

**Save the Language, Save the Nation's Children:
The case of the Azeri in Iran.**

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Nearly 6,000 languages are currently spoken in the world (Evans, 2010). To make a language live a longer life, various recording and written systems have evolved since 3,000 years ago (Yule, 2006). While all languages are perfect means of communication, for non-linguistic reasons, of all the languages spoken in a country, usually one or two gain the status of an official language with their writing systems. The rest remain vernaculars (usually with no writing system) spoken by members of minority groups. The estimates are that during the next century, between 50 and 90 per cent of the world's languages will die mainly because of the lack of an orthography system (Evans, 2010).

While most languages whose future is being threatened are spoken by a limited number of native speakers, the problem also threatens languages with millions of native speakers. The Azeri language spoken by between 19 and 34 per cent of people (14 to 24 million) in Iran is a case in point. For political reasons, Azeri-speaking children in Iran (like those speaking other vernaculars such as Kurdish) are banned from learning their L1 formally. Unfortunately when scholars have wanted to propose the need to allow children to learn literacy in their first language, they have been frowned upon and labelled as “separatists”.

The purpose of this perspective-oriented paper is to scientifically argue for the necessity of allowing children to get educated (at least at the primary level) in their L1 as their natural right, since parents of such children are now increasingly encouraging them to learn Persian as their L1 in order not to lag behind at school.