

Learning from Dari school books

1 Introduction

One of the resources we have for learning to read are the school books used for Dari instruction. It's a pretty good way to practice reading, but best of all the books contain a wealth of cultural information: these are the books that Afghan children read; they contain the information that the government felt was important for young children to know. This is also information that is familiar to many people. As I read through the stories, several were ones that I had heard from Afghans in other contexts. This suggests that the stories genuinely reflect Afghan culture.

1.1 Proficiency focus

- ❖ This activity develops your **interpretive reading** proficiency. This is your ability to absorb information from written texts.
- ❖ If you desire, you could develop your other proficiencies by talking about the lessons, summarizing them, doing writing exercises, and so forth.

1.2 Competence focus

- ❖ To the extent that you learn new words and grammatical expressions, this activity will develop **formal linguistic competence**.
- ❖ Though it's not considered a kind of communicative competence, this activity will expose you to a **wealth of cultural information**.

1.3 The Four Strands

- ❖ Since there will be some new vocabulary and grammar, this activity is **language-focused learning**.
- ❖ Since you'll be trying to understand what you read this is **meaning-focused input**.

1.4 Skill level required

- ❖ You should be comfortable reading simple texts before approaching these books. There is no orderly introduction of letters, which makes these books inappropriate for very beginning readers.
- ❖ In terms of the ACTFL proficiency indicators, this kind of activity falls in the **Novice High to Advanced Low** range (depending on grade level and which story you're reading).
- ❖ In the Growing Participant Approach, consuming local media is an activity for **Phase 5 or Phase 6**, i.e., a fairly advanced activity. But since these books are limited to very simple topics, you can easily do them earlier.

2 Instructions

2.1 Materials you'll need

- ❖ You can purchase in the bazaar for around 60 Afs per book.
 - It's probably best to start with درې صنف اول [dari senf-ε awal], even if you've got some experience reading, since you'll need to get used to the format of the books.
 - Make sure to get the اصلی [asli] versions, which are in full color
- ❖ Pen and paper to record new words

2.2 Time required

- ❖ How much time you need to work through a book will vary depending on how quickly you read, and how much Dari you already know
- ❖ Make time to read the lesson both before and after you go through it with a teacher in your lesson
- ❖ It's probably best to do this activity for one hour a week, interspersing it with other sorts of lessons.

2.3 Step-by-step

1. Schedule time with a teacher.
2. Read a portion of the book on your own.
 - ❖ You can skip the introductory material. For the first book, this means starting on page 9.
 - ❖ You can stick to the large lesson text if you wish, or you can read the boxed text as well. The text in the upper box has discussion questions; the text in the lower box gives instructions to the students.
3. Read the lesson with your teacher. Get explanations of any unclear terms.
4. (Consider putting new vocabulary into your flashcards)
5. Read the lesson again on your own.

2.4 Possible pitfalls

- ❖ Expect to learn some new literary forms. On the first few pages of the first book, for instance, words like نوشتن [neweʃtan] or اشکال [aʃkɑl] might be new to you—نوشته کردن [neweʃta kardan] and شکل‌ها [ʃaklhɑ] would be the informal ways of saying those things. Just consider it new vocabulary. The books define some vocabulary words in the text, either in footnotes or in a table at the end of the day's lesson.
- ❖ These books are a good introduction to the kinds of spelling mistakes that commonly occur in Dari. Most of these have to do with spaces between words. For instance on page 16 of the second year book, we have the sentence: «پدر، مادر، و معلم‌ها وهم صنفی‌هایش از اوخوش وراضی هستند». Correctly spaced, this would be written: «پدر، مادر، و معلم‌ها و هم‌صنفی‌هایش از او خوش و راضی هستند». Two things to keep in mind: (1) it's not as hard to read this kind of text when you know the words as ready, (2) since these are very common mistakes, you need to develop your ability to read this sort of text anyway.
- ❖ Poems are a difficult genre for a non-native speaker, so you may wish to skip over the lessons that consist of poems—or at the very least expect that you'll need to spend more time understanding them. Remember that lots of grammatical rules go out the window in poetry, so don't try to learn new grammar from a poem. And don't learn spelling from poems either: lots of poems spell out [ʌmijɑnɑ] pronunciations to make the meter and rhyme work.
- ❖ The readings in the third year book are sort of horizontally squished. That can make reading surprisingly difficult, so if it bothers you it might be best to move on to the fourth year book.