



Persian Language Learning by Iranian Children in Finland: Parents' Reasons and Challenges

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Master's Thesis in Education

Master's Degree Programme in Teaching and Learning (TLearn)

Faculty for Education and Welfare Studies

Åbo Akademi University

Vaasa, 2022

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Abstract

Author: Hanieh Mashayekhi	Year: 2023
Title: Persian Language Learning by Iranian Children in Finland: Parents' Reasons and Challenges	
Unpublished thesis for master's degree in education	Pages: 63
Vaasa: Åbo Akademi University. Faculty for Education and Welfare Studies	
<p>Preservation of ethnic identity and heritage language is one of the concerns of immigrants who are far from their country. This research was done with the aim of finding the reasons and challenges of Persian-speaking Iranian parents living in Finland for sending their children to Persian language classes as their family language policy. For this purpose, first similar previous researches were reviewed and categories of reasons and challenges raised in those researches were extracted. Then a semi-structured interview was conducted with eight parents and their reasons and challenges were categorized according to the thematic analysis method and presented in a chart. This research could be used for the policy of teaching minority languages in countries, especially Persian in Finland.</p>	
Keywords: Family language policy, Heritage language, Mother tongue, Persian language	

Table of Content

1. Introduction.....	5
1.1. Aim of study	6
1.2. Definition of main concepts.....	7
1.2.1. Heritage language	7
1.2.2. Heritage language speaker.	8
1.2.3. Persian (Farsi)	8
1.2.4. Family Language Policy (FLP).....	9
1.2.5. Ethnic identity.....	10
1.3. Theoretical framework.....	10
2. Literature review	11
2.1. Approaches	12
2.2. Reasons for learning Persian.....	15
2.3. Problems and challenges.....	19
2.4. Factors affecting Persian language learning	21
2.5. Conclusion	23
3. Methodology	24
3.1. Research Method	24
3.2. Data Collection	28
3.3. Methods of Analysis	30
3.4. Ethical Considerations	32
4. Results	33
4.1. Reasons and expectations	33

4.1.1. Learning Persian	34
4.1.2. Sending children to Persian classes	37
4.2. Problems and Challenges	41
4.3. Conclusion	47
5. Discussion.....	49
5.1. Limitations	55
5.2. Recommendations for Future Studies	56
5.3. Conclusions and Reflections.....	56
Appendix: Interview Questions	58
Bibliography	59

List of tables

● Table 1. The main research related to the subject of this research	11
● Table 2. Choice of language factors and learning language reasons	15
● Table 3. Questionnaire of parents' views about Persian language learning by children (retrieved from Gharibi, 2016)	24
● Table 4. Questionnaire	27
● Table 5. Characteristics of research participants	29
● Table 6. 15-point checklist of criteria for good thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)	31

List of figures

- Figure 1. Share (%) of children (aged 0 to 14) in different language groups in 2020 (Tilastokeskus, 2021)9
- Figure 2. Learning Persian reasons34
- Figure 3. Reason of sending children to Persian classes38
- Figure 4. Problem and challenges41
- Figure 5. Persian language learning by Iranian children in Finland: Parents' reasons and challenges48

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of increasing migration has been a marked trend in recent years, with individuals relocating to various countries for a range of reasons, including economic opportunity, political instability, natural disasters, and family reunification. Data from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) indicates that the number of international migrants worldwide reached a record high of 272 million in 2019, reflecting a 49% increase since 2000 (UN DESA, 2019).

While the trend of increasing migration has substantial social and economic implications for both origin and destination countries, it can also pose challenges, such as cultural adaptation, social integration, and discrimination (Sassen, 1999). The increasing migration and globalization have resulted in greater cultural diversity and exchange, but have also contributed to the decline of certain language communities. When people migrate to a new country, they may need to learn the dominant language in order to access education, employment, and other opportunities, leading to the first language of immigrants potentially not being passed down to future generations or being spoken less frequently within the family or community. This can result in the erosion of cultural identities and traditions that are deeply tied to heritage languages (Blommaert, 2013).

Introduction to a heritage language typically occurs during childhood within the home environment, however, without sufficient input, full language development may not be achieved. As a result, the heritage language may not be the dominant language among bilingual children (Valdés, 2000). Even if a person is unable to speak the language, they may still maintain an ethnic and cultural association with it (Valdés, 2005).

Immigrant parents may have concerns regarding the potential loss of their children's heritage language post-migration, due to the influence of the host country's language and culture. This is particularly pertinent for those parents who place significant value on maintaining their heritage language as a crucial aspect of their cultural and ethnic identity, and who aspire to pass it down to future generations (Grosjean, 2010). Ethnic identity is comprised of the various social, psychological, economic, political, and cultural interactions between human groups, with the heritage language serving as one of its components (Fishman, 1985).

Furthermore, research has demonstrated the potential benefits of heritage language maintenance for immigrant children, such as enhanced academic performance, cognitive development, and cultural identity (Grosjean, 2010). These considerations and concerns may prompt immigrant parents to enroll their children in heritage language classes. This issue will be explored in detail throughout the present research.

1.1. Aim of study

In this investigation, the reasons and challenges of Iranian-Persian speaking parents residing in Finland, regardless of their residency status (educational, political, work, asylum, or citizenship), in enrolling their children in Persian language classes as a part of their family language policy (FLP) will be analyzed. The study's target population encompasses all Iranian-Persian speaking parents living in Finland. The aim of the research is to explore the status of Persian as a heritage language in Finland and its position as the seventh most commonly spoken language among Finnish linguistic minorities. The purpose is to collect and categorize the reasons and challenges expressed by parents. In this way, we will have a list of the most common reasons and challenges. The study endeavors to contribute to the advancement of Persian language education in Finland and enhance the sense of ethnic identity among learners.

The central questions guiding this research are:

1. What are the reasons of Iranian-Persian speaking parents living in Finland for enrolling their children in Persian language classes?
2. What challenges do children face in learning Persian from the perspective of their parents living in Finland?

1.2. Definition of main concepts

1.2.1. Heritage language

Rothman (2009) defines heritage language as a language spoken within the household or within close proximity to the child that is not considered the dominant language of the larger society. This language can be distinct from the official and dominant languages of the community and may hold the status of being the official or dominant language in other communities. Furthermore, if a language is passed down from one generation to another, it can be considered a heritage language for the latter generation, even if they may not possess the ability to fluently speak it. The concept of heritage language has been referred to by various names in literature, including aboriginal, ancestral, diasporic, ethnic, and mother tongue (Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003, pp. 216-219). In this research, the term heritage language has been employed, as it is the most commonly used terminology in similar studies, and also effectively illustrates the divide between children of immigrant families and their parents.

1.2.2. Heritage language speaker.

If an individual has basic proficiency in their inherited language, such as having the ability to comprehend it or being familiar with one of its linguistic skills, they are considered a speaker

of that language. This individual can be considered bilingual as they have acquired the heritage language through natural means, rather than through formal education. They have grown up in an environment where the heritage language was spoken and were exposed to it from a young age. In this study, I focus on families that have provided some level of exposure to their children in learning Persian, even if there is limited use of the heritage language within the household.

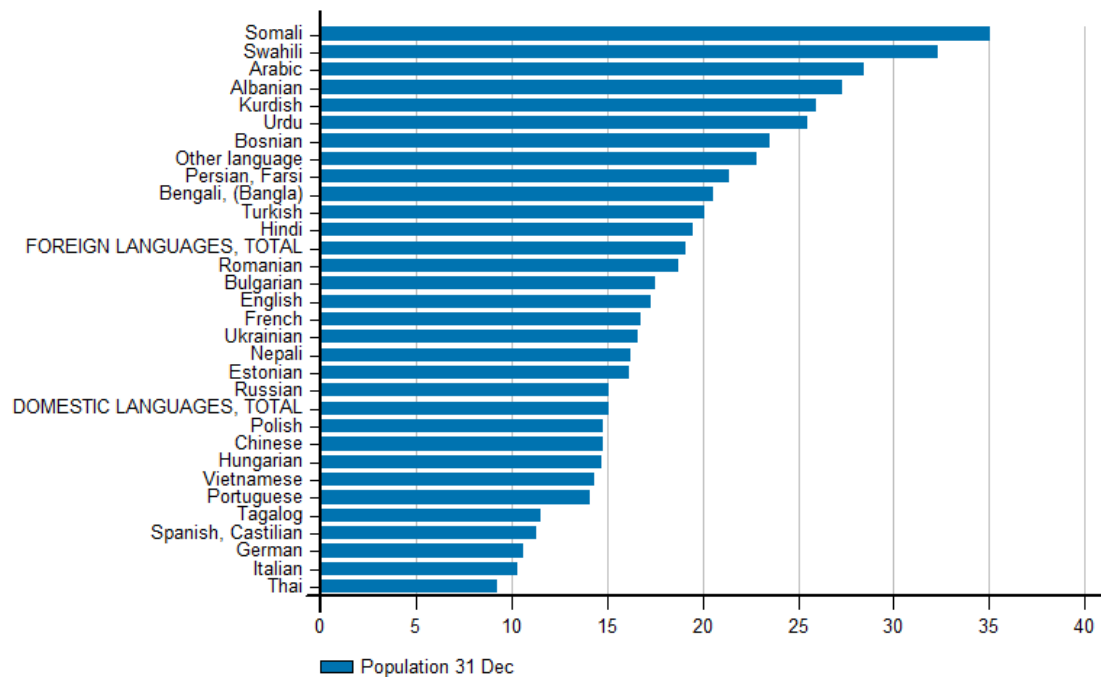
1.2.3. Persian (Farsi)

Persian, also known as Farsi, is a member of the Iranian subgroup within the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European language family. The language is referred to as Persian in Iran, Dari in Afghanistan, and Tajik in Tajikistan, and its script is written in the Arabic script in Iran and Afghanistan, and in the Tajik Cyrillic script in Tajikistan. Although various forms of the Persian language may share similar educational resources, such as Iranian Persian-speaking children and Afghani Persian-speaking children using the same resources despite differences in their language, this research focuses solely on Iranian participants and Persian as the official language of Iran. When referring to a different form of the Persian language, the country in which it is spoken will be explicitly stated.

As of 2020, there were 15,105 Persian speakers residing in Finland, making it the seventh largest language minority as depicted in the figure 1 (Tilastokeskus, 2021).

Figure 1

Share (%) of children (aged 0 to 14) in different language groups in 2020 (Tilastokeskus, 2021)



Statistics Finland / Population structure

1.2.4. Family Language Policy (FLP)

The concept of Family Language Policy (FLP) refers to the policies and techniques that families adopt within the household to foster multilingualism and maintain heritage languages. These can encompass decisions regarding the languages used with children, the timing and circumstances for language use, and the language exposure and input received. FLP is a branch of study that investigates the connection between the languages used in families and the influence of family ideologies, decision-making, language strategies, and the social and cultural context on the development and usage of language for children (King and Fogle, 2013).

1.2.5. Ethnic identity

Ethnic identity refers to a complex and multi-faceted concept that encompasses attachment to a group, adherence to the beliefs and values of that group, and engagement in specific behaviors and traditions associated with that group. These behaviors can include eating traditional food

and speaking the language of the group. Importantly, having a positive attitude towards the group and respect for its values and beliefs are crucial components of ethnic identity (Phinney and Ong, 2007).

Studies have extensively explored the relationship between ethnic identity and heritage language (e.g., Leeman et al., 2011). Most of these studies have shown a correlation between the proficiency in the heritage language and ethnic and cultural identity. Additionally, there is a positive relationship between heritage language proficiency and factors such as self-esteem, mental health, and academic achievement. Preserving heritage language can lead to a number of benefits, such as staying connected to one's home country, effective communication with friends and family, bilingualism advantages, and better employment and educational opportunities.

This research does not specifically address ethnic identity, however, as Meskoob (1992) pointed out, the Persian language is considered one of the four main elements of Iranian identity, and thus, discussing the language is equivalent to discussing a part of the ethnic identity of Iranians.

1.3. Theoretical framework

In this study, the focus will be on Family Language Policy (FLP) as perceived by Iranian parents and its impact on the acquisition of the heritage language, Persian, by their children in Finland. Semi-structured interviews will be employed to collect data from Iranian parents residing in Finland, and previous research on this topic will inform data classification. The study aims to explore the challenges and reasons behind Iranian parents' efforts to teach Persian to their children, and to present a framework of these challenges and reasons from the parents'

perspective. However, the impact of children, siblings, family members, the educational system, and society on FLP, as well as the effect of FLP on the language behavior of the parents themselves, will not be examined in this research.

2. Literature review

In this research, ten studies have been reviewed that focus on the reasons and problems associated with learning Persian as a heritage language in different countries (table 1). These studies have been conducted from the perspective of parents and cover various perspectives, including culture and identity (Chaichian, 1997), language as a main factor (Sohrabi, 1997; Babaei, 2013; Salahshour, 2017), and the role of teachers and students (Gharibi, 2016). The studies have been conducted in different countries, including the United States (Chaichian, 1997; Salahshour, 2017; Wang, 2018), Sweden (Sohrabi, 1997; Khaikhah and Cekaite, 2017), the United Kingdom (Babaei, 2013; Gharibi and Mirvahedi, 2021), and New Zealand (Gharibi, 2016).

Table 1

The main research related to the subject of this research

Name	Year	Country	Method	Sample Num.
Chaichian	1997	USA	Quantitative/ Qualitative	40/15
Sohrabi	1997	Sweden	Quantitative	40 students
Felling	2006	USA	Qualitative	15 parents
Namei	2008	Sweden	Quantitative	100 students/ 88 parents
Babaei	2013	UK	Qualitative	1 person
Gharibi	2016	New Zeland	Quantitative/ Qualitative	30 children/ 24 parents
Salahshour	2017	USA	Qualitative	12 parents

Name	Year	Country	Method	Sample Num.
Khairkhah & Cekaite	2017	Sweden	Qualitative	5 families
Wang	2018	USA	Qualitative	4 couples (1 from Iran)
Gharibi & Mirvahedi	2021	UK	Qualitative	18 months

The ten studies reviewed in the chapter discussed the reasons and challenges of learning Persian as a heritage language from the perspective of parents. The studies are either qualitative or qualitative-quantitative in nature, with participant numbers ranging from one person to 188 people. The four main reasons for learning the Persian language were discussed, as well as four challenges faced by parents in their children's Persian language learning. Finally, the factors that can have a positive or negative effect on Persian language learning were discussed.

2.1. Approaches

The main theoretical frameworks used in previous studies on heritage language include sociolinguistics, language maintenance and shift, language socialization, and identity construction. These frameworks help to understand the relationship between language and social, cultural, and psychological factors, as well as the process of language acquisition and maintenance within families and communities.

Chaichian (1997) studied the social and cultural adjustment of first-generation immigrants by using the assimilationist perspective and the bicultural/pluralist approach. The assimilationist perspective posits that immigrants need to adjust culturally to survive in the host society. The bicultural/pluralist approach suggests that a dialectical relationship between the

host and native cultures leads to better adjustment in immigrants. The results showed that Iranians in Iowa were well-adjusted and had a positive attitude toward the American culture while maintaining their own heritage. There was also some evidence of prejudice and discrimination against them. The study highlights the importance of considering both the assimilationist and bicultural perspectives when studying the adjustment of immigrants.

Sohrabi's study (1997) focused on the phenomenon of language shift and language attrition among the second generation of Iranian immigrants in Sweden. The research examined the communication between children and their parents and siblings, with the goal of determining how parents' education and occupation impact language usage patterns. Furthermore, it explored the importance of the Persian language for cultural, subjective, social, and emotional reasons. Sohrabi named it "language loyalty". The results revealed that the students have a relatively high self-assessment of their proficiency in both Persian and Swedish. Also, although children prefer Persian in interaction with their parents, they use Swedish language in interaction with their siblings.

The study conducted by Namei (2008) analyzed language usage patterns and language choice in different social situations based on the theories of language choice and language domain. The study found that Persian was the primary language used at home between Persian-Swedish bilingual students and their parents, while Swedish was the main language used outside of the home. The study also discovered that mothers used Swedish more often than fathers, due to their involvement in their children's education, which required good second language skills. The authors concluded that having a good command of the second language and being responsible for their children's education allowed women to achieve greater social mobility in both their families and in society.

Babaei's study (2013) used a qualitative approach of an oral history case study to understand the factors affecting the language maintenance of an Iranian person during their childhood in England. The study found that the process of language maintenance is complex and influenced by various factors such as the social and cultural environment, motivation, language attitudes, and identity. The participant was given an opportunity to share their experiences and relevant themes that emerged from their narratives.

In the first part of Gharibi's research (2016), the author looked at the quantitative examination of the Persian vocabulary knowledge of Iranian students. However, the second part of the study focused on the attitudes of immigrant parents toward their children's development and preservation of their heritage language. Using a language policy model as a framework, the study found that while parents had positive views on language acquisition and preservation, there was a disconnect between their beliefs and actual language practices. Gharibi's subsequent study (2021) highlighted the importance of considering not just the parents' beliefs, but also their language practices and management in understanding their attitudes toward heritage language preservation. The study emphasized the social and linguistic aspects of young heritage speakers' acquisition and preservation of their family language and illustrated that the language environment in which families exist plays a significant role in shaping the outcome of their family language policies.

The study by Kheirkhah and Cekaite (2017) investigated the role of siblings in multilingualism. It used a language socialization perspective and a multimodal interactional approach and found that siblings in bilingual families can play an important role in the development of children's language skills. The study also concluded that families have various management techniques to support their children's multilingual development. The research was

based on the concept of family language policies and aimed to understand how families promote multilingualism within their homes.

2.2. Reasons for learning Persian

Language studies have shown that a conversation is composed of several elements, including the setting, topic, participants, and interaction. According to Namei (2008), bilinguals and immigrants' selection of language for communication is influenced by these four main factors, with the reasons for language choice being intricately tied to each factor. Table 2 shows the relationship between these factors and the reasons extracted from various studies.

Table 2

Choice of language factors and learning language reasons

Factor	Reason
Settings	Strengthen cultural identity
Participants	Connect with family
Topic	The benefits of bilingualism
Interaction	Transmitting emotional concepts

The setting of communication encompasses contextual factors such as time, place, and geographical location of the speakers, which can play a crucial role in reinforcing cultural identity. For instance, choosing one's mother tongue during a cultural ceremony is tied to one's heritage.

The characteristics of participants, such as age, gender, language proficiency, socio-economic background, and power dynamics, can also impact language choice. Iranian children, for example, may opt to use Persian when communicating with elderly family members or to strengthen familial connections, while Hungarian individuals might use Hungarian when speaking to God.

The topic of conversation can also determine the language used. Individuals may choose their mother tongue when discussing cultural traditions or reminiscing about their homeland. However, Dastjerdi (2012) highlights the difficulties that Iranian immigrants in Canada, who are well-educated but lack familiarity with Persian slang and medical terminology, face when communicating in Persian with other Iranian patients. This underscores the benefits of bilingualism.

Lastly, the functions of interaction play a role in language choice, with speakers choosing the audience's native language to reduce distance and facilitate interaction and using their own language to create distance. This can be seen as a means of transmitting emotional concepts between the speaker and the listener.

1. Strengthen cultural identity

Persian language is a significant cultural value among the Iranian community, as evidenced by Chaichian's (1997) study on the integration of first-generation Iranian immigrants into the host community's culture. According to Hoffman (1989), learning Persian is one way for Iranian Americans to strengthen their socio-cultural identity. In the 1970s and 1980s, American Iranians were more inclined to speak English, believing it to be more authentic and having a higher social class. However, in the late 1980s, there was an increased desire to learn and speak Persian. This was reflected in the popularity of Persian schools, the encouragement

of Persian language use in Iranian media, and Iranian businesses offering discounts to Persian speakers. Iranian parents expressed regret at not having taught their children Persian, as they want them to be able to read and understand historical, political, and classical Persian texts and accept their parents' values and cultures (Salahshour, 2017). Literature is considered an essential part of Iranian culture, and parents want their children to have a connection with their socio-cultural identity through the ability to read Persian poems and texts.

Another reason that Hoffman (1989) points out is resistance to cultural assimilation. Iranian high school students often speak Persian instead of English with other Iranians in the classroom and outside of it, as a symbolic means of confronting American culture and preventing a deep commitment to core values, meanings, and practices. One of the English language teachers mentioned that these students can speak English but deliberately refuse to do so. Iranians are trying to demonstrate their Iranian identity by using the Persian language. For example, they might write a phrase in Persian with English letters on their t-shirts, such as "Zur nazar: Farsi neveshtam," which translates to "Don't try: It's written in Persian."

2. Connect with family

Modarresi (2001) suggests that one reason individuals may want to learn Persian is to establish a connection with their grandparents. For children who have visited Iran and participated in family gatherings, Persian is often the only common language between them and their Persian-speaking grandparents. In fact, Babaei (2013) found that parents who frequently travel to Iran are more likely to enroll their children in heritage language courses. Gharibi and Mirvahedi (2021) demonstrate that frequent trips to Iran can be an effective factor in learning Persian. Additionally, Salahshour (2017) reported that Iranian parents in the United States are eager for their children to learn Persian to communicate with friends and family in the language. Felling

(2006) argues that Iranian parents in the US speak only Persian at home to encourage their children to learn the language and maintain their connections to their ethnic culture and family.

3. The benefits of bilingualism

Felling (2006) argues that parents view bilingualism as beneficial for their children and consider promoting the transmission of their mother tongue to be effective parenting. Similarly, Gharibi (2016) observed that teachers of Persian language courses in New Zealand encourage immigrant parents to continue speaking their native language with their children to preserve bilingualism. Bilingualism has numerous cognitive, linguistic, and cultural advantages for children, including better problem-solving skills, greater cultural awareness and empathy, and improved communication with extended family members who do not speak the majority language (Kohnert, 2010). As a result, Iranian parents in Finland may perceive the maintenance and development of Persian language skills among their children as crucial for both personal and cultural reasons.

4. Transmitting emotional concepts

According to Atoofi's (2012) research, Persian language learners and educators use the language to express emotions like moods, attitudes, and feelings, using morphological, phonological, and discourse structure levels. This observation was corroborated by a mother in Gharibi and Mirvahedi's (2021) study who described Persian as "the language of my feelings."

2.3. Problems and challenges

1. Inability to write and read in Persian

Modarresi's (2001) study classifies the first generation of Iranian immigrants to the United States as those who migrated willingly. The second generation, in contrast, comprises the children of these immigrants, who were born in the United States and hold American citizenship, but still identify with their Iranian heritage. Typically, they have better English proficiency than Persian, and often require instruction in written Persian. Modarresi's research into the second-generation Iranian community in Ohio demonstrates that their parents estimate that only 38% of their children possess strong oral Persian proficiency, while less than 10% are competent in written Persian. Parents hope that their children will learn Persian to become more familiar with Iranian culture. These findings are consistent with Sedighi's (2010) research, which found that immigrant children tend to be more skilled in speaking and listening to their mother tongue than reading and writing it.

2. Reluctance to learn the mother tongue

Ansari's (1988) study found no evidence of "language loyalty" among Iranian children, indicating that they may resist learning Persian. The author attributes this to various factors such as the small size of the Iranian community in the destination country, the lack of cultural and religious institutions related to Iranian culture, and the geopolitical tensions between Iran and the United States during the US embassy hostage crisis. Hosseini-Kaladjahi (1997) also suggests that Swedish Iranians face a dilemma in which they must learn Swedish to communicate with their host society, but doing so could mean distancing themselves from either Swedish society or their own language. Modarresi (2001) similarly asserts that the second-generation of Iranian immigrants in the United States may shift away from Persian due to pressure for assimilation in the host society.

3. Problems of educational organizations

Sedighi (2010) highlights the issue of insufficient funding in some American universities that has resulted in cultural heritage classes being integrated into Persian language classes. Inadequate educational resources based on empirical methods are also identified as another challenge facing Persian language classes. Gharibi and Mirvahedi (2021) assert that the effectiveness of Persian classes impacts children's success in learning the language. Additionally, Wang (2018) notes that parents view the scarcity of educational resources as a challenge to learning Persian. Salahshour (2017) outlines several difficulties faced by Iranian parents, including a high volume of homework, limited instructional hours, weekend classes, lengthy commutes, complex educational resources, and outdated teaching methods.

4. Problems of parents

Fishman (1985) suggests that speaking the native language in the home is critical to preserving it among immigrants and future generations. This sentiment is echoed by Gharibi and Mirvahedi (2021), who argue that the success of children in learning Persian depends on their families' appreciation of the language and Iranian heritage. However, Sedighi's (2010) research reveals that some Iranian children feel that their parents do not speak enough Persian with them. Wang (2018) also highlights the challenges faced by parents in maintaining the heritage language, including limited time to speak it with their children, a lack of resources to aid in preservation, financial constraints in acquiring educational materials, and the psychological stress associated with ensuring their children learn the heritage language.

2.4. Factors affecting Persian language learning

This section will examine the various factors that impact the acquisition of Persian language. While the positive impact of such factors on language learning has been widely discussed in

literature, it is also evident that a lack of such factors can pose significant difficulties. One of the most important factors is the concentration of immigrants speaking the same language, which can either boost motivation to learn the mother tongue or decrease it. The reasons and challenges presented in the results chapter will take into account these factors and their effects, whether positive or negative.

1. Number of immigrants in their mother tongue

Fishman (1985) identified two elements that can impact the acquisition and preservation of a native language in a foreign country. The first factor is the number of immigrants who speak that language. A larger number of immigrants who speak a particular language in the host country increases the likelihood of the language being sustained.

2. Existence of different sources in the mother tongue in the destination country

According to Fishman (1985), the availability of resources in the native language, such as radio and television stations, press, cultural and religious centers, can also affect the learning and preservation of the mother tongue for immigrant populations. Gharibi and Mirvahedi (2021) have also emphasized the impact of having an Iranian social network on the success of learning Persian. Modarresi (2001) recognized the existence of various Persian-language press and television channels in the United States and their role in promoting the development of the Persian language among the Iranian immigrant community in the US.

3. The role of teachers

Gharibi (2016) noted the significance of the role of school teachers in teaching Persian to the children of Iranian immigrants. According to the author, the parents of these children place great value on the advice of their children's teachers, including the advice to speak Persian with

their child at home. This highlights the importance of the teacher's role in the preservation of the Persian language among the second generation of Iranians in the host country.

4. The role of mothers

Modarresi (2001) noted that Iranian mothers in Ohio, USA highly value their Iranian culture and actively encourage their children to learn Persian. Generally, families where mothers take a more active role in preserving their heritage language tend to have children who are more proficient in speaking Persian. However, Namei's (2008) study in Sweden found that Iranian children showed a greater inclination towards using Swedish in their everyday conversations, particularly with their mothers. The research indicated that mothers played a more significant role in shifting the language used by their children from Persian to Swedish compared to fathers. This shift was observed not only in conversations with mothers but also in general community interactions. These findings suggest that children's language use in their daily interactions can be influenced by both their family and social environment.

5. Family characteristics

Sohrabi (1997) reported that the social and economic status of the family has little impact on preserving the heritage language. However, the level of education of the parents has a significant influence. Khairkhah and Cekaite (2017) found that siblings can shape the language environment in immigrant families, influencing each other's language use and providing language guidance when language-related issues arise. Additionally, Gharibi and Mirvahedi (2021) stressed that the thoughts and ideology of parents, their dedicated efforts, and the costs incurred can all impact the success of learning Persian.

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of ten previous studies on the reasons and challenges of learning Persian from the perspective of parents. Four main reasons for learning the language were identified: strengthening cultural identity, facilitating communication with family, advantages of multilingualism, and transfer of emotional concepts. Additionally, four main challenges were identified: inability to read and write in Persian, unwillingness to learn the mother tongue, problems with the educational system, and issues related to parents. The chapter also identifies five factors that affect language learning: the number of immigrants with the same mother tongue, availability of resources in the mother tongue, the role of teachers, the role of mothers, and family characteristics.

The study uses the Family Language Policy (FLP) approach and aims to extract reasons and challenges from the perspective of Iranian parents living in Finland through semi-structured interviews. It is important to note that the study does not examine the impact of children, siblings, family members, educational system, or society on FLP, nor does it examine the impact of FLP on the language behavior of the parents themselves. The results of this study will contribute to a better understanding of the challenges faced by Iranian parents in Finland in teaching Persian to their children and may have implications for language policy and planning in immigrant communities.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Method

To investigate the research topic, a qualitative approach was utilized, as it allows for the exploration of a range of potential reasons and challenges. Based on Salahshoor's (2017) research, a semi-structured interview protocol was developed. This type of questionnaire does not have predetermined answers, and the questions were designed in a way that allowed respondents to share their experiences and perspectives through storytelling or a narrative approach, following Dastjerdi's (2012) suggestion. This approach fosters a conversational atmosphere, allowing the respondents to express their views more comfortably.

To design the questionnaire, two previous studies were consulted. Namei's (2008) work provided some questions, such as "Which language do you use to speak with your child?" and "Which language does your child use to speak with you?" Meanwhile, Gharibi's (2016) questionnaire structure, which is briefly outlined in Table 3, was also utilized.

Table 3

Questionnaire of parents' views about Persian language learning by children (retrieved from Gharibi, 2016)

no.	Name	Subjects
1	Family background	Age of parents Gender and age of child participating in research Number of children and their age Place of birth and nationality (Iran, New Zealand) of child Age of child at migration To New Zealand Parents' last level of education Time of arrival in New Zealand Reason for immigration Other countries in which you have lived except Iran and New Zealand

no.	Name	Subjects
		Current and previous occupation Travel to Iran after immigration to New Zealand Child travel to Iran.
2	Background of the language	The dialect you spoke in Iran The dialect you spoke to your child in Iran The languages you and your child knew before coming to New Zealand Child participation in English language classes before coming to New Zealand Child participation in Persian language classes in New Zealand Self-assessment between very bad and very good concerning your and your child's English language skills before immigration and now Current Persian language skills of the child.
3	Use of language in the family	How often do you speak Persian? How often do you speak Persian with your child? What language do you speak with your spouse? What language does your spouse speak with you? What language do you speak with your child? Do you have more Persian or English-speaking friends in New Zealand? Do you have many new friends? What is the language of these friends? Where do you meet them? Are you in frequent contact with your relatives in Iran? How do you communicate with your relatives in Iran? What language do you speak to them Do you intend to return to Iran Do you feel more comfortable with Persian or English? What is the reason for your comfort?
4	Use of language for children and the choice of language	How often does your child speak Persian? Do they know how to read and write Persian? How much do they read books in Persian How much do they speak Persian? How do you assess their literacy Do they listen to Persian songs Do they watch Persian movies or animations? If they do not watch Persian movies or animations or do not listen to Persian songs, what is the reason? What language do you speak most? What language do they feel most comfortable with? What is the reason for their comfort? What language does your child speak most of each of these (among these options: always in Persian, in Persian more than English, in Persian and English equally, in English more than Persian, always in English, None): father, mother, siblings, school friends, Iranian peers,

no.	Name	Subjects
		Iranian friends, pets, at school, in the shop, text messages, email and Facebook, Skype.
5	Perceptions and attitudes of parents	<p>How important is it for you to preserve Persian?</p> <p>How important is it for your child to speak Persian?</p> <p>Do you encourage your child to speak Persian?</p> <p>Do you encourage your child to read and write in Persian?</p> <p>Have you ever corrected your child in Persian?</p> <p>Do you feel sorry if your child can not read or write in Persian?</p> <p>Do you think your child's Persian language has improved or worsened since coming to New Zealand?</p> <p>Is your child comfortable speaking Persian with an Iranian who has lived in an English-speaking country for a long time?</p> <p>Do you think your child is bilingual (do you think your child is more fluent in English or Persian)?</p> <p>Anything else you want to say?</p>

The primary objective of developing these interviews is to explore the interviewees' perceptions and views regarding the research subject. Prior to conducting the primary interviews, I interviewed two Persian-speaking parents who had a child attending school to obtain feedback and revise the questions.

The interview questions center on two topics: reasons and challenges. I also included questions about the interviewees' travels with their children to their home country, duration of stay in Finland, attendance at Persian-speaking groups in Finland, and online conversations with family members or friends in their home country during the interviews. The main purpose was to enable the interviewees to freely express their narratives and not be restricted to answering the questions.

In general, the questionnaire comprises four types of questions. The first group of questions pertains to the participant's background, with the main objective of gathering secondary data to examine the possible influence of various variables on their responses.

Although this research is qualitative, this information will aid in generalizing future research. Additionally, sometimes the interviewee may indicate helpful points regarding the two primary research questions while answering questions about their background.

Three questions explicitly ask about the reasons for parents wanting their child to learn Persian and attend Persian language classes. Two questions are related to problems that arise during the Persian language learning process. In question 13, I asked about the problems, while question 12 inquired about the aspects of this process that parents find beneficial. Parents usually mentioned problems in response to question 12. Four questions are not directly related to the research topic (reasons and problems). However, they are designed in such a way that the interviewees' answers also point to the reasons and problems. The reason for not arranging the questions of each topic consecutively was to enable the interview to flow naturally, and the interviewee to feel that they were narrating a story. Table 4 lists the questionnaire's topics and questions.

Table 4

Questionnaire

no.	Subject	Questions
1	Background	1. Would you like to tell me something about your background? 2. Would you like to tell me about your decision to migrate to Finland? 3. How many children do you have? What genders? 4. How old were your child/children when you moved to Finland?
2	Reasons	6. Why do you want to teach Persian to your children? 9. Why do you want to send your children to Persian language classes? 11. Do you take steps to teach Persian to your children at home?
3	Problems	12. What parts of teaching your children Persian is working well at the moment?

no.	Subject	Questions
		13. What have been your problems so far in teaching Persian to your children?
4	Not directly related	5. What languages do the children speak in their daily lives? 7. How often do your children hear Persian? In which ways/contexts? 8. How often do your children use Persian? In which ways/contexts? 10. How often are the classes? How long? What do you know about what they do there?

3.2. Data Collection

As previously stated, the target population for this study comprises all Iranian individuals residing in Finland who have a child attending a K-12 school. Social networks were the primary resource utilized to locate suitable participants, resulting in eight Persian-speaking parents being chosen for the study.

To avoid potential bias, each participant was interviewed separately in a one-on-one conversation between the researcher and interviewee, lasting between twenty and thirty minutes. The interviews were conducted online in Persian and recorded for transcription and translation into English.

All eight participants in this study were mothers, with two of them holding Ph.D. degrees and the remaining six holding master's degrees. Of the fathers, two had obtained doctorate degrees, and three were postdoctoral researchers. Any instances where the father's education level was not specified are indicated with a dash in Table 5. The age of the children who were sent to Persian classes ranges from 7 to 15 years old, with additional details about the other participants' children included in brackets. Most of the children in this study are familiar with Persian, English, and Finnish, with some also being familiar with Spanish,

German, and Turkish. All participants were proficient in both Persian and English, with four of them also possessing a working knowledge of Finnish. Table 5 displays additional information about the participants and their children.

Table 5

Characteristics of research participants

Participant	Mother's education level	Father's education level	Child's age	Child's age when moved to Finland	Child's languages	Parents' languages
P1	Ph.D.	Ph.D.	11 and 7	Born in Finland	Persian, English, Finnish [first child: also German]	Persian, English
P2	M.A.	-	8	7	Persian, English, Finnish	Persian, English, Finnish
P3	M.A.	Postdoc	11 [, 5 and 1.5]	7	Persian, English, Finnish	Persian, English
P4	M.A.	Postdoc	7	2	Persian, English	Persian, English, Finnish
P5	M.A.	-	15 and 13	5 and 3	Persian, English, Finnish	Persian, English, Finnish
P6	M.A.	-	8 [and 4]	Born in Finland	Persian, English, Finnish	Persian, English
P7	Ph.D.	Postdoc	13 and 11	6 and 4	Persian, English, Finnish, Turkish	Persian, English, Turkish
P8	B.A.	Ph.D.	11	4	Persian, English, Finnish, Spanish	Persian, English, Finnish

3.3. Methods of Analysis

This study discusses various qualitative data analysis methods, including Grounded Theory, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), Conversation Analysis (CA), Discourse Analysis (DA), and Thematic Analysis. While all of these methods have their strengths and weaknesses, I chose Thematic Analysis because it allowed for a simpler and more straightforward analysis of patterns in the data.

IPA focuses on understanding individuals' subjective experiences and lived perspectives (Smith and Osborn, 2003), while CA examines the structure and organization of human interaction through the study of talk-in-interaction (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998). DA, a broad field of study, aims to comprehend how language is utilized to shape and mirror social relationships, identities, power dynamics, and ideologies (Willig, 2003).

In this study, I used interviews with parents to uncover reasons and challenges related to the research questions and chose Thematic Analysis as the method to systematically identify and analyze patterns in the data.

According to Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, there are six phases involved in thematic analysis. The first phase is to become familiar with the data by reading it multiple times. In addition to examining the current data, I also reviewed previous research in order to facilitate the second and third stages, which involve generating primary codes and identifying themes. Specifically, I included the data from previous studies as part of the current analysis. For the initial coding stage, I identified interview segments that were indicative of reasons or learning challenges, and then tried to match these initial codes to themes from previous studies.

During the fourth phase, which involves reviewing themes, I eliminated categories for which there was no corresponding data (code) in the current research, and created new themes for codes that did not fit any of the existing themes. This led to the fifth phase, which involved defining and naming the final themes. The last phase of thematic analysis is to produce a report. In the following chapter, I describe how each piece of coded data is related to its respective theme, and present the final classifications for this research.

Braun and Clarke (2006) have developed a checklist consisting of 15 points that can be used to verify whether the thematic analysis has been conducted appropriately. These 15 points were carefully reviewed at each step of the analysis, from data familiarization to report writing, to ensure the accuracy of the analysis (see Table 6).

Table 6

15-point checklist of criteria for good thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

Process	No.	Criteria
Transcription	1	The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcripts have been checked against the tapes for 'accuracy'
Coding	2	Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process.
	3	Themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples (an anecdotal approach), but instead the coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive.
	4	All relevant extracts for all each theme have been collated.
	5	Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set.
	6	Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive.
Analysis	7	Data have been analysed / interpreted, made sense of / rather than just paraphrased or described.

Process	No.	Criteria
	8	Analysis and data match each other / the extracts illustrate the analytic claims.
	9	Analysis tells a convincing and well-organized story about the data and topic.
	10	A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided.
Overall	11	Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately, without rushing a phase or giving it a once-over-lightly.
Written report	12	The assumptions about, and specific approach to, thematic analysis are clearly explicated.
	13	There is a good fit between what you claim you do, and what you show you have done / ie, described method and reported analysis are consistent.
	14	The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis.
	15	The researcher is positioned as active in the research process; themes do not just 'emerge'.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

Before the interview, consent was given to the participating parents, stating that participation in the study is voluntary, will not be of direct benefit to participants, and that the results will be used for academic research. Also, all information about the participants will remain confidential. During the interview, it was explained to the interviewees that they need to sign a form confirming the said items. In order to keep the information of the interviewees confidential, their names have not been used and they have been abbreviated as P1, P2, ..., P8.

4. Results

In the previous chapter, I outlined the four categories of questions that this research is centered on: background questions, explicit questions about reasons and expectations, explicit questions about problems and challenges, and implicit questions. In this section, I have organized the results into two general sections based on the two main research questions: reasons and expectations, and challenges and problems.

Depending on the nature of the questions asked, respondents may have mentioned reasons or challenges in their responses. However, it is not within the scope of this research to indicate which specific question elicited a particular reason or challenge. Therefore, I will not provide this information. Nonetheless, for each theme, I will mention which respondents discussed the specific reason or challenge.

Based on the thematic analysis, main themes were extracted from previous studies which were discussed in the literature review. However, some themes that were extracted from previous studies were missing in this research because the participants did not mention them. These themes include the possibility of communicating with the Persian-speaking minority community living in the country and using the Persian language resources of that country, as well as transmitting emotional concepts. Additionally, the problems of cultural and ideological differences were replaced by the characteristics of the family.

4.1. Reasons and expectations

This section discusses two types of reasons related to the learning of Persian by children. The first type outlines why it is important for parents that their children learn Persian regardless of the learning method employed. The second type highlights the reasons why

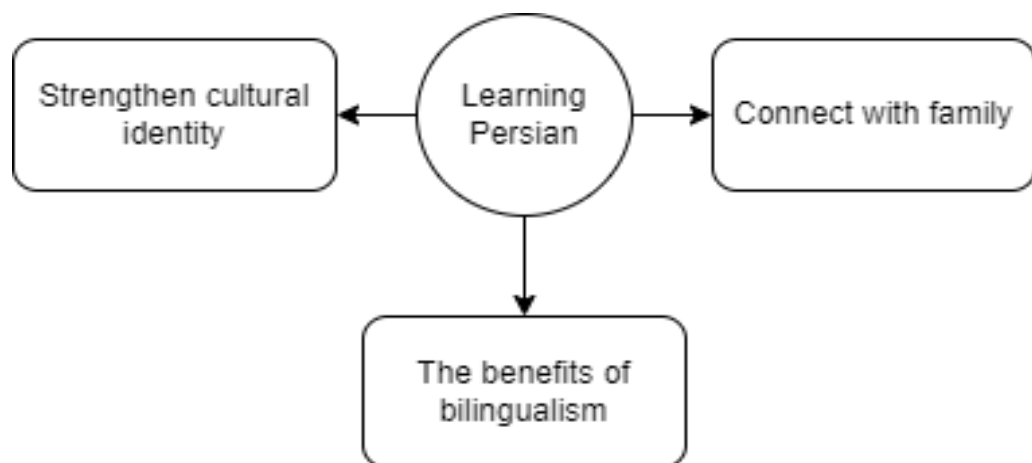
parents choose to enroll or not enroll their children in Persian language classes and why they tend to prefer a particular learning environment, such as group classes.

4.1.1. Learning Persian

Among the four reasons extracted from the previous studies, three reasons were found in the data of the recent research. Figure 2 shows the reasons given by parents for learning Persian.

Figure 2

Learning Persian reasons



1. Strengthen cultural identity. All of the parents in the study cited the strengthening of Iranian culture as a reason for their children to learn Persian. This can be accomplished through reading Persian books, which the parents believe will help their children maintain and improve their knowledge of the language. The parents expressed a desire for their children to understand Persian literature and become familiar with Iranian culture and identity. Additionally, all but

one parent reported Persian as their child's mother tongue, with the exception being a participant whose mother tongue was Turkish.

P2: To maintain the knowledge of the Persian language. Because my son is very fond of story books and reading.

P5: My kids can also experience the pleasures we had from reading the books of Hafez and Saadi [two famous Persian classical poets].

P2: After we came, I felt that my daughter forgot some letters. It is important to me that her mother tongue is preserved, and I want her to find this knowledge.

P5: Persian is their mother tongue. They get to know their identity. They get to know their roots. Because we are foreigners here in European societies. Society is not ready enough to consider the second generation as a real Finn.

P6: This is how they feel that they belong to two places [Iran and Finland].

2. Connect with family. Some Iranian families living in Finland are unsure whether Finland is their permanent place of residence or not. Some of them have moved to Finland to pursue their studies and may return to Iran after completing their education.

P4: Maybe we want to go back to Iran. I want my son to learn Persian.

P5: I wanted them to learn to read and write. Because I wanted them to be independent. I think that if something happens to me and their father before they turn eighteen, they should return to our families in Iran. And it is very important that they can live independently from us.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the majority of the families of all the participants reside in Iran and speak Persian. Therefore, parents consider it essential for their children to be able to communicate with their relatives via virtual conversations or to read and write messages in Persian in virtual groups.

P6: To know that they are not alone and that they have a family. They can talk to them.

Moreover, since parents themselves speak Persian better than any other language, they want their child to be able to communicate with them in Persian at home.

P6: Because we speak Persian better, they can easily communicate with us.

3. The benefits of bilingualism. Learning the mother tongue can have positive effects on a child's personality and the development of subsequent language skills. Bilingualism offers benefits such as enhancing the child's personality and improving their ability to learn additional languages. One participant stated that learning the mother tongue, along with other languages learned in the country of residence, strengthens positive aspects of the child's personality. Another participant mentioned that learning the mother tongue fosters independence and self-confidence in children.

P3: I had read an article before that there was a study that children who speak their mother tongue become independent and hardworking.

P6: It gives them confidence.

According to one participant's perspective, learning Persian language can enhance the child's ability to learn subsequent languages. This participant emphasized the advantage of

acquiring a new language (in this case, the mother tongue) for better language learning in the future.

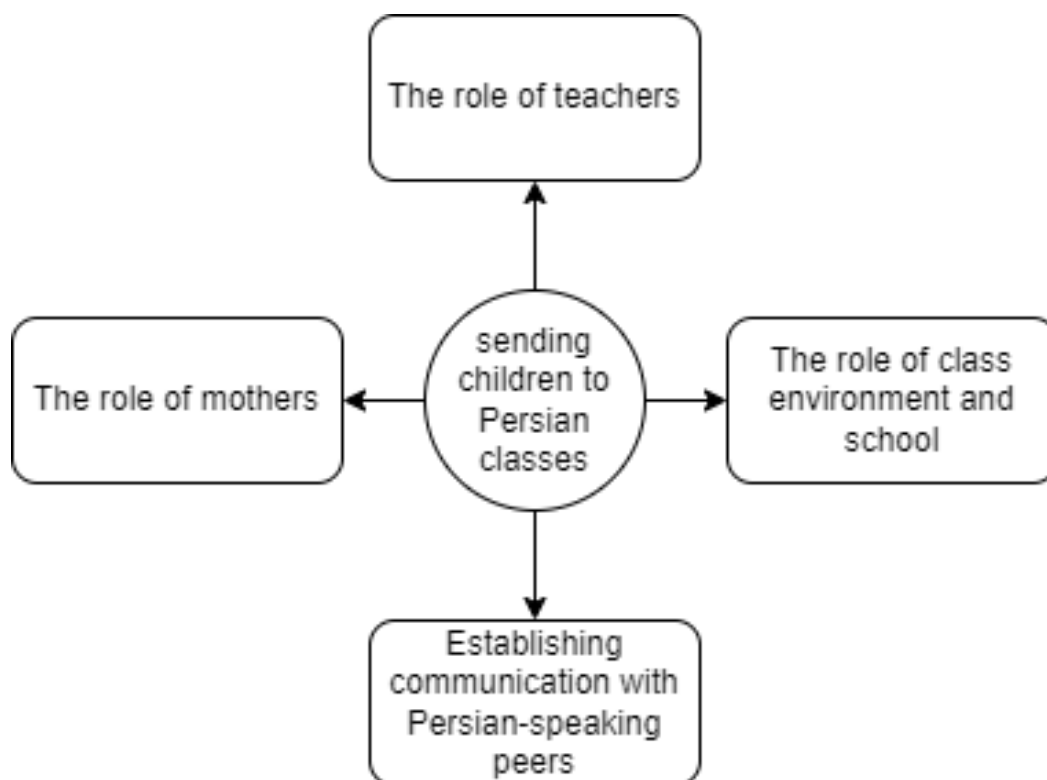
P3: There were many Afghan immigrants here, and they complained that our children do not speak Persian. I asked, why? They said that because when they go to kindergarten, they speak Finnish, and the children learn Finnish because of the Finnish environment, and they also speak Finnish to each other inside the house. That's why, because I saw how difficult it is, we made this rule to speak Persian at home. And I saw that the more a child learns one language, the better they can learn the second language.

4.1.2. Sending children to Persian classes

In this section, the reasons why parents have chosen either school or home-based education for their children are discussed. Of the participants in this study, six had sent their children to educational classes, one had sent their child for a short period but had not continued, and one had not sent their child to any educational class at all. Nevertheless, all participants had tried to teach their children at home, either continuously or as a form of educational assistance. Figure 3 illustrates the four primary reasons for this section.

Figure 3

Reason of sending children to Persian classes



1. The role of teachers. The majority of participants emphasized the significance of the teacher's role in their decision to enroll their children in Persian language classes. In some cases, parents compared the teacher's instruction to their own efforts to educate their children, while in other instances, they referred to the teacher's professional expertise. However, some participants expressed dissatisfaction with the teacher's teaching style or observed a lack of interest in the children towards the teacher's approach, which will be addressed in the problems section.

P1: Because children listen more to the teacher.

P3: The teacher of the mosque classes is very professional.

P3: My son was sad when he came here. When he went to the third grade, there was an old teacher. In order to make my son happy, this teacher had played an Iranian song for him in class. The teacher told the class that [Child's name] wants to teach you

Persian. Because the Persian language is also a language. This teacher was 70 years old. She told my husband if you want his math to be strong, explain to him in Persian.

P5: If I were on my own, I wouldn't have the ability to teach them the alphabet.

P6: I wanted the teacher to teach them. Education is also an art. If we all knew this, we would [all] become teachers. Some may not have the patience of the teacher. They may hit the child with too much pressure.

P7: The last two years when my children went to Persian class, it was because of the good manners of the teacher. And with this class, they learned Persian letters well.

2. The role of classroom environment and school. Parents are more willing to send their children to Persian language classes if the classroom environment is positive and happy. This is especially important as these classes are often held outside of the regular school curriculum and typically take place in the afternoon.

P2: I would like my daughter to attend face-to-face classes and be in the environment. Psychologically, it can have a positive effect, that's why I would like her to attend her Persian language classes in person.

3. Establishing communication with Persian-speaking peers. The participants expressed their satisfaction with the fact that their children are able to communicate and make friends with children of the same language and culture, including Iranians and Afghans.

P2: In these classes, she can make friends with other Iranian children. She can be friends with Afghan children. They speak a common language. It has a great effect on her mood.

P2: Children play together sometimes, and it is fun for them. She is eager to go to this class.

4. The role of mothers. Although the participants emphasized the importance of the teacher, most of them have also taken on the responsibility of teaching their children themselves. This can be in the form of pre-emptive language training before the child starts formal language classes or as a supplement to the classes.

P1: For my son, when we started, I wrote the letters in big letters and told him to read. I practiced writing with him. Or, for example, I would put the books I had brought from Iran in front of him, I would show him the letters he knew to read. But I felt it was getting late for my daughter. I started numbers a year ago. Similar to what they do in kindergartens here to teach English. I did the same for letters. We will go one step further so that she gets to know the way of writing letters and also to improve her reading. Before I had taken the letters in the form of magnets and we worked together. She can read some words. She may not know a letter of that word, but she knew the shape of the word and could read it.

P4: I brought the Persian book of Iran and started it myself. I worked on the letters with my son first, and when we were reading a book together, I showed him the letters to get his attention. We read two books to him a day. We bring a lot of books from Iran.

P7: When we first arrived, we brought Persian books from Iran and read to them. We had given a prize to my son that if he could read a paragraph from the Shahnameh book, we would give him whatever he wanted.

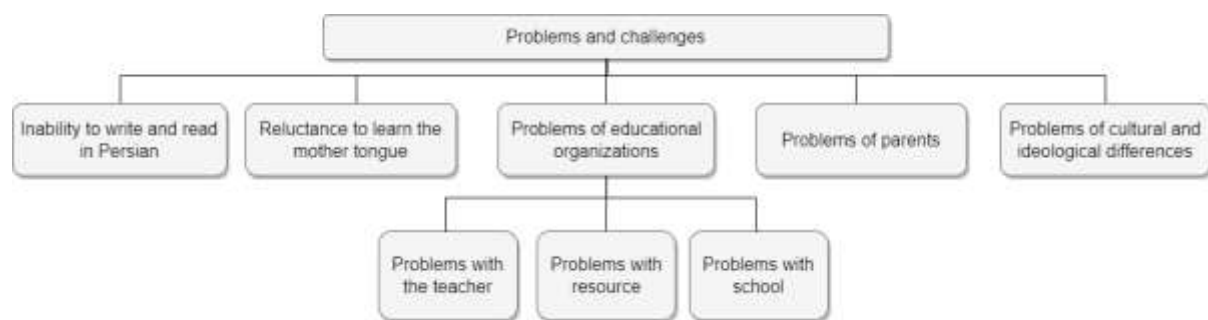
P8: I taught her the Persian book of Iran. I used to remove the religious parts of it. We used to do dictation together and I encouraged her.

4.2. Problems and Challenges

Figure 4 shows the themes and sub-themes of the problems and challenges.

Figure 4

Problem and challenges



1. Inability to write and read in Persian. Some parents express concern about their children's inability to read and write in Persian, whereas they are less worried about their children's listening and speaking skills in Persian.

P6: Now my children cannot write Persian at all. If I send them a message in Persian, they don't answer and ask what? They insist that I send messages in English.

P8: Her writing skills are poor. She knows the alphabet. She can transcribe from the text. But she does not have the speed of those who are her age in Iran and learned Persian in Iran.

2. Reluctance to learn the mother tongue. Several participants reported that their children were reluctant to learn Persian for various reasons. The main reason for this reluctance

was the children not feeling the need to learn Persian. Another reason was their dissatisfaction with the classroom environment.

P5: Children feel that their time is wasted if they go to class.

P5: In the chat, I write in Persian to them and they answer in English. In family chats, if they are the audience, they have to read, but if they are not the audience, they don't want to read at all. They have no patience to read Persian text.

P6: Due to the strictness of the teacher, the children were disappointed in the Persian class and went to the class with our insistence. The next teacher was good, but the children really did not want to learn to write Persian.

P6: The children had a full schedule. After school, they used to go to music or gymnastics or swimming class and Persian language class. In addition, they are not interested in reading Persian language. They did not feel the need to learn Persian.

P7: They talk in Persian with our friends who are Persian speakers, or my son only talks in Persian with his Afghan classmate, which means they use Persian only when needed.

3. Problems of educational organizations. I have listed all the problems related to teachers, educational resources, and schools that parents have mentioned under the section of "problems of educational organizations."

A. Problems with the teacher. The Persian language teachers who taught the children of the parents who participated in this research were located in four different cities in Finland. To protect their confidentiality, I have refrained from disclosing the names of the cities or

providing any information that could potentially reveal the teachers' identities. This is due to the limited number of Persian language teachers in Finland.

P1: The teacher is very close to the children emotionally. For example, if something happens and the teacher gives them a warning, it becomes a problem. They will be very upset. Children have different feelings for someone who speaks their mother tongue. Their Persian teacher is very different from other teachers.

P5: The children should not talk to each other. The teacher was strict and not caring. She was not motivated. It's as if she didn't find anything else and had to come to this job. She didn't care if the children went to class or not. ☹ [in the whole city] there is only one person who is a Persian language teacher and she sees no reason to improve. I gave her many suggestions to encourage the children, but she did not listen. With all the expenses, there is no monitoring of the performance of Persian teachers.

P5: She was a compassionate teacher. But she was stricter than Finnish teachers. She gave a lot of homework.

P6: The Persian teacher was very, very strict and gave a lot of homework (like eight pages of alphabet letters), which the children had not learned in Finnish schools. I also did not agree with putting pressure on the children.

B. Problems with the resource. The primary source of Persian language education for all the participants' children in this research is a series of books published by Sam Publishing in Sweden. While each child may have used different volumes and editions of this book series.

P1: There is no Persian book that the teacher gives to the children and tells them to read.

P2: The content of the book is very easy for my daughter. But this may be because this book is designed for children who were born here. In my opinion, children who have a background in learning Persian, their books should be different from someone who was born here and knows the Finnish language better.

P8 [and P3]: The teacher used old sources. She had copied an old book and given it to the children.

C. Problems with the school. Most participants in this study mentioned several common challenges related to attending Persian language classes, including distance from their place of residence, inconvenient class times, and insufficient class duration. The majority of participants felt that the two hours of class per week were not enough to make significant progress in learning Persian. Given the frequency of these concerns, I have opted not to provide specific quotes.

P1: The classes are not as rich as we want. It is an hour and a half class with ten students of different ages. Not enough. One of the problems is transportation, which may not be the same for everyone, and the Persian class is organized in their own school. Another problem is that the class time is in the middle of the day. Another problem is that this class is after school and the children are tired. They have to go to another school and the environment will change completely.

P1: The class is an hour and a half, and each child's share is a quarter. Sometimes it is used as an event. For example, there is Yalda or Nowruz, we say there is no problem, these are Iranian ceremonies. At the same time, it is also Finnish mother's day! Everything goes to the party.

P2: It would be better if the groupings were different. But it is not possible. Because she is the only second grader [in the class]. It would be better if each grade had a separate class.

P5: In school, their classes were 45 minutes, but the Persian class was 1 and a half hours. The children were tired. They did not have a break in an hour and a half.

P8: Once she came home after class and was upset. To teach something, the teacher had posted a video that was not suitable for my daughter's age and she was scared. I told her you don't have to go anymore. Because age separation is not done for classes. It is not possible because the number of children was small. One may be 8 years old, and one may be 11 years old.

4. Problems of parents. Parents have mentioned a few problems related to their children's Persian language education. Some of these problems include inconvenient class times, lack of motivation in children, and the involvement in learning multiple languages.

P5: My daughter did not continue. I have no motivation to encourage them anymore.

P6: In the middle of the working day, we have to take my daughter to a Persian class somewhere far away.

P7: Our speaking Turkish at home made the children forget Persian. Because the language here is Finnish, we speak English with our friends, I speak Turkish with my husband at home, and the children's second language at school is German.

5. Problems of cultural and ideological differences. Some parents mentioned that the educational materials or teaching methods used by the teachers were not in line with their family's cultural values.

P1: Another problem is that the Persian teacher may talk about other issues. The problem of schools in Iran is like that, and schools here are like this. Or the situation in Iran is like this now. I personally do not like to talk about these issues. I created an image of Iran for my child, right or wrong, I don't want that image to be ruined. Sometimes things are said that we have to answer to the children. They have questions in their minds. For example, years ago, there was an old teacher who talked a lot about political issues. As my friend told his children, you don't need to go to Persian class anymore. or, for example, about religious issues or religious occasions, or comments related to religion or specific groups; There are discussions about these issues in the class and the teacher cannot control them.

P1: We celebrate religious ceremonies at home and talk about them. My son went to school and said why should we celebrate Finnish mother's day. We can celebrate Hazrat Zahra's (Prophet Muhammad's daughter) birthday, which is Mother's Day (in Iran). The discussion has come up. Their book is a mixture of western culture. For example, the boy is walking his dog, he went to dance class. Or, for example, even words. For the letter z, the teacher gave the example of "VOZO" (Translation: ablution). Put this on the classroom wall. Some families pointed out that this has a religious theme.

P1: Both Afghans and Iranians are present in the mother tongue class. Afghans do not know some Iranian words and expressions or occasions.

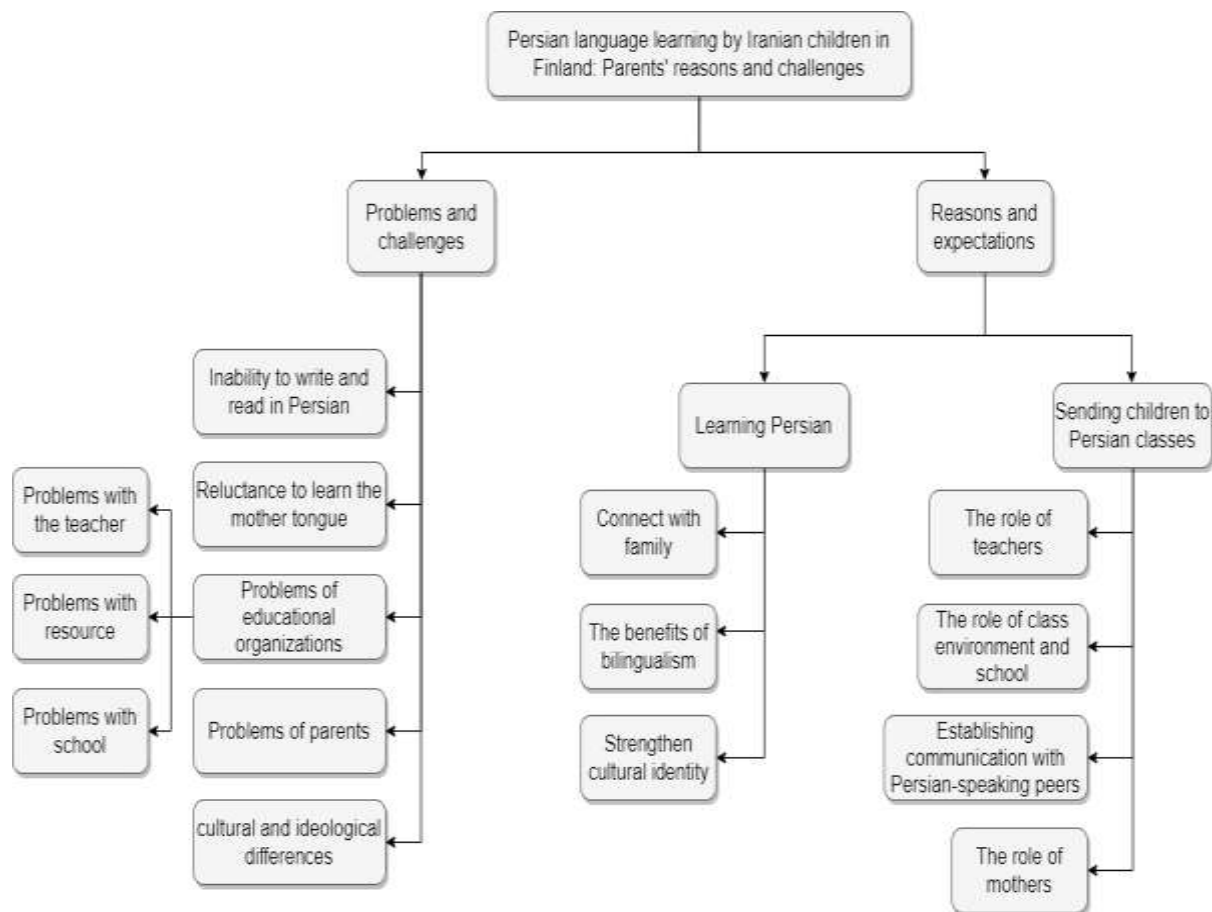
P6: They have a book similar to Iran's Persian book. Maybe it is culturally different from Iranian books. It focuses more on education than promoting something special.

4.3. Conclusion

In this section, I have presented the findings of eight interviews categorized into specific themes. The section on Reasons and Expectations was divided into two parts: Reasons for learning the Persian language and Reasons for sending children to Persian language classes. The first part included three reasons: strengthening cultural identity, communication with family, and the benefits of bilingualism. The second part focused on the role of teachers, schools, mothers, and friendships. The main problems identified in this study included difficulties with reading and writing Persian, children's reluctance to learn, problems with the educational system, and cultural differences. These findings are consistent with previous studies, with few variations. A summary of all the reasons and challenges mentioned in this study is presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Persian language learning by Iranian children in Finland: Parents' reasons and challenges



5. Discussion

Immigration to a new country brings with it a variety of social, cultural, and political aspects that also affect the language of immigrants. One way in which immigrants maintain their connection with their homeland and ethnic identity is through heritage language. Persian is a common language among minority populations in Finland. This study aims to investigate the reasons why Iranian parents living in Finland want their children to learn Persian, why they send them to Persian language classes, and what challenges they face.

In the first chapter, key concepts were defined, and previous research on the topic was reviewed from various perspectives. The theoretical framework used in this research is the concept of Family Language Policy (FLP). Chapter two explained the reasons and challenges identified in previous studies and named them accordingly.

In the third chapter, the methodology of this research was described. A qualitative method was chosen, and eight Iranian mothers were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire. The interviews were transcribed, translated, and coded to extract themes. Finally, in the fourth chapter, a diagram was presented summarizing the reasons and challenges of Persian language learning in Finland as perceived by Iranian parents.

All of the parents in this study cited the strengthening of cultural identity as their main reason for their children to learn Persian. As Meskoob (1992) has explained, Persian is considered a crucial part of Iranian identity. It is important to note that Iran is made up of diverse ethnic groups with different languages and cultures, but the Persian language serves as a means of communication among them. Thus, even mothers whose first language was not Persian emphasized the importance of their children learning the language.

Learning to read in Persian was also a significant goal mentioned in both this study and previous research. Salahshour (2017) discussed the potential benefits of children being able to read historical, political, and classical Persian texts. Similarly, the parents in this study emphasized the importance of their children being able to read literature in Persian. Persian literature is an integral part of Iranian culture, with classic poems by Hafez often read on national occasions and literary proverbs incorporated into everyday conversations. Additionally, many Iranians take pride in their national myths, which are featured in the classic Persian poetry book *Shahnameh*. Given this cultural significance, parents are motivated to ensure their children also have the ability to read these texts.

As previously stated, Persian is the official language of Iran and commonly spoken in the country. However, many Iranians speak other languages such as Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic, Lori, Gilaki, and more as their first language. Despite this, some parents use "mother tongue" to refer to Persian, indicating their belief that it is their true mother tongue and a crucial part of their cultural identity. This has been discussed in relation to the codes used for preserving cultural identity. In addition to this, mothers have emphasized the importance of preserving their ethnic identity and connecting their children to Iranian culture.

Hoffman's (1989) study noted that Persian is used as a tool for cultural assimilation among Iranian speakers in the US. However, this concern was not observed among Iranian parents in Finland. One reason for this could be that Finland does not receive as many immigrants as countries such as the US, Canada, Germany, and Sweden, resulting in fewer Iranians living there. Consequently, while the participants in this research expressed concern for preserving their cultural identity and language, they acknowledged that Persian has limited practical use for communication in Finland.

Felling (2006) and Modarresi (2001) have highlighted that parents' desire for their children to learn Persian is often motivated by the need to communicate with family members during trips to Iran. This reason was also cited in the current research, but with a slight difference. Immigrants living in distant countries like the US, or those unable to easily return to Iran due to political reasons, see Persian as a way to preserve their identity. Although they do not plan to move back to Iran permanently, they still want to maintain their connection to their past, memories, friends, and family there. In contrast, parents residing in Finland are more pragmatic. They are uncertain about their future and may have to return to Iran for financial reasons or family emergencies. Thus, they view Persian as a necessary language for practical reasons rather than just nostalgia.

Furthermore, some parents may not be proficient in the language of their current country of residence, leading them to encourage their children to learn Persian. This issue was also raised in the studies of Felling (2006) and Babaei (2013). In the case of parents living in Finland, the situation is somewhat different. They primarily use English rather than Finnish in their daily life, while their children learn Finnish or Swedish at school and in the community. Learning a new and unfamiliar language can be challenging for older individuals. Moreover, since these parents are uncertain about where their future work and education will be, they may not feel motivated to learn Finnish and communicate with their children in that language.

In this study, Persian-speaking parents in Finland identified several motivations for their children to learn Persian. First, they recognized the benefits of bilingualism, as noted by Felling (2006) and Gharibi (2016), and believed that learning a new language would positively impact their children's cognitive development. This view was particularly prevalent among well-educated families who aimed for academic success for their children. To support their

child's development, some parents even enrolled them in additional classes such as music and sports in addition to Persian language classes.

Second, previous studies such as Atoofi (2012) and Gharibi and Mirvahedi (2021) identified the transfer of emotional concepts as a reason for parents to encourage their children to learn Persian. However, this was not observed among the parents in the present study. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that the parents in Finland may place less emphasis on the active role of Persian interaction in their children's emotional development.

Overall, the findings suggest that Persian-speaking parents in Finland are motivated to preserve their cultural identity and language, but also recognize the practical benefits of their children's bilingualism.

In the second chapter, I discussed five factors that influence the decision to learn Persian. Upon analyzing the data, I found that these factors are related to the decision of parents to enroll their children in Persian language classes. Fishman (1985) highlighted the importance of the number of Persian-speaking immigrants, while Gharibi and Mirvahedi (2021) and Modarresi (2001) focused on different sources of the Persian language, such as media and social networks. However, these factors were not mentioned by the participants in the current research. This could be due to the lack of an Iranian community in Finland and the scarcity of Persian language resources in the country. Nevertheless, the parents living in Finland highlighted the possibility of their children communicating with their peers who speak Persian. This suggests that in the future, as the number of Iranian immigrants in Finland grows and communication networks are established, more attention will be given to these factors.

Gharibi (2016) emphasized the importance of teachers and schools in encouraging children to learn Persian, and this role was also acknowledged by the participants of the present

study. They recognized education as a science and believed that many language concepts can be effectively taught to children by teachers. Furthermore, the role of the mother in the child's Persian language learning was also highlighted in both previous research and the current study. While Modarresi (2001) emphasized the positive role of the mother in this regard, Namei (2008) found that mothers played a role in language shift from Persian to Swedish. In the present study, mothers viewed their role as complementary and preliminary. They indicated that they provide Persian language books, read Persian stories to their children, and assist them in learning Persian letters. Interestingly, unlike some previous studies, none of the participants in this research mentioned the effect of parents' higher education on sending their children to Persian classes.

Another problem that parents mentioned in this research is the lack of available resources for learning Persian in Finland. This issue was also mentioned by Gharibi and Mirvahedi (2021) in their study. Since Persian is not an official language in Finland, finding Persian language materials and classes is difficult. Parents mentioned that they have to rely on online resources, Persian books brought from Iran, and private tutors. Lack of access to Persian language materials and classes can have a negative impact on the child's learning experience and progress.

Furthermore, parents in the present study mentioned the difficulty of finding qualified and experienced Persian language teachers in Finland. This issue has been previously pointed out by Modarresi (2001). The lack of qualified teachers can result in a lower quality of language education, and can also make it difficult for children to stay motivated and interested in learning the language.

Finally, parents mentioned the challenge of balancing the child's language learning with other activities and commitments. Some parents mentioned that they have to sacrifice other activities or hobbies in order to make time for Persian language classes or private tutoring. This issue can put additional stress on the child and the family, and can also affect the child's motivation and interest in learning the language.

Various previous studies (Sedighi, 2010; Salahshour, 2017; Wang, 2018; Mirvahedi, 2021) and the current research highlight recurring problems related to Persian language education, including teacher strictness, high homework load, limited time allocation per student, outdated or complex resources, and inconvenient class schedules. The present research reveals that Persian language teachers in Finland are not well-versed in Finnish educational methods, which poses a challenge for students accustomed to the Finnish system. Additionally, as Persian is not part of the official curriculum and there are relatively few Persian speakers participating in classes, students must attend sessions with others at varying proficiency levels in separate schools. This unfamiliar setting and fatigue can further impede learning. Parents have identified a book series by a Swedish publisher as a popular resource that may not be appropriate for all children and requires revision. Furthermore, many parents have cited insufficient class time as an issue due to the low number of students per grade in each city.

Previous studies (Sedighi, 2010; Wang, 2018; Mirvahedi, 2021) have also highlighted the role of parents in influencing their children's motivation to learn Persian. This study found that parents' lack of motivation may stem from the difficulty of commuting to classes and the inability to regularly converse with their children in Persian.

Iranian society is composed of diverse religious and cultural groups, and the government is an ideological one. The views of Iranians may not align with the government's

or other societal groups' ideology. Therefore, the use of educational materials that represent a particular belief or culture may be distasteful to some. This was a significant observation in the present study.

The findings of this research can aid in better planning the teaching of minority languages in Finland. In my opinion, aside from considering parents' opinions in developing textbooks and curricula, including Persian as one of the main subjects in the curriculum of Persian-speaking students can enhance children's language learning experience.

5.1. Limitations

The limitations of the current study should be acknowledged when interpreting the results. The sample size was limited, with only a small number of participants being interviewed, which may have reduced the representativeness of the sample and generalizability of the findings to the larger population of Persian-speaking parents in Finland. The data collected was based on self-reported information, which may have been subject to biases and limitations in recall. Moreover, the study was conducted in Finland and may not reflect the experiences of Iranian children learning Persian in other countries. Additionally, the study's time constraints may have impacted the depth and breadth of the findings. The focus of this research was on Iranian parents residing in Finland, regardless of their ethnic background, who have enrolled their children in Persian language classes, with the statistical population comprising all such parents in Finland. However, it should be noted that while Persian is widely spoken as the official language in Iran, it is not the first language for all Iranians, with languages such as Turkish and Kurdish also being commonly spoken. To avoid the complexities of local languages in Iran, ethnicity was excluded as a factor in this research.

5.2. Recommendations for Future Studies

This study provides insights into the experiences of Iranian children learning Persian in Finland, but there is still much to be explored in this area. Future studies could benefit from a larger sample size to increase the representativeness of the findings and their generalizability to the larger population. A comparative study that compares the experiences of Persian language learners in Finland with those in other countries would provide valuable insights into cross-cultural differences in the challenges faced and reasons for learning the language. Longitudinal studies could provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of Persian language learners over time and any changes in the challenges faced and reasons for learning the language. Additionally, future studies could benefit from collecting data from a more diverse range of perspectives, such as teachers, language schools, and community organizations involved in Persian language learning in Finland.

5.3. Conclusions and Reflections

Family language policies become important in families for whom the role of language has become more prominent due to reasons such as migration. Iranian parents have different reasons for teaching Persian to their children. From making it possible to communicate with other Iranians to preserving identity and culture. The problems that parents face are also varies. From general problems that can occur in any other subject (such as problems of parents or the educational environment) to problems that originate from cultural differences and immigration (such as children's reluctance or teaching things that do not fit the family's culture in the classroom). The themes of the data of the current research largely confirmed the themes extracted from previous studies, but the Iranian community in Finland is facing different reasons and problems. For the participants of this research, it is not clear that their future life

will continue in Finland. Also, the community of Iranians in Finland is not large and there is no communication circle between Iranians living in Finland. This factor has made them, on the one hand, look at Persian as a practical language for their children in small family gatherings or during travel or permanent residence in Iran, and on the other hand, they are aware of the marginality and inapplicability of this language in Finland.

Appendix: Interview Questions

1. Would you like to tell me something about your background?
2. Would you like to tell me about your decision to migrate to Finland?
3. How many children do you have? What genders?
4. How old were your child/children when you moved to Finland?
5. What languages do the children speak in their daily lives?
6. Why do you want to teach Persian to your children?
7. How often do your children hear Persian? In which ways/contexts?
8. How often do your children use Persian? In which ways/contexts?
9. Why do you want to send your children to Persian language classes?
10. How often are the classes? How long? What do you know about what they do there?
11. Do you take steps to teach Persian to your children at home?
12. What parts of teaching your children Persian is working well at the moment?
13. What have been your problems so far in teaching Persian to your children?

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