

Part 1: Needs Assessment

Designing an Online Heritage Language and Cultural Awareness Program for U.S.-Born Children from Tigrinya- and Amharic-Speaking Families

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1. Introduction

Heritage language preservation presents an instructional challenge for many immigrant families in the United States. Children from Tigrinya- and Amharic-speaking households typically become fluent in English through school and daily social interactions while receiving limited structured exposure to their heritage language and cultural traditions. Although parents recognize the importance of preserving these connections, busy work schedules, limited instructional resources, and inconsistent opportunities for guided learning often reduce meaningful language and cultural experiences at home. As a result, many children have difficulty understanding and explaining their cultural traditions or communicating confidently in appropriate heritage language contexts.

The instructional need was identified through discussions with community leaders who organize educational and cultural activities for Tigrinya- and Amharic-speaking families. These discussions highlighted a common concern that many U.S.-born children have limited knowledge of their heritage language and cultural identity despite strong family interest in preserving both. The community leaders expressed a need for an instructional solution that complements family learning while providing children with consistent opportunities to build cultural understanding and heritage language awareness.

This needs assessment proposes the design of an Online Heritage Language and Cultural Awareness Program that teaches language through authentic cultural experiences rather than isolated vocabulary memorization. By integrating language learning with cultural traditions, everyday communication, family interactions, and community practices, the proposed e-learning program will provide a knowledge-centered learning

experience that encourages family participation and supports long-term heritage language and cultural preservation.

2. Identification of the Instructional Problem

The instructional need identified through consultation with community leaders is primarily a knowledge gap. Community leaders who coordinate educational and cultural programs for Tigrinya- and Amharic-speaking families consistently expressed concern that many U.S.-born children actively participate in community events but have limited understanding of the language, cultural meanings, greetings, traditions, values, and social expectations associated with those experiences. While many children enjoy attending cultural celebrations and family gatherings, they often lack the knowledge needed to understand or explain the significance of these traditions or communicate confidently in culturally appropriate ways.

Parents recognize the importance of preserving their children's heritage language and culture; however, many face challenges such as busy work schedules, limited instructional resources, and a lack of structured learning opportunities outside of occasional family or community events. As a result, children may understand isolated words or familiar expressions but struggle to use them appropriately or connect them to their cultural context.

The desired outcome is for learners to develop a foundational understanding of their heritage language and culture so they can recognize common greetings and expressions, understand the meaning of important traditions and celebrations, communicate respectfully with family and community members, and confidently explain aspects of their cultural identity. Because the identified gap relates to knowledge

acquisition rather than motivation or physical skill development, a structured online learning program represents an appropriate instructional solution for addressing this educational need.

3. Intended Audience

The primary audience consists of elementary and middle-school-aged children (approximately ages 7–14) from Tigrinya- and Amharic-speaking families living in the United States. Most learners are English-dominant and demonstrate varying levels of exposure to their heritage language. The initial implementation is intended to be supported through a local community organization serving Tigrinya- and Amharic-speaking families in the Dallas–Fort Worth area. Community volunteers and parents will serve as learning facilitators while the instructional content is delivered through an online platform. It has the potential to expand to additional communities. Parents and caregivers will serve as learning partners by encouraging practice, discussing cultural experiences, and reinforcing learning beyond the online environment.

4. Learning Context

The proposed learning environment combines self-paced online instruction with periodic live virtual sessions. Learners will access multimedia lessons using computers, tablets, or smartphones at times that fit family schedules. Learning activities will include narrated stories, cultural scenarios, picture interpretation, short videos, audio pronunciation, interactive quizzes, and reflective discussions. Live online meetings will provide opportunities for peer interaction, collaborative activities, and guided discussion. Family participation will extend learning into authentic home experiences, helping learners connect instructional content with daily life.

5. Description of the Proposed Solution

The proposed Online Heritage Language and Cultural Awareness Program is designed to introduce language through meaningful cultural experiences. Sample instructional modules include: Heritage Identity; Greetings and Respectful Communication; Family and Community Life; Holidays and Celebrations; Stories, Songs, and Cultural Values; and Living Between Cultures. Instruction will emphasize authentic situations that encourage learners to observe, explain, compare, and reflect on cultural practices rather than simply memorize vocabulary.

Proposed Learning Outcomes:

- Describe selected traditions, customs, and values within Tigrinya- and Amharic-speaking communities.
- Explain the purpose of common greetings and respectful communication practices.
- Compare selected heritage traditions with everyday life in the United States.
- Demonstrate increased confidence discussing heritage language and culture in family and community contexts.

Formative assessment will include knowledge checks, picture-description activities, reflective journals, discussions, and family practice tasks. A summative cultural awareness project will allow learners to demonstrate their understanding by explaining a cultural celebration or family tradition using appropriate heritage language expressions and cultural knowledge.

6. Project Timeline

Activity	Wk1 Jun 29- Jul 5	Wk2 Jul 6- 12	Wk3 Jul 13- 19	Wk4 Jul 20- 26	Wk5 Jul 27- Aug 2	Wk6 Aug 3-9	Wk7 Final Wrap- up
Analysis							
Obtain instructor approval	✓						
Conduct needs assessment	✓	✓					
Analyze learner characteristics	✓	✓					
Design							
Write learning objectives		✓					
Develop course blueprint/storyboard							
Design assessments							
Development							
Develop multimedia lessons							
Build interactive activities							
Develop prototype modules							
Implementation							
Pilot online learning activities							

Collect learner/family feedback							
Evaluation							
Revise instructional materials							
Finalize course documentation							
Submit final project							

7. Summary

This needs assessment identified a meaningful opportunity to improve heritage language and cultural knowledge among U.S.-born children from Tigrinya- and Amharic-speaking families. The proposed program responds to a clearly defined instructional need by providing flexible, culturally authentic online learning experiences that strengthen family communication, cultural understanding, and learner confidence. The findings from this analysis establish a practical foundation for the subsequent design and development of the proposed e-learning program.

References

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AI Use Declaration

Artificial intelligence was used to assist with brainstorming, organization, grammar, and editing. The instructional concept, analysis, educational decisions, and final review are the original work of the author.