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Heritage Language Maintenance in an Iranian Community in Canada

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Research shows that many immigrant children in Canada face challenges in maintaining their heritage languages, i.e., languages other than English and French or Indigenous languages. Public schools might not recognize or promote the use of heritage languages, many schools do not provide heritage language instruction, and in some instances, students and their parents are discouraged from using their heritage language at home. Heritage languages, however, should be maintained to help immigrant students succeed socially and academically and maintain stronger familial bonds (Chen, 2010; Kouritzin, 2006).

In light of these challenges and the importance of maintaining heritage languages, this qualitative case study, informed by the work of critical theorists in the field of additional language education, for example, identity and power (Norton, 2001), attempted to investigate language maintenance in a Farsi school in a major city in Canada. Issues under investigation included Iranian immigrant students’, parents’, and teachers’ perspectives on language maintenance, the availability of language maintenance resources at home, school, and in the first language (L1) community, successes and challenges of the students in maintaining their heritage language at home, school, and in the L1 community, and the parents’ and teachers’ effort in facilitating heritage language learning opportunities for children. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, field-observations, descriptive and
reflective field notes, and participants’ journal writing. The emerging themes included (1) the importance of language maintenance, (2) language maintenance strategies, and (3) language maintenance challenges. Results highlighted the importance of heritage language maintenance from social, familial, personal, and economic perspectives. Recommendations for family and community members, policy makers, and teacher are offered at the end.

**Author**

Dr. Naghmeh Babaee received a PhD in Second Language Education from the University of Manitoba. She has extensively studied immigrant students’ education, language maintenance, and identity. Also, Naghmeh has taught ESL and EAP for sixteen years. She teaches Academic Writing, Transitional English, and EAP at the Art Institute of Vancouver.