system in IRI School under supervision of this Ministry is divided into the following cycles:

1.6.1.1 Pre-school Education cycle

This first programme is one-year for children of five years old in which they receive the basic notions needed to enter primary schools. There is no exam at the end of this cycle and children proceed automatically to the following cycle.

1.6.1.2 Primary Education cycle

The six-year primary cycle covers grades 1-6 for children 6 to 11 years old. This phase is both free and compulsory. Students take exams at the end of each year on which their promotion to the following grade is based. At the end of grade 6, students take a nationwide examination. Those who pass the exam are qualified to proceed to the next cycle.

1.6.1.3 Middle Education Cycle

This cycle covers grades 7 to 9 for children 12 to 14 years old. Like the preceding cycle, this cycle also provides students with general education. In this phase, the abilities and interests of students are recognized, so they become prepared to decide which branch (academic or technical/vocational) they intend to choose in the next cycle. At the end of the middle cycle, students take a regional examination under the supervision of provincial boards of education. Those who pass the examination are eligible to proceed to the next cycle i.e., the secondary cycle.

1.6.1.4 Secondary Education cycle

This is a three-year stage that covers grade 10 to Grade 12, from age 15 to 18. Secondary education is divided into two main branches namely, academic/general and technical/vocational. The choice of either branch is up to pupils themselves. The academic branch, also known as the "theoretical branch" is divided into four mainstreams namely, literature and culture, socio-economic, physics-mathematics, and finally experimental sciences. The technical/vocational branch is particularly designed to train skilled personnel and technicians for the labour market. This branch covers three mainstreams namely, technical, business/vocational, and agriculture. There are specific subject and performance requirements for admission to some secondary programs. National examinations are conducted at the end of each grade during the secondary cycle. In our school, 180 secondary school students participate in a science-driven curriculum. The Persian language is a compulsory GCSE for all participants of the school, those wishing to take Persian A-level are free to do so. There are 10 A-level students currently enrolled in the school.

The secondary graduates who are interested in post-secondary education are entitled to attend the university entrance examination known as KONKUR. This nationwide examination serves as the general Iranian National Entrance Examination for admission to universities. We in IRIS School have a programme for those wishing to get into Iranian University. For instance, in the academic year 2015/16 there were a total of 10 Year 12 students who were enrolled in this programme. All theoretical subjects in the Iranian Curriculum were taught in the Persian language. After success in the entrance exam and being interviewed for a university place, 4 students enrolled in a Persian university in Iran. They are studying medicine, engineering and humanities-based subjects.

The Ministry of Education supervises educational researches and curriculum development; and has jurisdiction over post-secondary such as teacher training programmes. It has also the responsibility of providing textbooks for all educational courses. The Ministry of Education runs several schools outside

Iran, mainly in the Persian Gulf countries as well as some European countries in which 13,703 students are enrolled, one of which is IRIS School in London.

1.6.2 IRI School and its organizational structure

IRI School is governed by a five-member Board of Governors who is selected by students' parents and this Board has appointed me as the Head Teacher of IRI School. The team of Governors are working alongside me and we are supporting our teaching staff. The Governors are in place to oversee and ensure:

- Clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction.
- Hold the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils, and the performance management of staff.
- Oversee the financial performance of the school and make sure its money is well spent.

The Governors also carry out several other important duties, which include:

- Determining how the school's budget is spent.
- The appointing and dismissing of staff.
- Hearing appeals and grievances.
- Forming policy on the school's curriculum and worship.
- Setting standards for pupils' behaviour and discipline.
- Making sure school buildings are welcoming and safe.
- Setting and monitoring the school's aims and policies.

Our school governing body is also responsible for working with the school to ensure that it delivers a good quality education. Together with me, who is responsible for day-to-day management, they help to set the school's aims and policies.

The governing body provides non-executive leadership. Its role is to operate as a board akin to the board of trustees of a charity, or the board of directors of a company. In all matters, IRIS governors operate at a strategic level, leaving me and other senior school leaders responsible and accountable to it for the operational day-to-day running of the school.

To create robust accountability, governors ask challenging questions based on robust objective data. They do not just rely on information provided by me. Rather, they use visits to verify what they are told; and ensure my termly report provides appropriate and sufficiently detailed information.

Although governors are volunteers, they have a vital and demanding role that requires skill and professionalism. They meet six times per academic year, in addition, committees meet with me every month to review pupil performance and indicate their plans for the month ahead. My relationship with governors is positive but stressful. They have visions that are strategic and theoretical.

The governance that drives the school's performance is partly based on parent and governor relations. The parents feed any pupil complaint directly to the governors. The governors, knowing the nature of children and their ability to exaggerate school incidents, vet the concerns and present those that are most pressing for our monthly meetings. Our head of safeguarding is excellent at dealing with incidents of bullying without these being presented to me every month. I have the consensus of governors on most issues. Where we differ, the chair of the governors has the overriding vote. The chair of governors is appointed by the other governors for one academic year.

The Iranian Ministry of Education plays an important part in the provision of the curriculum. However, they do not select the governors; they are selected by the parents of the school for 2 years. The Iranian Embassy plays an active part to improve the school and provides the link between the Iranian Ministry of Education in Iran and the schools functioning in London. The nominees from the Iranian embassy help to meet the requirements of the Iranian Ministry of Education. However, they do not attend the monthly governors' meetings; they respond to serious contraventions of the curriculum.

On the whole, the pedagogic features I oversaw whilst in Iran are being delivered in the London school. There are however some differences. Firstly, there are no governors in Iran, instead, there is an annual review by the Ministry of Education. There is less involvement from parents, there is greater control given to teachers. The status of the teaching profession is regarded as being on par with engineering. In the UK, the teachers have lower professional status and are generally regarded as facilitators of learning.

Our primary section has two sub-sections: Lower Elementary (Grade 1 to 3) which also incorporates the Early Childhood Unit (Reception), and Upper Elementary (Grade 4 to 6). Our secondary section has two sub-divisions: Middle School (Grades 7-9) and High School (Grades 10-12). The curriculum framework is interdisciplinary and focuses on the development of the whole child using inquiry-based and a concept-driven teaching methodology.

Summary of IRIS School main features

| | |
|---------|--------------------------------|
| Context | Persian Classes in IRIS School |
|---------|--------------------------------|

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Theme | |
| Location | London, Borough of Brent |
| School Type | Complementary school |
| Persian is taught as | Heritage Language |
| Classes are conducted on | Sundays from 9:30 to 2:30 |
| Teachers | Persian /mostly Females |
| Age of students | 5 – 16 |
| Classroom Facilities | Computer, Projector screen, whiteboard, tables, chairs, wall posters |
| Textbooks | Published in Persia |

This table summarises my data sets across the educational context and provides an overview of my data sets.

1.6.3 The role of religion in IRI School

To comprehend the concepts of education and religion in IRIS, it is necessary to have some information about the mission and vision and cultural values of IRIS School. The school aims to serve its pupils by providing an education of the highest quality within the context of Islamic beliefs and practices. It encourages an understanding of the meaning and significance of faith, and promotes Islamic and Persian values and culture through the experience it offers to all pupils.’ The school has an Islamic outlook that encompasses its admissions policy and its ethos’ (IRI School, 20012).

Our mission is to create and promote firm foundations in a warm caring Islamic environment, in which each child can achieve their full potential in Faith and Education, and blossom into individuals who are proud of their Muslim identity and who are an asset to the society they live in. We are committed to preparing students to live in a multilingual and multicultural world and, as a foundation, to develop their fluency in the Persian Language. The weekend school’s mission is to make pupils great role models through the knowledge they have gained. The school’s vision is to improve awareness of Iranian heritage and what Iranian culture stands for.

Our primary concern as a part of the Iranian – British community in the UK has been the continuity of preserving the Persian background of our children through the education of children.

In Islam, education is defined as a combination of the terms such as Tarbiyyah (educate), Ta’lim (knowledgeable) and Ta’dib (moral). The Qur’an and the Prophet repeatedly mention the significant importance of education. According to Qur’an, Allah (God) will give high rank to those who are

knowledgeable and educate others (Allah will exalt those who believe among you, and those who know, to high ranks. Allah is informed of what you do, Quran, Al- Mujadalah: 11). Therefore, according to Islamic principles, the ultimate goal of education is to educate a good person who can promote goodness and act in line with Islamic teachings. Accordingly, the aims of Islamic education in Persia are teaching the Quran as the main source of education; providing experiences that are based on fundamentals of Islam as embodied in the Holy Quran and Sunnah. Bagheri (2008) believes that the philosophy of education of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the philosophical foundations and goals of education, based on the principles of anthropological, epistemological, and value based on the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran have been formulated and then the principles for education have been developed.

From an Islamic point of view, people are encouraged to learn as many languages as possible, especially those that will help them gain a better understanding of their religion. Because of their long association with Islamic culture, some languages, like Arabic, Persian and Urdu, have become "Islamic languages" (Rabab Jaffery, 2008). Therefore, the Islamic resources that we see today in Arabic and Persian are much more developed and advanced when compared to those in English. By learning at least one of these languages, one has better access to gaining further Islamic knowledge and understanding.

After the Islamic Revolution, Iran's culture was increasingly homogenized as the Islamic Traditions and ideologies were practised by the new Islamic government (Daniel & Mahdi, 2006). The Holy Quran and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad and His Descendants (Hadith) were the most important sources for establishing an Islamic and non-secular society (Rakel, 2007). Accordingly, the authorities decided to change the education system in Iran. The school's curriculum was also changed and religious perspective was included in the content of the textbooks.

It is important to note that all of the textbooks are published under the strict supervision of Iran's Ministry of Education. It can be assumed that the official religion can be instructed through textbooks. In other words, we can say that religion is an integral part of Iranian textbooks which is taught directly and also indirectly. Additionally, Iranian textbooks promote the Islamic notions and ideology in which moral implications are the main focus of education. In Rodriquez words, 'education in Persia is a means for expressing religious ideologies through textbooks and education is inherently theological in nature (Rodriquez, 2011).

1.7 Organization of the project

Chapter one acts as an introduction to this research. The factors found in the literature to be influential in heritage language acquisition, and maintenance are outlined in chapter two. A review of the existing

literature on heritage language schools and cultural awareness is set out. It also gives the desired aims, objectives and impact of the research project for all stakeholder groups.

Chapter three helps the reader navigate through the complex world of research methodology which supports the processes of my research. I describe and justify my chosen research approach and data collection techniques. The chapter articulates my ontological and epistemological stance about the Persian language. It describes the participants of the study and how data will be collected in this research project. As detailed in this chapter, the participants were young Persian heritage speakers in the UK and their parents, and a group of teachers of Persian in IRIS School. To collect information about parental attitude, the heritage speakers' parents were interviewed about their language practices and views about heritage language maintenance.

Chapter Four gives the reader an overview of the main activities that I undertook in the IRIS school during the research project. I will highlight the ebbs and flows, pushes and pulls and turning points that determined the research path.

Chapter Five and Six bring the reader into the world of the teachers and the learners. I present the reader with an analytic narrative of the data obtained during the research process and the findings that emerged. I summarise the findings of the study and discuss the significance of these findings.

This project ends with chapter seven with a discussion of the conclusions, implications and contributions of the qualitative investigations as well as the limitations of the research project. Finally, suggestions are presented for future research on heritage language learning. I discuss potential areas of research on parents' attitude towards heritage language, how it is acquired and how it is maintained. I also give a critical reflection of the research as well as a personal and professional reflection of the journey I have undertaken.

Summary

This chapter has identified how the research question emerged through professional practice and context. A brief introduction to my educational and professional background was presented with personal reflections. The focus of this research project is on second generation Persian students who were enrolled in IRIS School where I conducted this project. This group was chosen because of their previously limited exposure to Persian culture. As the students came to school, it provided a unique opportunity to research and study the role of schooling in the making of cultural awareness and provide insight into the unique contribution that heritage language schools make to children's language learning. The next chapter will explore through literature the impact both researchers and teachers have made in the field of heritage language education and identify the issues they have raised.

CHAPTER TWO

Terms of Reference / Objectives and Review of Relevant Literature

2.1 Introduction

This chapter serves as the literature review for my project. In the first section, I shall explain how ‘Language and Culture’ are to be understood in my research. In the process, I will outline the relationship between culture and language education, and discuss this in the context of the language classroom. This section will provide a theoretical background for my research question. Other issues such as a review of parents’ attitudes toward heritage language maintenance; and the causes and consequences of heritage language loss will be addressed. In addition, this chapter reviews heritage language schools, complementary schools and supplementary schools and their roles in teaching and learning heritage language. Finally, I give the reader an insight into the status of Persian as a Heritage Language in the UK. It will then discuss the educational change process that I embarked upon using Fullan’s educational change theory as a framework (Fullan, 1991). The chapter closes with a summary of the different subjects that have been explored and the desired aims, objectives and impact of the research project for all stakeholder groups.

2.2 Review of the Relevant Literature

When I started to think of the issue of Persian language education outside Persia (Iran, they can be used interchangeably), the first thing that I heard about this language was that it is a heritage language. According to Krashen (2004, p, .23), heritage languages are languages spoken by the children of immigrants or by those who immigrated to a country when young. Therefore, Persian is the heritage language of Persian language speaking immigrants who value heritage language maintenance highly and wish their children to maintain their home language; and culture.

Previous studies on heritage language maintenance in Persian communities tend to focus on the degree to which Persian has been maintained (Modarresi, 2001; Najafi, 2009; Namei, 2012; Sohrabi, 1997) without investigating potential challenges Persian immigrants might face in maintaining or transmitting the Persian language. Moreover, the previous studies lack addressing the educational implications of facilitating and maintaining Persian for Persian children. Therefore, to bridge these gaps, my research attempts to examine a heritage language programme at a Persian community school in London.

In what follows, I will elaborate on this issue, dealing firstly with a view of language as a social phenomenon, secondly with a view of language as a cultural asset, and thirdly with some implications for heritage language teaching and learning.

2.2.1 Defining Language and Culture

First, I open my discussion about language with Saussure's theory. Saussure (1974) believes that language is a system of signs. For him, a sign consists of a sound image or the written shape and a concept, in the manner that, they both are inseparably linked with each other.

However, for Kramsch (2002) language is used not just as a tool for the exchange of information, but as a symbolic system with the power to create and shape symbolic realities, such as values, perceptions, identities through discourse. Crystal (1971, 1992) defines language as the systematic, conventional use of sounds, signs or written symbols in human society for communication and self-expression. Similarly, Emmitt and Pollock (1997) believe that language is a system of arbitrary signs which is accepted by a group and society of users. Wardhaugh (2002, p. 2) defines language as knowledge of rules and principles and of the ways of saying and doing things with sounds, words, and sentences rather than just knowledge of specific sounds, words, and sentences.

However, in contrast, Thanasoulas (2001) believes that language does not exist apart from culture. Above that, Thanasoulas states language is a key to the cultural past, at the same time, it is also a key to the cultural present in its ability to express what is thought, believed, and understood by its members. Therefore, it is clear how important it is for members of any society to understand the actual power of their words and actions when they interact.

Furthermore, according to Róg (2017, p.37), and Wortham (2011, p.849) language as a medium for communication, is a crucial inseparable component of culture and as Xue and Ying (2006, p.72-77) put it, the cultural beliefs and ideas of the native speakers of a language community are reflected in their language.

Therefore, learning a language involves both learning its alphabet, the word arrangement and the rules of grammar, plus learning about the specific society's customs and behaviour. Moreover, paralanguage such as glances, gestures, postures and little changes in voice or tone and other communication tools to emphasize or alter what the speaker wants to do or say is specific to a culture. These specific communication techniques of one culture are learned mostly by observing people, initially from parents and immediate relatives and later from friends and people, therefore the communication with other members of the community can lead to misunderstandings without learning these techniques properly. However, when a heritage language learner grows up in an environment with a dominant language that is different from their

heritage language, the learner appears to be more competent in the dominant language and often feels more comfortable speaking in that language.

According to Varshney, language Acquisition is meant to process whereby children achieve fluent control of their native language (Varshney, 2003, p.307). Children can get the language that is inherited genetically but the particular language that children speak is culturally and environmentally transmitted to them. In other words, children learn a language, by exposure to it till they come to the adult model to which they are for the most part exposed.

Acquisition theories have been proposed in an attempt to explain why heritage speakers' competence in the heritage language diverges from that of their monolingual peers. According to some scholars such as Varshney (2003), Chomsky (2009), Steinberg (2003) complete acquisition of the first language takes place throughout childhood; and then stretches into the school-age period. Therefore, heritage language learners, who switch to the dominant culture's language when they enter school and experience a decline in input in the heritage language, consequently, do not completely acquire their first language. However, some heritage language learners are orally proficient but they are generally illiterate or have underdeveloped written comprehension and production in the heritage language (Oh & Fuligni, 2010; Salahshoor, 2017).

Flores and Barbosa (2014) found that heritage speakers went through the same stages of acquisition as their monolingual peers. However, the process of acquisition took longer for the heritage speakers because they had reduced input of the heritage language.

Theories of acquisition suggest that heritage language learners' production of the heritage language diverges from that of their monolingual peers because they are exposed to smaller quantities of input, in other words, the heritage language is only found in a restricted number of contexts and with fewer interlocutors.

Regarding culture, I maintain Byram's (2008) definition who states culture is the shared beliefs, values and behaviours of a social group. Likewise, according to the Collins English Dictionary, (2003) culture encompasses the total range of activities and ideas of a specific group of people with common and shared traditions, which are conveyed, distributed, and highlighted by members of the group. I mention Rocher's (2004) definition of the culture here as well, that culture is a connection of ideas and feelings accepted by the majority of people in a society (p. 142). I refer to (Roohul-Amini's (1989) analysis here about the roles of elements of culture such as language, rituals, clothes, science, beliefs and values which connect people. Scholars believe that culture is a social product, therefore, it is learnt through relationships with other people. Thus, culture transmits generation by generation and the elements are carried from one place to another place.

As Emmitt & Pollock, (1997) clearly state, culture is reflected and passed on by language from one generation to the next. We can say that words are the most significant tools of cultural symbols. That is to say, poems, stories, fictions, epics and myths are the main ingredients and components of a culture in a society.

From this, I agree with Allwright & Bailey (1991) who maintain that learning a new language involves the learning of a new culture. Consequently, as Byram states, teachers of a language are also teachers of culture (Byram 1989).

2.2.2 The relationship between language and culture

According to Mitchell & Myles (2004), the relationship between language and culture is deeply rooted and they are intertwined. Similarly, according to Brown (1994), "a language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture" (p. 165).

Some scholars such as Byram et al. (1994) and Kramersch (1993) look at how cultures might influence language learning. Others focus on how classroom cultures are created by participants and institutions (Fong, 2007; Holliday, 2012a). In all these studies, the emphasis has been on the importance of participants' cultural backgrounds in shaping their interactions which is the focus of my research as well.

As Kramersch (1993, p.8) has indicated 'Culture in language learning is not an expendable fifth skill. It is always in the background, right from day one.'Kramersch argues the importance of the learners' communicative competence and their ability to meaning in cultural contexts. Hymes (1971) also maintains that language would be meaningless without the sociocultural context in which it occurs. Krasner (1999) believes that the sole acquisition of linguistic competence is not enough to master a language. To successfully communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds, the development of this aspect of communicative competence is important in language learning.

Therefore, I believe that an understanding of the relationship between language and culture is important for language learners, teachers, and all those involved in language education. I begin to consider the connection between language and culture through relationships forwarded by Wardhaugh, (2002, pp. 219-220) who suggests that people in a culture use language that reflects their particular culture's values, in other words, the culture of a people finds reflection in the language they employ. In this regard, language may be seen as closely associated with a culture or inseparable and views language as culture-bound.

According to Halliday (1975) language acquisition is not a process that occurs in a 'vacuum'. Students get to be involved and active in various sociolinguistic situations. As Volosinov (1973) declares, "the actual reality of language-speech is not the abstract system of linguistic forms, but the social event of verbal interaction implemented in an utterance or utterances" (p. 94). Therefore, language learning is a socially constructed process. Since culture is embedded within every aspect of society, language learning, in Seelye's (1984) words, should not be isolated from the society that uses it. Based on this theoretical ground, this research argues that cultural themes selected from Persian speaking cultures should be integrated into the teaching of Persian, both in terms of classroom practices and textbook selection.

However, language may be seen as an instrument of communication or as a separate phenomenon in which language is seen as culturally neutral or as a code, such as Esperanto or Lojban languages. The following quotations from Ronald Wardhaugh (1987) may be seen as representing a range of opinions about the role of English as an international language: since no cultural requirements are tied to the learning of English, you can learn it and use it without having to subscribe to another set of values. As English is spoken almost everywhere in the world and tied to no particular social, political, economic or religious system, or a specific racial or cultural group, English is neutral in this sense (Ronald Wardhaugh, 1987). However, the idea of a linguistically neutral language is fiction: languages are socially constructed and socially constructive (Luke Houghton, 2007). Therefore, there is no neutral society and there is no neutral language, as language reflects the society it is embedded in.

I continue with the concept of languaculture introduced by Michael Agar here. The term "languaculture" was coined by Michael Agar in 1994 to define the essential tie between language and culture. Agar (1994) states that language user's draw on all kinds of things besides grammar and vocabulary such as past knowledge, local and cultural information, habits and also knowing the conventional behaviours and beliefs of that community. Therefore, he argues, it is necessary to tie the concept of language and culture together whenever talking about language (Agar 1994, p.60)

Michael Agar in *Language Shock* (1994) also argues that language and culture are not to be separated and that people will only ever be able to understand the other when language and culture are fused in a new term: languaculture. They are inseparable because language encodes culture and provides the means through which culture is shared and passed from one generation to the next.

Linguistically speaking, since the 1970s, the teaching and learning of languages have been influenced by the concept of pragmatic Competence, and that language teaching and learning should focus on the appropriate use of the target language according to social contexts.

Overall, over the past decades, language and culture have been considered inseparable, interwoven, and interrelated entities that have mutual effects on each other. Accordingly, knowing a language is influential in knowing a culture. From the mentioned points and discussion, it can be concluded that there is a very close relationship between language and culture in general, and specific language and its culture in particular. That is, culture has a direct effect on language. The two issues are closely correlated.

Having recognized the importance of the relationship between language and culture brings me to consider how this understanding can apply to language education and language policy.

2.2.3 Implications for language education and language policy

Bada and Genc (2000, p. 101) state that heritage language learners, who are not exposed to their cultural elements, may have difficulties in sharing and expressing meaning with native speakers of their community. As most heritage learners learn their heritage language in a foreign language setting, they do not have enough opportunities for real-life oral communication with native speakers (language group friends and social circles). According to Bernhardt (2009, p.137) language components including the knowledge of the language, and the cultural background knowledge, are influential in developing and enhancing the processes of language production and comprehension. Furthermore, some scholars believe that the activation of background cultural knowledge facilitates comprehension (Alfaki Siddiek, 2013; Bilgileri, 2016; Ghaniabadi & Alavi, 2012).

I agree with Krasner (1999) who believes the acquisition of linguistic competence is not enough to master a language. The learning of a language should be accompanied by a rise in the cultural awareness of the language. If we teach language without teaching about the culture in which it operates, the students are learning empty or meaningless symbols or they may attach the incorrect meaning to what is being taught. The students may use the language inappropriately or within the wrong cultural context, thus defeating the purpose of learning a language.

Therefore, an integrated language policy needed to be created that reflects the need for learners to learn about both culture and language. Policies for language teaching must encompass and include cultural values from the societies from which the languages are derived as well as being taught. In other words, when making policies regarding language teaching, one must consider the culture in which the target language is

being taught and the cultural meanings of teaching materials used. The materials may have a far broader meaning or encompass far more or less than what one has considered.

Therefore, the implications for language teaching and policymaking are vast and far-reaching. For instance, language teachers must instruct their students on the cultural background of language usage, choose culturally appropriate teaching styles, and explore culturally based linguistic differences to promote understanding instead of misconceptions.

It has been emphasized in the literature that the cultural component in heritage language education mainly refers to the acquisition of knowledge relating to the ‘heritage culture’, for example, information about the history, geography, society and literature of the language being learnt. The higher the linguistic proficiency achieved by learners, the higher the level of cultural awareness required of them.

According to Fenner (2008, p. 274), students only need to understand cultural knowledge of everyday life at the lower levels. However, after they have achieved a certain level of linguistic ability and want to develop more of their communicative competence, a deeper understanding of the ‘culture’ is needed (Fenner, 2008, p. 274). Furthermore, as Kramsch (2008, p.83) clearly states, culture and language should be learnt together to attain accurate linguistic understanding. After all, we can conclude that the more cultural concepts we learn, the more language abilities we acquire.

In summary, the findings of this literature review reinforce the view that cultural familiarity affects language learning, which is in line with my research goal.

2.2.4 Complementary and Supplementary Schools

According to data from the British Schools Census, due to the increase in migrations during the past 20 years, the number of children who speak languages other than English is increasing. However, these children rarely can use and develop their first languages in mainstream schools for educational purposes, as a result, it has been left to the communities to establish and organise schools themselves to develop their children’s heritage languages (Curdt-Christiansen & Hancock, 2014). These complementary schools (also known as ‘community’, ‘supplementary’ or ‘heritage language’ schools) operate in the evenings and weekends.

According to Stodter & O’Hanlon (2016), one of the benefits of knowing a mother tongue is that children will be able to communicate and interact better with their families. Another benefit is an academic achievement (Cummins, 2000; Thomas & Collier, 2004). Zhang (2016) states that heritage language

learners vary in their oral and script experiences at home and as a result, they tend to develop different skills in both oral language and literacy skills.

As there are almost no opportunities in mainstream schools to learn the heritage languages, according to Li Wei (2006) the complementary schools in the United Kingdom were established and expanded. And as Nwulu (2015, p.15) states establishing complementary schools were to conserve the linguistic and cultural heritage. Other scholars such as (Walters, 2011; Ganassin, 2018) acknowledge the educational and social role of complementary schools in England as well.

According to some researchers (Tereshchenko&Archer, 2014; Nwulu, 2015), these schools provide children with social, cultural and linguistic contexts. They also provide a site for more productive parent-teacher engagement as well as community engagement more widely (Ramalingam & Griffith, 2015).

Creese and Martin (2009, p. 1) indicate that different kinds of complementary schools exist in the UK. Some schools provide extra learning opportunities for students to improve in their mastery of mainstream subjects together with components of heritage language and culture learning; some work towards the maintenance of religious studies; and some complementary schools are focused on the development of language learning and culture maintenance of the community.

Accordingly, parents, teachers and the community believe that the primary role of these schools is the maintenance of heritage language and culture (Creese and Martin, 2009). Teaching about festivals, foods and holidays of a language has always been considered as a reification of teaching culture in the language classroom (Cortazzi and Jin, 1999).

Students attend complementary schools to learn the language and to understand tradition and culture according to their parents' expectations. However, cultural learning in language classrooms is never a one-way process. In Francis words (2008), unlike teachers and parents, who believe that complementary schools are places where children can learn culture along with the language, students of complementary schools claim that the key purpose of their attendance is to learn the language. Most of these language learners claim that English is their native language, and they claim that their primary motivation for studying their heritage language is their family background.

In the context of the UK as well, some children are to some degree bilingual and, indeed, multilingual. As such, they can acquire knowledge of the mother tongue(s) and English spontaneously. English is used in school while mother tongue or parental tongues are spoken at home. For this group of learners, the mother tongue (or in some cases, the parental languages) is/are considered as their heritage language(s). However, their parents believe that knowledge of heritage language and traditional culture is now at risk of being

forgotten due to lack of practice. According to Francis et al (2008) parents of an ethnic minority believe that traditional cultural heritage can be passed on to their children through the learning of language and participation in the activities of the complementary school. Thus, the responsibilities of complementary schools in this instance are not to just teach the home language(s) such as the Persian language, but also to provide these children with opportunities to acquire and experience their heritage culture(s).

To follow this policy, most Persian complementary schools in the UK aim to tackle the problem of maintaining the Persian language and culture among the new generation born in the UK. However, although, culture has been considered significant in these language schools, it has not been considered as a component of the curriculum in them. In addition, apart from the teaching of Persian language and literacy, most of these schools offer only some traditional activities related to heritage, such as dance, calligraphy, and so on.

In this sense, as the main role of heritage language schools is to teach, value and preserve the unique cultural heritage through teaching to second and third immigrant generations, these schools are perceived as an important resource for lively and dynamic education. Therefore, cultural elements and concepts should be planted in the curriculum of these schools to fulfil the obligation of sustaining traditions, culture and values. According to Hicela Ivon (2013), this perspective towards heritage schools treats students both as consumers and creators of cultural values and perceives school both as a place for cultural living, and a source and promoter of a cultural way of life. In Stevanović's (2002) words, to make pupils sensitive to cultural heritage, heritage schools must provide an incentive through interactive, and integrative learning, and by creating conditions that enable students to experience and live their heritage practically.

Admittedly, heritage learners who acquire knowledge of the heritage language through informal contexts such as home require formal education as a supplement to their knowledge of language use and function of heritage language so that they can gain confidence in using the language in both active and passive contexts effectively.

While recognising that many heritage schools might and do well in this respect, it is, therefore, necessary to change the character of learning and teaching in many heritage schools and provide a framework for experiences that surpass intellectual learning and encourage a more comprehensive developmental process in pupils.

With this in mind, as a starting point for educational change in the Educational and Cultural Centre (IRI School), I embarked upon using Fullan's educational change theory as a framework. According to Fullan (1991, p.37), there are "at least three components in implementing educational change." These components are the possible use of new or revised materials (such as teaching resources), the possible use of new

teaching approaches (such as new teaching strategies or activities) and the possible alteration of beliefs (such as pedagogical assumptions). Fullan argues that when these three aspects of change are operating together educational goals can be achieved (p.37).

Furthermore, the IRIS School with its literacy programme was an ideal site for implementing a proposed systematic change in syllabus design from the usual curricula, structure, and learning methodologies. IRIS School has many structural characteristics that may further be enhanced, adapted, and integrated to meet the goals of my proposed cultural syllabus.

My goal in this framework was to design a syllabus that reflected the world view, values and patterns of social interaction of the Persian community in which it was situated. It was culture-based as it was based on a framework of values, priorities and world view, so that syllabus change met the needs of the learners. In addition, it was community-based as it was rooted in the lives of the community for whom it was being designed.

2.2.5 Persian Community in Britain (*General population characteristics*)

There has been very little research on the traits of Persians who live in the UK. Very little research has been carried out on the problems that they face whilst migrating to a new land. The invisibility of Persians in Britain could be due to several reasons, including their relatively small number compared to other emigrant groups, the fact that they do not reside in concentrated areas like many other such groups, and because they do not pose social problems for British society.

Nevertheless, the Persians migrated to Britain in two waves. The first wave began in the 1950s and consisted mainly of students holding temporary visas from middle to upper-class families who were sent overseas for higher education. Many of these families remained in the U.K. after they have finished their education, giving birth to children, enjoying educational and professional successes, living comfortably, and returning to Persia for regular visits. Some of them even settled in the U.K.

In the second wave, the majority of Persians living in Britain left Persia due to the events surrounding 1978-1979 and its aftermath. The 1981 population census found a total of 28,617 Persians who were born in Persia living in Britain (OPCS/GRO(S), 1983). The 1991 census indicated that there were 32,262 Persians who were born in Persia and were residents in Britain (OPCS/GRO(s), 1993). According to the 2001 Census, 42,494 Iranian-born people are residents in the UK. This figure has risen to 83,000 in the year 2011. This is according to the U.K Census of 2011. In an interview I arranged with a member of the Persian consulate in London, approximately 75,000 Persians are living in Britain, half of whom live in the London

area. They informed me that around 35,000. Persians are registered at the consulate (Interview, Iranian consulate, 12 December; 1999).

Persians living in Britain form a vast set of political, socio-economic, religious and ethnic backgrounds. To shed light on the settlement experience of this heterogeneous group, it is necessary to refer briefly to Persians in Britain. The first settlers from high socio-economic levels were fluent in English and familiar with the London lifestyle and reside in affluent boroughs of London. The second group of immigrants were not as affluent as the early waves, and live dispersed in urban areas from London (Peach, p. 96).

There were only a handful of Persian religious, ethnic and cultural organisations in the mid-1980s. These organisations provided support to Persians who fled Iran because of the Iran-Iraq war. They offered advice on immigration, welfare, and housing. They provided support to resettle those who had fled the war. While many Persians have become self-employed, owning and working in businesses such as restaurants, grocery stores, laundrettes and taxi companies, others have professional and skilled jobs in various fields, including engineering, accounting, and computing and technical areas (Harbottle, pp. 89-97).

Although it has been very important for Persians to adapt successfully to British society, many have feared losing their sense of being Persian and have made great efforts in maintaining Persian cultural forms and the Persian language. Throughout the 1980s, a growing number of Persian educational and socio-cultural venues developed, including Persian language schools. Rostam Complementary School is one example of such a school, Kānun-e Persia (Persian Home), Religious Associations and Gatherings, Cultural Centres, Persian Restaurants, are other examples, in which activities like serving Persian foods, poetry readings, contemporary and classical Persian music concerts, films, comedy shows and discos, were performed

In addition, there is a range of Persian newspapers, magazines and advertising free papers printed in Britain in the Persian Language. These, along with several other Persian TV and Radio channels are active to broadcast a variety of programmes in Persian. An archive is held at the library for Persian Studies in Tehran, Iran. Several Persian charity organisations are also active in Britain. Persian newsgroups and chat lines have recently used the Internet to communicate, form opinions, and express political and social views. They are also a way of expressing a Persian's identity. It is important to add that popular cultural events are blurring the internal divisions among Persians, particularly among the second generation.

Persians have generally shown positive signs of economic and social integration among the different internal sub-groups. They emphasize the Persian language and traditions in informal contexts. Different social factors, including Persia's impressive wins in the 1998 world cup, full attendance in Olympics 2012

in London, and the success of Persian filmmakers internationally have contributed to a new identity for them in the British context.

2.2.6 Persian (Farsi) as a heritage language

Researchers have studied Persian as a heritage language from a variety of perspectives including the sociological, anthropological, linguistic, and pedagogical points of view. This section aims to provide a much-needed comprehensive overview of the literature.

Modarresi (2001) believes that since the original Persian immigrants were mainly students who did not come to the UK 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 Persian immigrants to the U.K. increased. As these attitudes changed dramatically in recent years, and Persians started to speak more Farsi at home, studying Farsi at heritage language schools and listening to Persian media, have become more popular. In Hoffman's words (1989) for most Persians, 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). Persian parents send their children to Persian heritage language classes hoping that through learning the 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 a willingness to use Farsi amongst Persian in the UK can be an indicator of a mounting sense of cultural and community identity. Persians are very proud of their classical and modern literature and most native-born Persians can easily read and understand classical Persian literature which is very rich in terms of the use of riddles and proverbs. Among Persian language, traditions, festivities, and family values were the most important aspects of the home culture (Mostashari, 2004).

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 Persians. Entertainment programs such as shows, music videos, and sitcoms target Persian speaking audiences. 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 Persians to connect across the globe using the Persian language. At present, many internet sites offer online Persian language learning without any cost to learners, an invaluable resource for many second generations.

Despite these means of maintaining the Farsi language, Modarresi (2001) however, mentions that these resources are not strong enough to combat or prevent the forces of language shift in the second generation. Persian parents face many challenges in their efforts to teach heritage skills to their children. Persian children have limited opportunities to develop bilingualism in the current U.K. educational systems. Therefore, the responsibility for the 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 generations. First-generation Persians frequently use Farsi as the language of their choice for everyday contact, while in contrast, the second generation is generally monolingual speakers. Persian parents rapidly realized that their children do not necessarily acquire the language and follow the traditions of their home country. Many families watched their children make new friends, attend British schools, and speak English as their first and sometimes only language (Modarresi, 2001). Some Persian children born in the UK either consider learning Farsi unnecessary, or they appraise it negatively (Atoofi, 2011). Persian parents face many challenges in encouraging their children to maintain their heritage language. Some parents feel they have to enforce the use of Farsi as a language spoken at home (Modarresi, 2001) and they struggle with intergenerational conflicts and dealing with their children's identity issues (Mahdi, 1998).

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

Public school support for the development of less commonly taught heritage languages such as Farsi is rare. Yet, children may benefit from attending organized Farsi language classes and socializing with others like themselves in sizable ethnic communities. Cultural activities and film festivals where the 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 children who speak Farsi have tried to counterbalance 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 the first generation has started to connect their children, mostly born in the UK, to the home language and culture. Over time Persian people have established various cultural and religious institutions that are considered the most important sources of linguistic and cultural heritage maintenance. In recent years, these centres have sprung up across the UK.

Therefore, the UK hosts several Persian cultural centres. 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 Persian immigrants and the homeland. Other than teaching the Persian language, these cultural centres have various initiatives to educate the younger generation in literature, music, dance and arts.

In general, heritage language education has existed in the form of weekend schools, which are community-based programs that offer language and culture instruction for a few hours per week. Modarresi Y. (2001) identifies three types of these cultural institutions and their role in Persian language maintenance. Firstly, sociocultural groups provide Farsi classes run in Persian religious and cultural centres. These groups include cultural centres or community groups that organize various programs in celebration of national holidays and cultural events such as Nowruz, Yalda, Mehregan, etc. Secondly, Religious Centres are among the most important cultural institutions for the observant members of the Muslim Persian community. These centres aim to transfer both religious practices and cultural and linguistic values to the second generation. These centres also offer Farsi classes to members of their communities. Thirdly, one of the ways of Persian language instruction has been taught is through courses offered by Persian secular heritage schools. These courses and classes are taught at different levels. 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 (Modarresi Y. 2001, p.107).

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

2.2.7 Perspectives of Parents, Teachers, and Students

I found several studies which have explored the motivation of parents, students, and teachers involved in heritage language (e.g. Liao, L., & Larke, P. J. (2008), Francis, B., Archer, L., & Mau, A. (2010); Zhang, D., & Slaughter-Defoe, D. T. (2009).

They state that the most common reason parents and teachers gave for participating in heritage language schools was to carry on the Heritage Language and culture (Liao, L., & Larke, P. J. (2008); Zhang, D., & Slaughter-Defoe, D. T. (2009).

Parents are also concerned with their children being able to communicate with themselves, grandparents, and relatives in the community or when they go back to the home country to visit (Liao & Larke, 2008; Zhang, D., & Slaughter-Defoe, D. T., 2009. Francis, B., Archer, L., & Mau, A. (2010) found that some

teachers saw their role as helping children understand the parents' thinking to reduce friction in the family. Some parents and teachers felt that children would regret not learning their heritage language when they were older (Francis, B., Archer, L., & Mau, A., 2010; Zhang, D., & Slaughter-Defoe, D. T., 2009).

Whether parents and teachers see the purpose of schools and language maintenance as a means to communicate with family members, retain cultural heritage, or improve future employment prospects, their participation is a way of resisting the trend of language shift. Without the commitment of parents and heritage language teachers, heritage schools would not be able to function.

Studies have found that students have varying reactions to and reasons for attending heritage schools. The differing reactions could be due to students' personalities; their confidence in their heritage language abilities; their overall attitude towards their heritage language and culture, or the structure and curriculum of the heritage schools.

According to Zhang, D., & Slaughter-Defoe, D. T. (2009) younger children seem to enjoy going to the weekend heritage schools; however, as they get older, they begin to resist attending. This may be because the younger children do fun activities, such as playing games and singing songs. As students get older, classes may include more seatwork and the learning of complicated written characters. Additionally, the academic requirements in mainstream schools become more demanding, and students may become more involved in extra-curricular activities. Heritage schools may be seen as an extra burden.

Zhang and Slaughter-Defoe's study only included students up to the age of fourteen; on the other hand, researchers who studied high school-aged students attending Heritage Language schools (HLS)reported that most of those students felt positive about attending heritage schools (Chinen, K., & Tucker, G. R. (2005); Oriyama, 2010).

Many of the students in Zhang and Slaughter-Defoe's study who viewed heritage schools negatively reported feeling forced by their parents to attend, which caused them to miss out on the free time their peers enjoyed (Francis, et al., 2009; Tse, 2001a; You, 2005). Li (2005) indicates that students may have difficulty relating to textbooks and materials

2.3 Statement of the Problem

As we found from the review of related literature, the immigrant population in general in the UK and Persian immigration in particular, has increased vastly in Britain over the past twenty years. Whatever the initial motives for migration, they have one thing in common; they bring a wide range of languages and cultures with them. As a result, we are becoming more culturally and linguistically diverse. Although

English has been the dominant language, many people in the UK speak languages other than English as their heritage language(s)(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 that such students receive no instruction in the heritage language. 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 parents" (p. 331), they will face consequences at the personal, familial, and social levels. However, without formal and direct instruction the development of speaking and literacy skills in the heritage language would be minimal and unsuccessful (Cummins, 2005).

Due to 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. For instance, there has been an increasing desire among non-English speaking communities to preserve their heritage languages (Campbell & Peyton, 1998; Griffith, 2004). 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).

For instance, Muslim parents want to insert religious values and their ideas of community and tradition in their children and pass on knowledge gained from life experience. When parents are not fluent in the language students learn at school and children have not developed their home language, several issues arise. For example, Wong-Fillmore (1991) and Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe (2009) argue that in that situation there can be little deep parent-child communication. In other words, children can discuss basic everyday happenings but lack the sophisticated language to fully express their feelings, motivations, and opinions. A "wall of words" separates children and parents (Cho, D., 2001, A01). At the same time, parents are unable to pass on values, beliefs, and advice about how to cope with life's challenges. Through a shared language parents teach their children about personal responsibility, work ethic, and how to be moral, ethical people (Wong-Fillmore, 1991). In the words of one mother, "*You want to speak to your children in your language; you want to talk about certain topics from your heart, but it is hard when you can only speak broken English*" (Cho, D., 2001, A01). A study by Portes & Hao (2002) found that second-generation students who became fluent bilinguals reported better relations with their families than those who became monolingual

English speakers. Conversely, the inability to communicate in a common language can strain family relationships. Children may begin to lose respect for their parents, and parents lose their authority. Wright (2007) found students in a community did not believe their parents were good role models to help them with their schooling or to give advice in life.

I have witnessed an aspect of globalization which means people are free to move from one country to another, be it for study, work or leisure. This might be beneficial however it affects the person's mother tongue. I now want to discuss why parents and educators should support children learning and retaining their native language (which, in my research, is Persian. In this section, I propose a framework for educational change.

2.4 My Framework for Educational Change

The level of Persian teaching in most heritage schools has been improved (Nooshan Ashtari, 2018 p.5). However, challenges remain. Taken as a whole, we still underperform in teaching the Persian language.

From my experience as the headteacher of a heritage school, I am convinced that one contributing factor for the underperformance in Persian attainment is due to the separation made between culture, religious values and Persian language. In my view, this separation was partly due to the absence of planned, unified, and national policy for the Persian language, and partly due to textbooks which function as one of the key influences in understanding the culture. Wandel (2011) proposed that textbooks must include materials that would require and encourage divergent views and discussions on cultural issues. However, according to Akbari (2015), the evaluations of Persian culture as it is currently presented in Persian textbooks is nothing but a representation of Islamic ideology incorporated into the language materials (Amirian & Bazrafshan, 2016; Mahboudi, & Javdani, 2012).

Another reason for this separation can be found in Francis' words (2008), unlike teachers and parents, who believe that complementary schools are places where children can learn culture along with the language, students of complementary schools claim that the key purpose of their attendance is to learn the language. Most of these language learners claim that English is their native language, and their primary motivation for studying their heritage language is their family background.

In addition, the separation between language and culture comes from a view that sees language as an instrument of communication or as a phenomenon separated from culture. This view claims that language is culturally neutral and language is just seen as a code.

Furthermore, based on my own experience working at a Persian school, unqualified, unprepared, and untrained teachers are another reason for this separation. According to (Peterson & Coltrane, 2003) language teachers should be aware of the culturally appropriate ways and behaviours of the language community, for example, to address people, express gratitude, make requests, and (dis)agree with someone.

This separation affects the teaching and learning of Persian in schools to the impairment of progress and achievement. Important pedagogic opportunities to enrich and deepen the learners' understanding of Persian and impact positively on their general Persian competence are being missed. Not only does this separation impact the learners but on the teachers as well.

Integrating these two areas, culture and language, can bring about collaborative planning by teachers which should increase the teachers' performance, and thus the learners' knowledge and confidence in both culture and Persian language.

Therefore, I focused on creating links between culture and the Persian language for both teachers and learners. This inquiry has been framed as a case study in IRIS Persian Heritage School where I undertook a participatory action research project with students. My pedagogic intervention incorporated devising a framework for the Persian language teachers to use to make these links explicit. Another very important goal of this research was to encourage and support the teachers to plan collaboratively to encourage this integration.

I would like, at this point, to discuss the theoretical framework for the educational change process that I embarked upon.

I have noticed that over the past years there has been a shift in attitude toward the integration of culture and language; there is now more aware of how this integration can improve the teaching and learning of Persian. This awareness has come about through various research works in the educational field and presentations researchers have given at various educational conferences and meetings between different scholars. To gain a deeper and wider knowledge of the language and culture learning, I endeavour to familiarise our students with Persian culture and traditions and through events and teaching materials incorporate aspects of the Persian arts, music, traditions, historical sites, poets, regional accents and costumes and much more into our curriculum.

As stated above, I embarked upon using Fullan's educational change theory as a framework. Fullan (1991, p.37), believes that there are "at least three components in implementing educational change." These components are the use of new or revised teaching resources, the use of new teaching strategies or activities

and the alteration of pedagogical assumptions. . Fullan argues that when these three aspects of change are operating together educational goals can be achieved (p.37).

From the teaching perspective, I would argue that my research methods and techniques (which are explored in detail in the following chapter) should illuminate whether Fullan's three components of change have taken place during my research and to what extent.

From the material perspective, this research project examined the ability of the teachers to implement the theoretical framework I devised into practical lessons, as well as their ability to modify and change it as and when necessary.

From the teaching approaches perspective, the ability of the teachers to teach culture is the key skill. Whether culture was integrated more generally into the life of the school.

From the changes in beliefs perspective, whether the teachers understood and appreciated why integrating culture can enhance the teaching and learning of Persian. Whether they have internalised this integration as a positive step in enhancing the teaching and learning of Persian.

From the learner's perspective, the research methods and techniques would determine if and to what extent the pedagogic intervention has impacted their language skills. In their attitudes, it means to the extent to which they have a positive attitude to learning Persian. And in their understandings, it means to the extent to which they learn Persian language lessons better.

2.5 Significance of the Study

There are benefits to promoting heritage languages at both societal and individual levels. 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 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 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. According to Cho (2000), participants in his research believed that their heritage language development provided a personal gain, eventually contributing positively to the improvement of their community.

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. 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.

2.6 Research Design

I used a qualitative methodology to investigate the language beliefs, practices, and challenges faced by Persian immigrants living in the UK as they strive to develop and maintain Persian as a heritage language. To the same extent, I explored Persian language teaching practices within three classroom contexts to identify the nature of heritage language teaching. Qualitative data analyses allow for a rich description of Persian people and give voice to their experiences as parents seeking to maintain the Persian language and cultural traditions within the UK context. Interviews with parents were used to gain in-depth knowledge of the respondents' experiences, to allow me to explore their feelings and positionalities 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 have received in IRIS Persian language school. By meeting with participants face-to-face in a focus group, richer information could be derived from them, such as voice, pitch, and body language in addition to their verbal answers (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Therefore, 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, and the types of family language practices and factors that work favourably toward language maintenance. In addition, they were able to share the challenges they have encountered.

In addition to the information provided in the focus group and interviews, data collected from classroom observations were analysed, compared and triangulated to identify common elements as well as differences. All of the data was transcribed in Persian and translated into English to support the major findings. Direct quotes from participants have been included to illustrate findings as well.

2.6.1 Purpose of the project

The main purpose of this project is to enhance the teaching and learning of Persian as a heritage language in a Persian Heritage language school by integrating culture with language. In addition, it has aimed to incorporate a cultural syllabus into teaching and learning the Persian heritage language programme. The second goal has been to investigate parents' attitudes toward Persian maintenance in the UK and shed light

on difficulties associated with language maintenance, both at home and in a heritage language school and to discover what benefits parents see in heritage language schools and why they send their children to them.

2.6.2 Research Questions

My central questions are:

- **Main Research question** to what extent integrating the teaching of cultural elements with the Persian language will impact positively on the children's general attainment in the Persian language.
- **Research question 1** whether the change has taken place in the teachers involved in my research and to what extent they have undertaken a personal journey?
- **Research question 2** to what extent the teachers have undergone a change in practice and what strategies and techniques they employ to teach the new integrative framework and to what extent they have been able to reflect on their practice and that of their learners.
- **Research question 3** whether and to what extent the teachers have established a collaborative planning and working partnership?
- **Research question 4** whether this course contributes to any of your language skills? To which skill did the course contribute most?
- **Research question 5** did this course help the learners raise awareness about Persian culture?
- **Research question 6** did the students' attitude towards Persian culture change at the end of this cultural course?

Therefore, I hope through the findings of this research project I can add to previous research about heritage language learning and encourage further research of this little-known group.

Summary

As an original contribution, this chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of the literature on language and culture and Persian as a heritage language that cohesively unifies the existing research and can be used as a resource for future scholars.

This chapter reviewed the history of supplementary/ complementary/ heritage schools in the U.K., 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 are increasing in the U.K. at a time when there is still no nationwide educational support. Maintaining heritage language is

a big responsibility of many immigrant families. Heritage language loss is increasingly seen among second-generation immigrants. Immigrant parents generally wish for their children to maintain their heritage language to secure their ethnic relationships and family ties, as well as to obtain better opportunities in the future. Keeping alive the traditions of the home nation are a big responsibility of the immigrant families. This chapter has also assessed the history and the current state of Farsi as a heritage language in the U.K. It has also looked at how Persian people preserve their heritage language. To help their children maintain their heritage language, 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 immigrants' experiences as they strive to maintain their heritage language. For this reason, this research intended to bring insight on the topic from the voices of the immigrant parents and the implementation of a new framework.

Chapter Three will help the reader navigate through the complex world of research methodology which supports the processes of my research.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Design and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

I begin this chapter by discussing four research levels: paradigms, methodology, methods and techniques". First, I will discuss the notion of the research paradigm where I will present the ontological and epistemological premises that underpin and inform my work. Second, I will discuss the concept of methodology and the methodology that I have chosen to direct my research. Third, I will give a detailed account of the research methods and techniques I employ to generate the data. This account will include a discussion on the triangulation of the data sources that support the validity and reliability of my work. I will then critically examine my positionality about the research and the ethical issues I need to consider in undertaking this type of research. I then discuss my chosen method of data analysis and the rationale for my choosing it. I end with a brief conclusion that provides the reader with an overview of the salient points discussed in this chapter.

3.2 Research Paradigm

I begin this part by providing a brief outline of different research paradigms. Generally speaking, research paradigms (positivism, interpretivism, critical theory) are ways of explaining the basic set of beliefs that the researcher has (i.e., at a philosophical level) and how these influences the way he/she does research (i.e., the practical aspects of doing research). A paradigm is a basic belief system and theoretical framework with assumptions about 1) ontology, 2) epistemology, 3) methodology and 4) methods. In other words, it is our way of understanding the reality of the world and studying it. I will now look at three different approaches to educational research.

3.2.1 Positivism, Interpretivism, and Critical Theory

Positivism assumes that reality exists independently of humans. It is not mediated by our senses and it is governed by immutable laws. Positivists strive to understand the social world like the natural world. Because the reality is context-free, different researchers working in different times and places will converge to the same conclusions about a given phenomenon. Positivist methodology relies heavily on experimentation. The purpose is to measure, control, predict, construct laws and ascribe causality (Cohen et al., 2007).

Interpretivism rejects the notion that a single, verifiable reality exists independent of our senses (Grix, 2004, p. 82). Instead, interpretivism believes in socially constructed multiple realities. Truth and reality are created, not discovered (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 204). External reality cannot be directly accessible to observers without being contaminated by their worldviews, concepts, backgrounds etc. The interpretive methodology requires that social phenomena be understood “through the eyes of the participants rather than the researcher” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 21). The most important aim of this methodology is to understand social phenomena in their context. According to Kincheloe & McLaren, a person’s reality is shaped by cultural, political, ethnic, gender and religious factors. This inter-relates to create a social system. (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, pp. 305-306).

The aim of critical educational research is not merely to explain or understand society but to change it (Patton, 2002). Instead of generating knowledge of the social world as it exists and perpetuating knowledge status quo (Kincheloe, 2008), critical researchers endeavour to bring to light the beliefs and actions that limit human freedom with the ultimate aim of transforming the situation. The critical methodology is dialogic and dialectical (Guba & Lincoln, 1994); it requires the investigator to engage the subjects in dialogue to bring about a change in their outlook on social systems that keep them deprived of intellectual and social needs. Now I will look closely at the four components of a research paradigm.

3.2.2 Ontology and Epistemology

Ontology refers to “the nature of our beliefs about reality” (Richards, 2003, p. 33). It is the ontological question that leads a researcher to inquire what kind of reality exists: “A singular, verifiable reality and truth or socially constructed multiple realities” (Patton, 2002, p. 134). The ontological position of positivists is that of realism, interpretive ontology anti-foundationalism and critical theorists’ historical realism.

Epistemology refers to “the branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge and the process by which knowledge is acquired and validated” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003, p. 13). Cohen et al explore “the nature and forms of knowledge, how it is gained and how it is communicated to others” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 7). It is the epistemological question that leads a researcher to debate “the possibility and desirability of objectivity, subjectivity, causality, validity, generalisability” (Patton, 2002, p. 134). Therefore, if a singular verifiable truth is assumed, then the posture of the knower must be one of objective detachment (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). Conversely, if belief is socially constructed; they get involved with the subjects and try and understand phenomena in their contexts.

Crotty defines epistemology as “how do we know what we know” (Crotty, 1998:P. 8) or as put by Guba, it is “the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known” (Guba and Lincoln, 1998:201).

It is related to ontology, “the study of being” (Crotty, 1998:P. 10) or “The nature of reality”. This is discussed in depth by Lincoln and Guba (Lindon and Guba 1985:37). Crotty (1998) suggests that an ontological stance leads one to a particular epistemological stance. The same can be said that a particular epistemological stance leads to an ontological stance.

An epistemological position suggests that positivism is derived from objectivism. No object can be researched without being affected by the researcher.

3.2.3 Implications for this research

It is crucial therefore that the reader has an understanding of the factors that have motivated me to undertake this research. To this end, I will critically explore both the ontological and epistemological bases of my work. In Chapter One, I gave the reader a brief insight into the world in which I was growing up in Persia.

It was during my school period that I grew to love the Persian language and became quite proficient in reading and comprehension. At school during my teenage years, the values of democracy, justice and fairness, and my commitment to the Persian language and the Persian speakers were consolidated. Persian then took on a different importance for me as a practical tool for communication. The experience of school days provided me with the ability to develop a strong Persian identity. This was an identity that was bound up in a rich cultural and historical identity, a social justice identity bound up within Persian values. For me, the ancient and the modern layers of the Persian language have always been inseparable, both informing and enriching the other. The Persian language with its three thousand years of existence has evolved and developed over the millennia and provided a constant and living link to the religion, history and culture of the Persian Speakers. However, from a pedagogic perspective, the teaching and learning of Persian remain a challenge in the school sector in the UK and steps must be taken to improve its failings. When I first came to the UK and discovered that Culture and Persian were taught separately it seemed very strange and unnatural. For this reason, I believe that one way to improve the state of Persian teaching and learning in the UK is to integrate Cultural elements and Persian Language, where possible and appropriate, to enhance the experience for both teacher and the learner. My ‘philosophical intent or motivation’ for undertaking this research project is about making a unique contribution in the field of Persian pedagogy through enhancing the teaching and learning of Persian in the diaspora through innovative curriculum design that integrates Cultural Elements and Persian Language. It is also about exposing practitioners invested in the Persian

language teaching and learning field to a new narrative and fresh possibilities. Moreover, it is concerned with empowering and working in partnership with them. My research project aims to address some of these ongoing challenges. One of the research paradigms that resonate with my positioning is that of the pragmatic paradigm. Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) contend that “pragmatist researchers focus on the 'what' and 'how' of the research problem... The pragmatic paradigm places ‘the research problem’ as central and applies all approaches to understanding the problem”. (Creswell, 2003, p.11). My research focuses on the what, namely, it aims to enhance the teaching and learning of Persian Language and the how by initiating a pedagogic intervention. As will be revealed, I have utilised a variety of research approaches and methods in my research project to address my central concern.

3.3 Methodology

As Crotty helpfully presents, a methodology is the “strategy, plan of action, process or design” of research. It lies behind the type of research method employed to gather data (Crotty, 1998:3). Methodology refers to the study and critical analysis of data production techniques. Also, Grix (2004, p. 32) defines methodology as being “concerned with the discussion of how a particular piece of research should be undertaken”. Methodology guides the researcher in deciding what type of data is required for a study and which data collection tools will be most appropriate for his/her study

My research methodology was designed to meet the research aims and objectives as well as my professional doctorate learning outcomes. Jonker et al (2010, p.31) sum up by stating that the type of methodology used by a researcher suggests the type of route that the research will take to achieve a certain result. This is divided into five sections being knowledge, insight, design, intervention, solution. My chosen methodology is not a single methodology but rather a combination of different research approaches. I have conducted a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project through the lens of Ethnography.

3.3.1 Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Action Research (AR) provides a straightforward way of taking a researching approach to practice or change” (Costley et al, 2011, p.88). Hitchcock and Hughes (2003, p.27) contend that those involved in AR are concerned with improving a situation “through active intervention and in collaboration with the parties involved”, thus giving AR a “very particular character”. They maintain that the result of the research is not simply a contribution to knowledge, but “practitioner-relevant information’. The particular form of AR in which I have chosen to conduct my research is participatory Action Research (PAR). Participatory Action Research (PAR) is an approach used for improving conditions and practices in an environment (Lingard et al., 2008). The purpose of undertaking participatory action research is to bring about change in specific contexts such as schools, organizations, groups or teams, as Parkin (2009) describes it. It involves action,

evaluation, and critical reflection and – based on the evidence gathered –changes in practice are then implemented. Through our observations and communications with other people, my teachers and I were continually making informal evaluations and judgements about what it was they did.

Fox et al (2007) point out that in PAR the researcher “moves from the role of being the expert in research to that of a process facilitator. The researcher is no longer centre stage deciding on how the research should be carried out. Instead, his role is to help participants with the process of research” (p.53). They also argue that one of the main requirements for the researcher, as a process facilitator is to establish a culture of trust within the group. With this type of research, the main purpose of the inquiry is exploratory rather than experimental. They add that the types of data collection include such methods as “participant observation, interview and the analysis of documentary evidence”. They make the point, certainly relevant to my research, that PAR supports both qualitative and quantitative data as well as self-reflection. In this way, for the most pragmatic reasons, it is recognized that the better the collaboration, the more likely people will implement the changes that come out of the research. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (2008) PAR is the investigation of real, actual and concrete practices taking place in specific contexts and not theoretical and abstract practices. Finally, I identify with Herr and Anderson, (2005) who state that AR is “often chosen by students because they are passionate about their topic, their setting, and co-participants. This brings me now to discuss the context in which I conducted my research, a heritage language school.

3.3.2 Ethnography

Epistemologically, my study is underpinned by an interpretive research paradigm which according to Kuhn, (1962) refers to ‘an integrated set of theoretical presuppositions that leads the researcher to see the world of one’s research interest in a particular way’. Ernest (1994: 24) argues that interpretive research looks for truth by observing the world. The paradigm provided me with an opportunity to get a sense of what goes on in our school. My study has intended to investigate how participants’ cultural enrichment influences language teaching and learning. Therefore, the interpretive approach provided the most suitable framework to guide me in carrying out my investigation. Ethnography has been said to be one of the most significant tools of the interpretive approach as it emphasises the role of culture in language teaching. As it plays a very important role in this study, the ethnographic approach will be elaborated on in the next section.

My study intended to explore the teaching and learning of Persian as a heritage language in the UK. The research theme lies within the field of sociolinguistics as it focuses on the study of languages in society. Thus, Ethnography, considered as representing an epistemological perspective on language and communication, is a significant theoretical and methodological tool for the study of ‘language in society’ (Blommaert and Dong, 2010: 5). Heller (2008: 250) also maintains that ethnographic research provides the

researcher with an opportunity to interpret the stories of participants, which ‘illuminate social processes and generate explanations of why people do and think the things they do’.

In terms of my study, I intend to investigate issues relating to beliefs and values by analysing the participants’ linguistic practices in their language classes. Subsequently, I would like to present to the reader a general view of how Persian as a Heritage Language (HL) is taught in the UK. In other words, I intend to tell the ‘story’ of the teaching and learning of Persian as a heritage language in the IRIS educational context, giving the reader an ethnographic ‘looking glass’ to see what is happening in the language classroom.

There is a special feature that distinguishes ethnography from the other approaches – the researcher’s ‘position’ in the study. Erickson (1990: 80) argues that ethnographic approaches allow the researcher to interpret the world by interpreting the subjective meanings of participants, and thus provide audiences with the opportunity to see the world from the ‘lens’ of the ethnographer.

According to Hornberger (1994: 688), ‘the value of ethnography lies in first-hand information, which the researcher collects directly from the participants and its holistic view which points to the researcher as a reporter who presents his interpretation of the recourse taken by participants at the research site. In fact, by making clear the researcher’s position in the research, the reader will be in a better position to understand the ‘lenses’ through which they are ‘watching’ the study. These reasons underlie my rationale for adopting the ethnographic approach in my study.

According to Ellis, ethnography is “an approach that analyses personal experiences (the auto) to understand cultural experience (the ethnography)” (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005). The use of ethnography as a methodology provided me with a very effective way to authentically convey my story and to rationalise the motivations for undertaking this research. It was through my lens that helped me to critically analyse the impact of the research on the teachers, the children and the school community. As my research project is a record of the culmination of my personal and professional journey thus far, I am satisfied that the use of ethnography as the lens through which I will be recounting this story is appropriate and effective. I would now like to pause to summarise before continuing to discuss my chosen research methods. I have conducted a Participatory Action Research project through the lens of ethnography.

Although ethnography and participatory action research (PAR) have different roots and different priorities, their trajectories have become entangled in educational research over the past half-century. In many ways, ethnography and PAR are compatible. Both make participants’ perspectives central to the research. Both rely primarily on qualitative methods. Both are ethically committed to appreciating cultural differences and promoting the welfare of the groups they work with. Taken together, each adds something important to the

other: PAR offers ethnography a “stance research” that is more democratic and action-oriented than traditional ethnography; ethnography lends PAR legitimacy as a research approach. Nonetheless, differences between the two create contradictions and tensions when they are combined. While educational researchers remain enthusiastic about the potential of combining activism with cultural analysis, it is important not to collapse ethnography and participatory action research, or privilege one over the other, but to find productive ways to move forward with the tensions between them.

I then critically analysed each of these approaches and applied them to my research project. I am satisfied that I have provided the reader with a clear rationale as to my choice of these approaches and strongly believe that my methodology is both appropriate and effective for the particular type of research I have undertaken. I now would like to move onto the third and fourth ‘action’ levels of Jonker et al.’s research pyramid (Jonker et al, 2010, p.23).

3.4 Research Methods and Research Techniques

Crotty explains that research methods are “techniques or procedures used to gather or analyse data related to some research” (Crotty, 1998:3). Methods are specific means of collecting and analysing data. Jonker et al refer to the research methods as “specific steps of action that need to be executed in a certain order” (Jonker et al, 2010, p.25).

It must be noted that methodology “indicates the main path to the destination” and methods are the specific steps in getting to the destination (Jonker et al, 2010, p.33). Within a specific methodology, the researcher needs to select the research techniques or ‘instruments’ or ‘tools’ (Jonker et al, 2010, pp. 34). Cohen et al explain methods as a “range of approaches used in educational research to gather data” or “techniques and procedures used in the process of data-gathering” (Cohen et al, 2000, p.44). In other words, the researcher wants to ensure that rationality between the chosen research technique and the research goals and objectives exist (Jonker et al, 2010, p. 35). Costley et al corroborate this: “the methods chosen to collect data and information from the field should be methodologically coherent, practically and ethically feasible, and capable of providing the type of information”. Costley continues by stating what researchers’ need to perform their research (Costley et al, 2011, p.92). I have used four main types of research methods. These were: classroom observations, focus groups, feedback interviews or conversations and reflection sheets. Therefore, by the end of these two academic years, I had conducted the following:

- Four lesson observations of each of the teachers participating in the research, totalling twelve.
- Four focus group discussions with children from each class following each class observation, totalling twelve.

- Four feedback discussions and interviews with the teachers following each observation, totalling twelve.
- Several conversations and discussions with the Islamic and culture coordinators.
- Additionally, the teachers also completed four reflection sheets each for every lesson I observed.

As for the pedagogic intervention, I needed to be generating data from a variety of sources to get an in-depth understanding of how the project was developing. This was crucial so that any changes or modifications that needed to be made could be done based on real evidence and in real-time. The following sections summarise the key issues related to the research methods

3.4.1 Triangulation

Triangulation, by the use of theories, methods or observers in a research study, can help ensure that fundamental biases arising from the use of a single method or a single observer are overcome (Joppe, 2000). According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) triangulation is a method used to increase the credibility and validity of research findings. Credibility is the notion of how trustworthy a study is; the degree to which it reflects the concept or ideas under scrutiny (Joppe, 2000). Patton (2001) states that “triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods. Flick (2007, p.82) suggests that triangulation is not a tool or strategy of validation, but rather an alternative to validation. There are two forms of triangulation type – namely, using the “same method on different occasions”, or in my case, using “different methods on the same object of study” (Cohen et al. 2000, p.113). Within educational research, methodological triangulation is used most often, and Cohen et al. (2000, p.115) argue it has possibly the most to offer. Therefore, each of the four methods that I employed was triangulating or validating my data and by using, involving and combining these different data sources, I would be able to “reflect upon several facts simultaneously” (Jonker et al, 2010, p. 160). A central tenet of triangulation is the hope that the methods used in the research paper arrive at results that have a good degree of accuracy. According to Mathison (1988 p.13) triangulation has given an important methodological benchmark to evaluate whether the data that has been gathered can be relied upon. It controls bias and sets up valid propositions. This is because traditional scientific techniques were not sufficient in identifying whether what we know is correct.

This now brings me to discuss how I ensured that my research project would stand up to questions of validity and reliability.

3.4.2 Validity and Reliability

I minimised threats to validity at all stages of the research process, namely at the design, data gathering, analysis and data reporting stages of the research. At the design stage, I ensured that I had allocated an appropriate period within which to conduct the research. My methodological approach, which encompasses

an action research project conducted within the context of a case study, in a culture of appreciative inquiry and through the lens of ethnography, enabled me to initiate and undertake an educational change process designed to enhance the teaching and learning of Persian language in a Persian heritage school. As discussed, I selected four appropriate research methods and techniques for gathering the data required by my research. Therefore, bringing these four instruments together ensured that the evidence was robust and valid. At the data-gathering stage for both the teachers and learners, I minimised the 'reactivity' effect, by spending a good amount of time in the classrooms. Within the focus groups, I asked all the children the same questions and in the same format each time. The teacher reflection sheets asked the same questions for each observation and this consistency enabled me to plot the teachers' progress and development throughout the action research phase of the project (Refer to Appendix I).

At the data analysis stage, I minimised the threat to validity by ensuring that I followed a particular process. First, I read the notes I made from the lesson observations. Second, I produced a set of initial codes from the data. Third, I analysed the codes and considered how they combined to form an overarching theme. Fourth, I refined the candidate themes identified in the previous phase. The process involved in this phase was to ensure that the data within the themes gelled together meaningfully and that there were "clear and identifiable distinctions" between them. Fifth, I went about defining and refining the themes to identify the 'essence' of each theme. At the data reporting stage, I minimised the threat to invalidity by reporting not only on the positive outcomes of the research but also on the negative and challenging aspects.

I would now like to move on to discussing the reliability of my research. The term 'Reliability' is a concept used in all kinds of research. The most important test of any qualitative study is its reliability. As Eisner states, a good research paper will help us "understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing" (Eisner, 1991, p. 58). This relates to the concept of good quality in the qualitative study has the purpose of "generating understanding" (Stenbacka, 2001, p. 551). What I gained from Patton (2001) is that validity and reliability are two factors that a researcher should be aware of. While designing a study, analysing results and judging the quality of the study as you perform the study should be in the minds of the researcher. A trial survey should take place before a complete survey commences. A question is then posed "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290).

I was acutely aware that due to the four different approaches I incorporated in my research, my research needed to be conducted in an accurate, precise and consistent manner. The Action Research framework provided me with a clear structure within which to work. Each AR cycle incorporated the same components over the three terms and was conducted consistently. My attention to detail and design ensured that I was able to research in such a way that my findings would be reliable. Furthermore, as the research was

conducted in a consistent, accurate and precise manner, I was able to gauge the development of the participants over a considerable period and the efficacy of the intervention. Testing and increasing the reliability, validity, trustworthiness, quality and rigour are important to the research in any paradigm. I will now examine each research method in detail.

3.4.3 Classroom Observations

In classroom observation, the researcher examines what is taking place in the classroom. About my particular research project, the observations I conducted were a means to assess how well my intervention was doing. Cohen et al argue that observations are an attractive form of data collection “as the researcher can gather ‘live’ data from ‘live’ situations”, rather than at second hand” (Cohen et al, 2000, p.305). I would consider that the form of observation that I undertook was mainly that of a semi-structured observation. The focus of my observations was the teaching and learning emanating from the pedagogic intervention I had initiated. I was also interested in observing the following: the classroom environment, classroom set up and whether it was conducive to teaching and learning. The make-up of the classroom members. The different types of interaction take place in the classroom between the different members.

Morrison writes that the researcher can gather data on different settings: the physical – how the physical environment is organised, the human – the characteristics and make-up of the people being observed, the interactional - the types of interaction that takes place and the programme – the organisation of the resources and curricula and pedagogic styles (Morrison, 1993, in Cohen et al, 2000, p.305). All four settings enable an overall and holistic view of the teaching and learning which takes place in a classroom and to ignore any of these four would not have been doing justice to my observations and indeed my research.

The observer role I took for the most part was that of observer participant. “This role requires the researchers to reveal their identities in the setting, but the extent to which the researcher actively engages with the members of the setting is limited” (Hesse-Biber et al, 2006, p.249).

This role allowed me to observe for the most part, but I was also able to ask the children questions, view and comment on their work and also answer the occasional question posed by the teachers. However, as time progressed, I occasionally took on a more participant-observer role, where I found myself being taught by the teacher and was much caught up in the different activities. Cohen et al argue that whilst observations provide an excellent opportunity to gain insights into different contexts and situations, there are questions relating to their validity and reliability in terms of how the researcher views and analyses the data. Therefore, they suggest, “additional methods of gathering data might be employed, to provide corroboration and triangulation, in short, to ensure that reliable inferences are derived from reliable data” (Cohen et al, 2000, p.315). I made notes of all the observations in real-time. (Refer to Appendix)

3.4.4 Focus Groups

Focus groups are a popular technique for gathering qualitative research data (Morgan, 1996). Williams and Katz define focus groups as “small gatherings of individuals who have a common interest or characteristic”. The use of a moderator, in this instance myself, is what allows my group ‘a way to gain information about a particular issue’ (Williams and Katz, 2001).

As my pedagogic intervention focuses on the teaching and learning of Persian, I needed to dedicate significant time to the learners’ experience during the AR project. Besides observing the learners in the classroom situation, I wanted to chart the experience of a group of children throughout the project. I would be receiving views from the teachers on how they felt the learners were progressing, but I wanted to have first-hand experience. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, I wanted to understand the impact of the AR project on the learners in three specific areas, namely: their skills, attitudes and understandings. Therefore, I formed three focus groups comprising of five or six children from the classes that I was observing, totalling 18 encounters. These groups were held after each observation in another room. This extra layer of data generation would be contributing to my project’s overall validity and robustness. Focus groups are viewed as a method that can enrich and complement a research study. (Wellington, 2000, p.125) As my focus groups were confined to young children, aged between eleven and twelve, I was mindful that I needed to proceed with care in terms of the ethical issues that are raised when researching with young children. Moreover, I needed to carefully consider the technical aspects inherent in conducting focus groups, but especially with young children. There were certain other measures that I undertook to minimise these effects when conducting each focus group. At the start of every encounter, I reminded the learners that there were no wrong answers to the questions I was going to ask. Furthermore, I explained that I would not be marking their answers and that their teachers, parents and fellow students would not know how they each individually had answered the questions. I also reminded them that they did not have to agree with what their friends were saying unless, of course, they did. I emphasised that I wanted to know what every one of them thought and felt, and ensured that children who wanted to speak were given the opportunity. In other words, I wanted the participants to feel as comfortable as possible and endeavoured to create a relaxed and natural atmosphere as possible.

3.4.5 Interviews

The third form of research method I employed was that of interview. In social sciences, Interviewing is considered to be the most commonly used method in qualitative research. According to Mason (2002), interviews are an “interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest”. (Mason, 2002, p.62)

I conducted a range of in-depth interviews. The participants of this research are three teachers, two coordinators, two school staff, and 18 Persian heritage language learners whose ages range from 11-12 years old in the focus group and 12 students from the school whose age ranges from 10 – 14 years old, and five parents. The pupils chosen for the focus group were selected by randomly picking them out of a hat. The number of pupils being above 150, I was able to get a level of accuracy reaching 65 to 70 per cent, given the sampling being above 30 people. This complies with the statistical methodology known as the normal distribution curve.

These interviews were conducted face-to-face, some were one-to-one conversations, and others were in smaller or bigger groups. They were all informal in style and did not have the “formal question and answer format” (Mason, 2002, p.63). Rather, as Mason describes, I began each conversation with a little introduction saying which areas I wanted the interviewees to talk about and what areas I was interested in hearing about. Sometimes, I would prepare a list of the general topics that I wanted us to talk about and I would interject with more questions as and when necessary. This gave the conversation the necessary fluidity and flexibility as Mason describes. It was very much the case that through dialoguing and interaction we were able to construct or reconstruct knowledge rather than excavate it (Mason 2002, in Mason 2002, p.63).

Therefore, the purposes of these conversations were manifold: they were an opportunity for me as the researcher to begin the conversation about my research and to explain how the research would develop. They allowed the participants’ time to ask questions and seek clarifications. Later on, the conversations became the space for the teachers to feedback on their lessons, to talk about the teaching and learning aspects, to think about how the research was impacting upon them on a personal and professional level, the challenges the research was exposing and the difficulties and stresses they were experiencing due to the research.

The conversations were also an opportunity for me to feedback to the teachers about their lessons; how I felt they could be modified for the following observation or how they could do things slightly differently to reduce the amount of time the lessons were taking to prepare or to produce different results. The conversations also included future thinking and how the school community could continue with the interventions into the next academic year. All conversations were digitally recorded, with permission, and transcribed.

These conversations were crucial as they gave me an insight into how the participants were feeling about the process, something that would not necessarily have been evident from the observations. It allowed them to reflect upon these matters through sharing information and experiences. From a research perspective,

these conversations were providing me with another layer of data and insight. Together with the other three sources of data, I was able to form a very good picture of the state of play as it was unfolding in real-time. This then enabled me to make any necessary changes to how the AR process was proceeding. This now brings me to my final research method and technique that I employed during my research project.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The principle that underpins ethical research is the view that research is not just a matter of collecting information, but is concerned with the dignity, rights, safety and well-being of those who take part in the research. Therefore, it was of utmost importance for me to follow the protocol for ethics. This helped me to ensure that participants were treated ethically during my research. On this basis, I did consider ethical issues which were inseparable from any research effort. I took certain precautions required by the design of a case study.

First of all, I elicited informed consent for those who were taking part in my research. They were aware that they could withdraw from the research at any point and without fear of retribution. Participants were assured that no one would reveal any names or even know that they had taken part. I also assured them that information collected during my research project was kept secret and would not be used for other purposes and would be held in a secure place. Regarding my face-to-face interviews with participants, they were assured that the information would only be seen and analysed by me. About focus groups, where my participants were being asked to express their opinions in a group, I undertook some discussion with the group about what confidentiality means in such circumstances. I developed an agreement in the group about how information was to be treated, respect for individuals' viewpoints and so on. By the same token, all of the participants were, of course, treated anonymously and their original names were not provided instead I had given pseudonyms to the participants.

Furthermore, I wanted to ensure that my needs as a researcher were not more important than those of the participants. Cohen et al argue that researchers are required to "strike a balance between the demands placed on them as professional scientists in pursuit of truth, and their subjects' rights and values potentially threatened by the research (Cohen et al, 2000, p.49). One way was to do my utmost to fit in with the teachers' timetables and time constraints and arrange for observations and feedback conversations to take place at times convenient for them as much as possible. I was very fortunate that I was able to manage my work time and research time effectively for this to happen.

Working with children raises additional issues about ethical conduct. As the learners who took part in my project were very young, once general permission by the Governor Body was granted, I then needed to seek permission from the children's parents (See Appendix B Letter to parents).

In sum, I gave participants an information sheet including the title of my research, explaining what it involved, how participants were selected, the purpose of the research, who the researchers were and their affiliations. It also involved research procedures in which described what the participants were required to do, where interviews were to be conducted, the length of the interview and the topics to be addressed. In addition, it involved the potential risks and benefits both to participants and to society, discussed any psychological, social and economic harms and benefits. Furthermore, voluntary participation was assured and the possibility of withdrawal from the research at any time without any penalty. Moreover, I emphasised that confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained. As my project involved talking to children under the age of 16 years, I obtained informed consent from parents or guardians. I also asked for children's agreement to take part in this project. This made it clear to children that they could decide for themselves about their role and gave them more of a sense of participation in research.

3.6 My Positionality

In Rowe's (2014) words, the term positionality describes an individual's world view and the position they adopt about a research task and its social and political context (Rowe, 2014). The individual's world view or 'where the researcher is coming from' concerns ontological assumptions (an individual's beliefs about the nature of social reality and what is knowable about the world), epistemological assumptions (an individual's beliefs about the nature of knowledge) and assumptions about human nature and agency (individual's assumptions about the way we interact with our environment and relate to it) (Marsh, et al. 2018 and Grix, 2019). An individual's values and beliefs that are shaped by their political allegiance, religious faith, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, social class, and status, and so on also should be accounted for (Marsh, et al. 2018).

According to Savin-Baden & Major (2013, p.71), positionality reflects the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study. And in Rowe (2014) words, it influences both how research is conducted, its outcomes, and results. And as Grix (2019) states, it also influences what a researcher has chosen to investigate.

I was considered an inside researcher so I realized that, right from the very start of the research process, my positionality may affect my research and may impact the result of the research (Holmes, 2019).

I found that self-reflection and a reflexive approach are both necessary prerequisites for a researcher and me to be able to identify, construct, critique, and articulate my positionality. Simply stated, as Cohen et al. (2011) state reflexivity is the concept that researchers and I as well should acknowledge and disclose ourselves in our research, seeking to understand our part in it or influence on it. According to Rowe (2014) engaging in a reflexive approach allows for a reduction of bias and partisanship (Rowe, 2014). Therefore, to conduct my research, I followed Ormston et al. (2014) who suggests that researchers should strive to avoid obvious, conscious, or systematic bias and to be as neutral as possible in the collection, interpretation, and presentation of data.

My positionality statement included a description of my lenses (such as my philosophical, personal, theoretical beliefs and perspective through which I view the research process), the potential influences on my research (such as my age, political beliefs, social class, race, ethnicity, gender, religious beliefs, previous career), my position about the participants in the project (e.g., as an insider or an outsider), the research-project context and an explanation as to how, where, when and in what way these might, may, or have, influenced the research process (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

To avoid role ambiguities, I was very mindful that I needed to reformulate the relationship I had with the school and situate myself now as a researcher rather than as a headteacher. I was also aware of the issues around power relationships that exist within a research environment. I broached this potential tension within my role in my first meeting with the teachers when I made it clear that I was now coming to undertake a research project at the school with their participation and I was not coming in as a headteacher or as an inspector.

From a personal perspective, the motivation for conducting this research was part of my continuing personal and professional development in the field of Persian pedagogy, as well as making an important contribution to the ongoing research in Muslim educational issues worldwide. I was particularly aware of the authority I held as a researcher and it was very important for me to not abuse this power. According to Costley et al who argue that as a researcher “you are trusted not to use this authority to manipulate and exploit the trustee” (Costley et al, 2011, p.57). Therefore, I needed to foster a culture of trust where professionalism, openness and collaboration existed on all sides.

3.7 Insider or Outsider

As stated before, this research was carried out in IRIS School where I am the headteacher. In the light of the courses and knowledge I got from the doctorate program, I was improving myself academically. I realized that there were aspects of the school that worked well and those which worked less effectively in the process of teaching and learning Persian culture and language. However, these impressions had to be

proven with systematic and detailed data collection. In consultation with my academic advisors, a case study design seemed to be useful to understand the issues and challenges. My advisors and I planned to conduct this research within my DProf project. Therefore, the general aim of this research project was to describe the integration of culture with language in the teaching-learning process at IRIS. To reveal the views of the participants, I had to collect the research data through observations, semi-structured interviews, questions and answers in the focus group. However, although there were several advantages of data collection as an insider-researcher, my status as the headteacher and other disadvantages might affect the process of data collection.

Advantages of an insider position include: (1) easier access to the culture being studied, as the researcher is regarded as being 'one of us' (Sanghera&Bjokert, 2008), (2) the ability to ask more meaningful or insightful questions (due to possession of a priori knowledge), (3) the researcher may be more trusted so may secure more honest answers, (4) the researcher is better able to understand the language, including colloquial language, and non-verbal cues. Disadvantages of an insider position include: (1) the researcher may be inherently and unknowingly biased, or overly sympathetic to the culture, (2) they may be too close to and familiar with the culture, or bound by custom and code so that they are unable to raise provocative or taboo questions, (3) 'dumb' questions which an outsider may legitimately ask, may not be able to be asked (Naaek et al., 2010), and (4) respondents may be less willing to reveal sensitive information than they would be to an outsider who they will have no future contact with.

Therefore, I made good use of these advantages in collecting the data such as speaking the same language, understanding the common values, knowing the formal and informal power structure, and obtaining permission to conduct the research, to interview, and to get access to records, and documents easily facilitate the research process (Coghlan, 2003; Herrmann, 1989; Rouney, 2005; Tedlock, 2000). I could collect the research data every day of the week at any time of the day, which an outsider might not have achieved. This provided continuity for the collection of the research data which made it possible to collect more detailed and more versatile, and thus more trustworthy, research data. The teachers who were directly involved in my project were also my colleagues. Thus, during the data collection process, my requests were rarely rejected by them. For example, interviews and lesson observations were planned and arranged easily with my colleagues. All the teachers, students and even parents showed respect for my research and me by sharing their time and knowledge with me. In addition, I could easily complete the missing data. For example, after finishing the interviews with teachers, I could easily ask them clarification questions, whether it was in their classrooms or just in the corridor of IRIS. This enhances trustworthiness as well. As an insider, knowing the source of the problem I could easily understand the situation without asking any clarification questions. The students did not appear to be affected by my presence in the classroom either.

On the other hand, while collecting the data there were some disadvantages of being in the insider position (Hermann, 1989; Rooney, 2000; Sikes & Potts, 2008; Smyth & Holian, 2008), which I tried to overcome some of them by taking a preventative approach.

Before starting my research project, I was known simply as the headteacher at IRIS. However, after the start of the research project, teachers, staff and students may have perceived me both as the headteacher of the school and as a researcher (Burke & Kirton, 2006; Herrmann, 1989). As I was accepted among the school staff, I did not have difficulty in expressing my role as a researcher to them. In addition, during the research process, to maintain the systematic continuity of the research, to provide the researcher with directive information, to discuss the current situations and to establish cooperation between the participants, a group including myself and my project advisors was established. One member of the committee acted like an outsider that tried to make sense of the data by asking “the real questions”, whereas another member of the committee acted as a key informant who was acquainted with the school. With all these properties of the key informant, I was sure of a great chance of success throughout the whole research process.

In addition, I did not reveal any observations that I made with any participants. Instead, I wrote my feelings, impressions and thoughts in my research diary and shared them only with my advisors. This ensured participants’ trust in me during the research process and I did not lose any valuable qualitative data.

I collected the research data without prejudice as much as I could. In addition, as Rooney, (2005) stated I tried to minimize the impact of biases with the help of the external member of the group and her invaluable contribution. According to Smyth & Holian, (2008) the more researchers overcome their bias as an insider, the more they can come up with a rich theme. Because my reports were evaluated based on the evidence-based criteria established by this committee, I gradually gained the skills for interpreting my data without bias. Multiple sources of data and methods of data collection, keeping a researcher’s diary as an audit trail, sharing and checking the interpretations with the informants and detailed description of the research setting and research participants also maximized the research rigour (Becker et al., 2005; 1990; Patton, 2002; Smyth & Holian, 2008).

Osterman et al (2004, p.1) regard the reflective practice as an effective strategy to develop one’s professionalism in that it can provide a way to nurture and develop learning, modify behaviour and improve performance. Moreover, people, through self-reflection, can undergo meaningful and sustainable change. Ultimately, engaging in reflective practice will impact learning and meaningful educational change, but only if educators can change the way they do things themselves (Osterman et al, 2004, p. 1). I requested teachers to complete teacher reflection sheets. I wanted to allow them to record their feelings, thoughts and

actions without having to answer specific questions. For this reason, I kept the teacher reflection sheet very simple and open-ended (See Appendix D Research Activities). I helped their thinking process by asking them to reflect upon matters before, during and after each observation. I also gave them space to write whatever else they wished. It was also important that this was an individual exercise so that the data generated from these could be viewed as the teacher's own, rather than having been influenced by others when participating in group feedback conversations. Despite all my efforts to encourage the teachers to complete their reflections sheets in real-time, the majority was completed only after the observations had taken place, so it was more reflection on practice rather than reflection in practice.

To summarise this section thus far: I have presented the reader with a discussion and rationale of the four research methods and techniques I chose to generate data for my PAR project. The observations, focus groups, conversation interviews and teacher reflection sheets constitute an extremely rich and varied amount of material that will enable me to significantly understand the extent to which this PAR project has been successful.

From the start of my project, I had to take into account possible ways in which my research findings were going to be used. I had to omit sensitive information. However, I could still refer to this information within the school or during staff meetings and, although after the final report, sometime in the future. I also want to mention that advisors play a critical role in supporting the researchers while conducting insider research. In my research, I was fortunate that the relationship with my advisors was fruitful and friendly but at the same time, we never lost sight of our professional responsibilities. I experienced many advantages being in an insider position and have overcome a few disadvantages in my research.

3.8 Analysis

During my research process, I captured a vast amount of qualitative data: lesson observations; focus groups with children; professional conversations and interviews; and the teachers who participated in the research project completed reflection sheets. I chose Thematic Analysis (hereafter referred to as TA) as my method of analysis.

Braun et al consider it as a method in its own right (Braun et al, 2006, p.4) for “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun et al, 2006, p.6). They argue that TA is not bound to any one particular theoretical or epistemological approach and because of this freedom, it is a flexible and useful research tool. It “can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data” (Braun et al, 2006, p.5). I am therefore confident that TA will indeed yield such an account of the data generated in my research.

Summary

I have used Jonker et al.'s (2010) research pyramid to frame this chapter. This structure has enabled me to navigate through an extremely complicated area of the research process. I am confident that my rationale for choosing a hybrid methodology and selecting each type of research method and technique has been sound and appropriate for the particular type of research I have undertaken. I also discussed the triangulation of the data sources that supported the validity and reliability of my work. I then introduced my chosen method of analysis, namely Thematic Analysis and gave the reader an insight into the process I underwent. Furthermore, I discussed various ethical issues that arise when conducting qualitative research and especially research that includes children as participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

Project Activity

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will begin by providing the reader with the socio-cultural context of the teaching and learning of the Persian Language in the United Kingdom. It will then explore the notion of the development of a new pedagogical framework in the context of the project. Next, the IRIS School will be put centre stage as the case study of this research project. Following on from that the reader will then be immersed into a detailed account of the different phases that constitute the project activity. The chapter will end with a summary giving an overview of all the different areas explored.

4.2 The Sociocultural Context of Persian Language Education

My research involves an educational *change in practice* bringing about a specific pedagogic intervention in IRIS School which is a Persian Heritage School in the UK. My project has brought about an intervention whereby language with cultural elements and religious values has been integrated as a way to enhance the teaching and learning of Persian heritage language in Persian schools.

To contextualise the teaching and learning of Persian in the UK, it is important to remind the reader that there is no one standard Persian language curriculum that all Persian schools follow in the vast majority of Persian schools in the UK. Even within each type of school, there will be an array of teaching approaches and emphases. The subjects that are taught in the Islamic and cultural courses would normally cover aspects from the *Quran*, the Islamic and cultural festivals and events, Islamic and cultural lifestyles, Islamic values and ethics, and Islamic prayer. In addition, Arabic as the Islamic language is not a living spoken language in the Persian community, but it is the medium through which children will learn all about these aspects of Islam.

In contrast to this, the *Persian Language* is a language taught at heritage schools. However, there is no one particular *Persian Language* course that all heritage schools in the UK follow. There are numerous textbooks on offer that have been written in Persia and elsewhere. The topics that are normally covered in heritage *language schools'* courses are such as, 'who am I?', 'my family', the weather, Persian months, numbers, 'where I live', age, birthdays, food and drink, school subjects and general activities. In these schools, the Persian *language* teachers also teach the Persian alphabet, plus reading and writing. As the children get older, they also learn Persian script. Persian Speaking is also taught and children from an early age can construct and say simple sentences in the *Persian Language*. Therefore, in most cases, the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking are taught.

Most Persian schools are voluntary aided, which means that the school needs to approach its parent body to pay towards the language studies provision at the school. As these payments are voluntary it is often the case that the religious foundational body of these schools subsidises the shortfall.

However, my research project challenges this state of separateness between culture, religion and language. My pedagogic intervention represents an attempt to enhance the teaching and learning of Persian by integrating cultural elements and religious values with the Persian language. Perhaps Heritage Language Schools would increase student interest and language acquisition by finding ways to connect the language and culture to immigrant students' everyday lives.

4.3 New Teaching Framework

My intervention comprised the three elements which are necessary to enable meaningful and sustained change to occur: According to Fullan, there are three parts to a teaching framework. These are the materials that are used, the teaching approaches presented and how the pupils' beliefs change" (Fullan, 1991, p.37).

In terms of my project, I incorporated all these three elements in a new *framework called* "cultural syllabus" and then, I introduced this syllabus for linking of cultural elements and Persian language to the teachers; I also inducted them in the different *teaching approaches* and *techniques* that the new framework demanded; and most importantly, I set about to change their *belief system* about the teaching and learning of Persian language. These three elements could be regarded as three separate and disconnected outcomes of my research. I managed, however, to successfully incorporate all three which contributed significantly to the success and sustainability of the intervention. I called this new framework "Persian cultural syllabus".

My starting point was to set about changing the teacher's belief systems about the teaching and learning of the Persian Language. I strongly believed that it was crucial for the teachers to understand the rationale for the intervention and to give them some concrete examples of the benefits of the cultural syllabus before I began to design an actual framework. Consequently, a considerable amount of time was spent with the teachers during part one of the research project to nurture openness and different possibilities. This element of the change was ongoing and the teachers' belief systems continued to be challenged throughout the research project.

Once I felt that the teachers had undergone a substantial shift in their thinking regarding the integration of cultural elements with the Persian language, I then set about to start working with the teachers on the actual framework, namely, the new Persian pedagogy in form of a cultural syllabus. It was only towards the end of this process I moved onto the final element - that of professional practice, namely, the teaching approaches. Therefore, although the new Persian pedagogy and the teaching approaches developed initially as separate entities and at different phases during the research process, they were inextricably bound

together. For the intervention to be put into motion, I needed to induct the teachers into the practical steps of converting a theoretical pedagogy into a concrete and living practice. The new framework demanded of the teachers to teach in a different way, such as allowing the children to link between cultural matters or elements with language. As the action research phase progressed these two elements continued to inform each other. For instance, changes were made to the framework, in light of professional practice, such as the need for a variety of tasks to better accommodate children with differing abilities.

It was important that before I was able to initiate this change, I needed to spend a considerable amount of time meeting with the teachers. These meetings were necessary to communicate my research intentions and to foster an open, collaborative and productive environment. The mechanism for the pedagogic intervention was *Action Research* and I had taken elements from *Appreciative Inquiry* to frame this period. Before I take the reader on my research journey, I would first like to put IRIS School centre stage.

4.4 The Case Study: IRIS School

IRIS School opened its doors in 1998. It is a Voluntary Aided School in the London Borough of Brent. It has approximately 155 children on its roll. As IRIS School is also a faith school, the costs of the school, namely, the religious studies programme, including the staff, are raised through voluntary contributions of the parent body. The school has a religious foundational sponsoring body, the Islamic Centre of England, which is responsible for providing and maintaining the Islamic educational programme. The sponsoring body also contributes to any capital funding costs as well as to its security costs.

4.5 Project Activity

During the time that I was involved with this research project at IRIS School, I conducted many separate activities. These activities include the *Appreciative Inquiry*, the design of the framework, the *Pilot* period, and the *Action Research* period.

I will now give an overview of the main activities that I undertook during each phase of the research project.

4.5.1 Phase One

My research journey began on 15 May 2014 when I emailed five teachers of IRIS School which is a heritage language school in London to enquire whether they would be interested in participating in my research project. They demonstrated their willingness to be involved in an innovative project regarding the teaching and learning of Persian in a new form. The outcome of this contact was arranging a date for the first meeting where the teachers would attend.

The first meeting took place on 28 May 2014 and was attended by all five teachers. The purpose of this first meeting was to create an open, warm and flexible dialogue among all teachers and to ensure a commitment from everyone participating in the research. It was also the opportunity to present myself in the role of researcher and to describe my area of research. I explained that I would be undertaking an Action Research project and illustrated, with the help of a handout, how Action Research works (See the handout in the appendix). The meeting also provided time to clarify my expectations as well as manage theirs. I was clear about what I was asking of them in terms of their time and what extra work it would involve. I also raised issues relating to ethical considerations (Explained in detail in Chapter 3) such as maintaining confidentiality. The meeting provided the space for everyone to ask questions, raise concerns and seek clarifications. The issue of which year groups I would be researching was raised. It was felt at this stage that I should concentrate on Years five (10-11-year-olds) and Six (12-13-year-olds). The reasoning behind this was that the involved teachers were teaching these two-year groups, it made sense for the research to include these ages and also, they were better ages to be exposed more to reading passages with cultural points.

I set two dates to observe some Persian *language* lessons in Years Five and Six. I wanted to have first-hand knowledge of what was being taught in these different lessons and to obtain an idea of the potential Persian pedagogic opportunities that could arise. We also set the date for the next meeting when I would feedback to the group on what I had observed.

I was overwhelmed by the goodwill of all those present to work and learn with me. I strived to create an open and informal manner, which I believe helped to create warm and easy-going learning and research environment. I was hoping to instil an atmosphere where the “form of interaction between individuals and groups determines the learning process” (Jarvis et al, 2003, p.51). I did not shy away from my needs, hopes and expectations, and these emotions were underscored by my desire to work in partnership. I also shared my passion for the Persian language, my commitment to improving how it was being taught and learnt, without negating what the teachers had been doing up until then.

I observed three lessons in early June 2014 and three lessons at the end of June 2014. The purpose of these observations was to give me some understanding of what was being covered in *Persian language* lessons and to look for opportunities to make easy links between culture and Persian. I also provided the teachers with immediate positive feedback following the lessons and shared with them opportunities for creating links. Tang and Chow (2007) argue that giving quality feedback is a key element in assessment processes that can enhance learning. Feedback aids a learner to identify the learning gaps between the current level and the higher level of attainment. This is to close the knowledge between the learner and the teacher (Sadler 1989, p.1069).

Following these observations, I drew together a chart of cultural elements emanating from the lessons that could easily be taught both culturally and *linguistically*. From my *observations*, I could easily see the potential links that could be made between culture and language.

One example is the term Khâleh vs Ameh. When an aunt is referred to, a maternal aunt, they are more beloved than *ameh*, the paternal aunt. *Khâleh* is a figure of speech, it is used in the Persian language as a sign of respect for the elder. A family friend is also referred to as *khâleh*. This is a way respect is inbuilt in Persian society.

In Persian, when someone feels welcome in a place, we refer to it as *khuneh-ye khâleh* (maternal aunt's house).

For example, if you go to someone's house for the first time and start rummaging around in their fridge, they might say (or think), "*Mage khuneh-ye khâlate?*" (Where do you think this is- your [maternal] aunt's house?) Or "*Engârkhuneh-ye khâlashe!*" *The comfort one experiences when rummaging through his aunties home is this same feeling.*

'Ameh', on the other hand, does not possess such a high status among the relatives. You know how English has 'yo momma' jokes? Well, those kinds of jokes in Persian are reserved for the 'ameh'. If someone insults you, you could shoot back '*ammat*' (your [paternal] aunt). That's the simplest example I can give you. The 'ameh' jokes can get pretty vulgar.

The above example illustrates the beauty of Persian, where a language can accommodate modern idioms.

This was just one example of words or phrases being used in a *Persian* context with the teacher creating the links to the cultural Persian context. It was not the case that they did not know these links, they simply had not considered them and the potential Persian pedagogic opportunities they could generate. Moreover, when I pointed these out to them, they were surprised at how easy it was to make the links and how they had not seen these links for themselves. They were still operating very much within their specific *language* area and were unable to 'see' the other side. It was becoming apparent that the teachers who were involved in the project were very *language*-centric and perhaps were also lacking the skills and confidence to make these links.

I had a very productive conversation with teachers after I observed their lesson in early July 2014. It became evident that they could bring in a good amount of culture into their Persian lessons and we discussed ways in which they would be able to include more. I introduced them to *peripheral* Persian, namely, the day-to-day classroom language, they could use to greet, praise, instruct and discipline the children. I was conscious of not overwhelming them and gave them easy and practical ways to bring simple *Persian cultural* items into their language lessons. The purpose of the early July meeting was two-fold:

Firstly, I wanted to give the team feedback on what I had observed and to show them the links I had produced from what I had seen in their lessons. The examples are as follows:

The first example is the word 'Day- mah (Month Dec. & Jan) and the word moon: ماه / mah(moon). Not only does mah mean moon or month, but when you call a woman (not a man) mah, it means that she is very beautiful. Because in Persian *culture*, the moon is a symbol of beauty- especially mah – e -shab – e -chahardah (Full Moon).

By doing so, the learners would have a much more holistic understanding of the language and realise that Persian is all around them and not only in one context. This would also help them to get skilled at deciphering the cultural words. This process enables learners to acquire transferable skills for different contexts and is an important way to assess knowledge and understanding.

The second example is a ta'arof exchange in greetings which reads:

A: "Hi. How are you?"

B: "I'm barely alive. How are you?"

A: "Not bad. How's your mother? How's your father?"

B: "Fine, all thanks to you. May your shadow not be reduced? How about you? How are your distant relatives?"

A: "That is due to your being generous. Thank you."

B: "Not at all! You're the crown of my head. This house and everything in it belongs to you. May my life be sacrificed for you?"

A: "May I stroll around you? I'm your slave."

B: "No way! I'm the dirt under your feet."

A: "You have complete control. You're hitting me with a stick"

This form of exaggeration is termed as 'ta'arof'. Ta'arof expresses one of the most central Persian cultural values. Etymologically, it means to meet in the middle. The Arabic translation is "meeting together" (Beeman 1988:27) or "meeting someone you know" (Abjadian, personal communication). Certainly, ta'arof is particularly evident in meetings and greetings among Persians. One look at the above exchange reveals some extravagant qualities of the Persian language

There was an excitement in the room when they began to see all the links that I had made and the fact that they could have also made these links if they were more conscious of the connections. The teachers realised

how important it was to know what was being taught in each other's lessons and they discussed ways of sharing their medium-term plans. Moreover, they suggested that they would like to meet at least once a term so that they could interact with each other and talk about what they were teaching. This was a crucial turning point for the teachers as they began to understand the importance of collaborative planning and interaction. Another theme I will be investigating and analysing in-depth is the crucial role teamwork and collaboration plays in the classroom.

Secondly, I wanted to discuss the concept of cultural language with the group: "What do we mean by Persian cultural language? Because my idea for this project is that the integration of cultural elements with the Persian language will impact positively children's cultural awareness. So, the question arises as to what extent will this integration impact positively on the cultural identity of the learners?"

I shared with the group what was in my mind and I discussed with them the idea of the Persian cultural language. I explained to them that culture is associated with language learning, that is, vocabulary, idiom, grammar, etc. and a set of shared assumptions about the world that we call "culture" (Paul Sprachman, 2002). I shared with them this assumption that Persian language and culture awareness promotes and helps a learner understand the way people communicate in Persia, therefore we came up with seven areas that we considered contributed to Persian learning. These were four language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing plus vocabulary and religious *core values* (basic/key prayers and key Muslim laws which children need to understand in *Persian*), *cultural* knowledge (festivals,), *Peripheral language* (for praising, greeting, disciplining and instructing).

I asked the group for their input and comments and a lengthy and fruitful discussion took place regarding all these points. For example, when talking about reading, the question of fluency was raised. How can it be defined? Are all children able to read fluently or accurately? What about children with learning difficulties? There was also discussion about the importance of children being able to understand the key prayers and whether the English translation should also be given to aid this.

The group added a further area, that of the *school environment* to the list. Teachers felt that the whole school provided access points for learning, such as the school foyer, wall displays, even all members of staff could share in the learning process. I mentioned that in the displays in the foyer of the different Islamic and cultural festivals, there was English and translated Persian rather than Persian itself. Just by simply adding Persian would impact significantly on learning opportunities. I was mindful of the fact that it took an outsider, such as myself, to notice these small details.

One of the action points from this meeting was that I would start thinking about how I would integrate these eight areas into some form of a workable framework. I was also asked by the teachers to produce a short report of my progress for the Board of Governors of IRIS School.

It was also agreed that for the remaining part of this academic year, I would spend time observing more lessons and acclimatizing to the school and for the school community to also acclimatize to me. I would not yet start to concentrate on formulating a framework, as it felt somewhat premature.

I arranged further observations, which would take place in mid-July which would include an assembly and two further *Persian language* lessons.

September 24 was a very important meeting. Everybody in the room was energetic and enthusiastic. Everyone was excited by the prospects of the research and I could not have asked for a more positive outcome. The teachers endorsed the way forward; they were very excited about the impact the research would have on the whole school community. The teachers could also see the potential benefits and were open and accommodating. I felt very fortunate to be conducting my research in such a friendly and eager environment. The future was looking good.

Despite this positivity, reflecting on what transpired in this meeting, I was beginning to be concerned about how I would be able to translate what we discussed into a workable framework. I was anxious whether there was enough substantial material with which to work. What we discussed were words and phrases emanating from different areas of Persian literacy. This was only one level of language acquisition. Any language is so much richer than a set of random words and phrases and Persian is no exception. The future was beginning to look more complicated.

I would like to pause at this juncture. I think it apposite at this time to discuss Persian language acquisition and pedagogy in light of language acquisition theory.

4.5.1.1 Language Acquisition and Pedagogy

My first introduction to language acquisition theory took place over twenty years ago when I was an MA student. Up until this point, my relationship with Persian was solely on a practical level: it was the language for communication when I was living in Persia and later on, I began to teach Persian to children in various Persian heritage schools in London.

At university, we were introduced to language acquisition theorists. This was one of the amazing moments in my Persian journey as we were being told that for us become better Persian practitioners, we first needed to understand the theories of language development and second language acquisition.

I would first like to discuss the distinction between Persian as a second language (SL) and Persian as a heritage language (HL) and whether this difference has contributed to how Persian is being taught today in our Persian schools in the UK. I have always maintained that when we teach Persian, practitioners should view Persian as a heritage language rather than a second language. In my opinion, Persian is not merely a second language, it is the language of the Persian people and it carries with it a history, a culture and a religion. To view it as a second language for second or third Persian generation immigrants is to do it an immense injustice.

According to PUNCHIETTI, (2103, p.5) “A *second language* is a language that a learner master the second best, after his *first language*” and it may have “generally direct link with the person’s immediate social or personal environment”, but “heritage language learner” is used to describe a person studying a language who has proficiency in or a cultural connection to that language through their family, (Fishman, 2001; McCarty, 2002).

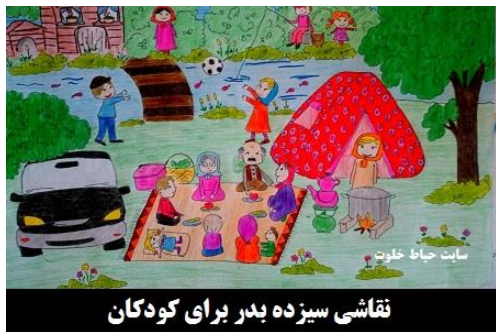
Taking PUNCHIETTI’s definitions and understanding of these terms, the reader can discern that the Persian that children are learning in Persian schools in the UK cannot be termed as a second language but rather falls into the heritage language definition. The National Curriculum sees the purpose of learning a second language as to enable pupils to express their ideas and thoughts in another language and to understand and respond to its speakers, both in speech and in writing. Providing opportunities for learners to communicate for practical purposes, learn new ways of thinking and read great literature in the original language. Providing the foundation for learning further languages, equipping pupils to study and work in other countries (UK National Curriculum 2016).

Although the *Persian Language* may be considered as an FL or SL for non – Persian language learners, for Persian learners, it is more than just that because it is an integral part of their religion, culture and history. It has been part of the psyche and journey of the Persian people from the beginning. I believe that Kaplan’s warning has in part been materialized. When Persians only see the *Persian language* as another FL or SL, they are in danger of losing their connection to Persia and its culture.

I contend that this over-simplistic classification of *Persian Language* as an FL or SL has contributed significantly to the separate teaching and learning of culture with language to the detriment of higher achievement in understanding and four language skills. We cannot separate the *Persian Language* from its religious, cultural and historic framework. That is why I advocate for integrating, where possible, between them, to keep Persian, its culture and history alive.

Perhaps there is a need for a third and more nuanced classification for the Persian being taught to students with Persian backgrounds or second-generation Persians? I propose a new name, a hybrid term that

combines both these concepts culture and language, that is; a *cultural language*. This term allows for a modern living language bound up in a particular religion, culture and history, as is the *Persian Language*.



The picture below of a wall display illustrates how the Persian language is inextricably linked with Persian culture, religion and history. The wall display was created by a Year Five child at IRIS School for the Persian festival of Nowruz (Persian New Year) – which starts from 21 March - which takes place in the spring term. It has become a powerful symbol of Persian identity, history and culture. One of the customs associated with the festival is Nature Day, called *Sizdah be dar*, which is written in Persian in the display.

I now return to Krashen’s theory of SLA. The *Input Hypothesis* exemplifies one of my approaches to Persian pedagogy. Krashen asserts that “acquisition is central and learning more peripheral”, he concludes “a goal of our pedagogy should be to encourage acquisition”. This hypothesis attempts then to answer the question of how people acquire language (Krashen, 2009, p. 20). He argues that we acquire “only when we understand language that contains a structure that is ‘a little beyond’ where we are now”, which he calls, *I+1*, where *I* equate to input. Regarding his hypothesis, one may ask the inevitable question of how this is possible when we have not yet acquired certain structures. To answer Krashen argues that we also use “context, our knowledge of the world, our extra-linguistic information to help us understand language directed at us” (p. 21).

Donaldson (1978) argues that it was enough that the language was uttered and it was the context and the understanding of each other’s intentions that enabled comprehension.

I have observed many *Persian Language* lessons at IRIS School. It is always gratifying to see very young learners understand the gist of what the teachers are telling them without really understanding every word. This is due to the teacher’s use of tone and gestures, but most importantly, the context helps their understanding.

Schütz, (2004) states that “according to the *input hypothesis*, language acquisition takes place when the learner receives language ‘input’ that is one step beyond his/her current stage of linguistic competence” In other words, maximum acquisition occurs when the acquirer is exposed to *comprehensible input* at a level that is at least one level beyond the current knowledge of the learner.

What is also core to Vygotsky’s thinking is that “development occurs as a result of meaningful verbal interaction, that is, of dialogic relationships between novices and experts in the environment, be they

parents, older peers, or teachers” (Vygotsky, 1962). Likewise, for Krashen, “language acquisition takes place during human interaction in an environment of the foreign language” (Schütz, 2004).

Vygotsky’s and Krashen’s theories of language acquisition and development and the importance of this happening in a social and dialogic environment were borne out in my research. This was occurring on various levels. First, I was the ‘expert’ bringing new thinking and skills to the teachers. I was doing this by supporting them and providing them with *scaffolding* to acquire these new understandings and skills. Second, the teachers subsequently became the *experts* and enablers for their learners. These multiple layers of learning were taking place *top-down* (teacher to pupil), but also *bottom-up* (pupil to teacher) and as well as *side-side* (teacher to teacher and pupil to pupil). There was learning *from* and *with* others.

4.5.1.2 Persian Language Pedagogy

The question now arises to what extent different linguistic theories have influenced and impacted Persian language teaching pedagogy.

More than ever Persian teachers would greatly benefit from understanding second /foreign language theory to inform their teaching and thus positively impact children’s learning.

My research with IRIS did not overtly include applying theories of second language acquisition to Persian as I was a researcher researching a specific area of Persian language acquisition. However, my knowledge and experience of teaching second/foreign language acquisition concerning the Persian language were ever-present. I return now to the next part of my research journey.

The report I wrote for the IRIS Board of Governors in October 2014 was an opportunity to share my research intentions and progress with a very important stakeholder group. It was important for me to have the Board’s permission for the work I was going to undertake as this constituted part of the ethical research process. The remaining activities for this academic year were an observation of an assembly in Nov 2014.

The assembly is the time for pupils to come together for communal Muslim prayer using a child-friendly *Du’a* (*oral prayer, nasheets, hadith and small talks*) specially designed for this purpose. It was gratifying to see teachers incorporate some of the new skills and understandings in the assembly. A connection to cultural matters in the assembly would have created a very meaningful link with cultural language for the children and would have given them a much deeper understanding. However, I needed to exercise patience and remind myself that we were just at the very beginning of the research process and rather appreciate what the teachers did and not what they did not do.

The two further *Persian language* lessons that I observed in December 2014 gave me an additional understanding of the content of the lessons as well as identifying links to cultural elements. This first phase of the research process was crucial.

To summarise, I had managed to achieve the following during this period. As a headteacher in IRIS, I was an insider researcher in this research. Like all insider research, it is crucial to discuss the advantages and attempts to address the disadvantages of being in an insider position, to collect valid data.

From my experience, doing case study research as an insider has many advantages in determining the case, entering the research site, defining the researcher's role to participants understudy and surviving in the research site. Accessing data is easily done, colleagues may be supportive and helpful, the researcher does not have to go to other research areas and the whole school may benefit from the research results. On the other hand, you may encounter some problematic situations in identifying the research questions, considering the ethical issues, bias, role duality and obtaining sensitive information about the personnel or colleagues and not reporting this information in the final report. I coped with these problematic situations in my case study with the help of several preventive suggestions presented above. I also want to mention that advisors play a critical role in supporting the researchers while conducting insider research. In my study, I was fortunate that the relationship with my advisors was fruitful and friendly but at the same time, we never lost sight of our professional responsibilities. I established myself in the role of researcher and learnt how to negotiate and cope with my role. I had created a positive environment for the research process: I operated in an open, transparent and collaborative manner. I had demonstrated to the teachers and other members of staff the benefits of creating links between culture and language. This in turn brought about a change in their belief systems with regards to how they viewed Persian and the pedagogic possibilities this would generate. I observed numerous lessons which gave me first-hand knowledge of the different subject areas covered in the classes. With this bird's eye view, I was able to make links between culture and language and start to think about how I would go about creating a framework that could practically incorporate this and accomplish my aims.

The start of the New Year (2015) heralded a new beginning and I felt confident to commence upon the next phase of the research process - the designing of the framework. I now invite the reader to continue journeying with me.

4.5.2 Phase Two: Planning

I met with my DProf consultant in February 2015 to update him on my progress and to clarify my thinking. We discussed the AR cycle and how it would be used in a practical sense for my research. We went through the different phases of the cycle: 1. *Plan for change* (pedagogic intervention) which would include

preparing the teacher tools (lesson plans, framework) and teacher induction into the new way of teaching. 2. *Observe* the teachers teaching the new framework. 3. *Reflection* on the lesson including focus groups with children and feedback sessions with the teachers, and so on.

This meeting was very useful in setting out my next steps and for putting the AR cycle onto a practical footing.

The team attended the next meeting on 10 March 2015. The purpose of the meeting was to integrate the teachers into the group and the research process, to update the team on my progress and to discuss the next immediate steps.

I had prepared a chart of some cultural elements and language links I had found when I observed the lessons and which we had gone through at the previous meetings. We had to involve Persia and its contribution to the Persian language. Indeed, the school participated in several Persia-related projects, including the children spending time in Persia in the summer term. The festival celebrating Persia's national day would also provide opportunities to make links between culture and language. Additional areas were added to the cultural template.

For example, teachers explained that the school has a *Social Activities* programme where each year group concentrates on a particular *activity* in a term. Children were invited to show each other what they had done in an assembly held at the end of the term. Moreover, the school participated in the annual '*Nikookary (Charity Day)*' celebration and contributed to this in many different ways, such as donating to needy people. All these activities would provide many opportunities to make links between culture and language. I explained to the teachers the generativity of research and my intention to create something that could have value beyond IRIS School.

I clarified that the framework would include material and subject areas that the teachers were teaching already and that we would find ways together to integrate culture with language within them. This was important to mention as it allayed teachers' concerns about the amount of work they would have to do. I further explained that not every subject area would lend itself easily to integration and that it was not my intention that we contrived a situation just to create links. We would take their lesson plans as the starting point. It was emphasised again that to create these links, each teacher would need to have an understanding of each other's schemes of work and syllabus.

Given the teachers' time constraints, I wanted to understand how closely they wanted to work with me in developing the framework. I could work on the framework on my own and bring it to them for their comments and input or they could work quite closely with me from the outset. I was very pleased to see that the teachers were happy to progress without me and to take on some of the research responsibility. This

was a very positive move. As much as I was pleased that the teachers would be working independently, I wanted to ensure that this next meeting would take place quite soon, so I asked that we set a date which was 27 March 2015. At this meeting, we would decide on what to focus upon. I assured them that I did not expect the teachers to do all the work, after all this was my research project, but I was not going to do it without their input.

The main aim of the meeting on 27 March was to focus on creating the pedagogic framework. I began the meeting by saying that we were entering a very exciting stage of the research process, that of starting to create the framework. I explained that I would be using *Backward Design*. *Backward Design* advocates that practitioners first consider what specific learning outcomes are sought and what evidence of these learning outcomes would be *before* considering all the teaching and learning activities. Lessons, units and courses should flow logically from the learning outcomes and not from “the methods, books, and activities with which we are most comfortable” (Wiggins et al, 2005, p.14). In other words, a course should set out the most effective way of achieving the desired specific results or “the best designs derive backwards from the learnings sought” (Wiggins et al, 2005, p.14). Wiggins et al.’s educational philosophy are that the purpose of education is to engender understanding and that syllabus designers need to be very clear about the specific understandings they want the learners to achieve. Once these are determined only then can “we focus on the content, methods and activities most likely to achieve those results” (Wiggins et al, 2005, p.15).

There were other aspects that the teachers were conducting as part of their teaching responsibilities, such as different forms of assessment, both formative (on-going) and summative (end of unit/course). In our meeting, the teachers informed me that as classroom teachers they do formative assessments all the time through their key questioning”. This trickles down into all classes. They’re constantly assessing their learning. This was very informative and I was pleased that if I were to be developing a framework, it would be along the lines of what they were doing already.

Our discussion generated an enormous amount of excitement and ideas of how each could provide links between cultural elements and language.

My aim to enthuse the teachers was certainly achieved, but my next task was to bring all this *blue-sky* thinking down to earth. It was clear that we could not possibly affect change in all areas during the research process and that we needed to focus on one area that was realistic and achievable. Towards the end of the meeting, it was decided that I should concentrate on creating a framework that began with the peripheral language.

Lozanov (1978) with “peripheral learning” believes that students can learn a lot of things that they see around them. In the environment of the class, a lot of language materials can be presented in the form of posters and students are not assigned to study them. According to McGlothlin (1997) a child does not use language for its own sake, language is considered a means to an end, that is, his joy. There are some ways for enriching the environment for the students who study Persian as a heritage language such as watching Persian television programmes, mobiles, the internet, reading advertisements, products labels, traffic signs, newspapers, and magazines, which are good sources of practising Persian peripherally.

Everyone felt that this was a good starting point that was easily achievable and realistic and could impact not only Years 5 and 6 but also the whole school community.

I explained that as part of the AR cycle, once I had created the framework (namely, the pedagogic intervention), which would include specific lesson plans, I would then have to induct the teachers into how to teach the framework. I would then observe them teaching it.

I also mentioned that we would have to reflect upon and assess the learning to gauge whether the children were benefiting from the intervention. All this would constitute one phase of the AR cycle.

I reiterated that this framework could be used in any context and was not driven by the content but rather by the pedagogical approach. In this way, the framework could be replicated in different schools enabling the IRIS case study to truly be *innovative*.

This meeting was very significant. I felt we were one step closer to creating a framework. All the teachers were on board. I did take notice of the concerns and different considerations that were voiced, such as time constraints, knowledge and confidence of the other teaching staff, always being mindful of the practicalities and so on.

Despite the positive atmosphere and the practical contributions made by the team, I found myself a few weeks later alone with my thoughts and doubts were creeping in. I began to realise that the teacher’s chosen area of peripheral language was not enough to impact the children’s Persian literacy and that I needed to explore other areas.

The number-one factor positively impacting student learning and achievement at the school level was a coherent, guaranteed, and viable syllabus delivered to all students. As previously discussed, I would be using the three-stage planning approach to design my framework. This approach called “backward design” could be used as a framework for planning and preparing a guaranteed and viable course. It offers a 3-stage design process, a set of helpful design tools, and design standards as follows: Stage 1: Desired Results The main focus in Stage 1 is making sure that learning goals are framed in terms of important accomplishments reflective of understanding. Students need to be able to grasp the big ideas if they are to make sense of their

lessons and transfer their learning to new lessons, and real-world situations. This question comes to our mind that what should students know, understand and be able to do? The ultimate desired accomplishment, in the end, is what students should be able to do with all the content on their own if this and other related units are to be successful. Stage 2: Assessment Evidence The focus of Stage 2 is “valid evidence” – making sure that what is assessed and how it is assessed follows logically from the Stage 1 goal. Assessing understanding needs evidence of a student’s ability to explain or interpret their class – “show their work” and “justify” or “support” their reasoning. How will we know if a student has achieved the wanted results? My experiences have found that I should think like an assessor before thinking as a teacher. Assessing understanding requires evidence of the student’s comprehension, their learning requiring reinforcement by presenting the information in a variety of ways. The desired outcome is that they choose the subject as opposed to merely answering the questions. Stage 3: Learning Plan The focus in Stage 3 is making sure that *what* is taught and *how* it’s taught follows logically from and aligns with the Stage 1 and Stage 2 goals. A learning event is designed to address three interconnected goals: These are as follows, acquisition, meaning-making, and transfer. Teaching for understanding requires that students are provided multiple opportunities to draw inferences so they can make generalisations of their own (with teacher support). Understanding cannot be simply told; they have to be actively “constructed” by the learner. A generic template is provided to help those involved in curriculum development to design their curriculum.

As the teachers used texts in their lessons, I wanted to assure them that I was not asking them to change their *method*. Rather I would help them to look for key elements within the text and then to look for opportunities to make links to either culture or religion. A text could be a prayer, a poem, a song, a sentence, a dialogue or a paragraph. Concerning the teachers’ request that I use peripheral language as my starting point, I explained to the team that even though the peripheral language was extremely important I did not feel that it would “give me enough meat for me to see how the integration would work”.

I clarified that the goal of this project was not to get the learners reading perfectly, but rather to give them a deeper understanding of the language and to make connections between culture, religion and language. I explained that the way to make these links was through culture. I reiterated that we would be making links to a text that the children would already be learning in their course. Most teachers said that they looked for the culture quite naturally but they do not plan specifically to do this. It is interesting to note that when I first broached the subject with teachers of using the culture as the vehicle for integration, they were quite concerned, as they had never taught culture to their children before. They felt that this was going to be too difficult for them. I thought that I was hitting a barrier, but I realised that in fact, they were projecting their concerns onto the children and the other teachers. When I heard that some of the teachers already included culture in their lessons, I was right in my understanding that it was some teachers who had the fears and no

one else. I reiterated that some texts or lessons might not be conducive to finding links and that was fine. We did not want to contrive a situation to create connections.

All members of the team echoed the importance of teachers meeting regularly to plan together. My ultimate goal was that the teachers and learners would be able to naturally and instinctively make links between culture and language. Teachers raised concerns that they did not feel that they would be able to get through all the material they had to cover plus with finding links to *culture*.

They were voicing realistic concerns to which I replied that I was not talking about big changes, but rather taking small steps and I would be there to support them. This brings me to another theme that I will be analysing – that of *scaffolding*, namely, supporting the learning of both the teachers and the learners.

I explained to the team that I had decided that I would research with a two-year group, Year five and six, the following academic year and not with Year four as we had previously discussed. The reason for this was that I felt that three-year groups with two classes in each would be too onerous and time-consuming. I was mindful of setting myself realistic goals and I realised that I would have to conduct double the amount of lesson observations, focus groups and feedback meetings. I wanted to do the best job possible and this would be more achievable with a one-year group. The team agreed that I should concentrate solely on Year five and six for the reasons cited above. Moreover, it was my aim that after I had completed the research, the teachers would continue to implement the framework and that it would eventually be extended to other year groups.

I also discussed that I would be conducting focus groups with children following each observation. At this stage, I was also interested in creating a focus group with parents of these children to examine if any of this new learning was transferred to the home. The letter that was sent out to parents did state that I would be inviting the parents of those children selected for the focus groups to work with me.

The teachers were asked to randomly select six mixed ability and mixed gender children from each class. I would write to all parents seeking permission and participation in the research. I asked all teachers to email me texts that I could incorporate into the framework.

Under shared *assemblies*, we added festivals as a good focus for these assemblies, for example, the celebrating of National Day, where the use of the Persian language would be used extensively. Under *reinforcement and transference of skills*, we changed *homework* to *home challenges*. This term seemed more appropriate for the tasks that we would be asking of the learners.

To arrive at Stage three – the learning plan, we went through the whole *backward design* process, starting at Stage one, the *desired results* which included the goals, understandings and questions, to stage two, which included the assessment evidence, then on to stage three – the actual learning activity. This journey

was crucial to the research process as it enabled everyone to have their say and most importantly it gave the team a full understanding of what the research was about and what I was trying to achieve.

The next set of meetings took place on 2 May and 6 June 2015 with all teachers involved. The purpose of the meeting with them was: First, to confirm that I would be working with teachers. Second, to share with them the activity plan that I had designed and how I envisaged it would work. Third, to set some dates so that I could induct the teachers into the framework. Fourth, to review the letter I had drafted to be sent out to the parents of all the children who would be participating in the research the following year. This meeting proved very important as it enabled the teachers to be *familiar* with all the details of the pending AR.

The main purpose of the meeting with the team on 2 May was to prepare for the AR taking place the following year. The majority of the time was devoted to going over the activity plan that I had devised using a *Persian Language* text that teachers had given me as an example. This generated a healthy and fruitful conversation. I emphasised the importance of allowing the learners to first listen to the text either readout, recorded without having the text beside them. This was an important skill in language acquisition and I felt that children were not often allowed to just listen to a language, to hear its different tones and rhythms.

I showed the team how the activity plan accommodated differentiation, but I deferred to their knowledge and experience of their children to decide how much to cover in the lesson. I reiterated that the teachers would be using existing texts and within these, they would find the links to either culture or Persian language. I clarified that, as part of the AR process, I would be observing each teacher teach one of these learning activities once a term. However, I also explained that I wanted the teachers to continue to make links to culture and language in the intervening weeks. In other words, I wanted the teachers to get into the habit of making these links more naturally as part of their weekly lessons and not to only rely on the bigger pedagogic interventions that I would be observing.

The meeting ended with me reminding the teachers to send me their texts which I would incorporate into the activity plan ready for the meeting on 6 June.

Again, this was another positive meeting. There was tremendous goodwill and the teachers were ready to embark on this new stage of the project. I was also noticing growing confidence amongst the teachers with previous concerns becoming less apparent.

The meeting on 1 July was the last we would hold in the academic year. I had received the texts from the teachers and I had slotted them into the activity plan ready for this meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to induct everyone into the running of the lesson.

I reminded everyone that what I had produced was a one-off activity that I would be observed for the benefit of the research and I did not expect them to teach this way every time. This was a specific intervention that I had designed to integrate culture with language. These one-off lessons would take place instead of their normal lesson, once a term. I also reemphasised the importance of the smaller interventions, the natural ongoing integrations in the lessons in between these big interventions. I went through each stage with everyone. As they both would be teaching the same content, it was sufficient for me to only go through one lesson. There were some minor changes to be made to the activity plan which included another stage before focusing on the key elements and introducing a plenary session at the end to gauge learner understanding. I would bring the revised versions to a meeting in the new academic year. Going through the activity plans and seeing all the links to culture and language generated once again much discussion and excitement. There was a positive and very relaxed atmosphere in the room. I assured everyone that I would support them in creating the materials, such as flashcards, they would need for their lessons. The meeting ended on a high with everyone feeling happy and confident.

It had taken many meetings and many different versions of the design process over two academic years to arrive at the pilot stage of the research process.

4.5.3 Phase Three: *Pilot period*

I convened a team meeting on the 15 September 2015 of the new academic year. The purpose of which was to give out the revised lesson plans and the supporting teaching materials.

It was also the opportunity to explain to the team that I wanted to conduct a pilot of the lesson plans to ensure that everything would run smoothly for the actual observations. We planned for these lessons to take place on 25 October 2015. I arranged a joint feedback session with teachers after all observations had taken place.

The letter to the parents of children was sent out in October. During this time eighteen children were randomly selected to participate in the Focus Group, giving me a potential of children with whom to work. I did not conduct a pilot of the focus groups, as I needed to wait a sufficient amount of time for any refusals to come back from the parents. Each group of children consisted of a range of abilities and an equal number of boys and girls.

4.5.4 Phase Four: *Participatory Action Research period*

I had now reached the point where I was to undertake the Participatory Action Research part of my research. I was ready to implement the pedagogic intervention that I had spent over the past two academic years to prepare.

With my guidance and support and with support from the other teachers, a course syllabus and ten lessons were planned using the new integrative framework. The topics of the lessons were part of the existing culture and *language*, so it slotted naturally into the normal flow of lessons (Refer to the appendix for the cultural syllabus and the lesson plans).

I had combined these two elements of the cycle as they took place in parallel. Namely, the teacher conducted a lesson using the new integrative framework and I observed the teaching and learning that took place as a result of this intervention.

From the teaching perspective, I was interested in the extent to which the teachers were able to translate the lesson plan which was on paper to a live teaching and learning environment. In addition, the extent to which the teacher was successful in teaching the cultural matters to the learners. Moreover, the extent to which the teacher was able to make the links between culture and language explicit for the learners. Furthermore, the extent to which the teacher-facilitated differentiation within the class.

From the learning perspective, I was interested in the extent to which the learners were engaged in the lesson. Also, the extent to which the learners grasped the notion of cultural elements and were able to apply this knowledge. Additionally, the extent to which the learners were able to make connections to cultural elements through the Persian *language*.

4.5.5 Reflect

The reflective element of the Action Research cycle consisted of two different activities: First, I conducted focus groups with the selected children straight after each lesson. All the children were undergoing a process of change in terms of the new skills and understandings they were being exposed to. However, the impact of this was even more significant for those learners who participated in the focus groups. Eighteen children participated in the Focus Groups. After each observation, I took the selected children out of the class to another location where I conducted the focus groups. Each focus group lasted up to an hour. I conducted a total of nine focus group sessions.

The purpose of these focus groups was to ascertain the learners' general understanding of the lesson's learning objectives. What activities in the lesson were seen as easy or hard? What new learnings were gained, such as new vocabulary, phrases and concepts? To what extent the new skill of identifying cultural matters was achieved. What enduring understandings were acquired, such as the role of the cultural matters, the overall meanings derived from the cultural matters, the nature of Persian, and the similarities between culture and Language? The attitudes and feelings associated with learning the Persian language.

Second, I met with the teachers soon after each lesson observation to conduct feedback interviews and conversations. These sessions allowed the teachers to be *reflective practitioners*, in other words, to reflect

upon the teaching and learning elements with the view to make any pedagogic changes that were deemed necessary for the next cycle of lessons. These moments also provided the opportunity for the teachers to reflect upon the research process as a whole and to voice any personal or professional concerns. These conversations took place with individual teachers or as a group.

Each teacher underwent three Action Research cycles, informing and improving the following one. One was on the *intrapersonal* level, where there was a process of change and transformation taking place *within* each teacher. The second was on the *interpersonal* level, where there was a process of change and transformation taking place *amongst* the teachers in terms of how they were operating as a team due to their participation in the research. I will be analysing these in the following chapter.

I conducted a final feedback meeting with the team on 15 July 2016. I provided the teachers with a set of guided questions to aid the process. The questions were formulated to elicit information about the following areas: The research process as a whole. The impact of the research on teaching. The impact of the research on learning. The impact of the research on the school community. The continuation of the integration in the future. Anything else the teachers wanted to add.

The final meeting of this phase was conducted with the Governing Body in August 2016. This was also the opportunity to bring the research activity to a formal conclusion and to thank all for their support and willingness to be part of the research process.

4.6 Implementation of Cultural Syllabus

To implement Cultural Syllabus into classrooms, I argued that socio-culturally informative themes selected from Persian cultures should be integrated into the teaching of Persian as a heritage language, both in terms of classroom practices and textbook selection.

Some of the strategies my teachers used in their classes were the utilization of Persian movies, lectures from Persian speakers, audio-taped interviews with Persian speakers, videotaped observations of the Persian language community, and Persian texts for readings. However, it should be noted that the potential activities and strategies are endless and that each teacher should assess their context to evaluate the effectiveness of any prospective activity, and should modify any activity or material at hand to fit their students' needs better. To set an example, I shared a sample lesson plan to teach about three Persian holidays, as popular themes, such as celebrating festivals, would be a simple and effective way to start approaching and teaching culture in language classrooms. I have attached the sample lesson plan in the appendix section (Appendix C).

However, to develop cultural awareness alongside language awareness, the content materials needed to provide more than a superficial acknowledgement of culture but addressed more thoroughly the kind of cultural adjustment that underlay the experience of learning a language. Therefore, I suggested to my teachers that the following practical tips were quite useful for the classroom. These tips aimed to create a classroom atmosphere that was conducive to opening minds to a new culture.

For instance, discussion activities organized around the elements of the Persian culture were recommended. However, I asserted that not every element of Persian culture was particularly helpful with lower-level learners, and activities such as simple surveys, and question and answer tasks proved to be more beneficial. For example, one teacher I observed used simple geography-based questions to strengthen the learner's knowledge. The teacher asked about the main cities of Iran. My observations showed that interactive teaching is the better form of teaching. In Religious Studies, the teacher asked pupils to draw the symbols of the month of fasting, Ramadhan. In Art, the teacher asked pupils to draw their religious centre or Mosque.

As mentioned, cultural competence identifies the ability of a person to behave adequately and in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of cultures (Meyer, 1991). In other words, culture acts as a blueprint for how a group of people should behave if they want to fit in with the group. Therefore, I prepared a list of appropriate cultural elements, among two basic components of culture which involved ideas and symbols (nonmaterial culture) including the values, beliefs, symbols, and language on the one hand and artefacts (material culture) including all the society's physical objects, such as its tools and technology, clothing, eating utensils, and means of transportation on the other. Among them, some major elements of culture such as symbols, language, religion, norms, values, and artefacts were selected as the ingredients of my cultural syllabus. I have compiled a list of the cultural elements and put them into two categories, the first being surface culture, the second being deep culture.

For example, a common symbol (nonverbal communication) was shaking hands, which conveyed friendship and was used as a sign of both greeting and departure. Gestures, movements of the hand, and arms that conveyed certain ideas or emotions were other examples of nonverbal symbols. In Britain for example, if we nod our head up and down, we mean yes, and if we shake it back and forth, we mean no. In Persia, however, head up means no, while shaking our head down means yes! Another example was the flag which was a symbol of Persian country and the crescent moon symbolic value for religious reasons.

I considered cultural norms or standards and expectations for behaviour such as table manners and interaction with people and observing the distance when talking with each other and hairstyles and clothing

styles in the syllabus. Values were another important element of culture that I added to the syllabus. I attach illustrations of our table manners in the appendix (See appendix D).

Persian cuisine with its ancient roots is among the most delicious foods in the world. There are a variety of foods as large as the variety of cultures and ethnicities and also as old as its history. Bread (called Naan in Persian) is one of the essential parts of Persians daily meals, particularly for breakfast and dinner. There are about forty types of bread made in Persia. Rice is the favourite ingredient of Persian foods for lunch. Most of the popular Persian cuisines including Chelo Kebob, Fesenjan, and Ghormeh Sabzi could not be served without the rice. Doogh as a drink is a mixture of yoghurt, water, salt, and some other ingredients.

Furthermore, there are many cultural norms in Persia, one of the strangest, is the concept of Ta'arof, which governs rules of social interaction and hospitality. It is a form of exaggerated politeness. For instance, restaurant owners or taxi drivers as a sign of respect often say there is no charge, and in return, you show your respect by insisting on paying until they accept. This also applies to hospitality at the home, where hosts are obligated to offer their guests as much as they can and guests are supposed to reject, sometimes several times, before accepting

Another element of culture is the artefacts that constitute a society's material culture. In the simplest societies, artefacts are largely limited to a few tools, the huts people live in, and the clothing they wear.

The textbooks include a section on Nawrooz. It is included in the appendix. The chapter begins with preparing the house for the spring celebration of Nawrooz, it shows the family gathering and party. The celebratory dish is a fish and rice meal.

4.6.1 A Sample Lesson

Eid al-Adha or Eid Qurban "Festival of the Sacrifice" (50 Minutes)

Materials Needed: Clergyman costume, Ibrahim story, pictures about "Eid al-Adha

Lesson Objectives: At the end of the lesson:

- 1) The students will have learned about "Eid al-Adha" and will be able to name at least two/three Persian customs attached to it;
- 2) The students will have learned how to ask for and give information politely;
- 3) The students will learn some basics about shopping in Persia such as 'redeeming coupons' and 'writing checks';

- 4) The students will have expanded their collaborative learning skills through pair and group work; and
- 5) The students will be able to check their abilities at getting their points across in speaking and writing and at comprehension in reading and listening.

Cultural Context: The students are continuing their stay in Persia. Together with other international friends at school, they go to the mosque as they are curious to know what it is like. Next, they go to a happy hour organized by their school. After the happy hour, they decide to go to a department store altogether to shop for “Eid al-Adha. After all of this fun time, they have to go home and do their assignment for their Persian Culture class.

Sequence of Activities

Warm-up (5 minutes)

The teacher comes to class in a Clergyman costume. He tells the students that he has been visiting all of the classrooms in the world before Eid. He asks them what they know about him and Eid. He then asks who Ibrahim is and what Quran is about. He facilitates the discussion with some sample pictures about “Eid al-Adha.

Activity 1: Story-Telling (15 minutes)

The students are supposed to be at a mosque service in Persia and the topic is Ibrahim and “Eid al-Adha. They have to be quiet and listen to it carefully. If they do not hear or understand something, they should kindly ask the teacher or a classmate. The clergyman tells the students that he will be bringing them to a mosque service in Persia with his car. He will tell an Islamic story from the Quran and they will understand the real meaning of “Eid al-Adha. He also tells the students that the language of the Quran or the sound system at the mosque can make it difficult for them to hear or understand the sentences. For that reason, after each sentence, he will stop for a minute and throw the stuffed animal (a sheep in a human costume) to ask politely for the repetition of the whole sentence or specific information in the sentence. Then, whoever is past the stuffed animal will answer the question. If s/he does not know the answer, s/he should pass it to another student. Although not expected, in case a few students cannot answer, the teacher will read the same sentence again. This will provide ongoing feedback and self-evaluation for the students. In addition, as Clergyman tells the story, he will make use of illustrations to make the meaning of unknown words clear **(10 min)**.

The teacher models what the students are to do before the story-telling takes place: He utters a sample sentence like “We will celebrate “Eid al-Adha soon” and asks the class:

‘Could you please tell me what you have heard?’ or ‘Can you repeat the sentence, please?’ ‘Could you tell me what will we celebrate soon?’ **(1 min)**

At the end of the activity, the students will be asked some basic questions to check their understanding **(4 min)**.

Activity 2: “Eid al-Adha Party (10 minutes)

The students are invited to the “Eid al-Adha party. After the service is done, they go there for some fun. They do not know any of the people there. They will introduce themselves, as well as try to get to know others. Each student will be assigned a name, which has something to do with “Eid al-Adha (Ibraheem, Ishmael, *The Messenger of Allah* and Sheep). Each student will be given a paragraph or two explaining the characteristics of only their name and what made this name important. After they read the information given to them, the party will start. Their names (tags/cards) will be stuck to their foreheads (with tape or post-it notes) so that others can see who they are. The teacher states that all students should try to talk to as many different people as possible. Since there will be students who are assigned the same names, the teacher warns them to avoid talking to people with the same names on their foreheads. The main aim is to try to get to know new people! They will not only keep talking about themselves but should also ask questions and listen to others to get to know them better. Interpersonal relationships are emphasized, so the teacher recommends that the students approach others in a kind way **(5 minutes)**. The teacher models what the students are supposed to do and starts the party. After 10 minutes, the party ends. The students are asked what they have learned about others. The teacher puts everyone’s name on the board, and the students take turns listing at least one thing under anyone’s name they have interacted with **(5 minutes)**.

Activity 3: Role Play “Paying for “Eid al-Adha Shopping” (15 minutes)

After the party, the students decide to go to a department store to buy “Eid al-Adha gifts for friends and family. The teacher asks the students if they like giving and receiving gifts. S/he tells the students that they will go “Eid al-Adha shopping at a department store since this is one of the customs. The teacher asks the students what they think a department store is. To help the students understand better, the teacher shows the students several pictures from a department store (furniture, housewares and appliances, men’s and women’s apparel and cosmetics) and finally shows a department store picture showing all of these different sections. Then, the teacher gives some examples of famous department stores from Persia such as Shahrvand, Ghods and Bazaar **(3 min)**. The teacher gives some basics about shopping in Persia. The teacher explains the use of coupons and how to write a check and (where to put the name, date, etc) with the help of a sample check s/he will show the students using an overhead projector. The teacher tells the students about coupons, which help people to get discounts when purchasing items. The teacher mentions to the

students that paying in cash is not common in Persia and that they should write checks or pay by credit card (**3 min**). Later, the students have distributed catalogues from a department store, as well as coupons and checks. First, they are asked to think about what they want to buy and what coupons they want to redeem for these items. Then, they will role-play the shopping activity in pairs by taking the roles of the customer and cashier. The teacher wants the students to be creative and ask as many questions as they need to for various things. She reminds them that they have to be kind and ask politely. (**2 min**)

The teacher models what s/he expects the students to do by using puppets and playing both roles:

A: "Hi, how're you?"

B: "Great, thanks! What can I help you with today?"

A: "I would like to pay for this fragrance and watch"

B: "Ok, your total is R25."

A: "Can I redeem this coupon?"

B: "Sure! Your new total is R20. Are you going to pay by credit card or write a check?"

A: "I will write a check. (S/he writes it) Here you go."

B: Thank you. Anything else today?"

A: "No, thank you!"

B: "Do you want the receipt in the bag?"

A: Yes, please. Thank you! Have a nice day!"

B: "You too!" (**1 min**)

Finally, 3 or 4 pairs are encouraged to role-play in front of the class. They are free to look at their notes (**6 min**).

Activity 4: Writing an "Eid al-Adha Greeting Card (5 minutes)

It is time for the students to go home and do their assignments for their Persian Culture class. They are supposed to write a letter to Hajar.

The teacher tells the students to imagine that they have to write Eid Mubarak greeting for Clergyman as an assignment for the Persian Culture class they are taking at a language school in Persia. S/he reminds the students that Clergyman would like them to be good boys and girls and to use polite questions to ask for what they want as a gift for "Eid al-Adha. S/he then distributes the greeting cards and addressed envelopes, and tells the students that s/he will be collecting them to mail to Clergyman's address:

Activity 5: Homework/Extension: The teacher tells the students that Yalda Night is coming and they will be learning about it. S/he asks the students to visit some sites to get a general idea of why people celebrate the coming of Yalda Night.

Evaluation Criteria: The main criterion is the students' participation in the activities. Taking an active role in the implementation of activities is a must. Questions (true/false, comprehension, etc.) or required tasks (role-plays, writing, etc.) during the activities will help the teacher to constantly evaluate the students' progress and to provide prompt feedback.

Summary

This chapter began by providing the reader with the socio-cultural context of the teaching and learning of the Persian Language in the United Kingdom. It then explored the notion of the development of new pedagogies and professional practice, both as separate yet overlapping research paths in the context of the project. Next, the reader was given an overview of the whole project activity that I undertook at IRIS School. The activities took place over three academic years. I presented these periods as four distinct research phases: Phase One being the *Appreciative Inquiry* period. Phase Two, the framework design period. Phase three was the *Pilot* period, Phase Four was the *Action Research* period.

I supplemented these phases with an exploration of various academics, writers and practitioners as well as giving moments of personal critical reflection.

I was extremely fortunate to have been allowed to work in such a positive setting. The teachers and the Governing Body of IRIS gave me full support and access and the teachers and children were willing to come with me on my journey. Ultimately it became *our* journey.

I now invite the reader to continue journeying with me as we enter into the world of the teachers and the learners.

CHAPTER FIVE

Experiences and Observations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the findings of the research undertaken during the action research of my project. The findings will be presented from both the teaching and learning perspectives. The chapter will explore the main themes that emerged from the data and give a detailed report of the analysis and findings. The chapter will end by giving a summary of all the findings.

5.2 Overview

As previously mentioned, the primary aim of this research project was to enhance the teaching and learning of Persian as a heritage language in a Persian Heritage language school by integrating culture with language. In other words, this research project was used to investigate the contribution of the cultural syllabus to the development of linguistic and cultural knowledge of heritage learners. In addition, it aimed to investigate the relationship between Persian Heritage Language and its effect on conserving the cultural identity of the second and third - generation Persian - British in London. The second goal was to investigate parents' attitudes toward Persian maintenance in the U.K. and shed light on difficulties associated with language maintenance, both at home and in Persian heritage language school. To remind, by the aforementioned distinctions, and in Sedighi, (2010) words heritage learners are different from both foreign learners of Persian and native speakers of Persian.

To do this, I started to conduct an action research project, within the context of a case study, in a culture of appreciative inquiry and through the lens of ethnography. I employed four main types of research methods and techniques; namely, classroom observations, focus groups, feedback interviews or conversations and reflection sheets.

In the beginning, it was important to provide certain terms which would help to define the parameters in which I had conducted the analysis. In this section, first of all, I discussed the demographics of the participants as well as the process of data collection for the qualitative portions of this project. Three groups of participants took part in this research. The main participants of the investigation were a group of 10-12-year-old children. This group of heritage speakers (see appendix) consisted of 75 Persian-English bilinguals (boys $n = 35$ and girls $n = 40$; mean age: 10.3) who have been living in the UK for different lengths of time (mean: 6.9 years). Why heritage speakers are chosen from this age range is due to the children requiring a connection, this is known as "tough assimilative pressure" (Hinton, 1999, p. 5). It is mainly created by their peers at school (see also Harris, 1995). The method I used to preserve anonymity and confidentiality was

the use of pseudonyms (fake name instead of real name) for all participants and also for the location of the research. Therefore, the names given throughout this research are all fake names.

Eleven of the heritage speakers were born in the UK where English is the dominant language, while the others moved here at different ages. Among the heritage speakers, four emigrated to the second language environment before the age of three. Heritage speakers are considered to be bilinguals only if their exposure to the second language started after the age of three (Montrul, 2008). The second group consisted of 5 monolingual Persian teachers in the UK. The third group of participants were sixteen Persian parents who were born in Persia and immigrated to the UK at different ages. Their ages at the time of the data collection ranged from 27-54 years old, and they had been living in the UK for between 1-30 years. The parents who participated directly in the interviews were mostly mothers (eight mothers and four fathers) and in an additional two families, both parents took part in the interviews. Seven of the immigrant families that took part in the research moved to the UK for higher education and they did not know whether they would return to Persia after graduation, while the others had UK permanent residency. Ten families had one child, while the others had two or more children (some of whom also participated in the research). Standard Persian was the first language of most families except for one where both Turkish and Persian were used at home (Turks are one of the ethnic groups in Persia). Their parents stated that their son and daughter could speak and understand some Turkish as well as Persian. I initially contacted the families, and information sheets about the research were given to them.

To implement the cultural course, the class met once a week (Sundays from 10 to 11) for 60 minutes over 20 weeks in two terms. The course syllabus included lessons in four language skills and some cultural elements, such as proverbs, existing in Persian culture. These elements were scattered in each lesson throughout the term. The course, in which the research was carried out, was a cultural syllabus course, which specifically aimed to offer some culture-specific items to students, focusing on cultural issues existing in the Persian language. The course syllabus was introduced to the participants at the beginning of the term, week one. The tasks, objectives, classroom activities were displayed in the appendix.

I analysed the data set from the teaching and learning perspectives and learning environment. The data for the teaching perspective comprised the observations, the teacher reflection sheets and the feedback conversations. The data for the learning perspective comprised the observations inside and outside the classrooms and the focus group discussions. The data for the learning environment comprised the observations outside the classrooms. In my role as *observer-participant* and as *participant-observer*, the classroom observations that I conducted provided a check of the teachers' and the learners' experiences of the lesson from my perspective. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p.4), such analysis is a flexible and

useful research tool and a method for “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns, which “can potentially provide a rich and detailed account of data”.

In this section, first of all, I entered into the world of the teachers and obtained an insight into the impact the research has had on them.

5.3 Impact on Teaching

In Barth’s words, teacher growth is closely related to pupil growth. Nothing has more impact on student’s development, self-confidence, or classroom behaviour than the “personal and professional growth of their teachers”. (Barth, 1990, p.49)

The evidence gathered during this research showed that teachers changed a lot due to their participation in this project. The nature of the research demanded that they thought and act differently regarding the teaching and learning of Persian. It required them to enter into a much more challenging ground. According to Fullan (1991, p.42), a change in beliefs is difficult to achieve. However, the data below clearly demonstrated that the teachers had undergone a change in their belief systems regarding the teaching and learning of Persian and specifically regarding the importance of integrating cultural elements into the Persian language.

This change in belief systems allowed the teachers to use a new pedagogic framework and adopt new teaching approaches to suit their learners. The evidence showed that integrating cultural elements into the Persian language was becoming a more natural process in the new framework.

The evidence, which I presented below in this chapter, indicated that as the research process progressed teachers began to work more collaboratively and to perceive themselves as a team. This was one of the goals that I had set for myself, as I knew that if the project was to succeed, the teachers needed to begin to work and plan together. The findings clearly showed that this was happening to a far greater extent. However, teachers felt that lack of sufficient time was the biggest barrier to reflecting on lessons and doing joint planning.

The data below showed evidence of the impact the team as a whole had on the wider school community, on other members of staff as well as on the parent community. The data also demonstrated how the team was planning to continue to provide this integration for the following academic year by putting a logical plan in place. Here in this section, I had summarised my analysis of the data below.

5.3.1 Teacher Development

According to Cárdenas et al., (2010) teacher development occurs when these aspects of development are occurring: personal, and professional. Within the first main theme, I analysed the growth and development

of the teachers from *personal* and *professional* perspectives. Within the *personal* perspective, I provided evidence to support the notion of the teachers having undertaken a personal journey whilst participating in the research project. I analysed how they *reflected* upon the research process. Within the *professional* perspective, I analysed the extent to which the teachers had undergone a change in practice and what strategies and techniques they employed to teach the new integrative framework. Thus, in terms of my research, from the teaching perspective, I set about investigating three areas: the ability of the teachers to prepare suitable materials, the ability of the teachers to teach cultural language, and the ability of the teachers to understand why integrating cultural elements with the Persian language could enhance the teaching and learning of Persian language.

(1) Personal Development

As Zineb Djoub (2018) presents, personal development refers to having personal strengths and characteristics that help teachers make sense of their teaching and themselves as individuals. This is through developing the necessary skills that can help them grow in and outside their profession. Personal development is a powerful tool to reach a well-defined and healthy sense of self as teachers, which can result in positive self-esteem and self-confidence. Besides, it enables teachers to recognize, understand and manage their emotions thereby having good intrapersonal skills. Accordingly, as teachers' professional roles can be affected by their personal factors, they need to develop certain skills to balance their professional and personal lives.

As previously mentioned, each teacher in this project had been on a personal journey during their participation in this research project. This had involved many achievements and challenges, but most of all a marked change.

The extracts that follow give the reader an insight into this journey of personal growth and development that teachers involved in the research had made. These extracts illustrated how the teachers were beginning to address the additional demands that the research was placed on them. A common thread that ran through these extracts was the comments about the time taken to prepare and plan for the lessons. There was an acknowledgement by one of the teachers, Ms Shima that the first time something new was undertaken, the more planning and time-consuming it would be. These comments reflected what I was expecting at the beginning of this journey.

The following extracts were from a feedback conversation that I had with two of the teachers after the pilot observation (25/10/2015), Ms Jolnar and Ms Shima. I understood that they were finding their workloads challenging and I felt that this could potentially impact negatively on the research. I called a meeting (25/11/2015) so that I could understand what the specific issues were to alleviate some of the stress before the next set of observations that would be taking place in the following sessions.

Shima: In the meeting, Shima stated "I spend evenings and weekends preparing lesson plans. If I don't, I feel guilty for not working and I am made to feel guilty for letting the children down. I want to leave the project - the workload is too much; I am ill and I want my life back."

Jolnar: Also, Jolnar told me "I don't have a social life - when I do, I find it increasingly hard as I am worried about what I am not doing for work."

Shima: She continued to say "I despise this job. Nothing is ever good enough. It's not about the learning, it's about getting the grades."

Jolnar: She sadly added "It's unimaginable and I need a new career. I'm not happy all the time. Maybe that is what is required to get job satisfaction. It affects my family time to such a degree that I want to vomit. I often miss time with my children and want to bring them into the school so that I get to see them. What should I do?"

Shima: She added "I can't what students want but hey, I was a rascal when I was a child. Ignoring teachers, showing up late for class, bunking off school, making fun of the teacher. It got really bad"

Jolnar: She tiredly said "The lesson plans are too much paperwork. Just getting everything to fit in...there is no way I can fit the syllabus into the teaching, I choose the naughty kid and give him tasks so that he becomes a part of the lesson. "

I realised that both Ms Jolnar and Ms Shima had planned "special" lessons for me to observe and what I was observing in the pilot one was not what they considered 'normal' lessons. These were special lessons in which they wanted to integrate culture and language. It was also clear that this entailed too much work for them, as Jolnar admitted: "so that I don't have this, have to plan it in such detail, for hours" "To make my work easier as well".

I explained that these observations were a means of getting the teachers into the attitude so that we could 'test' out a methodology. I re-emphasised the importance of the smaller interventions – the daily, natural links they could make either to culture or language. I reminded them of the nature of action research, that it is about observing a change, reflecting on it and making improvements for the next cycle. Thus, it was clear that they were investing too much time in the planning of these lessons and I advised them that they should perhaps reduce the number of examples they bring into the lesson.

The following extracts are from a feedback conversation that I had with Ms Ayat a Persian coordinator and teacher after the pilot observation (25/10/2015). At this stage, Ayat had planned and implemented two lessons. Her reflection revealed that she was quite at ease with the process; she was finding that linking cultural elements to language was becoming a much more natural process.

Ayat, teacher: I got more energy for myself and my work because of all those new things I learned in the project. She continued to say: I got more courage for my profession as a teacher because the positive support in our group was amazing. I learned to read my pupils more effectively because I'm focused more on watching their motivation and their emotional state. I also pay more attention to my colleagues at work.

Linking culture is happening more often now and I do it more in my classes. This however takes place mainly orally and isn't always put down in the lesson plan still, I feel it is great progress in terms of how often I introduce or encourage the children to notice the link to culture. With help from the cultural team, they have told me about a song they have taught, which I will use to help reinforce that culture and language are connected.

Overall, I believe that the relationship between language and culture is deeply rooted, and Language can be used to maintain and convey culture and cultural ties.

Furthermore, she was feeling to be able to bring in the links to cultural elements in different year groups. She acknowledged this progress. My observation notes from the actual lesson echoed Ayat's views. She brought in the links to the Persian language very naturally, firstly by recapping the cultural element that the class had learned in the previous lessons or films and then moving on seamlessly to the new target element. My observation notes from this lesson supported Ayat's reflection of the lesson. She was very relaxed and she has made excellent links to cultural language.

The following extracts were from a feedback conversation that I had with Ms Jolnar after our meeting on 25/11/2015.

Ms Jolnar: I don't teach grammar anymore. Instead, I let the students find cultural elements by playing the games.

I now know that We teachers must instruct our students on the cultural background of Persian language usage. If we teach language without teaching about the culture in which it operates, the students are learning empty or meaningless symbols or they may attach the incorrect meaning to what is being taught. In my experience, students, when using a learnt language, may use it inappropriately or within the wrong cultural context, thus defeating the point of learning a language.

My findings so far, is that the children in the class are becoming more aware of links between culture and the Persian language. I decided that the lesson will be where we got to. Face the challenge and not change the topic to find easier links. I in turn am becoming more aware of trying to create more mini interventions during Persian lessons.

I enjoy these special lessons (as hard as is the preparation for them). It is worth it.

These comments were made after Ms Jolnar's second lesson observation and after our joint meeting the month before (25/11/2015). They showed that she was beginning to be more at ease with the methodology. She was honest about struggling to find links to culture and that she approached the cultural team for help. Her use of research terminology – “my findings so far” indicated that there was an attempt to immerse herself into the research world, which I found gratifying. She was able to make “more mini interventions” in her Persian lessons.

There was definite progress being made. My observation notes of this lesson echoed Jolnar's comments: she made small links to culture throughout her lesson and most of the learners knew the cultural items and were able to work them out independently.

The most important thing was that they were getting more used to bringing in the links and were feeling more comfortable with that. I was reminded that this was still very early days and they had only planned and executed two lessons. They needed the time to get used to a whole new way of working.

The following extracts were from a feedback conversation that I had with Shima on 18/09/16 after we started the new framework.

Now I strongly believe that learning a new language involves the learning of a new culture, consequently, teachers of a language are also teachers of culture.

I have to say that my classroom climate has improved a lot. The children beg and want me to do the exercises with them I mean finding links between language and culture. My experience also meant some benefit for the school since I practised several exercises at the Open-Door Day. I worked with pupils I usually don't teach, and they were enthusiastic about the exercises. Moreover, many colleagues watched me that day and are also copying the exercises now.

I did not change my Persian teaching. I, if I was teaching 'where do I live', I would stick to it and just see if I can research the cultural points to suit my Persian teaching. And I felt like a professional that it enriched my cultural studies knowledge, and I felt like I grew a lot as a teacher, as a Persian teacher and that helped me.

I didn't find it was easy. But when you get an idea, it just enlightens you, so I didn't find it at all easy, and it takes time, you know, you've got to set time aside to plan a whole lesson that is different, you know, from what I'm used to doing, so it's time-consuming, and, but very rewarding, you know. Yes, that's what I've got to say so far about the research process, but I've enjoyed it very much because I feel that it made me grow as a teacher. I learnt a lot about myself as a teacher: I wasn't confident at

the beginning, I was doubting myself, this process allowed me to believe in myself, it gave me growth. Before I had self-doubt.

These reflections are written after her second observation also indicated that Ms Shima had begun to be more at ease with the process. She decided not to change the topic of her lesson to suit cultural links but rather continue with her normal lesson and bring in the cultural matter links. This was an important shift in her thinking and planning. Shima's acknowledgement that my comments after the lesson helped her feel more confident was pleasing to hear as I was glad that my support was effective and was enabling her to progress. Despite the challenges of preparing for these 'special lessons', she was beginning to enjoy them. My observation notes from this lesson very much coincided with those of Shima's. In my notes I have introduced the topic of this lesson as "where do I currently reside?" and the answer for that lesson was 'where do I live'. Despite the challenges this particular Item presented, Shima was adamant not to change the topic to make things easier for her or the children. This was an excellent lesson that was well planned, researched and delivered and which made explicit and interesting links to cultural elements.

By this stage Shima, Ayat and Jolnar had planned and delivered three lessons. It was evident from the comments made in the final feedback conversation (29/01/2017) that they had all undergone a process of tremendous growth and development whilst participating in the research.

Shima: Keeping ahead with planning is a must. The more you plan, the more the children become successful, it means you have stress free teaching. I find at the end of the day I'm tired - so I can go home and, eat some food before doing a couple of hours work. I also go into school early in the morning when I'm fresh and there's no one around to distract me. Our team leader has been my source of support. Basically, we started the year out and I'd be there, but she'd plan...and it's grown from there until now this term I'm writing my unit...well without her I would have been floundering, I think.

Jolnar: Thank you so much to you for coaching us and for 'escorting' us throughout this journey. This is a concept that we have neglected in the past and now brought to life and to use in a pleasant and fun way. It is a slow process. We are doing it in small steps but only going forward!

Ayat: I understand the importance of linking language and cultural points, I feel more confident to link and teach cultural points in my lessons. It's extremely important to cross-curricular these two subjects. I thought the lessons went well. This process has helped me grow as a Persian teacher and I felt excited. I would like to thank you for all your support during this process. I was very nervous about it at the beginning but your guidance was fantastic, I have learnt so much. Your enthusiasm for culture and the Persian language is catching and I feel that through this process I have gained more knowledge and grew in confidence in teaching these subjects that should always go hand in hand. The task isn't easy and I must continue these teachings with other year groups.

The extracts above provide another insight into their reflections and the process they underwent. Jolnar thanks me for my support. She acknowledges that this is a concept (integrating cultural elements into the Persian Language) that “we have neglected in the past” and “now brought it to life.”

Ayat even went as far as saying she aims to have work commitments completed two days before the set deadline and that ensures she finishes things on time without undue stress

Shima also acknowledged my help using terms such as “support”. In terms of her personal and professional development she “learnt so much”, “gained more knowledge”, “grew in confidence”, teaching cultural elements and Persian language “should always go hand in hand”. As Ayat did, Shima also ends with similar sentiments that the “task isn’t easy” but she “must continue these teachings”.

It is relevant at this point to share a Hadith (an Islamic quote) by one of the Imams (a great scholar) taken from a message of Qur'an (the Muslim Holy Book),

Imam says: Islam informs all human actions and puts them into five categories: obligatory, recommended, permitted, disliked or forbidden. Those actions that must be performed should be done because you want to do them. Good intentions are rewarded. The opposite is that of forbidden actions. Recommended action is that which a useful thing to do is. The opposite can be said about disliked actions. Permitted actions are those which are neither supported nor unsupported. The ultimate worth of actions is based on intention and doing things because you want to, as mentioned by the Prophet Muhammad, who said, "Actions are measured by intentions, and one shall only get that which they intended."

What Shima, Ayat and Jolnar had expressed was proof of this saying. They knew the task was not easy, but they had to continue with it. They were fully aware that they were just the current guardian of this knowledge that needed to be passed on and continued by our generation.

I had presented some evidence that all teachers involved directly in the programme had emerged from the research process the richer. They struggled initially and continued to struggle with their demanding workloads, but the overall sense was that this was very worthwhile in terms of their own personal and professional growth and development. Teachers with all levels of experience and length of service involved in this project said that they were motivated in terms of continuing to improve their teaching practice. Most commonly they were motivated by an intrinsic desire to do the best job they could and to become a better

teacher. The needs of their pupils and the aim of contributing towards school improvement were also strong motivators for them.

Now that the reader had been indicated how the teachers fared overall, I would now like to move on to the professional growth and development that the three-class teachers underwent during the research process.

(2) Professional Development

As put forward by Whitford, (1994) professional development is the process of developing the necessary knowledge-base and skills teachers require to carry out their role effectively. This does not only include learning new theoretical teaching methods, but also trying them out and learning to have effective teaching.

Today's teachers should be experts in their work, i.e., planning their lessons, communicating, managing, carrying out and assessing the activities of the teaching and learning process more effectively, and meanwhile adaptive, i.e., responding to differing pupils' learning needs. Thus, from a professional development point of the view, the aim is to help teachers learn how to adjust their teaching methods to their student's learning needs. This can be done through understanding the "why" or rationale behind any pedagogical decision that they make concerning their teaching contexts.

This section of my research examined different aspects of our three teachers' practices. Here, I had given the reader an insight into the strategies and techniques employed by my teachers to teach the new integrative framework. Additionally, I examined how the teachers reflected upon their practice and understandings, and their children's ability to grasp these new understandings and skills. In other words, I was analysing the extent to which the teachers have become reflective practitioners.

There were too many examples to include within the main body of the text here, however, I had selected only a few that would give the reader an interesting insight. The first extract was a semi-structured interview with Ms Shima on 18/09/16 after her class time in her classroom.

Me: So, I just want to ask you how you felt the lesson went in terms of your lesson objectives?

Shima: I think that lesson objectives are the key element in creating effective lesson plans. She added: The reason for this is that without stated objectives, there is no measure of whether a particular lesson plan produces the desired learning results. However, I use these guidelines in my language classroom:

- I use the Persian language exclusively and encourage the students to do so.*
- I provide opportunities to communicate in the Persian language in meaningful and purposeful activities that simulate real-life situations.*
- I mostly use skill-getting activities which enable students to participate successfully in skill using activities.*

- *Time that I devote to listening, speaking, reading, and writing is appropriate to course objectives and the language skills of the students.*
- *Culture is systematically incorporated into my instruction.*
- *I use a variety of student groupings.*
- *Most activities are student-centred.*

On the whole, I felt that the lesson began very well, I felt that the children understood what they had to do. They had to listen to the short conversation or watch a film and that went very well, I think the fact that I read it out first helped a lot because in the film I thought it would be too fast. Now they have never seen any of the films so I was a bit anxious about that so that's why I picked a very short, the first bit was very short. It contained language that they would know cos I ask them the same question: so I felt the beginning was really good, they could follow the conversation, they enjoyed following the script, the written script. Most of them still struggled to kind of pick and write down the cultural points they recognised, but I think it's in their heads, they certainly can talk about the cultural points that they recognise or understood, so to me the written concept is not so important, I don't know if that's right or wrong.

Me: I think you're right. The idea we want them to get is to find the links between culture and language.

Shima: Yes, and then they could find some of the songs they sing from assemblies with cultural items like Salam (Hello) or du 'ā' (Oral Praying) and they could pick out the respect, they recognised the respect.

Me: That's right.

This conversation with Shima revealed many different aspects of her pedagogy. She felt the lesson started well which was helped by the fact that she read the text out to the children, as the actual recording of the film was very fast. She also selected a very short excerpt because the children had not seen any of the films before. Both these examples demonstrated a keen awareness of the learners' needs and abilities and her ability to be adaptable and flexible. She identified what her children were finding hard (listening and writing) and felt that the listening exercise was more important than the written part. It was interesting to note that this particular class comprised the higher ability learners and I would have expected them not to have 'struggled' as much as Shima felt or perceived they did. Referring to my lesson observation notes, I observed that there was no mention that the children struggled with the writing element, but that was not to say that some did not. My notes did corroborate with Shima regarding the learners' ability to find some of

the songs they sang from assemblies with the words “*Salam*” (Hello song) and they could pick out the “*du ‘ā*” (a prayer of request), they recognized the “*du ‘ā*”. The next section revealed a great deal about Shima’s ability to reflect upon the lesson but also to be reflexive as she was aware that during the lesson she was talking too much, giving out too much information and “extracting” answers from them. She felt that as a language teacher her job was to enable them to speak and be more active learners rather than being passive recipients of knowledge. I appreciated Shima’s honesty, and I thought she had conducted an excellent lesson, which included all the different elements that my integrated framework demanded. This was a highly accomplished lesson and the learners demonstrated that they were beginning to understand the nature of Persian being presented in many different contexts. We spoke that perhaps for the next lesson she could reduce the amount of information she would give the children and evaluate it. This was only the first observation and I was feeling very optimistic that Shima would be able to find the right balance between active and passive learning in addition to making links to cultural elements in the Persian language. The following extracts are from an interview that I had with Ayat (1-hour semi-structured interview with Ayat, on 23/10/16).

I observed children greeted Ms Ayat in Persian and with a smile and seemed very happy to embark on this lesson’s task. Yet again it was great to see how enthusiastic and cooperative and engaged the children were. (My observation notes)

Me: It was great to see how enthusiastic and cooperative the children were in your class.

Ayat: They are cooperative as they are busy all the time. My students are always on task and engaged in an activity. However, I use these guidelines in my language classroom:

- *I use explicit error correction in activities that focus on accuracy and implicit or no error correction in activities that focus on communication.*
- *I assign tasks for students and ask questions that reflect a range of thinking skills.*
- *My instruction addresses student learning styles.*
- *My students are explicitly taught language learning strategies and are encouraged to assess their progress.*
- *I try to enable all students to be successful.*
- *I establish an affective climate in which the students feel comfortable taking risks.*
- *My students are enabled to develop positive attitudes toward cultural items.*
- *The physical environment reflects the Persian language and Persian culture.*
- *I use the textbook as a tool, not as a curriculum.*
- *I use a range of print and non-print materials including authentic materials.*
- *Technology, as available is used to facilitate my teaching and learning.*

- *Children are active learners in my class and fully understand the concept of linking culture to language.*
- *They are very excited to look through the texts for cultural items.*
- *The less able children are also fully engaged and can participate in all activities.*

Me: What do you do with your lesson planning and the connection between culture and language?

Ayat: Planning lessons to specifically link cultural matters happens occasionally. I feel that culture and language are now connected, where it wasn't before. So, I do feel, and just to reinstate what our colleague Jolnar said, reinforce, I do go to shima as well, shima is very approachable, what do you think about this? So, I'm consciously thinking, and also it made me realize that I enjoy cultural studies, you know I enjoy teaching it as well, it is part of Persian. So, I engage myself in continued professional development in the areas of language skills, cultural content and current methodology to be a better teacher.

Ayat's reflection of her lesson in the above excerpt was very positive. The adjectives she used to describe the lesson - "enthusiastic and cooperative", correspond very much with what I observed. Children were active learners and fully understood the concept of linking the *Persian language* to culture. Children were working in pairs (*Grouhi*), there was sharing of information, there was positive noise in the room and the children were working from their *prints*. Discussions and searching for points in pairs was very successful. Children seemed to particularly enjoy doing the work together, in pairs. They loved searching for other cultural points. It was a joy to see. Yes, some of the activities were rushed, which was a pity, but I was pleased to learn that Ayat revised some of the material in the following lesson. This lesson told me a great deal about Ayat. She felt safe now to make links to cultural elements that she has not done before. She was prepared to learn and modify her teaching to suit the new framework.

She was fully aware of the lower ability learners, but as I also observed, they were able to access the material and give valuable contributions. It was evident at this stage that the process of integrating was not as natural as she would like, but this could only improve.

The following extracts were from an interview that I had with Ms Jolnar(1-hour semi-structured interview with Jolnar, on 02/10/16).

Me: What is your perspective of the relationship between culture and language teaching? Do you teach culture in your class? If you do, how? Is that helpful for students' learning?

Jolnar: Language is embedded in a cultural context. All parts of life are. My best lessons will have the language embedded in a cultural context. If it doesn't, the pupils find it hard to grasp where the points

are coming from. It helps them to get the 'feel' for the language if I embed the language in a cultural context.

Me: What I've done here is introduce a whole different way of working, way of thinking, and inevitably it has impacted on your work, your workload. I'm only observing you sort of once a term. However, there's a whole thinking process that has gone through it, around it, so please just feel free to talk, about your lesson plans and lesson objectives. What elements of the curriculum are important to you as a teacher?

Jolnar: Okay, so, I've enjoyed the process tremendously. It has impacted the way I teach Persian, and what it's done certainly with my class

Finding the text was easy. Finding the connections was sometimes very hard, okay? To find those connections and make those connections and find the cultural elements, was a little bit tricky for me, I follow these guidelines in my teaching:

- Goals and objectives.*
- Evidence of achieving those goals*
- The school agenda.*
- The lesson plan is organized around a specific lesson.*
- The five language skills are part of the lesson (listening, speaking, reading, writing and cultural elements)*
- To proceed when all students are ready.*
- I monitored the paired group doing activities.*
- Critical thinking is evident.*
- Do more planning*
- Pupils are the centre for all parts of school life.*

After the implementation of the new framework, there's certainly more awareness amongst children about the connection between culture and language. And that's the most important thing. I think that we're gaining, and I think if we continue it with other year groups, then slowly, that awareness will become more apparent.

Today, we did the map of Persia with students, they were so interested. And we were talking about this Caspian Sea and they remember that I told them on (Independence Day) somebody remembered that I said we don't call it the Caspian Sea, we call it Khazar Sea.

I think most children are making connections, thinking about the items. I'm conscious of thinking constantly about the children who don't, so it's just something we need to think about. Because I want all my children to feel safe about it and not worry and not understand, do you know what I mean? Because some concepts are difficult to understand. How "I live" is connected to the strangers.

The above extracts demonstrated Jolnar's 'awareness' of how the process was developing and the importance of making these links to culture and language. In this extract, Jolnar was aware that *most* of her learners were making connections to cultural elements and that they were "thinking about" cultural points. However, she was concerned about those learners who were not able to make these connections so easily and she wanted to ensure they felt "safe" in her lessons. Ensuring that learning activities for all learners were accessible was vital and was a universal concern for all those involved in teaching. Jolnar provided some excellent examples from the Reading Textbook, which talked of the stranger, but understanding the connection between them was difficult, even for adults.

The following extracts were from a feedback conversation that I had with Ayat (1-hour conversation with Ayat, on 4/12/16).

Ayat: This is an example of a mini intervention that I made in my Islamic lesson. Here I am linking the word Nazri (Food Giving) to the poor families during Moharam. This is an excellent example of a quick and simple integration between Islamic blessings and Persian.

The basic objectives are to educate children particularly about ... what Islam says about social behaviours and the basic teaching of Islam, and how you deal with the parents and elder people, and how we live in a society, and how we live in common faith, multi-faith community. It's our requirement because most of the students coming here, for example, when they go back [to] homeland they have family there and relatives there and they need to [make] contact with them. And therefore, we think that this is the requirement of society, our community and that is why we teach them.

These extracts also showed the important role integration between Islamic values and the Persian language could play in the understanding of prayers and thus contributed to the spiritual development of children. Ayat placed greater emphasis on faith and religious education. I believed that integrating Islamic values and the Persian language and its associated skills and understandings, could provide a gateway for learners to access a deeper meaning of their Islam and Islamic prayer.

Before moving onto the next theme, namely, teamwork, I would first like to offer some concluding remarks regarding the growth and development of the individual. I analysed this first from their perspectives by looking at their reflections of their journeys.

I provided evidence to show that despite it being challenging in many different ways; they emerged the other side enriched and accomplished. I was reminded at this time by what Yalom (2005) points out about life journeys that we should live our lives to the full and we should not leave any un-lived life behind. The second perspective examined their growth and development as professionals. I examined the strategies and techniques they employed to teach the new integrative framework and provided evidence to support the

fact that they were able to reflect upon their practice and the process of learning undertaken by their children.

(3) Teachers Teamwork

I heard the collective groan of the teachers when I announced this group project. Much of the dislike of group projects came from my teachers not trusting their peers to pull their weight and place an equal amount of time and effort into the work. I said the best strategy to avoid negative group outcomes was to communicate. “It’s a simple fact, the secret to accomplishing work with others is to talk about it. Plan who is doing what, know what your role is, and if you’re shouldering too much work, then let that be known (Magas, Jennifer Lees, 2018)”.

In this section, I provided evidence for the development of the team and the nature of the collaboration between teachers, and the impact that the team had had on the wider school community, including succession planning.

The following extracts were from a feedback conversation that I had with three teachers (1-hour conversation with Ms Ayat, Ms Shima, and Ms Jolnar on 30/10/2016).

Shima: Working in a syndicate is great because of joint planning. It helps familiarise you with all curriculum documents. You don't feel like you are on your own... Being in a school is a bonus. Lots of people are therefore teaching children at the same level, key stages 1, 2, 3 or 4. There are therefore lots of people to get feedback from, be it in conferences, teacher training or through the teaching community is thousands in number.

Ayat: By attending regular teamwork-based meetings, we could stay in touch with any changes and overcome together any issues that have been presented. The importance of team members contributing is for the benefit of the student, every team member needs to be committed and work towards the same goal, which is for the success of our students.

Jolnar: The more you take part in a team and make a contribution, the more confident you become. Teamwork is an important skill. In this group project, I realized that the only way to accomplish anything significant is to collaborate with other people instead of working by yourself.

The above extracts showed that teachers had started to meet each other to discuss their observations. The collaboration was still in the infancy stage and did not take place regularly. Shima had positive things to say about planning and teaching together with Ayat. She also commented that it enabled her to combine the role of mother of a young child with that of a teacher. According to Gerlach (2002), teachers must work together and achieve success and understanding through teamwork.

Ayat and Jolnar met regularly for *lesson* planning as Jolnar started to teach one class of *Persian* this year. According to Belbin, a high performing team is dependent on all the team members knowing each other (Belbin, 2010, p.97).

I felt that Shima and Jolnar had to be meeting more to discuss their respective topics. I learned however from this conversation, that they were indeed meeting and discussing the cultural topics the children had to know. I was keen to emphasise the point that collaboration between the teachers was the key to this project succeeding. Shima acknowledged that this was “nice” and “it makes us a team”. This was the first time I heard the word team which was a very important development and one of my goals for this project.

The extract below was from a team meeting that occurred over a month after the meeting above (1-hour conversation with three teachers: Ayat, Shima, and Jolnar on 11/12/2016).

Shima: I feel stronger! After the project, I was persuaded that active learning methods were 'great for our students who have difficulties with the traditional way of learning. The new framework has helped me to talk about these methods and insist on applying them.

Ayat: Besides so much fun and a very meaningful experience, I have so many happy memories. I got many new ideas on how to work. Most important was the feeling in the group. The team leader skillfully used the whole year to create security and harmony in the group. The discussions we had were immense. I was enthused to improve my teaching. Now, when I plan my work in school, I have this fresh in my memory. It's a special lesson about connecting culture and the Persian language. Where in a normal Persian lesson, I will do a little bit of it. I might mention it twice in my lesson, where I can find a cultural item.

Jolnar: For my personal life, I got an energy boost that lasted for a long time. I could remember how warm the group atmosphere was when times were hard. I also try to implement a positive mentality in my personal life. In the months, an e-mail conversation developed with two other teachers, which also enriched my personal life.

Overall, teachers involved in this group project felt that professional development and learning activities had been beneficial to their practice and their schools. The teachers talked about changes to the way they worked as a result of engagement in the new framework, and of positive impacts they had on learners.

Many of the examples provided by teachers were related to the classes with which they had been involved, but they also talked about small changes made as a result of their investigation and search for information, discussions with colleagues and self-reflection.

The project showed that teachers were keen to continually make better their teaching practice and that they had seen positive impact as a result of practice development, although pursuing improvement was not

always free of barriers. Teachers highlighted several key supporting factors which helped them fulfil their commitment to becoming the best teacher they could be, including a positive working relationship with me and other colleagues within school and time to reflect on their practice.

The earlier section of this extract showed how the teachers were thinking about practical ways of sharing material and links. They were beginning to work as a team. The end revealed that teachers felt that they were now connected.

I had provided evidence that showed a group of individual teachers who at the start of this research process went about their normal day-to-day tasks but as the research progressed, they became part of a team with a joint purpose and vision. The teachers came together and we devised a plan to enhance the teaching and learning of Persian and set about putting that plan in action. We had a plan and each member of the team took on a specific position and had a specific role. The skills of each individual were important, but the strength of the team depended on how well the members worked together. I felt that the team had won several important matches but the road to winning the tournament was still in front of them. I would now like to move on to the next sub-theme that of impact. The section that follows gave the reader an understanding of the different ways the new framework impacted the teachers whilst participating in the research project.

5.4 Impact on Parents

These short extracts from sixteen parents with whom I made a semi-structured interview in the playground demonstrated that the research project was beginning to impact the parents in a small way too. For instance, Ms Soraya (the school coordinator) was asked to produce a *PTA* booklet for the parents so they could follow the service with their children. I thought that would be a good idea as there seemed to be a need for coherence and integration in all aspects of the school's life. In addition, some parents also asked Ms Ream (Islamic coordinator) if they could have a “*du ā*” (a prayer of request) booklet. It was clear that the research has begun to impact further afield.

In my informal conversations with Parents, they hold the view that apart from learning the Persian language, understanding their traditional culture, such as festivals, Persian foods and arts were also significant for their children. The connection the heritage language provided to family, community, history and culture was by far the most significant reason parents wanted their children to attend Heritage Language School. This finding was in line with the research of others who have studied the motivations of parents who send their children to Heritage Language School (Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009). Preserving family relationships was also extremely important to all parents. Similarly, but to a lesser extent, parents wanted their children to develop connections with the ethnic community; this included making friends with the

same heritage. A heritage language was seen as a necessary tool for parents, grandparents, and community members to pass on knowledge and cultural values to children.

Most of the parents I talked to noted changes in their children's language abilities, cultural understanding, attitudes, and relationships with family members after attending heritage school.

In a semi-structured interview with a family in the school office, I asked the participants about their understanding of culture and the position of culture in their language learning procedure. In the extract, F represented the father (Mr Rad), M was the mother (Mrs Rad) and Sama was their daughter, and Amin was her older brother (1-hour semi-structured interview with a family, on 18/09/2016).

Me: Well, there is another question I would like to ask. If I say 'culture', what is the first thing you will think about? What is the first thing in your mind about culture?

F: A dish?

M: Food, clothes, language

Me: What if I say 'Persian culture'?

M: Persian.

We all laughed

Sama: I think, the 'Nourouz Festival'.

Me: Oh, how do you know about the 'Nourouz Festival'?

Sama: Oh, I did a competition, we did before. We need to beat a lot of questions, and there is a lot about it.

In this extract, interviewees shared their understanding of culture with me. The information they brought up was related to food, customs, festivals and language. Sama a school student specifically mentioned the 'Nourouz Festival', and said that she was involved in a Persian competition in last year's 'Festival' which was held by the IRIS School. The event aimed to promote the Persian language and culture, and all the Persian language learners were welcome to participate. Ms Naseri, the teacher of this group of students applied for the position for them, as she believed that it was a good opportunity for students to practise what they had learnt and motivated them to study further. From the perspective of participants in this extract, culture took the position of what Holliday (1999) maintains as 'large culture' which is related to specific ethnic and national characteristics. Explorations of these characteristics of the culture of the target language

as well as developing students' cultural competence are understood as essential factors in the field of heritage language teaching and learning (Kramersch, 1993, 2005).

In the following extract, parents in the focus group told me what they think about the relationship between learning language and learning culture (1-hour discussions with Mr Afshar and his children Sara and Amin in parents' focus group, on 27/11/16).

Me: Do you think it is helpful, for you, knowing the culture? Is that helpful for you to learn the mother language?

Sara: Can be helpful. Like you call the older people 'aunt', something like that...

Amin: Er, make it more about spirit, not just about learning the word.

F: Guess it is context, I suppose

In this extract, I asked participants, especially the two children in the group whether they consider learning Persian culture was helpful for their study of the Persian Language. Sara gave me a positive answer and provided an example; she mentioned the different ways people refer to their aunts in English and Persian. In English, 'aunt' could be used to refer to many female relatives in the family. However, in Persian, there were many specific names for an aunt related to her age and whether she was on the father's side or the mother's side. Kinship terms in the Persian language allowed speakers to address a person indicating his or her status and the relationship with the family, and in Zhu words; this 'strategic use of the address terms makes the participants' social and cultural roles and identities relevant to various degrees in different contexts' (Zhu 2010). According to Zhu, the choice, and avoidance, of a particular address term, as well as the language the speaker chooses (for example, whether to address someone by his or her English or Persian name) is highly significant and carries complex cultural meanings.' (Zhu, 2010)

The example Sara provided here showed the intimate connection between language and culture, cultural awareness of the target language was essential in the processes of language teaching and learning (Kramersch, 1993, Krasner, 1999). To understand this kinship term information was important for a language learner to become an authentic Persian speaker, the choice the speaker made would illustrate their identity preference in the conversation. In this extract, Sara's brother Amin voiced a similar opinion and talked about people's spirits. Amin indicated that learning the culture of the target language was helpful for people to understand the spirit behind the language. For example, he believed that learning the Persian culture would provide more information about Persia along with the language. Amin's understanding of culture and language learning supported the argument that culture was the 'software of the mind' (Hofstede, 1991). The father

made his point clear that language had to be learnt in context, which supported the relationship between culture and language that Kramersch proposed (Kramersch, 1993, 2005).

In the following extract, a mother (Ms Asadi) in the focus group told me the reason why she sent her child to heritage language school (1-hour discussions in the focus group with parents, on 25/12/16).

M: My reason [for sending my child here] is that I am the only one who speaks to him in Persian. His father is English and so his only contact with the Persian community is here and when I talk to him in Persian at home he knows that I am not English and he answers back in English, but here he is in a situation that he has to use his Persian even though when he goes to Persia he uses it very well but he doesn't use it with me. Here it helps him in that sense and also it gives him another identity and sense of belonging and also some touch with the Persian culture and language.

Although Persian parents considered it important that their children had an opportunity to mix with children from a similar ethnic background and culture, one suggested that children also gained from being part of both (British and Persian) communities, 'I believe if they grow up in both communities they realize some important issues in a better way than just concentrating on one culture', the children who attended Persian classes were able to fully comprehend that they 'live in two cultures' and would need to learn how to 'negotiate that difficulty'. Understanding this difficulty was something which she said that the children's parents needed to take into account. Indeed, this was a major aim.

In the following extract, a member of the PTA (Mr Pooya) and a parent (Ms Kabiri) in the focus group told me about the heritage language school (1-hour discussions with parents in the focus group, on 05/02/17).

A member of PTA, Mr Pooya: I think very often there could be a difficulty that parents send their children to school, thinking that they're going to learn language X and the culture of X and that child belongs to that culture, but the fact that they live in the UK their child doesn't belong to the ... Persian culture, whatever it is. But they're having to negotiate something far more complex than a lot of parents often realise. So, one of the things we want to do at this school is to help parents learn more about where their children are coming from as well as obviously the parent's expectations of supporting the child and what the parents see as home language and culture.

A parent, Ms Kabiri: I think it's important too that our children meet together here and so now have a good time and play, not only learning, they play together.

Overall, the majority of parents interviewed saw heritage language schools as providing opportunities for pupils not only to learn Persian, but also to socialise with children from the same cultural or ethnic background, and to make new friends. In this respect heritage language schools were viewed by parents as offering social and not just academic benefits.

5.5 Impact on the Learning Environment

My first impressions of IRIS School after the change were recorded in the following observational note that I made on 25/09/16.

Most students are wearing dark blue uniforms, two boys are standing beside the front door to open it for newcomers, and greet them in Persian with warm smiles on their faces. Some Persian style decorations are hanging on the wall in the lobby, such as Persian paintings, Persian lanterns and students' calligraphy work. In addition, there are some handicrafts like copper dishes, baskets woven from thin strands of palm tree leaves, handmade cloth made from wool, some Ghalamkari cloth, a textile printed with wooden stamps, termeh, a luxurious silk cloth, pottery and ceramics and also posters standing at the side of the lobby, showing information about different historical places in Persia. Add to this some sweet-smelling Persian flowers like hyacinth, tuberose (known as Maryam, or Mary, in Persian), and daffodils. In addition to their simple beauty, these flowers which are Iranian favourites smell heavenly, with their fragrances intensifying especially at night. Include to this add a few copies of Saadi who are great poets famous among Persian People. Tie it all together with silk rugs which are Persian-inspired decor.

The extract showed how the school decorated their lobby from a visitor's eyes. This extract showed clearly the cultural elements of this school by presenting how the school decorated its lobby and how they distinguished themselves as a special Heritage Language School, which had a particular interest in teaching and learning Persian language and culture. The development of students' cultural components was considered an important factor in language education (Kramch, 1993). The cultural decorations along with some Persian culture activities such as calligraphy served to provide a learning environment for students to learn the Persian language and culture in this cultural arena.

The building of networks identified by the school coordinator (Ms Soraya) suggested IRIS Heritage Language School was particularly important for newly arrived communities and their children. (1-hour semi-structured interview with Ms Soraya, on 12/02/2017).

Me: What do you think of the newcomers? What do they usually do?

Ms Soraya, School Coordinator: Some of them do activities and community support events, Eid festivities, day trips for parents and awareness sessions and events, social events. These are the sorts of things they always do so it's a wide range and it's not only a place where kids learn during the weekends, but it's also a gathering, a network and I think that is one aspect of Heritage Language schools neglected by others ...For the Persian community, the Heritage Language school is a focal point for the community to come together and network together, and support each other and learn from each other, from their experiences. People when they come, they're always talking, they're always discussing, they're always comparing things. You know it builds relationships and networks and this Heritage Language school in this case fulfil a very important role for the Persian community [because] ... they discuss what happened to their children in schools and how they overcome their problems. They support each other in this respect ...and they've got lots of issues.

There are exclusions, there is underachievement, there are all sorts of things from the food they [their children] eat in the canteen, bullying. There are lots of issues within the educational system. There are lots of issues which affect children and parents. They're all coming together and it's a very good support mechanism for them.

In addition, I observed the following four types of culturally dependent behaviours more among the students at IRIS in the classes or the playground at the time of coming to school or going out of the school time after the start of the new framework, cultural elements such as greetings and farewells; terms of address; gratitude and apologies, and Taarof.

According to Holmes (1992:308), the way to greet a student offers a chance to build rapport between student and teacher. The handshake is the most common.

In a lesson which I observed pupils entered the classroom and greeted the teacher in the following patterns (Observation note, Ms Ayat's class on 23/10/16).

Ali H (pupil) – Salam” (hello)

Ayat (teacher), “Salamonaleikom” (hello, how are you?)

Or

Benin S (pupil) – Sobh-e Shomabekhair” (good morning)

Ayat (teacher), “Sobh- e Shoma ham bekhair” (good morning to you)

Or even

Nada S (pupil) – Vaght be Xeir. (good time)

Ayat (teacher), ‘Vaght-e shoma ham be Xeir’(good time for you)

The Persian greeting rituals carry a religious meaning based on the Quranic principle. This religious flavour might constitute untranslatable loopholes when translated into English. The following extract was drawn from an interview I arranged with culture coordinator Ms Soraya on 22/01/17.

Me: Would you please tell me more about greeting patterns in Persian culture?

Culture Coordinator: “Good morning” (sobh be Xeir), and “Good evening” (asr be Xeir) are used in Persian but not “Good noon” (zohr be xeir) and “Good afternoon” (bad azzohr be Xeir). When Persians meet for the first time, a similar phrase is used “Nice to meet you” (Xoshvaghtam or Az ashenaee ba shom axoshvaghtam), it usually includes body language such as nodding, smiling and shaking hands.

When people end a conversation, they usually say “bye,” “take care,” or “later” in English. Similar expressions are in every language. In Persian people say *khodâhâfezo* maybe even *khodânegahdâr*. That’s all well and good. I mean, they are accurate (they mean “May God protect you”) and a few variations like *Beomidedidâr* which means hope to see you soon. I heard the following parting conversations when I was standing near the entrance gate. It was leaving time around 3 pm on 09/10/16. I saw three students leaving school.

Fadak (pupil) – khodâhâfez” (Good bye)

Soraya (teacher), “khodâhâfezazizam” (Goodbye dear)

Or

Saba S (pupil) – Farda mibinamet” (See you tomorrow)

Leyla (pupil), “felan” (For now)

People in English-speaking tend to address others by their first name—e.g. John—rather than calling the person Mr Jackson. However, first name usage is unacceptable in Persian culture. One can imagine the reactions of adults if a child were to call a grandparent by his or her first name, or a student to do the same in addressing a teacher in such a “rude” manner.

In Persian, the behaviour of addressing members of one’s family, relatives or close neighbours is as “Hasan agha” (Mr Hassan), “Zahra Xanom” (Mrs Zahra), “AbjeeMolouk” (sister Molouk), “Dadash Amin” (Brother Amin), and “Baba Reza” (Father Reza). In Persian, a person’s title, office, or occupation is not used as a form of address, for example, Raees Lona (chair Lona), or Modeer Ream (principal Ream). “Aghay Mustafa (Mr Mustafa),” “KhanomeMaha (Mrs Maha)” or “Miss Saja” is a form of addressing in Persian.

I heard the following conversations when I was standing in the playground. It was break time around 11 am on 06/11/16. I listened to two dialogues between students.

Nazanin (pupil) – *salam aghaye Sobhani*” (Hello Mr Sobhani)

Mr Sobhani (teacher), “*salam azizam*” (Hello dear)

Or

Yasmin (pupil) – *Moelem-e shoma key miad*” (When the teacher comes)

Zeinab (pupil), “*Xanome Rezaih amishe deer miad*” (Mrs Rezai always comes late)

Also, Persian has expressions for gratitude, apologies, and remarks preceding a request; for example, there are: "Moteshakkeram, Moteassefam, Bebaxsheed..." (Thank you, I'm sorry, Excuse me). For favours like borrowing a pencil, polite expressions like *Lotfan* (Please) is used. Replies to “Thank you” are similar. In the Persian language, the most common is “Not at all,” “Don’t mention it,” “You’re welcome,” “*Xaheshmeekonam*,” “*Harfesh ham nazaneed*, and ”,“ *Ghabelinadasht*.”

I heard the following mini conversations when I was walking in the corridor. It was during the break time around 12.30 on 20/11/16. I listened to two dialogues between teachers with teachers or teachers with students.

Ayat, Teacher; *Befarmaeed*: (Please go ahead)

Jolnar, Teacher; *Chera zahmat keshidid*: (Why did you go through so much trouble?)

Shima, Teacher; *Daste shoma dardnakone*: (Hope your hands don’t hurt which is used as a “Thank you”)

Ream, Teacher; *Sare shoma dard nakone*: (Hope your head doesn’t ache and is used as “You’re welcome”)

Hannan, Teacher; *Salam beresoonid*: (Say hello to. The teacher tells her student to say hello to her mother)

Fatima, Pupil; *Bozorgitooon ro miresoonam*: (This phrase is a common response to the phrase above and means I’d say of your greatness).

Mr Behrooz, Deputy Teacher; *Salam beresoonid*: (Say hello to. He tells one student to say hello to his father).

Reza, Pupil; *Chashm*: (Literally meaning on my eyes and the phrase is used instead of ok; I’ll do it)

Mr Behrooz, Deputy Teacher; *Cheshmetooon bi bala*: (Sometimes the phrase above is responded by this phrase meaning No calamity on your eye)

The concept of “Taarof” is also an important one in Persian culture which should be considered here. It is a cultural phenomenon that consists of refusing something out of politeness that has been offered to you even though you want it. On the giving end, it is offering something that may cost a lot to be polite, but not wanting to give it away for free. According to Beeman (1986:56) “Taarof” is an extremely difficult concept in Persian, “encompassing a broad complex of behaviours that mark and underscore differences in social status.” According to Amouzade (2001:9), Persian “Taarof” constitutes an abstract basis for polite conversations. He asserts that “Taarof” is a central concept of politeness in Persian.

“Taarof” becomes a ritual guideline. It is an unwritten rule to assert that kindness between people is most important. Some find it annoying, stupid, and a waste of time, even to the point of asking the guest not to “Taarof” (“Taarof Nakonid”) when he refuses something. This is a double-edged sword because maybe the person offering the help is “taarof’ing” himself. This is where “Taarof” can be misleading and land you in sticky social situations. You never know the true intention of the giver of kindness. One of Prophet Muhammad’s saying is, the best of people is those who help people. They want to offer something for free. I heard the following conversation between a teacher (Mrs Naseri) and a student. It was during lunchtime around 1 pm in the canteen on 18/12/16. I listened to their conversation.

Mrs Naseri: This is a very beautiful dress. Did your sister sew it for you?

B: Yes.

A: Well done. What an artist.

B: It’s not as skilful as your sewing.

A: Thanks, but it’s not true. She is a professional who has surpassed me. I have become old.

B: You are welcome. I take my hat off to you.

A: Your hair is very nice. You are beautiful so anything suits you.

B: Beauty comes from your eyes.

5.6 Impact on daily school activities

After the implementation of the new framework, the daily program at IRIS School was as follows:

I took this observational note on 18/09/16:

Each school day in IRIS school after the change of curriculum starts with a ritualistic event in the assembly, in which the children demonstrate their understanding of Persian Language and Persian

Culture through drama, presentations, poetry and music. Afterwards, the students disperse to their classrooms until lunchtime. While they are in class, a teacher is on duty and waits outside the hall in case her help is needed. Most parents wait in the library and socialize by talking and drinking tea or going shopping and sightseeing. They come back for lunchtime with food for their children and socialize with other parents during that time. In the lunchroom, there is homemade Persian food, and drinks available for the schools' members. All of the food available is sold to the school clientele for low prices and proceeds go to supplement the school budget. This is the only break that the students take throughout the entire day. They unwind with activities like playing and running in the yard, which gets overcrowded during lunchtime. After lunch music education starts. Here, the room dividers are opened and the children come together to sing Persian songs accompanied on piano by the music teacher. They sing marches, patriotic songs, and folk songs from Persia. All classes last until 4 p.m. The children's parents or relatives come to get them after school. If the students are members of the Nasheet group or if they need to attend a rehearsal for an upcoming show, they stay at school and practice until 6 p.m. Teachers hold their weekly meeting after school, staying until 7 p.m. or later. The school also offers an opportunity for all its pupils to get involved with Persian culture by observing Persian arts, customs and traditions through photography and participating in Norouz photographic competition. In addition, the school will celebrate key Persian Festivals including ChaharShanbeSouri, Norouz, Sizda Be Dar and Shab e Yalda with the wider community. In addition to educational practices, certain routines are also followed, the most striking of which is the teachers greeting students the first thing in the morning in class. The students are required to stand up as the teacher enters the room and are reminded to stand if they fail to do so.

In contrast to the routines discussed above, rituals are “made up of routines, but ... are given far greater cultural significance for being part of a ritual context. Two kinds of rituals could be observed every school day:

- Persian national songs or religious songs said at the beginning of each school day, and
- National and religious holiday ceremonies.

The school celebrated some of the Persian national and religious events, as well as other days noted in the Persian calendar, with a ceremony. Many ceremonies were held during the school year, and the students performed in each of them. About three weeks before each ceremony, the teachers allocated a considerable amount of class time to prepare for student performances. They also frequently talked in classes about the approaching event, what it meant, how it had started to be observed in their home country. Right after one

event was celebrated, preparations for the next event would start. In this way, the students got used to the frequency of ceremonies. An example is recorded in the following note on 04/06/2017.

On June 4th, the commemoration of Imam, a ceremony was held. Chairs for the audience were set up in the second-floor hall. In front of the audience was a podium for speakers. Behind the podium hung a large portrait of Imam. To the left of the podium stood the Persian flag. All the audience wore Imam's pictures or brooches on their collars. The ceremony started with the playing of an audio-taped recording of the Imam's speech on the occasion of the anniversary of Independence Day. Then a moment of silence was observed in memory of Imam. After singing the Persian national song, school administrators made speeches. The last speech was made by the principal, followed by student performances including reading classic poems and essays written by the students themselves. In this specific event, all the speeches and student performances were about Imam, his character, success and principles. Some of the titles of poems read by the students were: [Remembering Imam], [Thank You Very Much, My Imam]. Afterwards, school songs about Imam were sung by the school choir. At other celebrations, the flow of the ceremony would be similar but also include dance performances such as folk dances or group dance shows. The children and audience would be dressed in the colours of the Persian flag. Since the June 4th event was a memorial event, no dances were performed.

I had given the reader a glimpse of the impact that the teachers in the new framework had had beyond the classes. I examined four different areas which had been impacted already by the research project, namely, school daily activities, the educational environment, the parents and finally the future continuation of the integration. Without the team, this research could not and would not have happened. All the teachers took a leap of faith with me and together we embarked on an incredible journey.

5.7 Teachers Reflection

I agree with John Dewey, (1938) in saying 'we do not learn from experience.... we learn from reflecting on experience.' As the Lifelong Learning UK Standard make clear, reflection is a core component of effective continuing professional development and key to becoming a skilled teacher. A Teacher has provided their reflection, evaluation and analysis. They assert practices are necessary elements of professional development.

Therefore, in my meetings with teachers, we thought that we needed to identify what needed to be changed. Accordingly, to be critical, and reflective on their teaching experiences in the heritage school, our teachers used a variety of ways, including self-reflection, observation and collaboration.

(1) Self-reflection

My teachers said that they carried out at least some self-reflection on their teaching and their lessons regularly. They told me that in most cases this was an informal, personal exercise carried out quite soon after a lesson was completed, and this tended to be about how the lesson went, rather than the quality of the teaching. For instance, Ms Ayat year 6 teacher with over 20 years of experience in an informal conversation with me on 19/02/17 explained that:

Ayat: Self-reflection is my main way of identifying areas for improvement. After lessons, I will routinely ask myself what went well, what didn't go so well, and plan [and] think about improvements to create a better lesson.

Ms Jolnar another year 6 teacher said that reflection on lessons and lesson plans was a part of school policy and was encouraged by the school and the feedback was collated centrally. She told me in conversation feedback on 19/02/17 that:

Jolnar: We are encouraged on our lesson plans, after the lesson to write a note about how the lesson went... our lesson plans go on a system in the school, on the lesson plan there is an assessment note which states, you are encouraged to reflect on the lessons.

Ms Shima the other teacher mentioned that self-reflection was an approach that had been developed as part of their teacher training in PGCE course at the school of education at the University of Roehampton and she had carried on doing it since completing her training. Ms Shima year 5 teacher told me in a conversation feedback meeting on the same day that:

I use self-reflection a lot, it's something that I think about, it's something when I was doing my PGCE, it's ingrained a lot and it's something that's carried through because it's automatic almost because I do it so much. It's necessary to take a step back and pause to reflect on what's working what's not.

I constantly reminded my teachers that reflection was a process of self-examination and self-evaluation in which effective teachers regularly engaged to improve their professional practices. Accordingly, as I advised my teachers before, they used a kind of diary to write down notes from their observations or feedback from students after each lesson describing reactions, feelings, lesson objectives, materials, classroom management, and any observations about students. Then, as I had told them, they analysed the information and figured out what needed to be changed, by finding solutions through talking to colleagues or going online to find a technique to remedy the problem or interact with other experienced teachers on

social media sites. I always reminded them that the ultimate goal of self-reflection was to improve what they teach. Through the findings they gathered, they might gain the insight they needed to take their teaching to the proverbial next level.

Overall, teachers had seen reflection on their teaching as a method of assessing where they were going right, and where there were gaps.

(2) Observation

The second technique of teachers to be critical, and reflective on their teaching experiences was observation. In a meeting that I had with teachers, they said that they had experienced observations from me, in a recent project. On the whole, observation was perceived to be useful in their views; however, this depended on the type and amount of feedback received from me. It was important to teachers that the feedback was positive, clear and at a level of detail where the teacher can improve. We found observation a useful approach that could not only highlight areas for them to improve but also areas in which they were doing well.

The feedback from an observer was particularly helpful in identifying areas that the teacher was not aware of, as highlighted by Ayat in a conversation with me in my office on 12/02/2017:

Ayat: it was useful for me to point out things I hadn't noticed or even things that had gone well which I hadn't realised, it's interesting to know if there is something I'm doing that I hadn't realised - that I'm not targeting a child, or it's better if I did something differently, anything useful - especially if it allows you to adapt and support the children's learning.

Shima: I have recently done an internal observation for the first time and I think it was quite helpful because I got to see how someone else would work on a topic that I was doing.

As one of my research techniques, I was using observations regularly and systematically as a form of professional development that improved teaching practices and student performance and this to me, was a very important form of professional development. Accordingly, our teachers who had been able to observe a colleague teaching were positive about the experience. This was especially the case where teachers were able to observe each other by giving the same lesson. I thought that teachers learned more from observations if they were carried out in a real, practical, immediately relevant situation.

3) Collaboration

The third method that my teachers used to be critical, and reflective on their teaching experiences was collaboration. Currently, teachers were often expected to improve their teaching as well as to enhance student learning through mutual experience-sharing and collective learning in school teaching teams. As mentioned, our regular meetings were crucial for teacher collaborations. We found that certain barriers to teacher collaborations were inadequate focuses during team discussions and a lack of effective coordination

between members of the team, and discussions only focusing on superficial issues. However, through experience-sharing, the participants of this research considered that a focus on student learning during discussions and examples of practices for course leadership were the key aspects for successful experiences in teacher collaborations in this project. Another approach to identify areas for improvement included collaborating with colleagues. In particular, reflecting on practice and discussing it with colleagues was highlighted as a useful tool by the teachers, and as described here by them in a joint meeting that I had with them in my office on 05/02/17:

Shima: You do bounce quite a lot of things off each other and you do get new ideas from that and think about what you've done and how you could adapt it and all those sorts of things. So, I do think that's quite an important one, it's quite an organic one.

Ayat: People plan in different ways, don't they? ... It's impossible to restrict people to one planning format. There are certain things you have to put into plans such as ... what are the learning outcomes, how you are going to assess it, that kind of thing ... But as long as the teaching is effective in joint planning, and the learning is good then I think you should be allowed to have some flexibility.

Jolnar: I didn't find it important to meet and to prepare topics together before this project. I had a very individual way of working and it was more efficient when I prepared on my own ... At the beginning of this project, it was praised so much by the researcher to find other teachers with whom to plan all the lesson plans. I tried that... I appreciate it here, the balance, as I always know what topics Ayat and Shima are working on ... we talk a lot about school together, for example how you integrate culture and language - over some time, rather than trying to cram everything into one lesson which is being observed.

Within our school improvement strategies, teachers' teamwork was seen as crucial. Therefore, in this project and in developing the new pedagogy framework, I tried to promote a new understanding of teachers working together, and joint planning, as well as in peer observation, and teamwork.

Overall, self-reflection, observation feedbacks, and discussion with colleagues tended to be the approaches that teachers said they used the most often to identify where they needed to make changes to their teaching practice. Sometimes, teachers said that they preferred informal feedback. Informal discussions with colleagues were also common because they could take place every day - for example during coffee breaks and in between lessons – it was not an activity that required extensive organisation or resources. It did, however, still require time, and this was an issue identified by some teachers. It was therefore apt now to enter into the world of the learners and gain an insight into the impact the research has had on them.

Summary

During my research process, I captured a vast amount of qualitative data such as lesson observations; professional conversations and interviews with teachers; and the teachers completed reflection sheets.

I analysed the data set from the teaching perspectives and the learning. From the teaching perspective, I examined two main themes: This exploration charted the journey of the teachers first as individuals and discovered how the research project impacted them personally and professionally. I then examined the movement from individual to that of the team and explored the development of the collaboration between the teachers. I finally examined the impact the team had on their Year group learners as well as on the wider school community.

It was also about exposing practitioners invested in the Persian language teaching and learning field to a new narrative and fresh possibilities. Moreover, it was concerned with empowering and working in partnership with them.

The data also indicated that the teachers were becoming more reflective in their practice; they were able to reflect openly about their pedagogy as well as being able to reflect upon the learners' abilities and progress.

In brief, the evidence suggested that the research project brought about a significant shift in the teachers' thinking of the teaching and learning of Persian and their practice. They experienced the importance of integrating culture and language from their perspective and that of the learners.

In the next chapter, we will enter into the world of the learners and gain an insight into the impact the research has had on them.

CHAPTER SIX

Key Project Findings

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the key findings of the research undertaken during the action research of my project. The findings will be presented from the learning perspective. The chapter will explore the main themes that emerged from the data and give a detailed report of the analysis and findings. The chapter will end by giving a summary of all the findings.

6.2 Overview

As previously mentioned, the primary aim of this research project was to enhance the teaching and learning of Persian as a heritage language and to investigate the contribution of the cultural syllabus to the development of linguistic and cultural knowledge of heritage learners. To remind, and in Sedighi, (2010) words heritage learners are different from both foreign learners of Persian and native speakers of Persian.

To do this, I employed two main types of research methods and techniques; namely, classroom observations, and focus groups to get information regarding the above aims.

The main participants of the investigation in the learning perspective were a group of 10 to 12 years-old children. This group of heritage speakers (see appendix) consisted of 75 Persian-English bilinguals (boys $n = 35$ and girls $n = 40$; mean age: 10.3) who have been living in the UK for different lengths of time (mean: 6.9 years). In addition, the reason for choosing heritage speakers from this age range was that children at this age connected with peers and adults, and they went through “tough assimilative pressure” (Hinton, 1999, p. 5) mainly find themselves from peers at school. A similar view is presented by the publication of Harris in 1995. The method I used to preserve anonymity and confidentiality was the use of pseudonyms (fake name instead of real name) for all participants and also for the location of the research. Therefore, the names given throughout this research are all fake names.

Eleven of the heritage speakers were born in the UK where English is the dominant language, while the others moved here at different ages. Among the heritage speakers, four emigrated to the second language environment before the age of three. Heritage speakers are considered to be bilinguals only if their exposure to the second language started after the age of three (Montrul, 2008).

To implement the cultural course, the class met once a week (Sundays from 10 to 11) for 60 minutes over 20 weeks in two terms. The course syllabus included lessons in four language skills and some cultural elements, such as proverbs, existing in Persian culture. These elements were scattered in each lesson throughout the term. The course, in which the research was carried out, was a cultural syllabus course, which specifically aimed to offer some culture-specific items to students, focusing on cultural issues

existing in the Persian language. The course syllabus was introduced to the participants at the beginning of the term, week one. The tasks, objectives, classroom activities were displayed in the appendix.

I analysed the data set from the learning perspective. The data for the learning perspective comprised the observations inside and outside the classrooms and the focus group discussions. In my role as *observer-participant* and as *participant-observer*, the classroom observations that I conducted provided a check of the teachers' and the learners' experiences of the lesson from my perspective. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p.4), such analysis is a flexible and useful research tool and a method for "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns, which "can potentially provide a rich and detailed account of data".

6.3 Impact on Learning

The term learning refers to changes that are occurring concerning the skill, understandings, or attitudes of learners. Accordingly, I used different procedures in this research to track changes over time in the competencies of our learners at IRIS School.

Therefore, the main theme that I analysed in this section from the learners' perspective was to what extent the pedagogic intervention (Persian cultural syllabus) had impacted upon learners' skills to make links between culture and language. In their attitudes, it meant to the extent to which they had a positive attitude to learning Persian. And in their understandings, it meant to the extent to which they knew that the culture learning and the language learning were the same.

Furthermore, this theme analysed what factors helped the acquisition of Persian. Within this, I examined the many different strategies and techniques the learners had employed to aid their understanding and mastery of skills. I also analysed the feelings and attitudes the learners attributed to Persian language learning.

6.3.1 Persian Cultural syllabus: A Framework

From the above background, I developed a course syllabus based on Persian culture. The course focused on the enhancement and enrichment of Persian heritage language and culture for heritage learners through a new pedagogical framework.

In this framework, course content created an educational link between culture and language which helped to reinforce the cultural identity of the learners. The most fundamental goal of the course syllabus was unity. Unity for the benefit of children, families, and the community.

In this course, the learners were well-grounded in the cultural heritage and traditions of Persian culture, and knew and understood the cultural values of Persian culture and could actively participate and engage effectively in various cultural environments.

With this cultural syllabus, the learners could gain a sense of identity and linkage with the past. In addition, the cultural content focused on the more intangible aspects of Persian cultures such as symbolism, values-systems, and beliefs and tangible aspects of cultures such as religion, works of art, and artefacts. Therefore, the contents along with cultural elements were organized around processes for acquiring cultural knowledge and skills.

This section of my research project illustrated the influence of cultural knowledge on learning language skills through the data collected from students attending culture classes. I had tried to find out what students thought about the effects of the culture class they attended in the 2016 – 2017 academic year. During this course, lecture-type sessions, role-playing and discussions, as well as project presentations were held. Year 5 and 6 students taking this class assessed the course, responding to four questions and their teachers responding to one open-ended question.

I asked the students in the focus group (n = 18) who were involved in the project four questions aimed to assess these themes: (1) *language skill*, (2) *cultural awareness*, (3) *attitude towards Persian culture*, and their teachers (n=3) the fifth item (4) *contribution to the teaching profession*.

In the first two items I asked the students whether the culture course provided any kind of contribution to any of their language skill(s), and if so, which particular skill(s) was/were improved compared to others. The second theme aimed to investigate if the students had become more aware of Persian culture's characteristics. The third theme was concerned with the attitude change in the students towards the Persian culture. The last theme assesses the contribution of a culture class to the teachers' prospective teaching profession. This theme aims to collect as much information as possible. The nature of any feedback should consider the teaching profession.

The responses of the students were analysed, and results and their interpretations were presented in tables below, referring to each item.

| Theme 1 and 2: Language Skill | | | | |
|---|--|------------------|------------------|----------|
| Item | | Responses | % | |
| I am wondering to ask whether this course contributes to any of your language skills. | | Yes | 100 | |
| | | No | 0 | |
| Item | | Responses | Frequency | % |
| To which skill did the course contribute most? | | Reading | 5 | 27.7 |
| | | Writing | 2 | 11.1 |

| | | | | | |
|--|--|-----------|---|------|--|
| | | Listening | 5 | 27.7 | |
| | | Speaking | 6 | 33.3 | |

I began my question with the item asking whether the culture course contributed to any of the language skills of the students. All of the 18 (100%) participants gave affirmative answers to this item, which suggested that although developing language skills was not the major objective of the course, it influenced these skills positively. Table 1 above clearly illustrates the results received for this item. Regarding the skill improved most, the participants, by 33.3% expressed views suggesting that their speaking skill was significantly improved. Reading and listening skills came next by 27.7% each, and writing by a small 11.1%.

Since the course was mainly presentation based, the participants spent a lot of time conducting discussions and presentation projects. Therefore, both the presenters and the rest of the class practised speaking since they discussed cultural topics in the Persian language.

One of the main objectives of the culture class was to raise awareness of language learners about the Persian culture. In Table 2 below, the participants expressed views regarding awareness-raising of their Persian culture.

| Theme 3: Cultural Awareness | | | |
|---|-----------|-----------|------|
| Item | Responses | Frequency | % |
| Did this course help you raise awareness about Persian culture? | Yes | 14 | 77.7 |
| | No | 4 | 22.2 |

The result for this item suggests that the course achieved one of its goals to a great extent. Nearly 77% of the students felt such awareness.

Culture classes could be considered as one means to change the language learner. The fourth item investigated if the participants were able to observe such a transformation in their attitudes towards Persian culture.

| Theme 4: Attitude towards Persian Culture | | | |
|--|-----------|-----------|------|
| Item | Responses | Frequency | % |
| | Yes | 15 | 83.3 |

| | | | | |
|---|----|---|------|--|
| Did your attitude towards Persian culture change at the end of this course? | No | 3 | 16.6 | |
|---|----|---|------|--|

Having a look at Table 3 above, we could see that nearly 83% of the participants expressed positive thoughts regarding their attitude toward Persian culture. The culture course seemed to have succeeded in accomplishing a task with such an improvement effect.

The last item asked teachers if and how the culture class would contribute to their teaching career. The responses which were taken in a joint meeting with them on 05/02/17 could be grouped in six points below:

| Theme 5: Contribution to Teaching Profession |
|---|
| <p><i>Ayat</i></p> <p><i>Point 1: Teaching language is also teaching culture. I will teach my language as well as the culture of my language.</i></p> <p><i>Point 2: Familiarization with the target society. I will be able to answer the questions of my students about the Persian community and I will be able to answer the questions of my students about cultural topics</i></p> <p><i>Shima</i></p> <p><i>Point 3: Assistance in teaching grammar. While teaching grammar I will be able to provide genuine examples from the lives of Persian people.</i></p> <p><i>Point 4: Enhancing communicative competence in Persian. I had the opportunity to use Persian a lot; thus, I think my students feel more confident in speaking Persian.</i></p> <p><i>Jolnar</i></p> <p><i>Point 5: Expanding vocabulary. Cultural knowledge will play a role in my teaching and learning new items. My students' vocabulary was expanded significantly due to the culture class.</i></p> <p><i>Point 6: Providing information before a visit to Persia. In case I or my students visit Persia, we will not have a culture shock.</i></p> |

The findings suggested that culture class was significantly beneficial in terms of language skills, raising cultural awareness, changing attitudes towards Persian culture, and contribution to the teaching profession. As the findings indicate, teachers have a positive attitude when cultural content is used. They refer to their childhood days and what was the best teacher they had. However, a gap was observed between what teachers believe about teaching culture and what they practiced in heritage classrooms.

It was also found that for teachers developing cultural awareness meant enhancing students' knowledge of the target culture rather than developing their skills.

Concerning the main obstacles facing teachers in developing cultural awareness in heritage classrooms, the findings made it clear that "shortage of time" and lack of teacher training in how to deal with cultural content and lack of suitable strategies and clear goals were critical concerns (Gonen&Saglam, 2012).

6.3.2 Prior Cultural Knowledge

Recent studies indicated that without enough background cultural knowledge or making connections between prior and new knowledge, the readers could not realize the deep meaning of texts (Novak, 2002). Accordingly, in this section of the research, I tried to examine the effect of cultural background knowledge teaching on the reading comprehension ability of our heritage language learners in the new framework.

According to Ruthemsey (2011), 'cultural knowledge helps readers to reconstruct the text directing to more personally and culturally relevant prints. And as Rumelhart, (1985) states "in teaching reading, the teacher should teach the background knowledge first so that students equipped with such knowledge will be about to guess the meaning from the printed page". According to Celce-Murica, (2001) cultural teaching goes beyond instruction, it is embedded in behaviour. Context- and culture-specific connotations and implications of word and phrase meanings also need to be addressed. However, she adds that socio-cultural meanings and values greatly affect a learner's ability to comprehend text and the context in which it is employed. In texts, such as those from advanced print, culture-specific references and symbolism play a big role. Most importantly, however, the teaching of culture and its impact on text comprehension needs to be addressed at all levels of proficiency to build learners' awareness. Without this, few texts are understandable (pp.452-453).

In other words, it is reasonable to say that reading is an active process, or to be more exact, an interactive process. Print and background knowledge is required in reading.

Therefore, the purpose of this section of the cultural syllabus course was to investigate the effect of cultural background knowledge teaching on the reading comprehension ability of Persian heritage learners. The teachers helped the learners to construct related knowledge through activities at the pre-stage reading. They used questioning, brainstorming, and pre-discussing as simple and efficient pre-reading activities. Through questioning at the pre-reading stage, our teachers created an active classroom atmosphere and arouse students' reading interest which made students prone to use their previous knowledge. These questions help the reader focus his attention on what he is reading, they provide for useful reading. In addition, brainstorming involved students listing concepts or ideas or facts or feelings relevant to some topic or context.

As mentioned earlier, this research was conducted at IRIS School and the participants were seventy-five low-intermediate students of primary level studying Persian in this school. For instruments, I constructed

ten reading comprehension passages with some questions as the main texts. The content of passages was exactly based on the cultural contents in the cultural syllabus.

In general, when students come to levels 5 and 6 in language learning, they already possess knowledge, skills, and beliefs that significantly influence how they think about the world, or approach new learning (Novak, 1994). Therefore, we tried to help children to construct prior knowledge regarding cultural elements in the passages through pre-reading activities and then enabled them to find meaning for the new ideas by relating them to ideas they already understood.

In these sessions, our teachers asked students to examine together the title of the selection they were about to read. The teacher listed on the board all the information that came to mind as students read the title. These pieces of information were then used to further recall, and in the process, considerable knowledge would be activated. It created an atmosphere for students to choose previous background knowledge from the brain. Reading under the guidance of the teacher and discussing with partners were all effective on-class activities that benefited the development of students' reading abilities.

The teachers presented selected reading passages with pre-reading knowledge cultural warm-up activities which were designed to activate the cultural background knowledge of students and some later culture-bound questions. For example, if the cultural content of a reading passage was Nowruz, (Persian New Year) they provided their students with background knowledge of Nowruz customs and Persian beliefs in this regard.

During the class times, the teachers made their students familiar with Persian culture. And the students enjoyed the advantages of cultural warm-up activities which were designed to activate the cultural background knowledge of students.

At the end of each session, in the focus group and my observations during the class times, I wanted to see whether this programme had any influence on their reading comprehension ability. Data were collected after each class observation I made from the 18 students in the focus group during the course.

The results showed that the students performed differently, which indicated that familiarity with specific culturally-oriented language reading text would improve Persian learners' reading comprehension ability. According to the results of this research, cultural background knowledge instruction had a significant effect on the reading ability of Persian heritage learners. Cultural background knowledge instruction about Persian holidays, wedding customs, ways of life and relationships would help readers more and more to realize the main ideas of Persian passages on these contents.

The following extracts were from a semi-structured interview in the focus group that I had with children after my class observation on 06/11/16.

Me: *What did you like most about this course?*

A: Wow! This was an amazing class, and I am so happy to have taken it.

B: The whole course is like a dream- a good one. It's everything you could have asked for and then at the end of it, you want it to go on for a bit more.

C: Overall very happy with the course and the number of topics covered

D: A lot of work, but worth it

E: Overall good course

F: Good course. But sometimes I felt like it is designed to be unnecessarily time-consuming.

G: The topics discussed are very interesting. A big thanks to

H: Active class, energetic teacher

J: Content was relevant

K: A great personality, is really funny, and includes a lot of references to movies, TV shows, current events, and other things that keep me focused.

L: Enjoyed the course, and with more in the future

M: The course is very interesting and informative. It helped me understand all the.....

N: Is easy, to sum up—Excellent!

The feedback of students showed that the majority of the students found reading class without using cultural elements quite boring. Most of them said that in class they were passive receivers of what the teacher said and they seldom thought of themselves. The percentage of decrease is 79% to 34% for the class when the teachers employed a theoretical lesson plan. 63% of them say they participate more in reading classes since there are a growing number of activities provided by their teachers, which require individual or group efforts. The response from the teachers is also positive, and all of them find their classes are more active than before. The findings of the focus group indicate that most of the respondents approve of the extensive employment of various activities based on schema theory.

Ayat: Needless to say, culture teaching is an essential supplement for language teaching, which enables students to experience pleasure from language learning.

Shima: The material itself was fascinating, I loved almost every topic that we covered. I liked a lot about this class, however, one thing stood out above the rest...The Haft Seen Projects. These were by far the most interesting part of the class; my only regret is that we didn't get to do all of them because of a shortage of time.

Jolnar: It was by far the best class I have ever taught at IRIS. Not only was the topic interesting, but I taught the class in an extremely interesting and engaging manner. For a class that could have easily been another monotonous language, I taught an interesting content in a masterful way, which was unlike any other language class I've taught in which more stress was placed on being interested in the content, which led to understanding the content, I loved the depth and interest regarding the course material. The atmosphere was very welcoming and relaxed which resulted in hyper attention followed by drowsiness.

To conclude, cultural background knowledge teaching has an important effect on reading ability among students. In another word, having a strong cultural knowledge would improve reading comprehension ability. This is in line with Damen's (1987) view that classroom-based learning can only reflect and integrate cultural facts rather than the dynamic view of culture.

This section has given the reader an insight into the many different strategies and techniques that the learners and I employed to aid Persian acquisition.

I would now like to proceed to the theme, of cultural background knowledge.

6.3.3 Cultural background knowledge construction

As films in Persian were easily available, so the utilisation of films had become a technique for me and my team to teach language and culture in the new framework at IRIS School. Our students also had a strong desire to understand films in the Persian language. I used films as a strategy because most films were rich in linguistic content and cultural backgrounds. In addition, characters in films provided a variety of authentic speech, and language was introduced in the real context and in various communicative situations and between speakers of different kinds, therefore, students could learn how people communicate in real situations. Meanwhile, the themes, conversations and actions in films also mirrored the habits, beliefs, and customs of Persian culture, which could serve as a good introduction to the various cultural characteristics in Persia.

As Robert Watson (1990, p.3.) stated, “the culture provided by all the mass media, but particularly by film and television, represents the most significant environmental factor that teachers have to take into account”. Therefore, one of the ways to teach culture to students who did not have the chance to experience culture in Persia, I thought, was to ask them to watch films. Lacking the possibility of travelling the world with my students to seek opportunities to engage in “cultural experiences,” I realized that film, as authentic material, with the appropriate adaptation and guidance, can provide a powerful tool to project rich and genuine insight into a culture.

As a result, knowing the advantages of using films to teach culture, and the entertainment value of films and their strong impact on the students’ process of learning, I incorporated films into the language class to motivate students’ interest in learning, and to make lessons more interesting and to nurture students’ understanding of the Persian culture.

In this section, I discussed and demonstrated how films in the new framework had become an effective platform for students to immerse themselves in the Persian culture, broaden their geographical knowledge of Persia, and observe the socio-linguistic, socio-economic, socio-political, and educational issues in Persia.

Accordingly, I had carefully selected some Persian films as a means of imparting cultural values at different proficiency levels of instruction (from intermediate to advanced levels). I believed that the use of films in the process of teaching and learning could reinforce class activities such as role-playing, discussions, and debating, as well as out-of-class activities.

The lesson plans which we prepared for the films were concise, yet contain different kinds of activities, which supported the speaking, listening, writing and reading skills. The discussions and role-plays and debates around cultural topics also could enhance students’ cultural understanding.

Similarly, the interview sessions gave the students a chance to speak and listen to Persian native speakers. Thus, students’ listening and speaking skills were enhanced. Moreover, the written report based on the interview enhanced students’ writing skills. Additionally, the reading skill was also enhanced when the students were asked to read reading material related to the film discussed.

On the other hand, the time allocated for the classroom activities was used efficiently since some of the activities such as watching films, conducting interviews, and writing reports were done outside the classroom. For the films, students were not allowed to watch them with English subtitles. This was to give students a chance to develop their strategy in inferring the meanings of difficult words.

In conclusion, I would highlight three factors described in this section. First, watching films gave students exposure to many aspects of Persia and its culture (geographical, sociolinguistic, socio-economic, socio-political and educational). Second, the lesson plans enhanced the four skills in learning the language. An active lesson when children use time in class is the best form of learning.

These combined with the learning strategy taught, and the interactive and communicative way of learning illustrated how we used films in an innovative way for teaching the Persian language and constructing cultural background knowledge.

In this section, I introduced some of the Persian films which we used in our programme. At the end of each film, I wanted to learn if my students had gained something from these activities. I asked them to share what they had learned about Persian culture and if their perception of the culture had changed. I received many different answers; some encouraged me. Many of the students had become even more interested in Persian culture and wanted to experience Persia in person.

Film 1: Norooz, Somewhere Else نوروز جایی دیگر



This documentary film was assigned for students reading lower intermediate levels. At this level, the students were only asked to watch the film and write an analysis (minimum 300 words) of the film in the Persian language. In this way, besides learning about the Persian culture, the students' listening and writing skills were also enhanced.

From this documentary, our students learned a depiction of Persians, their motivation and conduct of keeping their culture alive. According to the film, the day on which the spring season starts is reminiscent of Persia. 'Norooz' (meaning 'New Day') is more than a New Year celebration. It is the celebration of new life, rebirth and hope. The focus is to hold on to remains of the ancient Persian culture, celebrating Norooz more or less for Persian identity.

Here are some comments on this issue from students:

Mona, year 6 student: I didn't celebrate Nowruz as I didn't know about it much, but I celebrate Easter. It's celebrated in Spring, but there isn't an exact date for this holiday. A few days before Easter, people paint and decorate eggs in different colours and then we eat them. We also play a game called "knocking". Two people take two eggs and knock them and the winner is the person, whose egg isn't cracked. After watching the film, I found that Nowruz is fun! In Nowruz, we have two weeks holiday as well... One of the characters of this occasion is Amo Nowruz.

Mahla, year 6 student: Thanks for this wonderful topic it surprised me... I'm Persian and we celebrate our new year "Nowruz" like the people in the film. But I learned more about it. Ohhh... It's so nice to know that Nowruz is coming up. It's the most fascinating holiday of the year that you can make all the difficulties of the last year go. A really special time to forgive or to be forgiven.

We celebrate Nowruz every year and we have fun with the family. In these 13 days off, we have parties, picnics and so many enjoyable events. I hope you have a happy holiday and new year.

Tina, year 6 student: In my family, Nowruz is not celebrated (My father is English). This is the first time I have watched a film about Nowruz. But it sounds amazing. It seems happy and meaningful day too. By watching this film, I can know different festivals around the world. I loved Persian classes because I can learn a lot of things I have never heard.

Film 2: Iran Documentary (in Persian: Mostanad-e-Iran)

This is a television series produced by the IRIB that shows the beauties of Iran and its history. The series contained everything about Tehran, Isfahan, Kashan, Persepolis (Takht-e-Jamshid), Shiraz, Mashhad, Qom, Yazd and Kerman.

From watching the film “**Iran Documentary**” the students realized the vastness of Persia. When the main characters in the film travelled from West to East, students realized that the distance from the cities is large, about 1000 kilometres. The film is an eye-opener for the students where they learn about the diversity of nature in Persia. Here are some of the students’ comments.

Atena, year 7 student: It shows how big Persia is as a country when the kids travelled from Tabriz to the village and Zahedan.

Elna, year 7 student: Persia is a large country. To travel from one city to another is a time-consuming process and they have to take trains.

Ahora, year 7 student: By showing the vast fields and mountains of Persia, I am in awe of the depth of heterogeneity that is present within Persia. It is a fresh change of scenery because whenever I think of Persia, the first picture that springs to mind is that of the urbanized city of Tehran. This movie reminds me of the presence of Mahabad, which is a strong contrast to the fast-paced, noisy lifestyle of Tehran as the people of Mahabad live a more relaxing, slower pace of life and are closer to Mother Nature as compared to the city dwellers in Tehran. I think that it is a good movie that showcases the side of Persia that is seldom made known to outsiders, and it is important for us as students learning Persia to learn to appreciate the many sides of Persia.

Film 3: Children of Heaven (Bachcheh-hā-ye āsemān),



This film was assigned for students reading lower intermediate levels. At this level, the students were only asked to watch the film and write an analysis (minimum 300 words) of the film in the Persian language. In this way, besides learning about the Persian culture, the students' listening and writing skills were also enhanced.

“Children of Heaven” students learned about a home without sadness, about a brother and sister who love and care for their mum and dad. The film showed routines in working-class people and, at the same time, in one sequence, into a breathtakingly privileged neighbourhood, the film offered our students with its gentle, relaxed style, that life is sweet despite countless hardships.”

Here are some comments on this issue from students:

Poua; year 5 student: *"Children of Heaven" is about a home without unhappiness. It is about a brother and sister who love one another, instead of fighting. About situations, any child can identify with. In this Persian film, I found a sweetness and innocence that shames the land of Mutant Turtles, Power Rangers and violent video games.*

Elnaz; year 6 student: *Some universal values can be drawn from the story. In the first place, being poor materially does not always mean being poor mentally and morally. The father of the poor boy taught the boy to live honestly and to never steal anything from others, even though they were very poor. In the second place, it is important to be realistic and optimistic in life, no matter how hard things appear to be. When one of the slum dwellers found that the government had destroyed their slums, he comforted the boy, whose parents had been taken away by the police, by saying that wherever there is the sky, there will always be a place for him to stay.*

Film 4: Bashu, (the Little Stranger (باشو غریبه کوچک)



This film was also assigned for intermediate students. After the teacher asked basic questions about the plot of the film, there were discussions about the culture and traditions in Gilan (North of Persia) society, the life of a stranger in the village.

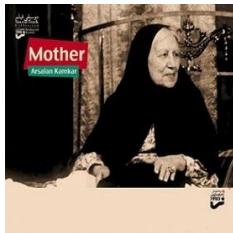
Our students learned about the climate, geography, different languages and ethnicity in this film. The location of the film was from southern Persia along the Persian Gulf, and in a flaming village the camera

picks up a small boy after passing through vast stretches of desert to the verdant rural far North around the Caspian Sea. The beautiful shots of northern Persia were breathtaking and surely inspired wanderlust for many. Within the folds of *Bashu*'s was a complex and thought-provoking tension between interlocking identities, and questions of race, gender, class, and nation. Constantly, his blackness became a point of reference for his being and Otherness. Moreover, language demonstrated that Persian, while the official language of Persia, did not characterize all Persians – both in terms of ethnicity and gender.

Shima, year 6 teacher: *Bashu explores the possibility of communication across linguistic, geographical, and ethnic divides to construct the Persian identity that is conscious of its diversity. While pointing to language and ethnicity as markers of otherness in the existing nation structure, the film follows the process that transforms Bashu's Otherness into sameness for Na'i and the villagers as well.*

Yekta, year 6 student: *The film gives us exposure to the variants in pronunciation of Persian vowel /a/ in different parts of Persia. My linguistic knowledge is broadened by knowing it.*

Film 5: Mother (Persian: مادر, Madar)



In this film students also learnt about some Persian beliefs as the old nanny always taught the rich boy to pray, to surrender one's soul to the One who gives life, before going to bed. The Persians also believe that one never can change one's fate because life is predestined. One has to know what he/she is and what situation he/she faces. The movie reflects some unique and traditional Persian values such as love of mother, affection and emotion and family relationships.

Our students learned a lot from this film as for Persians, this was a part of Persia's national heritage. It was a part of Persian culture and Persian identity. Many argue that the mother in this movie symbolized Persia and the children were its different social classes or races. This film was almost too Persians. Many symbols, words and dialogues in this film were meaningless outside of the Persian social context. The story of "Mother", also allowed to be developed with more sentimental aspects of the Persian literature and culture.

Jolnar, Persian Teacher: Madar is a part of Persia's national heritage. A part of Persian culture and Persian identity. Many argue that the mother in this movie symbolizes Persia and the children are its different social classes or races.

Ayat, language teacher: Many symbols, words and dialogues in this movie is meaningless outside of the Persian social context. Madaris was full of untranslatable lines. This is a bitter phrase from the movie which says in Persian words: "از بس که جان ندارد مادر مرد". How would one translate this to English? "Mother is dead. Because of how much she does not have life" is the best I can, and I know I have failed miserably.

Saba, year 6 student: From the film, I could observe the cultural aspects from the actors and actresses as well as songs. For example, through the conversation and action, I noticed the way Persian people respect elder people. I learned the way of using colloquial words through film.

Aryan, year 6 student: The use of colloquial words like "Doret Begardam literary: let me circle around you" always catches my attention. Because I always want to know how it was used in real life.

Savin, year 6 student: I suppose learning colloquial words help me to communicate with Persian People at a higher comfort level because from what I understand, standard Persian is primarily written.

Reza, year 6 student: I learnt about how Persian people behave to communicate using facial expressions and body language. For example, through the conversation and action, I noticed the way Persian people respect elder people.

I found some advantages of using films in our language classes. As has been mentioned in the discussion section, I observed that films were an effective platform for the students to be immersed in the culture or way of life of the Persian people. It broadened their geographical knowledge about Persia, they gave them exposure to the sociolinguistic issues, socio-economics and socio-political situations and also educational issues in Persia.

Besides those factors mentioned above, Persian films also provided strong motivation for students to learn the language and culture because they could learn in more interesting ways compared to the traditional way. Films could furnish background knowledge of Persian as well, as noted by some students. Some students said that film facilitated effective learning. According to them, some concepts were easily understood by watching a film rather than by using other media of teaching such as reading materials or books. In addition, it was a more interesting way to learn since it was a kind of entertainment as well, as the students commented below:

Soraya, a teacher: The film can motivate students' interest in understanding the target culture. If we use film rather than notes in our classes, it is already an interesting way of learning. It seems more real. Melika, year 7 student: I think that I know better of Persian People after watching the films.

Besides, the films also provide good background knowledge of Persian People which is harder to know through readings.

Hamed, year 7 student: The exposure from a film is much greater than what you can learn from books in two hours. This is because the film covers the myriad aspects of Persian life in the short duration of the show, and it enables us to learn more about them.

Apart from what has been discussed above, I found that watching Persian films also enhanced our students' language skills. From twelve students in the focus group, six students believed that by watching the films, their listening skills were enhanced; four students said that they developed their listening, speaking and writing skills; two students mentioned that their listening, speaking and reading skills were enhanced.

I found that teachers played a vital role in choosing films that were to be discussed in class. If chosen correctly, films could furnish students with background knowledge of the target culture and provide educational opportunities for students to witness non-verbal behaviours as they observed native speakers in authentic settings, speaking with different accents, facial expressions, gestures, and subtleties of attitude which could not be easily explained in words.

In conclusion, this section argued that films played a vital role in furnishing our students with background knowledge of the Persian community, provided strong motivation for them to learn the Persian language and culture, deepen their understanding of moral values of the Persian language speakers, and stimulated our students' empathy towards Persian community, in addition to enhancing our students' language skills through creative activities such as discussions, role-playing, and debates. I would now like to proceed to the next theme, of meaning-making.

6.4 Impact on attitudes, motivations and dispositions of students

The presence or absence of specific attitudes and motivations will enhance the learners' capacity to learn. Accordingly, I examined the feelings and attitudes of learners about learning Persian culture and language. Therefore, I asked the children involved in the project two main questions. I asked them how it made them feel when they worked out the cultural points and how they felt when they learned Persian.

Question 1: How much do you enjoy your Persian language school?

Hassan, year 6 student: I did not enjoy Persian at all in school because classes were based on doing grammar drills. However, nowadays I developed a passion for learning Persian. I enjoyed it. Nowadays I listen to audiobooks, watch interesting Persian films, and read whatever stuff I get my hands on.

Majid, year 6 student: I didn't mind the Persian language but I hated Persian class because it had very little to do with the language, or even with literature. Most of the class time was based on grammar. I

remember the first sentence I learnt when I was in school, it was: "Look at number one, what it is?" Regarding the literature aspect, it was pretty crap. Even when we read Gholestan(Great Persian Literary Book) no one read it because the teacher handed out "summary notes" which had the plot summed up in modern language, which is all you need to know to pass. The teacher was very pleasant but the class was somewhat boring. However, this year, the Persian class was just packed full of things like creating "static images", "analysing" films, designing advertisements, talking about random stuff like music, teacher starts discussing this and that but not discussing only the language itself. We studied grammar for only a few weeks total during 2 years, and that was in chunks of 1-week sessions. One of the problems was that success in the class seemed to depend on previous knowledge rather than just on something that was being taught.

I was surprised to find the spread of opinion in the responses. Most pupils expressed enjoyment. This could be due to the very nature of the new framework. My discussions with pupils have found two mindsets when attending weekend schooling. Number one, it is an opportunity to meet with friends to enjoy the experience as nothing more than a leisurely meeting up of classmates. The second is that it is an attempt to become fluent in Persian to take a GCSE in Persian or to become fluent in Persian to use when visiting Persia. However, as the intrinsic motivation of students was enhanced when learning Persian, I found that their learning tasks and activities were perceived as being interesting and personally meaningful and presented at the proper level of difficulty, not too difficult to create frustration, not too easy to lead to boredom.

I searched through all 18 students interview transcripts in the focus group (FG), the range of responses fell into three groups: positive, neutral and negative. (The table in Appendix N shows the words, sentiments and phrases that were expressed. Their occurrence is given in brackets). I have included here some of the contextual conversations along with the transcripts conveying these different sentiments for the reader.

The extracts from FG students have highlighted an interesting range of meanings, feelings, values and attitudes that the learners have attributed to Persian learning. The reasons given for feeling positive towards Persian learning include statements about learning something new, sense of accomplishment, sharing this knowledge with others, using the language as a communicative tool when in Persia or with Persian family and the value of learning another language as a value in itself.

There were also several neutral statements expressed which were more prevalent in Term Three. One learner said, "It doesn't make me that happy because it's just culture" indicating perhaps that at this stage culture did not hold much fascination for her, or she had 'mastered the skills.

On the more negative side, I got an insight into some learners who found the process of Persian learning quite difficult, yet with help, they were able to succeed. There also was a child who was feeling “left out” because she did not know the answer straight away when doing the exercise in the FG. Furthermore, the child who knew an answer, but was not chosen by her teacher to share the knowledge, perhaps was having a sense of frustration and unfairness.

Another thread that emerged from these extracts was the learners’ perception of their abilities. Statements such as “it gives me pride. Because (long pause) because, um, sometimes I think I can't accomplish things but I really can, so, it makes me feel proud of myself” and “because to some people, everything is hard, and something people everything is easy. And I'm one of the people who's right in the middle. So, it's sometimes hard and sometimes easy. Because I'm not that good at Persian”. For these children, the sense of accomplishment when they achieved something was difficult, perhaps even greater than for those who ‘find’ things quite easy.

6.5 Persian Language and Persian Cultural awareness

This final section gave a brief insight into the question of whether Persian provided a gateway to the learners’ religious and cultural awareness. My ontological stance was that the Persian in heritage language schools should be viewed and taught as a cultural language rather than just as a second language. In so doing then, the children involved in the research project have been exposed to different aspects of the Islamic values and Persian culture in IRIS to maintain the language and form and promote cultural awareness.

Overall, the extracts I highlighted, demonstrated that the Persians played a significant role in their Islamic lives. The ‘language’ they used to describe the ‘world’ around them expressed this fact. I searched the occurrence of certain words that I deem to have a connection with aspects of the learners’ religious and cultural awareness. The word Persia, Islam, Namaaz(Salah, prayer), Quran(Muslim Holy Book), family, religion and Islamic education were among them. In addition, the children were very familiar with Islamic and Persian terms such as The **Hajj** (/hædʒ/; Arabic: حج "pilgrimage"), Salam (Hello), Masjed (Mosque) and the **Adhan (Islamic call for Prayer)**, and Dua (a prayer of request). They also mentioned different Persian festivals, such as **Nowruz** (Persian: نوروز, pronounced [now'ru:z](Persian New Year) and **Eid al-Ghadir** (Islamic Celebration). Furthermore, they were familiar with many Persian songs either learned in culture classes or sung in assembly.

Question 6: How do you greet your teacher or fellow pupil when seeing them?

Amir Mahdi, year 6 student: Salām means “hi,” or “hello.” I use it when I meet someone or enter a room with people in it. I can use it as a greeting almost anywhere. After Salām, I almost always say “how are you?” when I greet friends or close relatives. Every day, we can hear this way of conversation.

Shima, Persian teacher: In formal situations, Persian people of the same gender commonly greet each other by shaking hands. If we meet our friend, we hug and kiss each other on both cheeks

57 per cent of children greet their teacher or fellow pupil by saying ‘salamalaykom’. Salam alaykom is the customary way Muslim people greet each other. It means, may peace be with you. It is a high percentage of school children. However, the answers I presented might be incorrect. It would have been better if I had included the colloquial term ‘salam’ and ‘chitori’.

Question 7: How do you end a conversation with your teacher or fellow pupil?

Anita, year 6 student: I mostly use (khodahafez), (خداحافظ), it’s a formal way that means “God keep you safe” but when we want to say this word informally, I pronounce it like (khoda fez). Sometimes I say (Khodanegahdar), (خدانگهدار). It is also a formal word that means like the first one.

50 per cent of children answered ‘khoda hafiz’. ‘Khoda hafiz’ is the Persian for God to protect you. This question is partnered with question 8, however, the number of possible answers is higher. The 5th answer might have resulted in the smaller majority of 45 per cent. Nonetheless, I will use the results of this question.

Question 8: How do you address your teacher?

Parisa, year 6 student: I use Āghâ. It is a title of respect, like “Sir” or “Mr.” It’s the most general title that can be used in any situation. Āghâ-ye + last name (i.e., Āghâ-ye Mahdavi) (more formal) Ostâd is a professor or teacher. If someone has a formal education, he is: Ostâd + last name (i.e., Ostâd Mahdavi)

I use Khânum. It is the most common title as it means “lady, wife, Mrs., Ms., and Miss.”

Khânum-e + last name (i.e., Khânum-e Hatami)

The answers were split into 2 main categories. 31 per cent of pupils answered that they refer to their teacher by stating ‘sir/miss’, with the other 56 per cent answering ‘agha/khanoum’. ‘Agha and khanoum mean sir

and madam in the Persian language. This supports the assertion that the children at IRIS Persian School have mannerisms that are more enhanced.

In undertaking this research project, I began by asking how current practice in teaching the Persian language might be improved. I then studied the relevant literature and researched to select an approach that might improve current practice. I used IRIS School as the research site, I asked the teachers teach heritage language in a different way to determine which had the greatest effect on student learning.

The following extract is from an interview that I have done with an eleven years old girl called Mina held before the class started. In this extract, Mina answered my question about her preference for traditional Persian festivals and English festivals.

Me: Mina, what are your thoughts on traditional Persian and English festivals? Which one is more interesting to you?

Mina: Err; I think I was more interested in English festivals. Like Christmas, everybody knows Christmas - Christmas trees, Christmas gifts. These are things we all know. And I can discuss these with my friends. But, like Norouz Festival, now, I know some, but... my friends, my English friends, do know about it, but not that much. We cannot talk about it, so...

This extract showed that compared to the Norouz festival, Mina was more familiar with Christmas. The reason was that she could talk about this with her friends at English school because they had a common understanding of these festivals and they could share some similar experiences. Holliday (2010) argues that ‘being part of one cultural reality does not close off membership and indeed ownership of another. Individuals can have the capacity to feel a belonging to several cultural realities simultaneously.’ According to Goodenough, (1994) “in the language classroom, culture and language are both considered products shaped by human activities”.

A similar story happened in the conversation between me and students in the classroom in the next extract. It was in the break time of the study, I tried to talk to a student sitting next to me, and some other students spontaneously joined our conversation later.

Me: What do you think of Persian traditional culture, such as Nourouz festivals?

Shayan, year 3 student: I think it is OK... I don't know very much.

Me: What do you think, er, compared to festivals like Christmas and Nourouz Festival? Which festival do you think is more important?

Shayan: Christmas. You get more presents.

Me: How about the Nourouz festival? Don't you get gifts with money?

Shayan: When I... Every Christmas or birthday, I get gifts as well.

Me: Haha, okay

Shayan: I think I get it all the time, like Christmas, birthdays...

In this extract, Shayan said he did not know very much about Persian culture, and he considered Christmas to be more important than the Nourouz festival because he would get more presents at that time. I referred to the 'gift packet' which is one of the Persian traditional customs associated with the Nowruz festival. However, Shayan did not share my feelings about this gift packet, as the cultural universe in which he grew up did not apply this meaning to the gift packet. For Shayan, there was not a clear boundary between Persian culture and English culture. Intercultural communication becomes a resource for these children to create their own third culture. With this in mind, the functions of culture in the Heritage Language Schools go beyond just inherited traditions. Students' intercultural communicative competence should become another focus in the classroom.

The following extract is an example that illustrates how the teacher and students communicated with each other and created their own culture.

The topic of this class is the 'Yalda-Night festival' (It is about the longest night of the year). After practising the new words in the textbook, Ms Ayat tried to explain some customs that people do in this festival in Persia. She also reminded students of some other folk stories they had discussed before, particularly the folk story about a monster called 'NanehSarma' of the Nowrouz festival. Hedyeh asked if the monster is a lion, then:

Hedyeh: Is 'NanehSarma' a lion?

Ayat: No, it is not a lion; it has nothing to do with a lion. About lions, when I am talking about the lion, I'll always mean the Persian lion. In the Persian culture, the lion is different from the western idea of a lion, completely different. The Persian lion is an imaginary creature, something like, er, the head of the deer, the animal, the body of a snake, the claw of eagles, the scale of fish and the tail of a horse. So, it is like a combination of imagination, a picture. In the Persian culture, people

like it, because it is a kind of representation of the Persian idea of braveness and power. It is not like the black lion in the western culture, being evil...

Hedyeh: So, you are not trying to kill it?

(Students laughing)

Ayat: No, we are not trying to kill it.

The data revealed that the integration of culture and language played a significant role in the learners' cultural awareness. This connection between culture and language and the learners' cultural awareness was evident by the language the learners used to describe the world around them. In addition, the evidence has corroborated with my ontological stance that Persian should be viewed and therefore taught as a cultural language rather than just as another language for Persian immigrant children.

In this part of the project, I attempted to better understand to what degree children maintain their cultural awareness using cultural tools such as language, cuisine, media, family and friends, and religion. As Persia is rich in history and Persian people are very proud of their culture, the majority of the participants in this research either continue to or desire to maintain some part of their Persian culture.

Learning Persian culture reinforced our students' understanding of the world and cultivated their cultural awareness. Culture learning was informative, as well as interesting, which covered language, culture, custom, ethics, science, social issues, etc. Our students were exposed to various information which appealed to their taste. And what they learned would be of great use in their daily life. As a result, their interest in learning and their motive and desire to communicate in the Persian language were aroused.

This study has been my journey originated by a love for the Persian language that has been the motivating force for this Doctorate and, in particular, this research project.

However, there was considerable variation in the 'journeys' undertaken by the five participant teachers through this project experience. The five teachers' experiences who were involved in the programme can be represented as a continuum, with a life-changing impact at one end, a pedestrian experience at the other. Nevertheless, the cultural syllabus has made a tremendous impact on the heritage language teaching practice in IRIS School in general and has changed the way teachers and learners view the world and themselves in particular. The main areas of impact found in the data extended to (a) teachers' personal development; (b) teachers' professional development; (c) impact on learners; (d) impact on the educational environment; and (e) aspects relating to the wider community.

7.3.1 Impact on teachers and learners

I have demonstrated that it is normally the principal who strongly influences the likelihood of change and can have a major impact on the implementation process. However, in Fullan's words, (1991, p.77) in fact, teachers may have a "greater sense of efficacy, which leads them to take action and persist in the effort required to bring about successful implementation'. I concluded that teachers who were part of the research process were taking a very active role in implementing these changes and influencing other members of the school staff.

According to Fullan (1991, p.37), there are "at least three components in implementing educational change." These components are the possible use of new or revised materials (such as teaching resources), the possible use of new teaching approaches (such as new teaching strategies or activities) and the possible alteration of beliefs (such as pedagogical assumptions).

From the learners' perspective, ability to make links between culture and language (skills) the extent to which students have a positive attitude to learning Persian (attitude) the extent to which they know that the culture learning and the language learning are the same (understanding) also, factors enhancing the teaching and learning of Persian language (Persian acquisition).

This research was conducted with 75 primary students intending to learn Persian as a heritage language. The reason for selecting this sample group was due to convenience as they were accessible to the researcher (Friedman 2012:186). The participants, who took part voluntarily in the focus group throughout the research, were composed of 6 male and 12 female students, ranging from 10 and 11 years old and 5 teachers.

Teachers involved in the project acknowledged that they had benefited considerably from the project, although the degree of impact varied. The perspective of the majority was that impact of the teamwork had been substantial, sustained and relevant to subsequent teaching practice. This is a fundamentally optimistic picture of Professional Development and is in line with researchers such as Powell et al (2003).

Successful change more than other things requires an alteration in people's belief systems. I would claim that a key accomplishment of the present project is the deep impact that changed the teachers' beliefs and values system; changed their teaching methods; developed their reflective skills and critical thinking skills; and identified this research project as a key developmental experience. The sense of accomplishment I felt at the end of this project was due in part to the considerable time I spent with the teachers in changing the way they perceived the teaching and learning of Persian. They needed to understand that integrating cultural elements with the Persian language could enhance the teaching and learning of Persian in a

significant way. Only once this had been achieved there could be a change in teaching resources and teaching approaches.

In general, teachers' motivation could be categorised into three broad types: extrinsic motivation, relating to institutions; extrinsic motivation, for personal reasons; and intrinsic motivation. In this project, I found that teachers who gave detailed reasons describe a teaching philosophy that should be used in IRIS. Those teachers who had intrinsic motivation for being in the project were almost willing to learn from the outset. However, those whose arrival on the programme was for extrinsic reasons often develop this 'willingness' during the project.

I also found that those teachers who already had a strong professional self-identity before coming on the programme, and were, therefore, more confident of their skills, were least likely to describe 'deep' impact, and more likely to describe clashes of perspective with the team leader. In this sense, the project appears to function better for those seeking a stronger sense of professional identity. However, I stress here that substantial prior teaching experience, before coming into the project, was the vital foundation for learning.

I found that feedback on teaching observation was seen as a key learning tool, but the quality of feedback often came in for criticism. Some teachers identified a lack of balance between the positive and the negative, and many felt that positive feedback was as vital in language teaching. But I also found that mentoring support, both during and following the class time, was relevant and valuable for the teachers.

Teachers believed that a 'good' team leader would be an excellent model, enthusiastic about the project, providing good positive feedback and a lot of support, and inspirational to the teachers. On the contrary, if the team leader himself was not engaged or only gave lectures, and tended mainly to give negative feedback, then the team leader was judged 'Poor'. Thus, the requirements of a team leader, if the programme is to run successfully, are much more than technical competence in their field of education.

Teamwork was also seen as very important in a successful programme. Some teachers even said that their learning from other teachers was the most important aspect of their development. This connects with writings by the prominent Day (1999). Dadds (1997) and Eraut (1994) have also written on the subject matter. Teacher cohesion is important in a headteacher making a school successful.

My research highlighted the fact that those involved in language teaching and learning would greatly benefit from understanding and learning about language theory. It positively impacted the learners and teachers. My research highlighted Krashen (2009) as one of the leading lights in language acquisition theory. His theory and different hypotheses had a great influence on me professionally and I had used his work extensively to continue to inform and question my work and that of others.

I believe that culture teaching is not an independent course, but an integral component of language teaching. Therefore, to arouse students' interest in learning a language, I and the teachers involved in the new framework tried to introduce cultural knowledge in an interesting and naturally occurring context. As set out in Chapter 4, teachers used activities such as role-playing about some interesting stories, tales, fables, legends, or making cultural festivals to serve this purpose. For instance, having introduced some basic knowledge of Nowruz (New Year celebration), teachers guided students to celebrate the festival how Persian people do.

In the light of findings from this project, I also found that discussion was one of the best ways to help students acquire cultural knowledge. When processing the intensive reading and extensive reading texts, teachers spent as much time as possible on the ideas, ethics, values or customs, and the like embodied in them and organized discussion. It needs to be pointed out that discussion shouldn't simply be the teacher telling students a body of information, but should be an interactive procedure, in which the teacher and students talk about a given topic.

Furthermore, I used some selected films inside and outside classes to aid culture teaching. Most movies were rich in linguistic content and cultural backgrounds as well. Characters in movies provided a variety of authentic speech for children. The language was introduced in the context and in various communicative situations and between speakers of different kinds, therefore, students learned how those people in the culture communicate in real situations. Meanwhile, the themes, conversations and actions in movies mirrored the habits, beliefs, and customs of the culture, which could serve as a good introduction to the various cultural characteristics in Persia. Students who were involved in this project and watched Persian movies improved their all four language skills, especially their listening and speaking skills faster than others. Watching films gave our students an accurate image of how Persian people speak. They got to notice particular expressions, accents and tones of voice that helped them understand more about the cultural environment of the Persian language.

The programme had an impact on the number of our students reading. They now spent considerably more time reading in their heritage language than before. Specifically, fifty per cent of them spent at least one hour per week reading in Persian outside of class.

As another technique, before each class, I asked the teachers to give students one or two topics related to cultural knowledge and encourage them to surf the internet for some relative information. Therefore, our students found deeper reasons behind the Persian language, they found how the Persians act, how they live, what they eat, what their beliefs and traditions were. All these details gave them a new perspective on the Persian language and allowed them to learn faster.

A learner's motivation by self-teaching is the truest form of learning. In addition, motivation can be performance-oriented, for example, to get a good grade or learning-oriented, for example, to satisfy curiosity or to master challenging material. In this framework, we enhanced the second by making the tasks and activities more interesting and meaningful and presenting them at the proper level of difficulty.

In addition, I could observe directly the practical skills that the students acquired due to their engagement in the new framework, they:

- developed cultural competence and ability to successfully communicate within a heritage cultural environment
- enjoyed reading the authentic materials in the syllabus and the freedom to practise the heritage language in discussing interesting topics
- developed their linguistic competence, improved their linguistic skills (reading authentic materials, writing on interesting topics, speaking, etc.), gained fluency
- Practised research and presentation skills (collecting and processing information, interviews, speaking in front of an audience, role play.)

However, there were some indirect influences on the students participating in the lessons, more subtle changes in their life philosophies. These are some of the qualities that were aimed at:

- adaptability to changes in their host and Persian heritage culture
- tolerance while working in teams, they learned to listen more attentively to each other, to respect each other's opinion, team-work
- ice-breaking experience changed the atmosphere in class, improved relations with other students, fostered new respect for teachers who teach interesting lessons in an enjoyable way
- emotional connection to the material, the satisfaction of a challenge
- Students' attitudes to work changed as a result of comparing a variety of cultures.

Culture is a fundamental building block of knowing who you are. The development of a strong cultural identity is essential to an individual's sense of self (Educators' Guide Framework p23)

Accordingly, my research shows that when asked about their heritage, often students in the focus group or while interviewing expressed a sense of pride and deep belonging to their heritage and culture. Moreover, I found that more than any other institution, except the family, heritage schools have the potential to shape and nurture the cultural awareness of children.

Overall, I found that heritage schools like IRIS are good in helping children thrive in a safe place of learning. Linguistic identities produce better prospects for our children. Students were not the only ones affected by the changed approach to culture. Some changes can be observed in the teachers as well. The experience affected them on two levels: as professionals and personally. Their professional growth can be better understood if we list some of the possible problems identified at the first meeting. Despite their willingness, the participants expressed a lot of concerns such as:

- lack of authentic materials, teachers do not have a syllabus to teach from
- no reward for the students who thrive and the teachers who perform
- lack of interest and motivation
- lack of confidence in dealing with sensitive topics
- lack of suitability of lessons and topics to students' age group and language abilities
- curriculum constraints

Teaching the lessons had a mixed bag of emotions for teachers. It enriched them, provided them with many opportunities for growth and improvement in their professional capacity, helped to overcome the problems envisioned in the beginning, and also brought to the surface other unforeseen problems.

- Timing – difficult to plan
- Sensitive topics – not all students felt comfortable with discussing them; some refused to voice their attitude on certain topics.
- Danger of imposing your ideas; evaluate phenomena instead of objectively comparing them.
- Lack of up-to-date information (Non- Profit Schools in Persia) – there were questions about the Persian school system that the teacher was unable to answer.

In addition, collaborative course syllabus development such as planning materials, finding the best teaching methods, finding resource materials and assessment tools provided a unique opportunity for these teachers to work together and to delve deeply into teaching the Persian language. Also, within the scope of a professional growth plan, our five teachers undertook a range of professional learning activities including trying out new practices in the classroom. Teachers were engaged in a research project in their classrooms and it helped them identify which techniques worked best for heritage students and might teach a concept in different ways. This gives the greatest effect on student learning.

The cultural syllabus gave teachers an insight into their new role as culture teachers – as mediators and monitors of the process of teaching culture and not only providers of knowledge. However, they supplied

ideas on selecting and adapting materials that provoke students' interest. In addition, they improved classroom dynamics and classroom management. Furthermore, they learned how to design their lesson around skills. Finally, they found a fascinating connection between teaching 'pure' language plus culture plus life- skills.

The new framework- the cultural syllabus- changed the five teachers in the programme on a personal level as well. Teachers:

- gained confidence
- improved relations with colleagues, more teamwork (they observed each other, discussed possible problems)
- became more tolerant of others and "otherness"
- increased their cultural awareness.

On the whole, teachers reported positive benefits from involvement in professional and personal development activities. I have to mention a key point here that the impact of the project is determined not solely by the project itself but also by important pre-and post-project factors.

The most common reasons parents mentioned for pursuing heritage language maintenance included cultural awareness and communication.

Summary

In this research, I aimed to figure out the efficacy of the suggested culture-oriented syllabus framework. Thus, the participants, whether teachers or learners were requested to put forth their views about activities that were specifically designed for the course. My findings indicated that the participants were introduced to the new cultural elements through the activities in which they were engaged. About activities implemented in the course, it was found that the participants were satisfied to a great extent, and as heritage language teachers, they stated that they would like to implement them in their future careers.

In the context of the Persian Language School, parents, teachers and students need to negotiate an understanding of culture with more tolerance, which allows young people to understand the culture from their perspective. It could also be said that cultural background knowledge played an important positive role in students' achievement in all language skills.

Repeatedly, the parents expressed their strong beliefs that acquisition and maintenance of the heritage language enable their children to develop and keep their cultural connections as Persians.

Learning was enhanced because students had the opportunity to interact and collaborate with others on instructional tasks. In IRIS we encouraged collaboration among peers, such as those in real situations, and learn by observing others. This research demonstrated that opportunities for students to articulate their ideas to peers and to hear and discuss others' ideas in the context of the classroom were particularly effective in bringing about conceptual change.

Effective teaching involves gauging what learners already know to build on that knowledge. (Novak, 2002).

I also found that the main reason why the majority of parents sent their children to a Heritage Language school like IRIS was that they wanted to ensure that their children did not lose touch with their cultural or religious identities, historically or linguistically.

A heritage learner acquires their language from their home and community (Kondo-Brown 2003). One of the major differences between the acquisition of a heritage language and that of a foreign language is that the former begins at home while the latter begins in classrooms (Sedighi, 2010). For instance, Persian heritage gets their language by being stronger with spoken language. Persian foreign language learners prefer classrooms. They prefer writing the language.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusions, and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

This chapter provides conclusions and recommendations in light of the research findings for those working in teaching Persian as a heritage language and involved in Persian educational research. Another part of this chapter will be an insight into the personal and professional journey that I have undertaken. In addition, some implications and opportunities for future research will be addressed.

7.2 Overview

My research focused on teaching the Persian language to students with Persian background or second-generation living in the UK in one heritage language school where I was and continue to be a headteacher. My objective aim was to find more about the characteristics of heritage Persian speakers and their linguistics abilities and attitudes to impact positively on the children's general attainment in the Persian language.

It has been argued in the literature (Chapter 2) that Persian heritage language learners exhibit different attributes than both native speakers of the Persian language and foreign-language learners mainly because they have learned the language through different sources and at different times in their lives. According to Sedighi (2010) heritage learners are different from both foreign learners of Persian and native speakers of Persian. Therefore, it is not surprising that heritage language teaching requires courses and materials different from those designed for second/foreign language teaching or those which native speakers are taught in primary schools in Persia.

With this in mind, I have created a new framework, namely, the cultural syllabus to fill in this gap and to propose a way of integrating the teaching of culture with language. It proceeds from my belief that language is part of a culture and to participate meaningfully in an inter/intra-cultural context, one needs to possess knowledge as well as skills for effective communication. Linguistic performance alone without cultural awareness does not warrant this success – an aspect that has long been neglected by our educational system.

Accordingly, my cultural syllabus promotes a new understanding of culture teaching in terms of what and how to teach. The word “what” is concerned with the provision of information but with developing cultural awareness. Such awareness as stated in the syllabus grows out of a combination of knowledge and skills. Moreover, the cultural syllabus provides not only the aims of cultural education but also proposes a new methodology for achieving these aims through “how”.

To start this framework, I have run a series of meetings with five teachers in the heritage IRIS School to enable them to use the cultural syllabus creatively and through changing their views on the teaching of culture and improving their classroom behaviour to contribute to a large-scale process of change in heritage language education.

As stated in the introduction Chapter, this research was carried out in the heritage IRIS School where I am the headteacher. However, although there were several advantages of data collection in my role as an insider-researcher, I had to take into account my status as the headteacher and other disadvantages that might affect the process of data collection. As indicated, I made good use of these advantages in collecting the data, but I tried to overcome the disadvantages by taking a preventative approach. In addition, I did consider all the ethical issues which were inseparable from any research effort. First of all, I gave informed consent to all participants. Furthermore, voluntary participation was assured and the possibility of withdrawal from the research at any time without any penalty. Moreover, I emphasised that confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained. (Full explanation in Chapter 3)

I got my data, drawn from a case study which include classroom observations, and interviews with students, and reflective notes on the interviews and observations. To get better results, I evaluated literature, interviewed parents of heritage students and conducted classroom observations. I also worked with teachers who have had some experience in teaching the Persian language and professional training. The focus group which I had with students helped evaluate the impact of teacher education and our cultural syllabus in students' Persian Language learning. During the data collection periods, I travelled around the school, talked to participants and observed classes. As a researcher, I carried my desire to learn from experienced teachers and contribute to the field of teaching and learning the Persian language with me, and I am also a part of this research. Finally, in the end, I have offered my recommendations to improve the heritage programme for heritage language teachers, policymakers, and materials developers.

Studies carried out by Kafipour, and Jahansooz, (2017), Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) support the positive impact of cultural familiarity in the culturally-oriented syllabus for language learning enhancement in heritage language contexts. The language learners trying to learn a language in culturally-based textbooks and materials reach more successful results when compared with those doing the same exercise within culture-free textbooks.

7.3 Conclusions

As stated before, the primary aim of this research project was to enhance the teaching and learning of Persian as a heritage language in a Persian Heritage language school by integrating culture with language.

In other words, this research project was used to investigate the contribution of the cultural syllabus to the development of linguistic and cultural knowledge of heritage learners. In addition, it aimed to investigate the relationship between Persian Heritage Language and its effect on improving the cultural awareness of the second and third - generation Persian - British in London. The second goal was to investigate parents' attitudes toward Persian maintenance in the U.K. and shed light on difficulties associated with language maintenance, both at home and in Persian heritage language school.

To do this, I started to conduct a participatory action research project, through the lens of ethnography. I employed four main types of research methods and techniques; namely, classroom observations, focus groups, feedback interviews or conversations and reflection sheets.

7.3.1 Impact on Participants

As shown above, in Chapter Four, three groups of participants took part in this research. The main participants of the investigation were a group of 10-12-year-old children. This group of heritage speakers (see appendix) consisted of 75 Persian-English bilinguals (boys $n = 35$ and girls $n = 40$; mean age: 10.3) who have been living in the UK for different lengths of time (mean: 6.9 years). The second group consisted of 5 monolingual Persian teachers in the UK. The third group of participants were sixteen Persian parents who were born in Persia and immigrated to the UK at different ages.

Table 1 – A summary of participants

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| The first group of participants | 75 children of 10 – 12 years old in level 5 or 6 in Persian School |
| The second group of participants | 5 Persian teachers |
| The third group of participants | 16 Parents |

To implement the cultural course, the class met once a week (Sundays from 10 to 11) for 60 minutes over 20 weeks in two terms. The course syllabus included lessons in four language skills and some cultural elements, such as proverbs, existing in Persian culture. These elements were scattered in each lesson throughout the term. The course, in which the research was carried out, was a cultural syllabus course, which specifically aimed to offer some culture-specific items to students, focusing on cultural issues existing in the Persian language.

7.3.2 Thematic Analysis

During my research process, I captured a vast amount of qualitative data: lesson observations; focus groups with children; professional conversations and interviews; and the teachers who participated in the research

project completed reflection sheets. I chose Thematic Analysis (hereafter referred to as TA) as my method of analysis.

I analysed the data from the teaching and learning perspectives and learning environment. The data for the teaching perspective comprised the observations, the teacher reflection sheets and the feedback conversations. The data for the learning perspective comprised the observations inside and outside the classrooms and the focus group discussions. The data for the learning environment comprised the observations outside the classrooms. In my role as *observer-participant*, the classroom observations that I conducted provided a check of the teachers' and the learners' experiences of the lesson from my perspective. As stated above in Chapter Four, in my thematic analysis all the data were read carefully and codes were assigned. The codes are words that summarise the main outcome. Then the codes were collected in a data extraction sheet. After completing all coding, all codes that were identical or alike were grouped and were referred to as a theme. Each theme was named reflecting the contents of the theme.

Table 2 – A summary of the Themes

| | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|---|--|
| Impact on Teaching | Teacher Development | Theme 1 Personal Development | The growth and development of the teachers from the <i>personal</i> perspectives |
| | | Theme 2 Professional Development | The growth and development of the teachers from the <i>professional</i> perspectives |
| | | Theme 3 Teachers Teamwork | The growth and development of the teachers as a team |
| Impact on Learning | Student Development | Theme 4 Language skill | To develop the linguistic competence of the learner |
| | | Theme 5 Cultural Awareness | Strategies and techniques the learners have employed to aid their understanding |
| | | Theme 6 Attitude towards Persian culture | Feelings and attitudes the learners attribute to Persian learning |

7.3.3 Themes and research questions

- **Research question 1** whether the change has taken place during my research and to what extent the teachers have undertaken a personal journey?

7.3.3.1 Theme 1 Personal Development

The evidence gathered during this research showed that teachers changed a lot due to their participation in this project. The nature of the research demanded that they thought and act differently regarding the teaching and learning of Persian. It required them to enter into a much more challenging ground. The research process enabled them to believe in their capabilities and they could overcome their fears and shortcomings. According to Fullan (1991, p.42), a change in beliefs is difficult to achieve. However, the data below clearly demonstrated that the teachers had undergone a change in their belief systems regarding the teaching and learning of Persian and specifically regarding the importance of integrating cultural elements into the Persian language.

7.3.3.2 Theme 2 Professional Development

- **Research question 2** to what extent the teachers have undergone a change in practice and what strategies and techniques they employ to teach the new integrative framework and to what extent they have been able to reflect on their practice and that of their learners.

This change in belief systems allowed the teachers to use a new pedagogic framework and adopt new teaching approaches to suit their learners. The evidence in this research showed that integrating cultural elements into the Persian language was becoming a more natural process in the new framework. The evidence also shows that the teachers were becoming more reflective in their practice; they were able to reflect openly on their pedagogy as well as being able to reflect upon the learners' abilities and progress.

7.3.3.3 Theme 3 Teachers Teamwork

- **Research question 3** whether and to what extent the teachers have established a collaborative planning and working partnership?

The evidence, which I presented in Chapter Five, indicated that as the research process progressed teachers began to work more collaboratively and to perceive themselves as a team. This was one of my goals, as I knew that if the project was to succeed, the teachers needed to begin to work and plan together. The findings clearly showed that this was happening to a far greater extent. As the research continued, the connection and collaboration between teachers improved. However, teachers felt that they needed more time to reflect on lessons and to do joint planning.

7.3.3.4 Theme 4 Language skill

- **Research question 4** whether this course contributes to any of your language skills? To which skill did the course contribute most?

The evidence, which I presented in Chapter six, indicated that although developing language skills was not the major objective of the course, it influenced their language skills positively. Regarding the skill improved most, the participants, suggesting that their speaking skill was significantly improved. Reading and listening skills came next and writing at the end. Since the course was mainly presentation based, the participants spent a lot of time conducting discussions and presentation projects. Therefore, both the presenters and the rest of the class practised speaking since they discussed cultural topics in the Persian language.

The lesson plans which we prepared for the films were concise, yet contain different kinds of activities, which supported the speaking, listening, writing and reading skills.

7.3.3.5 Theme 5 Cultural Awareness

- **Research question 5** did this course help the learners raise awareness about Persian culture?

One of the main objectives of the culture class was to raise awareness of language learners about the Persian culture. The result for this item suggests that the course achieved one of its goals to a great extent. The evidence, which I presented in Chapter six, indicated that most of the participants felt such a Cultural awareness.

According to the results of this research, cultural background knowledge instruction about Persian cultural matters such as holidays, wedding customs, ways of life and relationships had a significant effect on the cultural awareness of Persian heritage learners.

Watching Persian films gave students exposure to many aspects of Persia and its culture (geographical, sociolinguistic, socio-economic, socio-political and educational). The discussions role-play and debates around cultural topics also could enhance students' cultural understanding.

7.3.3.6 Theme 6 Students' Attitude towards Persian culture

- **Research question 6** did the students' attitude towards Persian culture change at the end of this cultural course?

In the evidence which I presented in Chapter six; we could see that most of the participants expressed positive thoughts regarding their attitude toward Persian culture. The culture course seemed to have succeeded in accomplishing a task with such an improvement effect.

7.4 Limitation of the Study

According to Gay, Mills, & Airasian, (2003) limitations of a study should be stated explicitly so that the reader can decide to what extent they affect the results. It should be borne in mind that this research project has several limitations:

- Firstly, while there are various types of families (first- and second-generation immigrants, multi-racial descendants, and adopted individuals), this research only investigated second-generation parents who have settled in the UK.
- Secondly, since the research explored thirty-eight children learning Persian Language in IRIS School in London, the findings are limited to this small sample size, therefore, the study cannot conclude to generalize its findings to the larger population and does not represent the broader population of immigrant in the UK who receive Persian heritage language instruction.
- Thirdly, it is important to acknowledge that my close relationship with the Persian-British community and my status as the headteacher might have jeopardized the analysis of the data and interpretation of findings.
- In addition, there were no interview questions with teachers specifically relating to their learning processes, and professional self-identity, which, upon analysing the data, appear to be concepts of some importance in the research. This is perhaps one of the weaknesses of this project but does suggest a direction for further research.
- Moreover, due to the limitations of part-time doctoral study and full-time work, the main parents' interviews and some of the meetings were held within a relatively short period with only transcription time in between. More time between interviews to analyse would have been useful.
- Furthermore, the possibility of bias existed since I interviewed my students in the focus group. I have been transparent about this. If I had more resources, I would employ 5 White or European native surveyors. The more data I gather the better the evaluation will be. I believe they add value to the research.
- Some teachers could not speak freely about the way the school was run as I was the headteacher as well. This meant that it was difficult to get unbiased feedback.
- Also, the principal limitations of this research were a small sample and participants. Therefore, additional studies with a larger sample should be conducted in the future.
- Finally, gathering more information about the learners is essential to understanding their needs and goals in learning the language. A survey of background factors that correlate with general proficiency, including age at immigration, use of language in the family, exposure to literacy, etc., can prove useful in this regard.

7.5 Recommendations

The research findings outlined in previous chapters have determined that integrating culture with the Persian Language enhances the teaching and learning of Persian. Therefore, Persian heritage language schools must work towards breaking down the ‘barriers’ that exist between the heritage culture and language. Breaking down these barriers both physically and mentally can facilitate the creation of a teaching and learning environment that puts cultural language learning at its core. My research has shown that such a school can develop the values of collaboration, enhanced communication and coherence, not just at the teaching level in the classroom, but also at the school-wide level. In light of my findings, I present several recommendations.

My recommendations may be of interest to those working in Persian education; those wanting to engage in educational change and embark upon the innovative programme and course design. Furthermore, language teachers and those responsible for determining language-learning policies more widely may also find these recommendations of use. I present my recommendations here. They have been divided into those that will benefit: teachers, policymakers, parents, pupils and the research community.

7.5.1 Recommendations for support teachers

1) Learning from other educational providers and experienced teachers

Given the findings reported in Chapter Five, teachers’ previous teaching experience appears to be an important foundation on which to base new teaching experience. It is therefore advisable that the importance of sufficient experience should continue to be emphasised for heritage language teachers. *‘...previous teaching experience is strongly recommended... This is to ensure that teachers have sufficient prior knowledge and experience to start their teaching in heritage schools.’*

Therefore, visiting language departments such as the King’s College and SOAS languages department will be supportive. Furthermore, teachers should be encouraged to take advantage of their learning styles and strengths and on supporting and learn from each other. Talking to former teachers, especially if they are long-standing members of staff, helps to provide teacher peer-to-peer enhancement

2) Increasing Motivation

My findings in the classroom observations suggest that motivation needs to be in place if the teachers are to be able to engage with the project in sufficient depth for the impact to be substantial. This can be discussed at a first meeting, but schools also should engage with their teachers about their readiness to participate in the programme, and if possible, facilitate the emergence of personal motivation without ‘pushing’ them.

3) Increasing the professional development budget

One way of helping to manage teachers' expectations and stimulate willingness towards the professional development experience will be to provide a training budget for them to attend professional development courses. They will increase their professional qualifications to support their development.

4) Annual teacher performance review

It is maintained that culture-based teaching is likely to be a motivating and engaging component of language teaching and learning. Therefore, it is specifically proposed to language teachers to pay closer attention to integrating culture into their classrooms and supplementing their textbooks with the essentials of the target culture.

Prospective teachers should be prepared for change and honest and constructive feedback on their teaching. My findings show that this is not always easy; being prepared in advance may help to ease the process.

I also set a performance review meeting with teachers to discuss their performance. This will, it is hoped and intended, provide reflections to improve the running of the school. This should also help to strengthen their motivation and sharpen their feelings of willingness towards professional development. Teachers might benefit from reflecting on their own professional identity as a teacher. In their view, they ask the following questions. Where do they see themselves in 12 months? What is their career path in five years? What trajectory do they want their careers to follow to become an advanced teacher? Where are they now and where would they ultimately like to be? How closely do they identify themselves with their teaching community?

Teachers may benefit from reading methodology books and attending teacher development sessions before the programme, and from trying to relate what they read/hear to their teaching. The purposes are partly to familiarise themselves with new teaching concepts, but just as important, they begin the process of anchoring new learning within their knowledge and years-long experience.

Before/during the course, teachers could consider how they normally prefer to learn. It seems that they need to optimise what works best for them while remaining open to other methods. When choosing whether to take a full-time, part-time or distance learning option, this point should also be borne in mind. During the course, teachers should keep their learners in mind. The findings in Chapter Five suggest that teachers learned through relating new ideas to their prior teaching and the context(s) with which they were familiar.

5) For new teachers, provide a mentor

I found that some teachers' previous experience was different to our teaching programme. I will introduce each new teacher to an existing teacher. As recommended by Freedman (1985, p252), an ideal programme should provide support for improving teaching, as meetings and feedbacks alone are not enough. Therefore, I used a mentoring scheme where teachers shared their teaching situation with experienced teachers. The helping processes included receiving feedback on teaching; planning and teaching lessons together, and being supported through the process of constructing a lesson plan.

If mentoring support is not provided as part of the teacher training, teachers can ask the local school such as St Augustine's school for advice. Lesson plans and classroom management should be reviewed. Although they will no doubt gain help from fellow teachers, interacting with another person who is not undergoing the same experience might provide the mentoring opportunity that the teachers in this project so appreciated and which many writers advocate (for example, Elmore, 2000; Singh and Richards, 2006).

Teachers should continue to be supported in their post-programme teaching since it has been shown that impact is not necessarily immediate and the potential benefits are vulnerable unless the process is fully supported. Therefore, I utilised the enthusiasm, motivation and confidence that teachers brought to their teaching in the framework, by asking them to mentor other teachers and expanding their roles in other ways.

9) Appoint ahead of year for years 5 and 6

Chapter Four demonstrated that it was not only team leader knowledge and skills which were deemed important; his/her qualities such as engagement, enthusiasm and understanding, and behaviours such as modelling and supporting were also viewed as highly relevant. Team leaders like to take responsibility. By having a year leader, there is more ownership of their pupils.

The team leader as far as possible should have recent classroom experience; keep up-to-date with methodology/techniques; have been trained in giving post-observation feedback to experienced teachers; have an understanding of both teacher development and children learning; adopt a personal teaching style where they engage both on an individual and group level with programme participants, and value what participants bring to the programme.

7.5.2 Recommendation to support students

1) Part of the learning process takes out of the classroom and the students should be encouraged to take greater responsibility for their learning. For example, in many cases, the comparison can be based on research that the students carry out in Persian culture on different occasions: Nowrouz, teenage working, religious events, etc. The students will be encouraged to find more about their own heritage culture and

acquire an understanding of their own culture. Such research helps students realize that learning can happen outside the classroom, that by objectively observing they can learn more about themselves and gain increased awareness of changes in their own culture.

2) In my study, heritage learners of Persian express different motivations for learning Persian. The main reason they report is “literacy.” As a general rule, heritage speakers tend to exhibit stronger oral skills (listening and speaking) than written skills (reading and writing). Some also stated that they wish to concentrate on better oral skills in the hope to communicate with family and extended family. Some also stated that they want to learn the language to learn more about their ethnic background, roots, and Persian culture. Few instances reported other reasons such as credit for school, plans to go to Persia, career reasons, and fun. It is recommended to students, no matter their motivation, the most direct way to acquire the culture of the Persian language is to communicate with Persian speakers.

3) Cultural proficiency “requires more than becoming culturally aware or practising tolerance”. Rather, it is the ability to “identify and challenge one’s cultural assumptions, values and beliefs, and to make a commitment to communicating at the cultural interface”.

4) In these days of the learner-centred approach, the responsibility for learning is the learners. “The teachers may help overcome difficult stages, may organize learning activities and try to stimulate the process, but can never predict the outcome” (de Jong, 1996).

7.5.3 Recommendation to support policymakers

1) As previously stated, it is not possible to separate Persians from their religion, culture and historic framework. For this reason, I recommended that there be a need for a new classification for the Persian being taught outside of Persia for second and third-generation Persian children. I proposed a new name, a term that combines both these concepts culture and language – a *cultural language*. This term allows for a modern living language bound up in a particular religion, and cultural context.

2) For this type of change, by which I mean instead of separation, to have integration of culture and language, to have the optimum chance of success, I felt it was important that for the whole school community, including parents and governors, the philosophy, pedagogy and rationale of this form of integration would be introduced. My research has shown that a school that embarks on this integration, will impact the personal and professional development and growth of its practitioners. As a result, the learners will gain a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the Persian language.

Ofsted inspects our Curriculum just as any other Modern Foreign Language in the UK. In Chapter Four, I argued that although *Persian* is considered an MFL, it is more than that. I maintained that Persian is an

integral part of the religion, culture and history that has been part of Iranian. When Iranian only see *Persian* as another MFL, we are in danger of losing our connection to Persia and its culture. I argued that this had contributed significantly to the separate teaching and learning of culture, language and religion to the detriment of higher achievement in understanding and reading skills. As previously asserted, we cannot separate the *Persian Language* from its religious, cultural and historic framework. For this reason, I advocated for integrating them, to keep Persia, its culture and history alive. I suggested that there was a need for a third and more nuanced classification for the Persian being taught outside of Iran. As stated above, I proposed a new name, a hybrid term that combines both these concepts – a *cultural language*.

3) As mentioned before, heritage language learners including Persian speakers exhibit different attributes than both native speakers of the Persian language and foreign-language learners mainly because they have learned the language through different sources and at different times in their lives. Therefore, it is recommended to policymakers that heritage language teaching requires courses and materials different from those designed for second/foreign language teaching or those native speakers taught in primary schools in Persia.

4) An important feature of the Cultural Syllabus is that it is extremely versatile which allows the same topic to be used at various levels in several different ways. For example, the topic of Nowruz proved to be the most enjoyable one. In each of the classes; however, the lessons on Nowrouz were focussed on different aspects of the holiday depending on the language level and background experience of the students. Therefore, it is recommended that policymakers and curriculum developers take this into account.

7.6 Reflection on the whole programme

I had some basic research skills before engaging in this research; however, those skills were greatly improved as a result of conducting the current research. Accordingly, during the literature review stage of the research, I had learned to prioritise the data related to the research questions.

The skills that I have acquired, offers a range of substantial benefits such as time-saving and increasing the level of validity of research findings. The critical mindset that I acquired in terms of analysing data proved to be highly beneficial in my future professional life because I am equipped with the necessary skills to identify the shortcomings associated with data and offer inputs for improving the contents of materials. I have acquired valuable research skills during conducting this research. It was an unprecedented experience, where I have been engaged in research of such a scale that involved data collection and analysis. I have learned how to do qualitative research methods and I had a practical experience of conducting a general survey through observation and interview.

I have obtained and analysed the data by the use of data collection methods such as interviews, focus groups, observations, and thus obtained in-depth knowledge about these data collection methods and in addition, I have gained a piece in-depth knowledge about sampling through critically analysing the most popular sampling methods

The biggest contribution to my development as a researcher was through engagement in data collection and its analysis. The positive role of my advisor and consultant needs to be stressed here, who offered valuable and practical advice to deal with the issues that arose at different stages of the research, particularly in the stage of dealing with methodology and findings issues.

On personal and professional levels, I have also greatly benefited from the research experience through improving my time-management skills. Specifically, the research process required preparation and planning. Each stage of the study had to be conducted in an organised manner. I have given months of my life towards this doctorate. In general, the research experience has improved my time-keeping. It has made me more professional.

My level of self-confidence has increased significantly as a result of conducting this research. This was mainly achieved through overcoming communicating with data sources – members of the sampling group in a confident manner.

However, as a result of tremendous efforts which included spending many hours for preparations for data collection, as well as, thanks to the encouragement given by advisors, I was able to overcome the sense of insecurity and confidently conduct the research.

It is beyond any doubt that I will greatly benefit from the increased level of self-confidence in the future as an individual, as a researcher and as an educator as well. In this way, it can be said that being engaged in the research has contributed to the leadership skills of med indirectly as well.

7.7 A Reflective Account of My DProf Journey

Throughout this research process, I felt I have been impacted both professionally and personally. It has led me to challenge my assumptions and recognise my growing need for development.

Whilst the findings have demonstrated the overall success of the project in terms of achieving the goals that I set out at the beginning, several areas are worthy of a more critical examination

First of all, undertaking this research project has been an invaluable learning experience for me. I have gained some understanding of the nature of research and the iterative nature of the research process. I have learned, for example, that people do not fit into categories. Research can be frustrating and sometimes tedious, yet at other times so rewarding that I may embark on a professorship.

The second area is regarding the impact the parents of the children attending my school may have, both positively and negatively, on the outcome of the project. I did not know the exact makeup of the families of the children who participated in the focus groups. I did know that one child was not Muslim and that there were several mixed families, namely, where one parent was Muslim. I did not have knowledge of which families supported their children with Persian language and Islamic values or which did not.

Suffice it to say that to get a fuller picture of all the factors that contributed to the success of this project, the impact of the child's home environment would need to be investigated further and would need to be undertaken at the time of the research.

Another area that arose was that if a different year group had been chosen to participate in the research perhaps the results might not have been the same. I am reminded, however, that any research of this length that is undertaken is only a snapshot view at a particular time but that, however, conclusions and recommendations can be drawn.

A further area that emerged during the analysis of the data was that of pupil disengagement. The data revealed such indications, what I considered, boredom. Disengagement with learning can also rear itself with those learners who have learning difficulties. There were some learners in my focus group that had learning difficulties and which can be compounded when learning other languages.

Additionally, I have begun to question how much attention I paid to my participants' beliefs about teaching and learning, how much I valued what they brought to the programme.

Another area that I feel could have a negative impact on the future viability of this project is the fact that the Islamic and cultural coordinators were not fully involved in the research process. I was fully aware of this and I tried as much as possible to include them in the joint meetings as well as having individual 'catch up' meetings with them. The success of this project continuing relies heavily upon them and, the *Persian* coordinator, working together and planning for the future. I fear that this may have been impeded by their not having been part of the process, as they needed to be.

This research has provided some key ideas which have helped me examine my professional values. I have changed my 5-year career path to complete a professorship in teaching. I will hope to begin the professorship at Middlesex University in 2020/2021.

In Boud, Keough, & Walker, (1985) intellectuals can improve by giving themselves feedback in their field of expertise. I hope this is the case in the 5 years to follow.

I used self-reflection as a critical skill for the ongoing development of my professional practice. I broke down my self-reflection into: (1) *problem identification*, during which I identified a problem or a question

about my practice that I was motivated to address; (2) *information gathering*, during which I collected data to inform the area of practice; (3) *reflection and decision-making*, during which I attempted to find meaning in the data through reflection and analysis; and (4) *application and change*, during which I planned how to improve my practice.

My reflection enabled me to process and make meaning of all of the great learning and working experiences I have had. Self-reflection helped me to develop my skills and review my effectiveness, rather than just carry on doing things as I have always done them. It was about questioning, in a positive way, what I did and why I did it and then deciding whether there was a better, or more efficient, way of doing it in the future.

However, my main concern is that unless somebody is moving this project forward in the school, it will eventually fizzle out. Knowledge has to be shared and a mechanism needs to be put in place that can facilitate this project becoming embedded within the school's ethos and *policy* for future use.

7.8 Overall Reflections on the Course Syllabus

This project involved collaboration between five teachers, the school governors and me as the researcher on activities related to implementing a new pedagogical framework, including collaborative course syllabus planning and implementation, monitoring, and ongoing evaluation and reporting.

This research mainly focused on the classroom implementation of a cultural syllabus designed by the research team for teaching Persian as a heritage language at IRIS School.

The results proved that implementation of the syllabus was beneficial for the participants in developing their linguistic, cultural and even personal growth, in which they felt that they needed a great amount of support and encouragement.

At the end of the project, I requested the involved stakeholders; students, teachers, and parents to reflect on the effectiveness of the activities, specified above. The students evaluated the impact of the activities on the syllabus through discussions in the focus group. Teachers commented on the strength and weaknesses of the course via their feedback conversations and reflection sheets, and parents in the interviews. I have to add that I took notes during class observations and focus group discussions as well.

To get a satisfactory understanding of the research, I analysed the results in detail. First of all, I evaluated the students' portfolios and cultural notebooks at the end of the term. The data revealed that their skill, creativity, and imagination in writing improved amazingly due to creating meaningful writing products. Moreover, they agreed to state that the course fostered their communication skills, fluency in speaking, and presentation skills such as speaking and acting in front of the class. Most importantly, the majority of the participants confirmed that the course was not boring, and learning the Persian language was unexpectedly fun. In the focus group, participants were required to indicate the degree to which they

benefited from the activities implemented throughout the course. The results indicated that a high percentage of the participants were introduced to some of the cultural elements of the Persian language for the first time (See the unfamiliar elements in the appendix). Thus, the syllabus had a great impact on the students' acquaintance with the cultural values in the Persian language.

This research found that a Cultural Syllabus would also be a great help for language teachers to motivate learners to learn. The first strategy to engage students' interest was selecting appealing aspects of the Persian culture to talk about such as food and eating behaviours. Our teachers designated a cuisine day in which they brought in ingredients and recipes. The students listened to the simple recipe directions from the teacher and tried to prepare popular Persian dishes. Teachers shared stories relevant to the topic and engaged students in discussions, also gave them time to work on projects as teams. Using both team learning and individual learning strategies encouraged them to adjust to different situations.

It was obvious that during the process of culture learning, language learning was accelerated. As the questions and discussions about Persian culture, comparisons between different cultures reinforced the students' language learning.

In sum, integration of culture into language teaching was a requirement to pass on heritage knowledge to heritage learners. If successful integration took place, heritage language learners of Persian would have been able to act flexibly and sensibly along the lines of cultural norms that they encountered within the Persian language culture.

In addition, as Pearson (2007) states 'parents' attitudes could play a crucial role in heritage language maintenance if they promote family language use. Parents with a positive attitude could pass on the language to their children

To conclude in this small-scale research, which revealed the participants' development over a period, the objective was to present an alternative way of integrating cultural elements into a language-teaching syllabus. Because this has been a pilot study, further research should be conducted in future to explore the efficacy of the suggested activities in this research.

7.9 Contributions

My research paper has made three contributions to the literature on heritage language learning and teaching. However, research in these three areas is relatively new and the related literature is still limited. The professorship programme will aid in greater research into heritage language schools.

This project illustrates the influence of cultural knowledge on language teaching in a heritage language school. As a researcher, I would like to help fill the gap in heritage language research by examining the

challenges related to developing and maintaining Persian as a heritage language in the UK within the context of community-based schools. As an educator, I believe the knowledge gained from this research will contribute to our understanding of the factors that support the heritage development of immigrant children. As well, on a personal level, conducting this research will help me gain a better understanding of how to support parents seeking to maintain Persian as a heritage language for their children.

7.9.1 First contribution

Firstly, the integrating of culture and language as a way to enhance the teaching and learning of Persian challenges the existing state of affairs in Persian schools in the United Kingdom. Where the teaching and learning of these subjects have normally taken place separately, my research has brought about a shift in the way practitioners think about and teach Persian. I have challenged the notion that cultural and Islamic elements with the Persian language should not remain separate entities and insisted that their integration can contribute towards a holistic approach to the teaching and learning of the Persian language. This integration brings about collaborative planning amongst all teachers and encourages joined-up thinking and planning resulting in enhanced teaching and learning.

7.9.2 Second contribution

Secondly, my research revealed that the Persian cultural language plays a significant role in connecting with aspects of the learners' Persian identities, which manifested itself in the use of the Persian language by the children and their connections with Persia. My assertion that Persian teaching and learning outside of Persia should be taught from the perspective of a cultural language was supported by the fact that the integration between culture and language provided a more meaningful and enhanced understanding of and relationship with the Persian language and with Islamic and cultural elements.

7.9.3 Third contribution

Finally, the cultural system became the vehicle for integration and required the teachers to learn new skills and teaching approaches to impart them to the learners. Using cultural elements as the route to integration between culture and language proved to be an easy and effective way for both teachers and learners.

How can I ensure that my research contributes to the field of Persian pedagogy? I have recently presented recommendations of my research at an annual conference exploring the future of Persian learning in the UK which has been organised by the **Centre for Promotion of Persian Language and Literature in Tehran**. In addition, I will be submitting my findings to the Ministry of Education, and the Centre for International Affairs & Schools Abroad in Persia *and* proposing further development of my practice in other Persian Overseas schools in other countries. Furthermore, since the completion of my project, the question

of Persian teaching in the United Kingdom is gaining momentum. On 12 – 13 December 2020, the 3rd International Conference at the University of Cambridge in the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies will be held. The Conference is around Research Initiative on Teaching Persian Language and Literature and also Second Language Acquisition and Pedagogy of Persian exploring the future of Persian learning in the UK to which I plan to present my findings on the integration of culture and language as a way to enhance the teaching and learning of Persian in the UK. The conference will be attended by academics working in the field of Persian pedagogy.

7.10 Implication

Although this project was specific to IRIS School context and heritage language learning, it is nevertheless possible that this model may contain some pointers to how professional development in general, could be developed in other fields of education in the future

In achieving high motivation in schools with heritage language teaching, culture classes do have a great role because learners like culturally based activities such as singing, dancing, role-playing, researching countries and peoples, etc. The study of culture increases learners' curiosity and interest in their host country. It also assists in their motivation to complete their schooling.

The UCLA Research Priorities Conference (2000); emphasized that “heritage language acquisition begins in the home” and heritage language learners bring the home language, including cultural stereotypes, into the classroom. Therefore, a classroom that either negates the value of the students' background language acquisition or ignores it cannot be efficient for these students. In addition, teachers who do not know the community of speakers of the target language cannot be effective in a heritage language class.

The importance of anchoring heritage language teaching in heritage language schools has long been recognized. Merino, Trueba, and Samaniego (1993) proposed that heritage language pedagogies and curricula should be inclusive of students' home language and culture(s). They also advocated using Vygotskian principles to develop learning contexts in which students are active participants in the learning process and in which learning emerges from the interaction of learners, teachers, and community members (Faltis, 1990; Rodríguez-Pino, 1994).

The willingness of teachers to in-service learning generated by prior teaching experience, together with the opportunity during the programme to integrate theory and practice, provide a potentially solid foundation for impact to take place in the quality of teaching.

Finally, the project showed that classes with heritage language students were characterized by substantial student diversity. To deal effectively with issues of diversity, teachers needed to understand their students individually as well as collectively and apply this knowledge to differentiating instruction by learner needs.

The findings of this paper will have major pedagogical implications for Persian language planners, material developers, and pedagogues. Language planners should increase the number of instructional hours so that heritage teachers can address cultural content as well as other associated materials

Schools should be equipped with multi-media facilities and other teaching aids to enable heritage teachers to present students with aspects of cultural content and perform other tasks such as role-plays, dramas, etc. Heritage teachers should be provided with courses and workshops on how to teach cultural content. I will apply for a grant to print a GCSE Persian dictionary. This will have a print run of 1,000 and cost £700 to print. The design and laying out of the dictionary will be in the region of £5,000. Study books will support the Persian GCSE dictionary. Language planners should also take into consideration my teachers' comments and ideas about how to teach the GCSE Persian course.

7.11 Final words

Trying to write the perfect ending to a project that has been part of my life for over six years feels like an impossible task. Over this time the research has shifted form, evolving with the developments in my thinking and changes in my life.

Whatever criticisms of the project have been made by the participants in this project, the strongest single theme in their evaluations of their learning is that this is a sound, valuable, well-integrated programme, containing most of the key ingredients of successful learning and development, and which none of the students or teachers regretted taking part in the research project. My view, today, is that this fundamentally optimistic picture nevertheless leaves the project as fruitful ground for a further study aimed at refining the programme to the point where it is a model of educational excellence.

In addition, it has been an immense privilege for me to work with the teachers and children at IRIS School. We were able to undertake innovative research and I cannot thank everyone enough for accompanying me on this voyage together.

Now I want to answer my main research question:

- **My main research question** is to what extent integrating the teaching of cultural matters with the Persian language impacted positively the children's general attainment in the Persian language?

I hope that I have succeeded in imparting to the reader that Persian is indeed a *heritage language* in this context and that integrating its cultural elements with language would be an available and significant way to enhance the teaching and learning of the Persian language.

The evidence in Chapter four strongly suggested that this research project brought about a significant shift in the teachers' thinking of the teaching and learning of Persian and their practice. Furthermore, my time spent with the children in the focus groups revealed a growing understanding of the nature of the Persian language which has equipped them with a new skill set of identifying cultural elements. In turn, integrating culture and language gave the learners a more meaningful and coherent relationship with Persian and Persia. The evidence I collected through my data collection tools and presented in Chapters four, five and six strongly indicate the contribution of the cultural syllabus to the development of linguistic and cultural knowledge of Persian heritage learners.

Now at the end of this journey, I strongly believe that learning a language goes beyond memorizing words and basic grammar rules. When studying languages, children need the motivation to progress with verbs, tenses, the use of adverbs, phrasal verbs, and hundreds of new words, even new letters, if not they will find themselves ready to quit after a while. On the contrary, when we place all this new information in a cultural context, it can help the learner engage at a different level with the new language. Learning about how native people live and talk introduces a human side to the language, which keeps the learner hooked on the learning process. Understanding culture is like having a context that allows the learner to give the right meaning to each new word he learns. The more he knows about the sociocultural background, the easier it is to get involved and learn

Therefore, to understand a culture, learners need to go further and beyond textbooks and dictionaries. They can use a wide range of alternative resources to get relevant and authentic information about the culture of the local community. Heritage language schools like IRIS Heritage Language School allow heritage language learners to learn the *cultural language* in the right environments.

This is the end of our journey.

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Zineb Djoub (2018 Exploring Teachers' Identity: Reflections and Implications Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Volume 9. Number 1. March 2018.

Appendixes

Appendix A Cultural Persia and its Contribution to Human and Culture

A.1 Introduction

The Persian culture has been one of the most ancient and deep-rooted cultures in the world. The Cultural Persia is a term used to describe the geographical expanse in which the Persian culture has been influential and produced various effects throughout its history. This influence has been created by taking advantage of a host of components that make up Cultural Persia and includes language, literature, religion, arts, cultural heritage and so forth. The impact of the Persian culture has been changing in various historical eras and its power has waxed and waned. However, the most important point is the major effect that this culture has had on a geographical expanse, which has been sometimes very vast and quite smaller at other times.

A.2 Major Elements of Persian culture

A.2.1 Pre- Islamic elements

Nowruz and solar Hijri calendar: Nowruz (which marks the beginning of the Persian New Year), is among the most ancient festivities observed by Persian People. The festival of Nowruz is preceded by another genuine Persian festival, though on a smaller scale, which is called ChaharshanbehSouri (Fireworks Wednesday). Another festival called Sizdah-be-Dar ends Nowruz celebrations (Sizdah means ‘thirteen’ in Persian and the occasion is called as such because it marks the 13th day of the first month of the Persian New Year). This occasion, on which people bid farewell to Nowruz, is symbolized by people going out of their houses to spend a whole day in natural surroundings before officially beginning their new year.

Many rituals go back to the pre-Islamic era. But only Nawruz (‘new day’), has been observed continuously in the Islamic period. In addition, Persians traditionally celebrate the first night of the winter, Yaldā or Shab-e Chelleh, the longest and darkest night of the year. Persians – friends, and families- gather and celebrate this night by reading poetry (especially Hafez) and eating nuts, pomegranate, and watermelon. According to Persians, on the Yalda festival, they celebrate the arrival of the winter, the renewal of the sun and the victory of light over darkness. The Yalda Night is one of the most ancient Persian celebrations which falls on the winter solstice, either on the 20th or 21st December of the solar year. The festival is rooted in the Zoroastrian faith.

A.2.2Islamic Elements

Shia denomination: Following the invasion of Persia and during subsequent centuries, many Persian people converted to Islam and became Muslims. Muslims believe that God has directly sent down its divine

revelations on many prophets with Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) being the last of them. In Persia, more than 89 per cent of Muslims are following the Shia branch of Islam. In addition to the three main principles of their religion, which are common with other sects, that is, Monotheism, Prophethood and the Resurrection, the followers of the Shia faith believe in two more principles, which include Justice and Imamate. The Shia denomination of Islam has been known by this name at least, since the second century after Hegira and experienced extensive growth under the sixth Shia Imam. However, the main growth of Twelver Shia [that branch of Shiism which believes there have been twelve Infallible Imams as successors to Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) following his demise], took place under the rule of the Safavid dynasty in Persia after they announced Shiism as the official religion of the country.

It is very important to emphasise that Persians who are from a Muslim background and living in London, hold a wide range of orientations and views towards religion. For example; the majority of Persian I spoke to considered themselves to be ‘culturally’ Muslim. It was often stressed how threads of Islamic traditions are unconsciously woven into their daily practices and vocabularies, and provide the framework for ceremonies such as weddings and funerals. I was frequently told that the essence of Islam is beautiful and tolerant, and this prompted me to ask Persians to describe their religious practices in more detail, and subsequently, I learned about several religious gatherings, such as Sofreh and Jaleseh gatherings for women. I concentrated on Sofreh gatherings here, and the aim is to unfold the continuity and changing forms and practise of a Shia Muslim religious tradition in London

Another very important religious issue in Persian culture which was not touched much in the literature is the martyrdom of the third Imam al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī, which is an essential component of Shi‘i culture. The biggest festival of the Persian culture is the martyrdom of Husayn, the son of Ali. It is commemorated in Karbalā’, although permeates all of Persian culture. It finds expression in poetry, music, the workplace, teaching, family life and the day to day activities of the Persian people. It is a Shi‘i tradition that has an epicentre in all cities in Iran. No Iranian feels they can express their belief without remembering the events in Karbalā’. The old, young, religious or non-religious all remember the story of the death of a leader. Outside of Islamic months of Muharram and Saffar are other anniversaries of the deaths of the twelve leaders that followed in Muhammad’s footsteps. No month in the 12-month calendar passes without at least one day of mourning for the 12 gurus. The Shi‘ah commemorate the Karbalā’ tragedy on the day of ‘Āshūrā’. They perform ta‘ziyah (theatre performance) and through rituals of self-flagellation with bare hands and, sometimes, with chains and blades. These acts of mourning continue throughout the year in the practice of the rawzahkhānī, a ritual of mourning in which a storyteller, the rawzahkhān, incites the assembled in a ḥosayniyyeh which is a special place of mourning. This place is the location where a mourning programme takes place. It begins with reciting some verses from the Quran, it is followed by a

lecture by a religious scholar. It ends with a lamentation ceremony where men hit their chests to express the pain of Husayn's death.

Moreover, Persians do celebrate several festive occasions. In addition to the four Eids (from Arabic 'īd: "holiday"), Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Ghadeer and Eid al-Mubahilla. These are other important holidays such as Nōrūz, the Persian New Year, and the birthday of the 12th Imam, whose second coming to the Shi'ah is expected as the end of days or Armageddon. Another celebration called Nōrūz or New Year begins on the last Wednesday of the old year. The next week is the start of a holiday period. School children have two weeks of spring holiday during Nōrūz. It is similar to the 2 weeks of Easter break held by UK schools. The festival continues until the 13th day of the New Year. On this 13th day, families go picnicking in the countryside. On the 12th Imam's birthday, cities sparkle with lights, and the bazaars are decorated and teem with shoppers.

A.3 Persian Art

A.3.1 Poetry and literature

In terms of ethical and religious literature, it is my view that the Persian language is the richest. The Persian language has played the most crucial role in establishing the link among those geographical areas. There is no doubt that Persian poetry enjoys a lofty status in the Persian language and literature and has played a very important part in the development and promotion of the Persian language. In addition to this historical expansion of the Persian language, at present, Persian poetry has transcended geographical borders and Persian poets are famous with laypeople and elites alike all across the globe. For example, Mowlana Jaleddin Mohammad Balkhi is known by the name of Mowlavi in Persia, while Western countries know him as Rumi. During the past century, he has drawn a lot of attention from great Persian scholars. During the new period in which Western scholars have been paying increasing attention to the culture of the East, especially that of the Far East and the Middle East, and intellectual, mystic and cultural movement, better known as the New Age, has been underway. As a result of this new movement, more attention has been paid to Mowlana and many people have hailed a translation of the excerpts of Mowlana's odes, which are known as Ghazals of Shams. Another instance is the collection of poems written by the world-famous Persian poet, Hafez, which has been already translated into many languages. In addition, to these examples, a reference should be made to other great Iranian poets like Ferdowsi, Saa'di, Khayyam, Attar and many others whose works have established the lofty status of Persian poetry among the global heritage of the world.

The Cultural Persia transcends the current geographical and political frontiers of Persia. Throughout history, this vast region has been frequently conquered by various powers, but at the end of the day, the brilliance

and power of Persian identity and civilization have been the final victor in all arenas. The limits of the Cultural Persia should by no means be taken as equal to “the political realm of Persia.” On the contrary, the limits of Persian civilization and culture have been always much greater and more expansive than the country’s political borders. On the other hand, the limits of Cultural Persia should not be considered as an independent and uniform domain. This vast domain has been always a partner for other civilizations and cultures and has consistently taken invaluable elements of those civilizations and cultures. As a result, the true power of the Cultural Persia has its roots exactly in this characteristic of Cultural Persia, which is the power to integrate and assimilate cultural elements from other nations to reproduce a more fertile culture. There is no doubt that by using various tools at its disposal, including the language and literature, architecture, music, customs and rituals, religion and faith as well as diverse rites and many other similar elements, the Cultural Persia has been able to play a crucial and determining role through the entire human life.

I have read much Persian literature, and it is my view that Persian is most famous for its poetry, both fine epic and lyric poetry. I would like readers to see the 3-hour documentary about Persia (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000k48g/art-of-persia-series-1-episode-1>). It discusses the life of many poets, some of which are revered by having mausoleums up and down the country. Persian is the second language of Islam, writings by Persians have remained since the time of Muhammad. Many important works of history such as Ibn Siena were used to advance medicine. I do not have the scope to list the literary works, philosophical works and works of Sufism (Islamic mysticism). I cannot translate the degree of perfection within these works. It is safe to say that they are masterpieces. They are taught in Persian universities, they are embedded in the culture of Persian society.

A.3.2 Great Persian Poets

The impact of Iranian poets’ works on the evolution of the Persian language cannot be ignored. Some of them, such as Ferdowsi, utilised poetic measures and meters in their masterpieces most effectively. These meters motivated and enabled Persian poets to devise a more expressive and imaginative poetic language. Poets’ unique contribution to the flourishing of the Persian language rests on this unprecedented ability to weave an intangible web between their fertile poetic imagination and the poetic measures and meters. Also, their contributions relate to their use of short and pulsating verbs, innovative adjectives, descriptive phraseology unencumbered with verbs, similes of natural forces and phenomena, as well as rhythmic word structures for arousing a variety of emotional responses in the reader. The continuing impact of their masterpieces on generations of Iranian poets and the innumerable attempts to imitate his style is the clearest testament to the seminal role he played in how the Persian language survived and thrived.

A.3.3Saadi Shirazi(An example)



*Saadi Shirazi is also known as Abu-Muhammad Muslih al-Din bin Abdallah Shirazi was one of the great Persian poets of the 13th century (1259 A.D). His best-known works are the **Bustan (The Orchard)** and the **Golestan (The Rose Garden)**. It is a source of wisdom. The Boustan is entirely in verse and consists of stories illustrating the standard virtues such as justice, liberality, modesty and contentment. An example of Saadi’s poem:*

Below is a translation of one of Saadi’s poems:

Human beings are parts of a whole How they were created part of one essence and soul.

If one member experiences pain Other members will become uneasy and remain.

If you do not sympathise with human pain How can you be a Human, the name you cannot retain.

Saadi invites human beings to consider themselves as parts of one body regardless of social barriers and races. Saadi describes the concept of empathy in a meaningful and artistic sense that if one human being is suffered, it is like that all people in the world will be suffering. He emphasised unity in mankind, an interdependence regardless of social barriers and labels.

The entrance to the United Nations' Hall of Nations’ carries the above inscription culled from Golestan.

And final words, studying the Persian cultural language at IRIS Heritage School opens up this world for you, giving you access to one of the greatest canons of world literature, in the original language.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) announced the year 2008 as “The International Year of Languages,” launching the slogan “Languages matter!” Moreover, “International Mother Language Day” has been celebrated on 21 February every year since 2000, as proclaimed by the United Nation’s General Assembly. The Director-General of UNESCO, Mr Koi`chiro Matsuura, stated the following on the occasion of International Mother Language Day, on 21 February 2008: International Mother Language Day is an especially promising opportunity to recall what is at stake. He continues by stating “Languages are vital to the identity of groups and individuals, factor in advances towards sustainable development and the harmonious coordination and their peaceful coexistence. He added that languages are strategic of the global and the local”

Appendix B Letters to parents

1) INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS

THE PROJECT

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with your parents. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

I have recently set up a project that will look at how the integration of culture with language will impact positively teaching and learning Persian in Heritage Schools. I hope that what I find out will help Persian language policymakers as they plan services for children and families. To find out what difference this integration makes to Persian education, and which features of the new framework help teaching and learning, I need to do my research in this school and your classrooms. I am asking parents who have children in this school to help with this important research.

WHAT IT WILL MEAN FOR YOU

I would like to invite you to talk with a member of the research team to discuss whether you are willing to take part. If you agree I would like to keep in touch regularly to find out how you, your parent and other family members are getting on. This will involve in the first instance a visit by a member of our research team to your home, to talk to you for about one hour and complete some questionnaires. I may ask some mothers and fathers to take part in small group discussions with other parents in a focus group, but you can take part in the research without any group discussion.

The questions in the interview will cover some background information about your family, information about contact with relatives and friends, your views on Persian culture, how you are feeling, and some background about the community you lived in as a child.

IS THIS CONFIDENTIAL?

Yes. Everything you tell us will be treated as confidential. When the information is put together, families can only be recognised by a code number. The information will not be seen by anyone outside of the research team.

IS TAKING PART COMPULSORY?

No. I would like to stress that you are under no obligation to take part in the research, it is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you agree to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form, which you will also have a copy of to keep.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions about the project please contact me on 02073728051. If you do decide to take part you are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Your decision regarding the research will not affect your ongoing education or any other services in the community in any way.

2) LETTER TO PARENTS

Dear Parents

My name is Seyed Hosseini and I am a doctoral candidate at Middlesex University. My chosen topic of research is cultural language teaching, an area in which I have been involved professionally for many years. IRIS School has kindly allowed me to undertake my research with Year 5 & 6 children during the academic year 2015/2016 with the full support of the Governing Body.

This letter is to provide you with some information concerning my research.

My research is aiming to link the teaching of cultural matters with the Persian language to impact positively on the children's general attainment in the Persian language.

I will be working very closely with the Year 5 & 6 teachers over two academic years. This work will involve my observing lessons and conducting follow-up interviews and discussions with the teachers.

I will also be forming a small focus group of randomly invited children and their parents whom I will ask to work with me in a more concentrated manner. You have the right to not participate in this if you are invited.

I can assure you that all material and data gathered will be anonymised and your child's identity will not at any time be revealed.

This is groundbreaking research in the field of Persian teaching that will benefit not only your child but all children studying Persian in many different contexts. It is a wonderful opportunity for IRIS to be part of it at its very beginning. I am very happy to discuss the research in more detail with anybody who would like to know more. Please contact me via the school.

I hope that you will be happy for your child to participate – your support is very much valued and appreciated!

If however, for any reason, you are not happy for your child to participate in the focus group, please indicate this on the attached sheet.

Thanking you in advance and kind regards,

Seyed Hosseini

3- REPORT TO BOARD OF GOVERNORS OF IRIS School

Doctoral Research

My name is Seyed Hosseini. I am a Doctoral candidate in Professional Studies at Middlesex University. I am currently in my third academic year and the area of my research is Persian teaching and learning.

I approached you in the hope that I would be given access to conduct my research at IRIS School. I chose IRIS as I have a long-standing association with the school when I acted as a teacher and I felt that IRIS would be an excellent choice in terms of accessibility and willingness to participate in the research. I was delighted to be welcomed into the school to conduct my research and this report serves as an update of my progress so far.

After an initial meeting with the chief of Governors in August 2013, a first meeting was set up in October with teachers. The purpose of this meeting was to outline the specific area of my research, how I intend to conduct the research and what impact it will have on the school community.

Specific area of my research

My central question is:

To what extent will integrating culture and language in a heritage School impact positively children's Persian language and Persian Cultural awareness?

to what extent integrating the teaching of cultural matters with the Persian language impacted positively on the children's general attainment in the Persian language

Conducting the research

By working closely and collaboratively with the teachers both together and separately, I plan to design a methodology for integrating culture and language within Persian lessons and also within other areas of the school, such as assemblies and the general school environment.

The approach I will be using is Action Research. The purpose of which is to:

- Plan, implement, review and evaluate an intervention designed to improve practice
- Empower participants through research involvement
- Develop reflective practice
- Promote equality
- Link practice and research
- Promote collaborative research

Impact on the school community

I hope the process of researching in partnership and collaboration with the different stakeholders will be positive. The research will provide the teachers with an opportunity for personal and professional development.

The outcome, namely a methodology which will be tried and tested, will yield positive results on children's Persian language and will be implemented within the school. Hopefully, this methodology can then be replicated and used in other Persian heritage Schools.

Framing the research:

It was decided at the first meeting on the 4th of April, that I would be focusing my research on Years 5 and 6. I would spend this summer term just observing lessons and having brief conversations with the teachers whenever possible. From the next academic year, I will start to design the methodology in collaboration with the teachers and begin to introduce it into the classes.

My progress so far:

I spent two days (22 April and 13 May) observing different lessons. On 24 May, I met with everyone to give an update on my progress. This included giving feedback on the observations and discussions with teachers as well as sharing some of the opportunities where I felt this integration could happen. Finally, we began to look at the question of what comprises the Persian language and how I might begin to start working on a framework.

Next steps for this academic year:

Dates for observing lessons as well as a final catch up session for all members of the team were scheduled.

In concluding this report, I would just like to say that I am extremely grateful to IRIS School for allowing me to undertake my research within the school community. I am privileged to be working in collaboration with wonderful teachers who are giving up their time to work with me. It is greatly appreciated.

If you require any further information about any aspect of my research, please do not hesitate to contact me at: irihosseini@gmail.com.

Seyed Hosseini

Appendix C Lesson plans & Cultural Syllabus

1) Persian Cultural Syllabus

PERSIAN CULTURE

This course considers Persian society and culture from the point of view of history, geography, lifestyle, supplemented by insights provided through fiction, film, and scientific articles. Topics will include rural society, urban life, women issues, everyday life, religious beliefs, national rituals and their interactions. The course will emphasize the subject of diversity in Persia. This course is focusing on the four language skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking through work on oral fluency, written expression, and reading comprehension.

Objectives

During this course of study, students learn about the complexity of Persian culture and the peoples' lifestyles. Alongside increasing their familiarity with modern Persian culture and society, students develop their awareness of Persian preoccupations and lifestyles.

Expected Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will develop the ability to understand the frameworks of modern Persian culture through its historical, geographical, religious, national, and literary background.

Instructional Methods

The course consists of lectures by the teacher, as well as in-class discussions and presentations by the students.

COURSE OUTLINE

| |
|---|
| Session One: 18/09/16 -25/09/16 Geography of Persia |
| http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/geography-i Cultural Element Greetings and farewells Song: Jan Maryam(Singer: Mohammad Nouri) |
| Session Two: 02/10/16- - 09/10/16 History of Persia |
| http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/historiography-x Cultural Element: Using body parts in expressions |
| Discussion on the Persian Film: Bashu, the Little Stranger |
| First Reading Response Paper Due: Monday, January 30th, 5 PM in Dropbox |

| | |
|---|--|
| Session Tree: 23/10/16 – 30/10/16 | Religious Rituals in Iran |
| http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/asura | |
| Three Persian Proverbs & Idioms | |
| Session Four: 06/11/16 – 13/11/16 | Classical Persian Literature |
| http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/sadi-sirazi | |
| Rustam and Sohrab, The Book of Kings by Hakim Ferdosi | |
| Simorgh, an ancient Persian fairy tale | |
| http://www.iranchamber.com/culture/articles/simorgh_ancient_fairy_tale.php | |
| Cultural Element: Traditional Bazaar and Bargaining | |
| Session Five: 20/11/16-27/11/16 | Cultural Reflections in Modern Persian Poetry |
| Ahmad Shamlou | |
| http://www.iranchamber.com/literature/ashamlou/ahmad_shamlou.php | |
| “Common Love” by Ahmad Shamlou | |
| http://prairieschooner.unl.edu/fusion/secrets/common-love | |
| Cultural Element Poem: برد گلستانه by Sohrab Sepehri | |
| Poem: نیکوینما ی سبب آید یب-شرف | |
| Students’ First Presentations | |
| Session Six: 14/12/16 – 11/12/16 | Everyday Life in Persian Fiction |
| http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/suvashun | |
| S. Daneshvar, <i>Savushun</i> (A Modern Persian Novel) | |
| Cultural Element: First interaction, how to address people properly | |
| Cultural note: Ta’arof | |
| Talking about Everyday Life, Places, Travelling | |
| Session Seven: 18/12/16 – 25/12/16 | Persian Cinema and Family |
| Feature Films | |
| http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/cinema-ii | |
| Documentary Films | |
| http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/cinema-iii | |
| Film: Fajr and Roshd Festival | |
| Cultural Element: Persia’s ancient sites | |
| Discussion on the Persian Film: "A Separation" by Asghar Farhadi | |
| Session Eight: 15/01/17-22/01/17 | Food, and Music |
| Food | |

| | |
|---|----------------------------|
| http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/cooking#pt3 | |
| http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ab-gust | |
| http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/celow-kabab-a-popular-persian-dish-which-consists-of-cooked-rice-below-see-been-and-a-variety-of-broiled-kabab-se | |
| Music | |
| http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bidad | |
| Cultural Element: Persian cuisine, food temperament / Recipe of Kuku Sabzi | |
| Singer: Farhad | |
| Students' Second Presentations | |
| Discussion on the Persian Film: Two Women by Tahmineh Milani | |
| Second Reading Response Paper Due: Monday, April 3rd, 5 PM in Dropbox | |
| Session Nine: 29/01/17 -05/02/17 | Iranian Folklore |
| FESTIVALS | |
| http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/festivals-index | |
| http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/nowruz-index | |
| Cultural Element: Traditional celebrations and festivals | |
| Session Ten: 12/02/17-19/02/17 | Birth, and Marriage |
| Birth | |
| http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/children-ii | |
| Marriage | |
| http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/arusi-the-secular-wedding-celebration-which-follows-the-wedding-contract-ceremony | |
| Students' Final Presentations | |
| Third Reading Response Paper Due: Sunday 19/02/17, 5 PM in Dropbox | |
| Final Paper Due: 26/02/17, 11:59 PM | |

During this course, students will continue to increase their vocabulary, develop their abilities in oral and written expression, and complete the study of the fundamental structures essential to an understanding of modern literary Persian. It is assumed that the students completing this course will be proficient in speaking, reading, and composition in the Persian language. In this course, students will have the opportunity to read literary texts and essays and comment on them, both in writing and orally. Some of the activities will involve skits that will be video-recorded, in-classroom debates, formal polished presentations to the class, and compositions and written exercises that are sometimes to be submitted in typed format

A Sample Lesson 1

New Year's (50 Minutes)

Materials Needed: Pictures of New Year's celebrations in Persia, an authentic letter (with a stamped envelope) from a Persian student (Negar), a piece of paper, note cards

Lesson Objectives: At the end of the lesson:

- 1) The students will have learned about New Year's and will be able to name at least two or three Persian customs attached to it;
- 2) The students will be able to use advanced thinking skills such as evaluation, synthesis, and analysis;
- 3) The students will have learned how to ask for and give information politely;
- 4) The students will have expanded their collaborative learning skills through pair and group work; and
- 5) The students will be able to check their abilities at getting their points across in speaking and writing, and incomprehension in reading and listening.

Cultural Context: The students come back to the UK to spend the New Year's with their family and friends. A few days later, they receive a letter from one of their Persian friends in Persia. They should write this friend back before they meet their friends at a café.

Sequence of Activities

Warm-up (5 minutes)

The teacher asks the students what they have discovered in the readings about New Year's. Then, the students discuss what "new year" means to them. The teacher shows the students some pictures of New Year's and its celebrations in Persia and asks the students where they think these pictures are from and why.

Activity 1: Reading a Letter (15 minutes)

The students come back home to the UK to spend New Year's with their families. They have made many Persian friends during their stay in Persia and one of their friends has sent them a letter for New Year's.

The teacher tells the students to read the letter they have just received from their friend living in Persia. Before they start reading (silent), they have to guess the answers to a true/false exercise (**2 min**).

Then, they can read and see if they have the correct answers. It is not anticipated that the students will have difficulty in understanding the letter since their friend gave the meanings of the unknown words in parentheses as s/he knew that they would not know some words **(7min)**. When the students are done, they are going to give answers to a set of questions about the letter. As they try to find answers, they are free to scan through the text **(6 min)**.

Activity 2: Writing a Letter (15 minutes)

The students should send a reply to their friend's letter. The students are put in pairs to discuss how Persian people celebrate the New Year before they are asked to write a response to Negar's letter **(2 min)**.

The teacher tells them that the letter should be at least 2-3 paragraphs long and it should provide information about how Persian people celebrate the New Year with examples. The students are advised to write their letters on a separate piece of paper since they will randomly exchange the letters with their classmates when they are done **(3 min)**.

Each student will evaluate their partner's letter regarding the criteria given by the teacher in advance: "Does it give examples of at least two/three things Persian people do for fun on New Year's Eve and/or day?; Does it talk about any special food Persian people eat for New Year's?; Are there any examples of special occasions which take place on New Year's, such as religious events, games, parades and television programs?; Is the tone of the letter friendly? (Can you see language functions such as *greeting, thanking* and *farewell?*)" **(5 min)**

The students are then encouraged to share what they have read. The students report the class on their classmates' letters; what they have found to be interesting if they have learned something new, etc. **(5 min)**.

Activity 3: Meeting with Friends (15 minutes)

After they write the letter and mail it, the students will meet their friends, who they have not seen for a few months. They will want to know about the UK and the differences between Persian and British cultures. The main topic of interest in the conversation will be holiday customs. The teacher tells the students to discuss in groups of four what New Year's customs they have in Persia, as well as Persian cultures **(4 min)**. Next, each group is given a notecard with a British New Year's custom on it. They are asked to compare and contrast this custom to theirs in their groups: Is it similar, same or different?

In what ways? **(6min)** one person from each group will report on what they have discussed in their groups **(5 min)**.

Activity 4: Homework/Extension: The students are asked to do project work or portfolio in any style and format to present what they have learned from the unit. They are given some ideas: For instance, they can design a newspaper or a holiday guide for tourists. They are encouraged to synthesize the information passed on to them through the study of the unit and to be as creative as possible. Pair or group work is promoted, but individual projects are accepted as well. This will be a cultivating activity for the students and will make up some portion of the total evaluation and assessment.

Evaluation Criteria: The main criterion is the students' participation in the activities. Taking an active role in the implementation of activities is a must. Questions (true/false, comprehension, etc.) or required tasks (role-plays, writing, etc.) during the activities will assist the teacher in assessing the students and providing feedback.

Appendix D Research Activities Undertaken

Interview Questions (Students)

1. Why are you learning Persian? [What do you hope to do with the language]
2. How would you describe your progress or abilities, if any, in each of the four language skills, speaking, listening, writing, and/or reading? Explain.
3. In which domains (spaces) do you use Persian outside of the classroom?
4. Are you studying any other languages? Which ones (and why?)
5. Do you plan to use your Persian in academic studies?
6. Do you expect to use Persian in your future career?
7. How important do you think it is to learn and become fluent in two languages?
8. What would your preferred class times look like? (An hour every day, three times a week, or once a week, etc.) Please explain.
9. Do you feel your current Persian language program is effective in advancing your understanding and use of Persian?
10. Do you have any positive attitudes about the Persian language? Explain.
11. Do you have negative attitudes about Persian? Explain.
12. Do you have any suggestions about how heritage learners of Persian can develop a more meaningful cultural and linguistic relationship with Iran and the Persian language?
13. Have you been exposed to books and materials in Persian at home or while growing up? Give an example.
14. What kind of materials, books, and content would you prefer to help you develop your reading skills in Persian?
15. Do you read Persian books or materials for pleasure? What about films in Persian?
16. Do you believe being bilingual will make you smarter and broaden your intellectual development?
17. How do you self-identify (heritage language learners, non-heritage language learners, Persian American, American, etc.)?
18. Do you plan to continue to study Persian at your university or in your community?
19. Do you plan to use Persian in your personal life?
20. Will your learning of Persian affect your relationship with family, relatives, and community members?

21. Do you think you would enjoy speaking Persian and engaging in cultural practices as a bi-literate, bilingual, and bicultural person?
22. Do you feel proud about being a Persian speaker? A Heritage language speaker?
23. To what degree do you credit your acquisition of Persian to the language program? To your family connections? To the media?

Interview Questions (Teachers)

1. What teaching methodologies do you use in your class?
2. What is your preferred teaching methodology?
3. How do you make your teaching materials comprehensible for learners?
4. What do you do to make learners interested in continuing to learn the Persian language?
5. Do you feel that learners are interested enough to continue their Persian language learning?
6. How do you teach discrete structures of language including grammar and vocabulary?
7. What activities do you use in the classroom while teaching?
8. What scaffolding strategies do you provide to different types of learners?
9. Do you use sheltered strategies in your teaching? Can you give me some examples?
10. Do you have any challenges in your teaching and classroom such as different types of learners or lack of budget for purchasing teaching materials? If yes, elaborate on them.
11. What problems/challenges might learners face while learning Persian?
12. Can you tell me about the successes that you have had during your teaching of Persian?
13. What are you hoping to do shortly to promote the Persian language among second-generation Iranians living in the U.K.?
14. What materials do you prefer to use in your classroom?
15. What do you think about including technology in your teaching?
16. How do you feel “loud and proud” while teaching the Persian language? Give an example of being “loud and proud” as a Persian language teacher.
17. How might you help your students be “loud and proud” about learning Persian and participating in Persian cultural events?

Appendix E Meetings with teachers

Persian Research at IRIS School – Focus Group Script

Introduction

It's lovely to see you and to work with you again. Just to remind you I'm interested finding in out about your experiences in Persian lessons and I will soon be asking you some questions about your Persian lessons.

Remember there are no wrong answers to the questions I will ask you. I just want to hear what you think or feel about the questions I ask. Also, you will not be marked on your answers. Your teachers, your parents and your classmates will not know how you answered any of the questions I will ask. If you have any questions about what I have just said, please raise your hand now.

Great! When I start asking you questions you don't have to raise your hand to answer. But I must hear *all* your answers. So when you have something to say, please wait until the person talking stops talking or until I call your name.

I want you to remember one last thing before we begin. Some of you may agree with some of the answers you hear others saying, and you may disagree with some of the other answers people give. That is fine, I want to know how each one of you thinks and feels. Are there any questions about this?

Allow a couple of minutes.

Great! Now I would like each of you to take the label with your name on it.

Wait a minute or so.

Clarification of terms

I am going to ask you questions about the Persian lesson you have just had with Mrs Shima. So every time I say **today's** lesson, I am talking about this lesson that you have just had. I may also ask you about some other Persian lessons you already have had with Mrs Shima, not just the one today.

Does everyone understand that?

Ok then, here is my first question.

Questions

What was Mrs Shima's lesson about today? Probe: Can you remember the learning objectives?

I now want to find out how you found today's lesson.

Were there any bits that you found easy to understand? Probe: what were these? Why were these easy to understand?

Were there any bits that you found hard to understand?

Probe: what were these? Why were these difficult to understand?

What new Persian cultural elements did you learn today?

Focus Group 10

I am now going to do a short activity with you:

Circle the three cultural elements of this lesson.

Do you know of other Persian cultural elements that you have seen in this lesson?

So, what do you think these elements mean in general?

Do you think it is important to understand the job of Persian cultural points? Probe: why yes? Why not?

How does it make you feel working out the cultural points? Probe: why?

Probe: Can you each give me one word that describes how you feel when you learn Persian?

Where else in other lessons, not just in your Persian lessons, would you come across these Persian cultural elements similar to these?

Have you been able to use or recognise any of the Persian cultural points you have learnt in Mrs Ayat's lessons?

Probe: can you give me some examples?

Probe: what does that tell us about Persian?

Wrap-up

Unfortunately, we are almost out of time. Let me repeat the main things you gave in your answers.

Member check

Closing statement

I want to thank all of you very much for coming here and talking with me today. I enjoyed meeting with you again and your answers helped me to better understand what Mrs Ayat's lessons are like for you. Again,

I want to remind you that your teachers, parents and classmates will not know your answers. Do you have any last questions?

I also want to tell you that this will be the last time I will be meeting with you and I have appreciated your help with my study.

Ok now please follow me back to your classroom. And thank you again for helping me today.

Table 1: Persian Language Learners

Note: The method **I used** to preserve anonymity and confidentiality was the **use of pseudonyms (fake name instead of real name)** for all participants and also for the location of the **research**.

| Research Setting | No. of pupils | Name of Teachers | Focus Group |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|------------------|-------------|
| Year 5 A | 26 | Ms Shima | 6 |
| Year 6 A | 25 | Ms Ayat | 6 |
| Year 6 B | 24 | Ms Jolnar | 6 |
| Total No of Pupils in the project | 75 | | |
| Total No of Pupils at school | 155 | | 18 |