An Ethnographic Inquiry into Persian and English Education in the School of the Embassy of India in Iran: Marginalization of Persian in its Homeland

Research Article

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Abstract

Language marginalization is one of the main concerns of many nations. Several driving forces may endanger indigenous languages including globalization, hegemonic ambitions such as colonialism, and the lack of proper language planning and policy at national and international levels. This research is an ethnographic study to explore the status of Persian compared to English among the members of an Indian community residing in Iran. The data of this qualitative study was collected through semi-structured interviews with 18 teachers and parents of the students in the

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School of the Embassy of India in Tehran, Iran, as well as one-year observations of this school, accompanied with detailed field notes, and general investigation of the Persian and English course materials taught at this school. Thematic analysis of the data revealed that English holds the highest status among the members of this Indian community. This is while, on the one hand, members of this community are in urgent need for Persian due to their communicative and educational demands during their residence in Iran, and on the other hand, the Iranian Act of Foreign Citizen's Schools has required quality Persian instruction and supervision in Iranian Schools for International Citizens. This study illustrates how Persian is marginalized in its homeland because of the postcolonial remnants and neocolonial forces of English dominance which lead to over-appreciation of English among members of this community, along with the absence of Iranian language policies' implementation monitoring, and poor Persian instruction.

Keywords: School of the Embassy of India, English dominance, Persian marginalization, ethnographic inquiry, contributing factors

Introduction

With the rapid spread of English throughout the world during and after the postcolonial era, marginalization and devaluation of indigenous languages have become important concerns of many scholars (e.g., Dillon, 2016; Mario et al., 2014; Park, 2017; Sarkar & Lavoie, 2014). Critical sociolinguists have noticed that while the colonial era ended many years ago in countries such as India, the colonial influences are still lingering on languages and education systems of former colonies (Adjei, 2007; Raju, 2011; Sekhar, 2012). There are ample evidences of French and British colonialism legacy in the educational systems and national/official language policies of African, Latin America and Asian subcontinental countries including India (Bhattacharya, 2017; Cogneau, 2003; Dupraz, 2019). Because of this colonial background, many researchers (e.g., May, 2001; Shohamy, 2006; Spolsky, 2009; Wright, 2007) are greatly concerned with the threat of English for other languages inside their borders.

One such case is the declined place of Persian among Indian non-Persian speakers. Despite the good ties between Iran and India and the long history of their close relations, communication between two nations in their indigenous languages is hardly, if ever, possible. This is mainly because of the removal of Persian from Indian schooling during the British colonial reign, and the subsequent intervening role of English (Chandio , Jafri & Ansari, 2014; Stroud & Wee, 2006). This concern sounds to be due in Iran because of the growing prominence assigned to English in academic settings such as an Indian school inside Iran, which is the subject of the present study. Despite the urgent need for Persian which is the national language in Iran, we noticed that Indian learners of Persian cannot meet their daily communicative needs through Persian.

In spite of the sociolinguistic significance of the issue, and the problems it has created for this Indian community in Iran, this subject has not been investi-

gated so far. Accordingly, the present research means to scrutinize into different facets of this issue through exploring, first, how this Indian community viewed Persian and English education, and, second, which driving forces encouraged/discouraged the promotion of any of these two languages in the research context. For this purpose, an ethnographic research was conducted in this Indian school, since this type of research could assure credible reports and trustworthy results through extended "co-presence of observer and events" (Luders, 2004, p. 225). Effort was made to address the aims of an ethnographic research through prolonged observations along with field notes, personal interviews, and course book data analysis in the course of one year. This could give us clues as to a series of forces which contribute to devaluation of Persian among the members of this community, and high appraisal of English instead, as they will be explained in the subsequent sections.

Literature Review
Colonialism, English and Persian in India

European colonialism started out in the 15th century and by the late 19th century, more than three-quarters of the earth belonged to some European countries. This was reinforced by colonizers' plots to discourage local people from their linguistic and cultural heritage, hoping that they would not resist the colonial powers if they willingly adopted the colonizers' way of life, language and culture (Rajasekhar, 2012). As far as India is concerned, soon after it was occupied by Britain, the British East India Company was founded. Despite its claim of being a "commercial company," it started to recruit chaplains to spread Christianity in India and *ministers of religion and schools* were assigned for all their factories in India (Venkatanarayanan, 2013). As the colonizers expanded their power, they kept introducing traditional indigenous knowledge as "backward and outdated," which resulted in "segregation of indigenous people" and encouraging them to assimilate British life style (Pratt et al., 2018, p. 5). This was the time when the English language was introduced into Indian educational system (Rajasekhar, 2012), annual grants were allotted to English-based schools while British missionaries observed the schools regularly (Venkatanarayanan, 2013). In a course of about two decades, English was officially recognized as the medium of instruction from the 6th year of schooling, taking the place of Persian, Arabic, and Sanskrit (Venkatanarayanan, 2013).

Before colonialization, the Indian education system had an "oriental pattern" (Chandio et al., 2014, p. 76). There were three types of schools, namely, Pathshalas, Madrassas, and Maktabs. Pathshalas were conventional Indian schools, Madrassas were the schools for Muslims, and Maktabs were Persian schools where the mediums of instructions were Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit. Persian had a great influence on Indian languages like Urdu, Punjabi, and Sindhi, and other Indian languages like Marathi, Hindi, Rajasthani, and Gujarati have borrowed a large number of words and phrases from Persian (Khansir & Mozafari, 2014).

After British colonization, some primary schools in India continued to use mother tongues as the medium of instruction and Sanskrit was extensively used in schools, but higher education was strictly decided to be in English. With the development of British rule in India, oriental-patterned schools as well as the funds for printing books in Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit were eliminated, and Persian in office, court, and administration was replaced by English (Chandio et al., 2014). Consequently, regional languages were replaced by English which was recognized as the language of "upper and middle class" (Singh & Singh, 2014, p. 128). This was while no official effort was made to translate the imported western literature into local languages, nor to standardize Indian scripts (Kumar, 2015).

English became the official and academic language of India by the early twentieth century, and it increasingly gained the status of the language of "government, the social elite, and the national press" (Singh & Singh, 2014, p. 128). From the time that English was introduced in India, it has had impacts on various domains such as business, literature, education system as well as Indian culture and civilization (Sekhar, 2012). English has even been recognized as the "means of personal achievement and the language of necessity" and the traditional languages including Persian have been removed because of the imposed superiority of English (Singh & Singh, 2014, p. 128).

"Imperialism of the English language is still evident in the modern world followed by colonialism" (Sekhar, 2012, p. 113). The power and authority of (neo)colonialism, which was originated in the west, exists in the form of soft power today; "unlike ordinary military conquest, colonialism involved a cultural conquest; through the mind" (Raju, 2011, p. 147). English, which was once imposed on the Indian society by colonizers, maintained and promoted its place in India, through *globalization* since, as the following discussions reveal, globalization is an extension of colonialism (Fukuyama, 2006).

Globalization and the Marginalization of National Languages

As "the interconnections of global economic, political, cultural and environmental processes" (Steger, 2013, p. 7), globalization shapes new ways of life, identities and institutions (Giddens, 2000), and associates, more than everything, the power and dominance of the English language (Chang, 2006). As such, Tsui and Tollefson (2007) hold, "globalization is effected by two inseparable mediation tools, technology and English; and to respond to the rapid changes brought about by globalization, all countries have been trying to ensure that they are adequately equipped with these two skills" (p. 1). Armed with technological, scientific, military, political, economic, academic, and cultural powers, English has become a golden key to keep pace with technological, economic and social advancements and has assisted in integration with the rest of the world (Jenkins, 2006). This is more significant in post-colonial countries, like India, where information about power, status, and identity are embedded in the patterns of English language acquisition and use (Bhatt, 2010).

In fact, the spread of English as a global language is a major consequence of globalization (Crystal, 2000), which acts as a "driving force to strengthen" this position (Chang, 2006, p. 515), and has succeeded in introducing English to the world as official, foreign, and second language as well as the lingua franca (Salö, 2017). The evidence that English has achieved the *unrivaled* status of global language (Pennycook, 2007; Park & Wee, 2012) is the reality that "only one-fourth of all English users worldwide are native speakers, and most non-native speakers using English do so in the absence of native speakers" (Seidlhofer, 2011, p.1).

Despite being a fact, the global spread of English is a controversial issue among various thinkers (Bhatt, 2010). *Proponents* of the global status of English believe that it is an "exceptional" (Ammon, 2001, p. 345; Baker, 2006, p. 12; Graddol, 1997, p. 3) language in that it is favored as the language of education, occupation, and communication throughout the world. In this sense, English is regarded as a gateway through which economic activities and information exchange are done globally (Graddol, 1997; Harmer, 2007). Seidlhofer (2005) states that English as a "global" or "International language" can reduce the misunderstanding and misinterpretations among people (p. 339). Similarly, Mufwene (2002) holds that the local populations benefit from the language shift which occurs through colonization and globalization. He contends with viewing the world's major languages as the "killer languages" declaring that language endangerment and extinction can simply occur under "peaceful conditions" due to language shift (p. 162). Moreover, English as a single global language is assumed to bring peace to the countries around the world, and linguistic diversity can arise conflicts among ethnic groups in societies (Brewer, 2001).

Although considerable benefits are attached to having a global language, the potential threats of the phenomenon have been discussed by many commentators (Crystal, 2000 & 2003). As a result of global language, an "elite monolingual linguistic class," who is quite satisfied with its mother tongue and reluctant to learn other languages, will grow (Crystal, 2003, p. 14). Moreover, the recognition of a global language accelerates the disappearance of languages with relatively smaller number of speakers, since many people think that one language suffices and they do not need to learn other languages (Crystal, 2000). Another observation is that through the flows and interactions of globalization, national "self-reliance" has diminished as people interact across borders to a far greater degree (Wright, 2007, p.167).

One other concern about English globalization is that even as a foreign language, Crystal (2003) observes, English is being used in more than 100 countries and in many cases other foreign languages are being replaced by English. This, will change the big world into a small village (Crystal, 2003), which in turn, leads to English hegemony, and the dominance of English endangers the smaller languages around the world (Tsuda, 2008). Phillipson (2008, p. 4) points out that "global English" seems to be an appropriate term since English is widely used in the "global linguistic market" and its purpose is becoming "the

dominant language of international communication in an increasing number of countries worldwide," which itself results in the extinction of many languages (Crystal, 2000). In other words, the value of national languages declines in transnational communications, to the extent that the global language prevails (Salö, 2017). In a nutshell, opponents of English globalization, hold that English language growth is a policy which intends to destroy the smaller languages in the world, to homogenize the world culture, and to inject the beliefs, dispositions, values, and practices of English native speakers to the communities of English users (Bhatt, 2010). No matter how many proponents or opponents global spread of English has, it has influenced the world generally, and many nations like India particularly.

Language Planning and Policy in the Globalized World; the Case of Iran

As the above discussions reveal, institutionalizing national and foreign language policies is essential for all nations to preserve and promote their indigenous language(s) and to access foreign/second language resources and potential revenues. Keeping in mind all the contemporary demands of English as the lingua franca of global communication, language policy makers in all countries need decide on series of issues including the national, official, second or foreign language; medium of instruction language(s); the place of indigenous languages in educational systems, the time and quality of introducing and institutionalizing English as either the subject or medium of instruction, and so on. This has led to a variety of language polities which can very broadly be recognized as: 1. monolingualism in countries like Britain, South Korea, and France where one language is recognized by their constitution as the single national and official language, mainly due to the ideology of "one nation, one state, one language" (Spolsky, 2004, p. 133); 2. bilingualism in countries like Canada, Finland, and New Zeeland where two languages are recognized as the official languages throughout a country; 3. multilingualism in countries such as Singapore, India, and South Africa where more than two languages are decreed by the constitution as the national and official languages.

In this broad category, Iran falls in the first group. Chapter two of Iran's constitution (Article 15) proclaims Persian as the single national language which is bound to be used for all official and educational affairs. However, tribal and regional languages are free to be used in local media, and their literature can be taught at local schools besides Persian. Moreover, Iranian universities are allowed to offer optional courses of *local language and culture* of the place wherein they are located (Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution, 2009). With regard to foreign language policy, Article 16 of the Iranian constitution declares that the Arabic language is bound to be taught during the junior and senior high school, since it is the language of the holy Quran and Islamic teachings, and is much intermingled with Persian literature. So far as English education is concerned, there is no policy overtly stated in the Iranian constitution.

Historically speaking, English received attention in Iran due to strong ties between Iran and the US in 1925 as a result of which Iran-America Society was established in Iran. "The Society set up branches in major cities such as Tehran and Shiraz, with instructors mostly from the United States and Britain" (Hayati & Mashhadi, 2010, p. 30). Later in 1934, English was introduced into the formal educational system of Iran, and since then it kept functioning as a school subject at junior and senior high school up to now. English education continues at university level with general and specific English courses. In addition, private English institutes are allowed to teach English for a variety of purposes, from general English to English for specific and academic purposes.

According to National Curriculum of Iran (2009, p. 38), the linguistic objective of general English at school level is declared to be development of the four language skills for communication purpose. Beyond language objectives, National Curriculum (2009, p. 38) states that foreign language education should enhance "national culture and values," through including local issues in foreign language course books. This can be addressed via introducing concepts such as health, environment, and everyday life of students at elementary levels, and cultural, scientific, economic, or political issues at more advanced levels.

Regarding international citizens' schools, which is a case of the present research, Iranian Act of Foreign Citizen's Schools (2007, Article 7) has proclaimed that such schools "are committed to devote at least 4 hours of their weekly schedule to teaching the Persian language and [Iranian] socio cultural studies in accordance with the regularities established by the Iranian Ministry of Education." The same act declares that "the Iranian Ministry of Education is required to provide appropriate curriculum and qualified teachers" for international schools (Article 8). According to this act, "the Iranian Ministry of Education is in charge of supervising the international citizens' schools. It can even appoint, at its discretion, an agent at school for the exact monitoring of school affairs. The Ministry of Education is also required to submit biannual reports of its supervision to the High Council of Education" (Article 13). Above all, "the Ministry of Education reserves the right to amend or reject any programs, educational resources and textbook content which are in contravention of the values and interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran" (Aritcle 14).

Taking into account the national and foreign language policies of Iran, and viewing India in the pretext of being a former British colony and influenced by the global status of English, we studied the Indian community residing in Iran with regard to its appreciation of either of English and Persian languages. Since different forces in a community including social, cultural, economic, and military demands may end up in language appreciation, marginalization, endangerment or replacement (Nettle & Romaine, 2000), driving forces contributing to the participants' standpoints towards these two languages were discovered in the course of a one-year ethnographic inquiry. The following sections are devoted to the detailed description of this inquiry.

Method

Since we needed explore the participants' views and practices, our extended and informative presence in the research context along with other data collection tools, as suggested by ethnography, could best address our research goals. In fact, ethnographic studies allow the researcher investigate "the perspectives of participants, the nature and forms of their knowledge, their interactions, practices and discourse" (Luder, 2004, p. 225) through participation in their activities for an extended time, "watching what happens, listening to what is said, and asking questions; in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues" (Hammerseley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 2). Such an ethnographic approach, as we adopted to carry out the present inquiry, will be elaborated in the subsequent parts.

Context

The research setting is the School of the Embassy of India neighbored by Gurdwara, a worship place for Indian Sikhs. The school was founded in 1952 by an Indian Sikh businessman, and is, at the moment, affiliated with Central Board of Secondary Education, New Delhi (CBSE). It has classes from Lower Kindergarten (LKG) to the last grade of high school, with almost 220 students on its roll, with an average of 12 to 18 students in each class.

The school is located in a downtown business area in Tehran. While you walk in the street where the school is located, you see Iranian businessmen who work there and Indian residents who live in that neighborhood. Since fifty years ago when the school was first established, many Indians have settled in that neighborhood because both the school and Gurdwara are located there. As you walk down the street for some blocks, you reach the ally in which the school is located. What you see from the outside is an almost huge four-story building with a wooden door. The gray building with closed windows could hardly make you understand what this place is unless you notice a big board with the Persian script on it: " مدرسه سفارت هند ", i.e., "the School of the Embassy of India."

When the door is opened by the janitor, you enter the first floor. Then, you are invited to the guest room on your right. Other rooms on the first floor are the principal's and staff's rooms, accounting office, and kitchen. Everything in the hall of the first floor gives a sense of India. The smell of spicy food that teachers who live on the fourth-floor cook, the color of furniture, the ceiling fan that is seen in most Indian buildings, and the smiling people dressed in Indian clothes who reach you to help. While you walk there in the school, you feel that people have brought here a pinch of everything from India to create a sense of being in a little India.

If you walk down few steps in the same hall, you will notice a large assembly hall where the students line up to chant the national anthem of India every morning before they go to classes. The light green walls of the hall and the red

decorative curtains of the stage are there to remind you that you are in an Indian school. India is a culturally vibrant country where people of various cultures, religions, and traditions live together. Therefore, various colors in India and Indian contexts symbolize the multitudes of outlooks, lifestyles, and traditions. Down the assembly hall, a door opens to the yard where students can play.

In the basement of the school, there is a large hall with five rooms. The rooms are devoted to French, Hindi and Punjabi classes, the janitor's room, storage room, and bookshop. While there is a classroom specified to each language, no classroom has been predicted for the Persian language. In the classrooms of different languages, you can see various instructional materials of that specific language on the walls. For instance, in French class, there are wallpapers about pronouns, parts of the body, and some verbs on the walls. In the large hall of the basement, there are sport facilities such as tennis tables, fixed bikes, and treadmills.

There are seven rooms on the second floor including the library, study hall and six rooms are classes from the first to the sixth grade. On the third floor, there are classrooms for the seventh to the twelfth grade, biology and chemistry laboratories, and a studio with a large screen to watch films. On the fourth floor of the school, there are five furnished suits that native Indian teachers can reside within the three years of their missions in Iran. There are 20 teachers teaching in the school. Seven teachers are India-based teachers who are sent from India to Iran for a period of three years. Among the other teachers, 11 are the local teachers who are originally Indian but they permanently reside in Iran. They teach subjects such as English, environmental studies, French, Hindi, and Art. There is an Iranian female teacher who teaches Persian to the students of third to eighth grade.

Participants

The participants consisted of eight teachers including one Iranian teacher, four local and three India-based teachers, who were willing to cooperate with the researchers. The Iranian teacher has been living in India for 17 years before she comes to Iran, so she is fluent but not perfect in Persian. The four local teachers have learnt daily Persian conversations due to their residence in Iran, but the Indian teachers do not know Persian at all. The interviews with the Iranian teacher were conducted in both Persian and English at her convenience, but the Indian teachers were interviewed only in English. Brief introduction of the teacher participants is as follows (all names are pseudonyms):

- Harjit Madam; 45 years old, 11 years of teaching experience
- Gloria Madam; 40 years old, five years of experience
- Maria Madam; 42 years old, local teacher, five years of experience, born in an Indian family in Tehran
- Farhat Madam; 41 years old, local teacher, three years of experience, living in Iran for 15 years

The three India-based teachers were as follow:

- Neela Madam; 41 years old, two years of experience at this school
- Mr. Malik; 50 years old, on a three-year mission from Bangalore
- Mr. Rampal; 55 years old, on his mission for one year and a half
- Razavi Madam; 55 years old, originally Iranian, Persian teacher of students at all levels

In addition to teachers, ten Indian-Iranian parents were interviewed. There are three types of families whose children are studying in the school. Some are Indians who have temporary jobs in Iran, and they leave the country usually after three to six years. The second type of Indian families are those who have immigrated to Iran in the past. They have married to Indians from India or Indians who reside in Iran and have stayed here in Iran. The last group includes families who live in Iran and one of the parents is Iranian and the other is Indian. The ten parents who participated in this study are among the third group since their need for Persian seems more urgent. Except for Ms. Sadeqi who is Iranian and Knows only Persian, other parents know either Indian, Persian and English, or at least Persian and English. Accordingly, the interviews were conducted in Persian and/or English at the participants' convenience. They are briefly introduced as follows (all names are pseudonyms):

- Mrs. Mataro; 34 years old from an Indian father and an Iranian mother. Her son is studying in Upper Kindergarten (UKG).
- Mrs. Gorji; 30 years old. Her father is Iranian and her mother is from India. Her son is at first grade.
- Mrs. Sadeghi; 45-year-old Iranian mother who is married to an Indian man. Her son has studied in this school up to grade 10 before he was sent to India to continue his education. Her daughter is studying in class seven.
- Mr. Vahidi; 36-year-old father whose daughter is studying in UKG. He was born in Iran in a family with an Iranian father and an Indian mother.
- Mr. Malhotra; 38 years old. He has studied at the same school and has got his B.A. in Delhi. His father is Indian and his mother is Iranian. His daughter is at first grade.
- Mrs. Anand; 37 years old. She is Iranian and married to a man from Bangladesh. Her two sons are studying in UKG, at grade two and seven.
- Mrs. Varma; 40 years old. Her father and husband are Indian but her mother is Iranian. Her two sons are studying in grade three and seven.
- Mrs. Patel; 35-year-old Iranian lady who is married to an Indian man. Her daughter is studying at grade four.
- Mrs. Maharati; 38-years-old mother who has studied in this school. Her father is Indian and her mother is Iranian. Her daughter is studying at grade two.
- Mr. Sharma; 37-year-old father who has studied in this school. He is from an Indian father and an Iranian mother. His daughter is studying at grade three.

Procedure

After we managed to obtain the school principal's permission for class observations and teacher interviews, we started observing the classes from grade three, where the Persian language education starts, up to grade eight, where it ends and the students will have the choice of a second language. Observations of Persian classes were not conducted consecutively because they were occasionally canceled for various reasons such as air pollution, other teachers taking Persian class time to make up for subjects such as math, or for practicing performances for school festivals and extracurricular programs. However, effort was made to observe all Persian classes which happened over the course of this study. Adopting an etic perspective in a whole year, we observed the school and language classrooms settings and activities, and took field notes in a meticulous manner, as a non-participant observer. In addition to physical atmosphere of Persian class, several aspects of Persian teaching including methods and techniques; classroom activities; teacher's expertise; student-teacher interactions; students' collaborations, interactions, and reactions to learning Persian, as well as educational materials and course book were probed. The observed classes were audio recorded and field notes were taken.

Winning the trust of school manager, teachers and parents, we could carry out semi-structured, face to face interviews for six months. Long term presence of one of the researchers at school and her prior familiarity with this community made it easier to establish rapport with teachers and parents. This familiarity and new observations had created in our minds many questions regarding the status of different languages at this school, the participants' viewpoints about current language policies and language teaching practices, their motivations for selecting this school, their language-related expectations and personal experiences, the advantages and challenges of the present language programs, the quality of language instruction, suggestions for enhancing their language skills and addressing their linguistic needs, and the like, all with specific concern about Persian as compared to English, which generally guided our interviews.

Since teachers had to be present in classes, they rarely had enough time to participate in interviews, yet we managed to arrange some times for this purpose. Moreover, parents were not allowed to stay at school during the school hours, so finding parents who were available and willing to cooperate with us took a period of almost 6 months. Each participant was separately interviewed for about 30 minutes, and some participants were interviewed more than once for more clarification and validity in reporting the results. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and made up a huge body of research data.

Data *Analysis*

The analytic approach was used for data analysis, through implementing different types of coding. During "initial" or "open" coding, the data were read several times for tentative codes, which were later compared for more similarities in a

process of "focused" coding through which major codes were formed and main categories were developed. The resulted categories were reexamined several times through "axial" coding until the categories and subcategories were finalized (Charmaz, 2006, p. 42). After the recognition of the categories, the themes were initially extracted out of the specified categories. The themes were placed in the context of the data several times to see if they actually made sense and the main themes were decided upon. Then, the main themes were rechecked with the participants and it resulted in more accurate recognitions.

In addition, all during the observations, field notes were taken to make sure that no piece of relevant information was missing. In the course of our observations, as we came across new findings and referred back to our field notes, we occasionally doubted if we had true understanding of the points raised in the interviews. Accordingly, we rethought our understanding of the interview themes and revised them according to new observations and consequent interviews. In this sense, intensive field observations informed our understanding of the accuracy of the themes obtained from the interviews. In addition, our control over the school setting achieved through observations, helped us revise and modify the initial guiding questions and formulate more accurate interview questions, hoping to get more trustworthy results out of the interviews. Eventually the whole process of thematic analysis helped us find similar themes and their subthemes as they are introduced in the following parts.

Credibility

According to Tracy (2010), credibility refers to the "trustworthiness, verisimilitude, and plausibility of the research findings" (p. 842). Credibility is achieved "through practices including thick description, triangulation or crystallization, multivocality and partiality" (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). The present study enjoys credibility for series of reasons. The first important feature is the researchers' familiarity with the context, especially since one of the authors had lived with this community for almost 15 years. This means living the experience and absolute control over the context, teachers, students, and course books which facilitated providing of a *thick description*. To this, we added the presence at this school almost four hours a day, five days a week, for an entire year for the mere purpose of exploring the context, observing the classes, establishing rapport with teachers and parents, and conducting interviews.

To address *triangulation*, several interviews and extensive observations were made. Moreover, to achieve *crystallization*, data obtained from the interviews were recorded, observations were accompanied with field notes to make sure that every aspect of the research is quite transparent. *Multivocality* which refers to "including multiple and varied voices in the qualitative report and analysis" (Tracy, 2010, p. 844) was achieved in two ways: First, the interviews were carried out with both teachers and parents and their views were similarly investigated and reported. Second, in addition to the researchers, two individuals with prior experience and vast knowledge of qualitative enquiry analyzed

the whole data a couple of times in several phases of the research. This yielded high consistency among the analyses and enhanced the credibility of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Results

In this section, the thematic patterns that emerged from the exploration of data are presented, exemplified and explained. Table 1 displays an overview of the obtained themes and subthemes:

Table 1.
Themes and Subthemes Obtained from Data

Themes	Subthemes
Theme 1: Persian instruction deficiencies	• Lack of Persian classroom discipline, organized syllabus and assessment • Inappropriate teaching techniques and procedures • Learning resources insufficiency • Untrained Persian teacher • Challenges of and needs for Persian
Theme 2: High status of English	Job opportunities provided by English • Higher education prospects through English
Theme 3: High appreciation of CBSE due to its reliance on British education system	—

Persian Instruction Deficiencies

Our observations revealed that this school is very strict about classroom discipline and instruction quality. This was evident in the rules present and implemented in different facets of schooling and management such as on-time presence of teachers and students; requirement of teaching according to predesigned syllabi, and reporting the teaching progress and problems in a timely manner; close monitoring of students' learning and assignments; adopting particular rubrics for qualitative and quantitative assessment of students; regular meetings among teachers, parents and the principal, as well as professional meetings among teachers of the same subject, and the like. Although the school tried to provide well-organized educational programs for all subjects and extracurricular activities, it did not seem to be the case with Persian classes. This deficit was traced in four major subthemes which are as follow:

Lack of Persian Classroom Discipline, Organized Syllabus and Assessment. In Persian classes, the teacher is on time, but the classes start with few students. Then, after about 10 minutes, the students join the class one by one. Almost half of the class time passes before all the students join the class. Another issue regarding the Persian class is related to its location. Persian classes are held after 11 A.M. in the LKG room. The class is for children who are three to four years old and, therefore, the chairs are too small and do not fit older stu-

dents. The class is surrounded by lots of colorful paintings and photos which naturally distract Persian learners. If Indian teachers are interested in learning Persian, they join the same classes. So, in each class, one or two Indian teachers are present along with the students. The teachers' presence can make the class seem more disorganized since these teachers talk to the Persian teacher and they freely express their opinions about the students and Persian teacher, as it is evident in the following dialogues:

- How bad your handwriting is…. Teacher, please give him a minus. (Farhat Madam)
- The best student is Farhat Madam… (Persian teacher)

Among the factors which make the class informal and chaotic are the short time dedicated to the class and the absolute absence of any exams and grading systems for Persian. Moreover, the class is held only one session of 35 minutes a week for each grade, which is cancelled very often. The Persian teacher expressed her dissatisfaction with all these in the interviews:

- The time which is dedicated to teaching Persian is not enough. All languages such as French are taught here at least three times a week. It is just Persian language classes which are held once a week for just 35 minutes. That would be very good if the Education and Training Ministry of Iran required the school to specify more time for Persian.
- The class is canceled for several weeks some times and the students forget what I have taught in class. Moreover, since there is no exam and grading system for Persian, students think it is not serious, therefore, they don't try to learn, practice, and even be present in class.
- According to the planning of the Ministry of Education and Training of Iran, we must have Persian teaching once a week for each class. No more details about teaching or testing the language is declared,… and the teaching and testing process is not observed and monitored.

Inappropriate Teaching Techniques and Procedures. Students at various levels of Persian language proficiency sit the same class; those who were born in Iran are fluent in Persian although they do not know how to read and write. Others who have recently entered the country do not know Persian at all, except for a few who know a little since they have been living in Iran for a while. Hence, the teacher interviews each child and decides on their levels, and teaches them individually according to their Persian level. Nothing is taught to the whole class and nothing is written on the board for all the students. Students bring their notebooks to the teacher one by one and the teacher assigns them their tasks. In the whole class period, all of the students do their writing assignment on their seats, except for moving a few steps to receive a new assignment from the teacher.

During the interviews, the Persian teacher explained about her teaching procedures as follows:

- I start teaching Persian by teaching the letters of alphabet, sentence making, interrogatives, tenses, translation, comprehension and finally story reading, all at the same class.

One major problem is that the teacher teaches students individually according to her intuitive understanding of their levels, all at the same class. In addition, since the students are taught individually, no interactions take place among them in the class. We noticed in our observations that while one student was working on a sentence making exercise, another one was translating some sentences from English to Persian.

Moreover, there is no creativity or incorporation of new teaching techniques in this class. Our interviews with English teachers at different levels revealed that they were concerned with bringing joy, creativity and variety to their classes:

- We don't teach them only from the books, because it becomes boring. To motivate them, we have to do some other things: playing games, telling stories, showing them outside and nature. We have a room upstairs with a video projector…, they watch and listen to stories there. (Farhat Madam)
- I am very good at sketches, I do that. I draw many things on the board. (Neela Madam)

In English classes, as well as classes for other subjects, things are more systematic. The teachers follow the syllabi and teaching procedures of the CBSE system. There are meetings held every week at school where the school English team consisting of English teachers and the school principal explore the teaching methods and procedures, and offer various teaching techniques to help students improve. For the Persian course, on the contrary, there are no meetings, observations, and monitoring of teaching materials, methods and procedures. The only person in charge of planning and teaching Persian is the Persian teacher.

Learning Resources Insufficiency. Another major issue, we came across during our observations, was the astounding fact that students did not have any Persian course books; they just had their notebooks and drill copies. The teacher taught an old Persian book published almost thirty years ago. The book was always kept by the teacher; hence, students needed copy it in the classroom. To give them more practice, however, the teacher had prepared them *handwritten*, poor-quality copies of exercises as homework. General evaluation of these exercise copies by the researchers uncovered problems such as several misspellings and unintelligible handwriting of the teacher.

To our astonishment, we noticed that a single Persian book is taught at all levels from the third to the eighth grade. For upper-level classes, the teacher provided some supplementary materials. For example, in the eighth grade, the teacher worked on a poem by an Iranian poet named Parvin Etesami. It was a dialogue between thread and needle. Some students had managed to read the poem and were trying to answer the comprehension questions, while constant-

ly nagging about its high difficulty level. Many of them were not able to answer the comprehension questions and they asked the teacher for more clarification. In all, it was evident that the difficulty level of the materials and the tasks did not fit their Persian level.

An overall investigation of the book used for teaching Persian in this school revealed that it was the Persian course book published by the Iranian Ministry of Education and Training in 1989 to teach literacy to Iranian, Persian-native students at the first grade of elementary school. In the school, it was just the Persian language teacher who had the book and no Persian course books were available, nor had any source books been developed particularly for the students of this school.

One major problem with the book is that it was published almost 30 years ago and during all these years many changes have been made in the books of the Iranian elementary schools, but the School of the Embassy of India and the teacher who is responsible for teaching Persian language have not kept up with the changes. The second weak point related to the book is its content. This book is written for Iranian students with Persian as their L1, so it does not address the needs of Persian as the second/foreign students. Evidently, when a book is developed to be taught to native students of a language, it is taken for granted that these students speak the language before they start the school. In other words, they know the spoken form of their mother tongue, and they are at school to obtain literacy in terms of the written form of their native language. On the contrary, the books which are designed and provided for the students who are non-native to a language mean to develop learners' skills in both spoken and written forms of a foreign or second language. Therefore, it is evident that Persian course book designed for Iranian students does not fit the needs of non-Iranian Persian learners. In the course of our inquiry, we learnt that in many families, no parent is Iranian and they have learned Persian through interactions in the society. It is obvious that what they have learned themselves and what the children learn in those families cannot be compared to the language competency of Persian native speakers. So, teaching them the elementary school Persian book which targets Iranian native students, is by no means logical.

This was the concern of several interviewed parents who raised the point, as in the following excerpts:

- Actually Persian is not taught in this school. What is taught is the books of the first grade of [Iranian] elementary school[s]. So, when the students graduate, what they know is how to write their names and address. (Mrs. Mataro)
- They have Persian classes but the students don't learn anything because they don't teach grammar. (Mrs. Sadeghi)

In upper-grade classes such as seven and eight, although the students have been reading Persian for three to four years, they were not able to reply in complete sentences. They answered all questions in the shortest forms possi-

ble, often in one- word responses, and they were no longer able to comprehend and answer the questions if they were a little complicated. For instance, when the teacher asked the students to summarize the reading passage which was related to thread and needle, none of the students could reply. Then, the teacher asked the students "who is Parvin Etesami?" and their only reply was: "a poet." This was while she had explained about this poet's life rather extensively. In addition, Persian learners were expected to read Persian classic literature, memorize ancient words and their meanings in modern Persian while they were not proficient enough to do so.

It is noteworthy that, contrary to Persian textbooks, English textbooks are graded according to students' proficiency level, include CDs to enhance the four skills, are up to date and enjoy attractive graphic designs, and every student has his/her own course books and activity books. Moreover, according to English teachers' statements, any comments regarding the English course books are reported to CBSE, and the books are revised in a regular manner. Sample pages of the Persian and English course materials are provided in the appendices.

Untrained Persian Teacher. Persian teacher was recruited by the school. She is an Iranian who knows Persian, and has learnt English and Hindi in India where she has lived for 15 years. She has not passed any teacher training courses, and even her knowledge of Persian is under question. She has started learning Persian after coming back to Iran from India, when she was 17, and Persian was not her first language when she started literacy in India. As we noticed, the teacher did not have enough mastery over Persian herself, and felt more comfortable with using English in Persian classes. She even misused some words when speaking Persian, like, for instance, taking the word اشتغال زدایی (removing job opportunities) for اشتغال زایی (creating job opportunities). The Persian teacher's educational background and knowledge of the Persian language proved that she was not qualified enough to manage Persian language instruction, nor to decide on the levels of learners, to plan programs, and to prepare materials and activities for the classes.

This was pointed out by some parents like Mrs. Varma:

- The Persian language teacher is not educated in [the] related field. She is teaching Persian just because [she] knows it.

Challenges of and Needs for Persian. The poor quality of Persian instruction in this school as well as the tendency and need for learning Persian was evident in teachers' and parents' interviews. Almost all teachers believed that it was absolutely an advantage, and very often a need to know Persian:

- After coming to a country, it is an asset for us if we learn their language. (Mr. Malik)
- We should always learn the native language wherever we go because that is the base actually. (Neela Madam)

Notwithstanding their tendencies and needs for Persian, they stated that they encountered many difficulties while living in Iran because they were not

proficient enough in skills such as speaking, reading and writing, and the school does not address their Persian language needs:

- Although I was born here and I am [an] Iranian national [native], I cannot write in Persian, therefore I can't do any official jobs. (Maria Madam)
- I have made an effort to learn Persian but I can't write that much. So, bills and things are paid and done by my husband. (Gloria Madam)

Lack of quality Persian instruction in this school had made problems for those interviewed parents who used to study at this very school:

- I've always had problems at work. Since I cannot read or write in Persian, I have faced many problems regarding reading or writing letters in my workplace. (Mr. Malhootra)
- When I'm somewhere that I have to write in Persian, I start trembling and sweating. My greatest problem is writing. You can't imagine how I feel when I have to go [to] the bank. (Mrs. Maharati)

The last point we came across regarding Persian instruction was that students at this school learn Persian from the third grade of primary school for five years. At grade nine, Persian is offered as an optional language, besides Hindi, Punjabi, and French, by CBSE. It was learnt that very few students in each class take Persian courses at this level since their prerequisite Persian obtained during the five elementary years at this school does not meet the requirements of Persian course offered by CBSE. Thus, even the students' need for the minimum Persian ability which enables them to select this course at grade nine of this very school is hardly fulfilled through this Persian instruction.

High Status of English

School observation and curriculum overview revealed that there were five languages in the school program; namely, English, Hindi, Punjabi, French, and Persian. Each of these languages had their specific time in the school schedule, except for English which was used all the time, at all sites, and for the teaching of all school subjects. It was not just in the staff room that English was spoken, it could be heard in the hustle and bustle of the students who flock for the yard to enjoy their break time. The prevalence assigned to English was confirmed by teachers in the interviews, as the following samples reveal:

- English is the central language. English is the global language; you see English is the only language which keeps the students together. (Neela Madam)
- ...During the break time if they speak...Hindi or Persian, we don't object but in the class it has to be English only. (Maria Madam)

English privilege at this school was admired by parents too. They declared that it was so important to have their children study in an English-centered system through which English learning would be guaranteed. They were dissatisfied with Iranian schools, where their children could master Persian, for they

did not emphasize on English as this school did. Some of their narratives are as follow:

- English is a gun which arms you against life. Even in Iran if you know English, everybody respects you more. (Mrs. Anand)
- …They (Iranian schools) should start teaching English from very early ages. (Ms. Gorji)
- When we travel, we are like deaf and dumb people. When we don't know English, we are deaf and dumb. (Ms. Sadeghi)

Even the Persian language teacher did not value Persian instruction when compared to English teaching:

- Actually even [if] there is enough time for studying Persian, it is felt that it is useless to study this language since it is not an international one.
- Only people who stay in Iran may take the course because knowing Persian beside their English knowledge can boost their money-making ability.

The English-only attitude along with downgrading other languages, be it Persian or Indian indigenous languages, was stressed by nearly all the teachers, as the following excerpt displays:

- We give them examples of their parents [who knew just their mother tongue]. We tell them, "you don't want to grow up like your father and mother. So, you should learn your language [English] well…. (Razavi Madam)

Job Opportunities Provided by English. One of the frequent themes in our respondents' talks was their common tendency to live, work and pursue studies in India or other countries rather than in Iran. This naturally discouraged them from learning Persian and encouraged learning of English instead.

- I could find a job when I was eighteen. It was just because I knew English and I had studied in this school. (Mrs. Mataro)
- There are a lot of competitions in India. Competitions by multinational companies, you don't have much of them in Iran… these days, they just need young people and people who know English. (Mr. Malik)
- …There are some English or German companies in India which employ young educated people who know English…. They select a workforce with high qualifications and offer high salaries. (Razavi Madam)

Higher Education Prospects through English. Through our interviews and observations, we found out that the students of this school can join high schools in India after the tenth grade when they pass a boarding exam. They join the high schools, which are known as 10 +II, in India for two years. Afterward, if they get the *distinction*, i.e., more than seventy-five percent of the total score, they can get admissions in the top fifteen Indian universities. Then in future, they can continue their education in the foreign branches of those universities

in countries such as the UK, Canada, and Australia. This opportunity is a hope in horizons that attracts to this school many of the Indians who were born in Iran and have Iranian nationality. This will naturally discourage learning Persian as the following examples from interviewed parents reveal:

- I will send my son abroad. Because he studies here, he has the opportunity to go. I know if he doesn't go, he can't be successful in university entrance exam because he doesn't learn Persian in this school. (Mrs. Gorji)
- I would like my daughter to go to France to continue her education because she learned French here and she really likes it. (Mrs. Patel)

High Appreciation of CBSE due to its Reliance on British Education System

During our observations, it was found that all books and teaching materials such as workbooks, activity books, and exam questions were sent to Iran from CBSE in India. Every year, the school is provided with books based on the number of the students. The only book which does not belong to CBSE is Persian language course book from grade three to eight, which is provided by the Persian language teacher. During the observations, we found out that students need pass the boarding exams of CBSE system, at the end of the eight and twelfth grades, so that they can receive admission at the top 15 Indian universities. Overall, the school is highly observant of the rules and guidelines prescribed by CBSE.

In line with our observations, one of the most frequent teacher narratives was the attribution of CBSE to western educational systems, rather than to Indian national educational values and standards. Here are some examples:

- We strictly, completely follow the British system of pronunciation and everything. (Harjeet Madam)
- It's a famous system in India and recognized abroad in Canada, London, and many other places. (Gloria Madam)
- CBSE is recognized all over the world. Anywhere in Dubai or London, they accept it. (Farhat Madam)

In their interviews, the participants valued CBSE for reasons such as its adherence to an international system recognized in western countries, offering a curriculum which is compatible with that of "developed countries," facilitating migration to "first world countries," and being directly supervised by "British" educational system. The only exception was Neela Madam who mentioned that:

- It's a governmental system and teachers who are sent to different countries are the best teachers in India. There is a huge competition and only a few are sent to other countries....

Discussion

As the research findings reveal, the members of this Indian community view English, more than other things, as the language that promises them better life and job opportunities. Besides the global demands for English which is part of the "linguistic neocolonial" project of the day (Dillon, 2016, p. 97), this extraordinary overemphasis on English which leads to marginalization of their indigenous languages, as well as Persian, could be viewed as the lingering essence of what has been created in colonial era in India, the time when British colonizers offered better jobs to those who knew English (Rajasekhar, 2012). This adherence to English supports Stroud and Wee's (2007) findings which report the decline of Punjabi among Indian adolescents due to the dominance of English, to the extent that they prefer even not to learn and speak their ethnic mother tongue.

Another major finding was that both teachers and parents admired this school, not because of its attachment to Indian culture, language and history, but because of its orientation to CBSE; an enthusiastic appreciation of British educational system, which associated modern remnants of colonialism. This reminds Raju's observation (2011) that one of the purposes of the colonial education had been to create Indian educated "elite class" who were loyal to Britain. This loyalty was achieved through an education system which "implanted the desired attitudes and values and also instilled an unshakeable belief in Western superiority." (p. 147).

Despite the dominance and overappreciation of English, the majority of the interviewed teachers believed that knowing Persian was as an asset especially since they were living and working in Iran. Similarly, the interviewed parents declared that their children should know Persian to be able to communicate with Iranian people, to do official jobs, and to handle their lives in Iran. When comparing Persian to English, however, the story changed; they attached supremacy to English, even over Hindi. In line with this expectation, most of the students' time at school was devoted to the study and practice of English language skills. This accentuated the point that students, teachers and parents were the core of British colonial mission where their new mentality was being formed in a course of about a century (Bhattacharya, 2017, Dupraz, 2019).

In an effort not to be misled by colonial, postcolonial and globalized world ideologies, we triangulated for more factors contributing to the low appreciation of Persian. One major finding was that Persian education was offered in the poorest form one could ever imagine. The time devoted to Persian was very limited; while languages other than Persian were taught three to five sessions a week, Persian was taught only once a week. It was even more disappointing to learn that students were not provided with any sources for learning Persian, while they enjoyed up-to-date materials supplied directly by CBSE for other school subjects. More regrettably, we found that Persian language teacher was the only person who kept an old Persian text book, which had been published 30 years ago for Iranian primary school first graders. In addition to being outdated, it is evident that this book suffered several inconveniences mainly be-

cause it had not particularly been developed for teaching Persian to non-Persian speakers. Moreover, compared to English courses _which are held with high discipline, definite syllabi, and accurate exam dates_ absolutely no syllabus, no exam or evaluation of any type had been planned and executed for Persian. Another factor which decreased the quality of Persian instruction was that, while teaching Persian to non-Persian students requires academic knowledge and expertise, the Persian teacher had never been trained or certified for this purpose, nor was she proficient enough in Persian.

Another facet of this study investigated the related *rules and regulations passed by the* Iranian Act of Foreign Citizen's Schools (2007). Article seven of this rule stated that these schools must devote at least four hours of their weekly curriculum to Persian language education as well as to cultural and social studies. It was also declared that the Iranian Ministry of Education and Training is required to provide appropriate teaching schedule as well as teacher training programs for this purpose. What we explored within our full-year presence at this school revealed that this article was not implemented; this school never devoted four hours per week to Persian language and culture, nor did we see any monitoring on the side of the Iranian Ministry of education

In a nutshell, Persian marginalization in its homeland among the members of this Indian community is the outcome of several forces such as globalization and its new demands for English, British colonial remnants and its neocolonial requirements, joint with internal deficits including lack of proper instruction, evaluation and monitoring on the side of the Iranian Ministry of Education. Accordingly, this study highly recommends more funding and deliberate monitoring of Persian education in international schools. The results of the study may prove useful for critical thinkers, language policy makers, international centers for teaching Persian to non-Persian speakers, English and Persian language teachers and learners.

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