

LangCred: Language Credentialing Made Easy

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Abstract

In March 2015, HADI-CLASSRoad launched LangCred.org, a website displaying U.S. routes to world language teacher certification. On LangCred, teachers can create an account, participate in discussions, and identify requirements for state certification. Project Director, Mayeen Farooqui will present LangCred and demonstrate the search function as a prospective Arabic language teacher.

About the Authors

Mayeen Farooqui M.A. Ed. is the President of *incrEDucate*, an education-consulting firm, specializing in Teacher Certification and Instructional Coaching. She is the Project Director of LangCred, and provides guidance to world language teachers seeking certification. In developing the foundation for LangCred she met with teachers and administrators nationwide to assess the need for a website displaying simplified procedures for credentialing. As a credentialed teacher, she taught in various U.S. Muslim schools and has successfully completed the Islamic Teacher Education Program with the University of Toronto. She frequently facilitates workshops on Teacher Certification, Education Technology, Islamic Pedagogy, and College and Career Planning.

Munir Shaikh M.A. is the Director of Academic Affairs at Bayan Claremont, a graduate institution educating American Muslim scholars and leaders. Munir has nearly 25 years of experience as an educator and administrator. He spearheaded several online educational initiatives of HADI, including development of QFI's Al-Masdar Arabic resource website, and LangCred. He serves as Executive Director of the Institute on Religion and Civic Values, an organization that provides textbook reviews and teacher training, and engages international educators and policymakers on curriculum development. He is a frequent commentator, textbook reviewer, consultant and technical advisor on issues pertaining to Islam's place in world history, the practice of Islam and the Muslim community experience in contemporary America.

Introduction

U.S. K-12 “foreign” hereafter correctly referred to as “world” language teachers, increasingly seek certification, however obtaining accurate information about procedures and requirements on most state websites is not only complex, but also distinctive across states.

Noriko Ishihara (2010) posits that unlike non-native speaking world language teachers, native speaking world language teachers (the majority) are new to the U.S. and may have difficulty navigating through the unfamiliar institutional discourse of the American education system. Many such teachers rely on informal networks for clarification, or independently piece together the steps needed depending on their individual circumstances. Information is limited, or several layers deep in existing online sources.

Teacher certification is a central issue connected to adequate teacher supply. The National Foreign Language Center (NFLC) at the University of Maryland's 2010 white paper, *The Teachers We Need: Transforming World Language Education in the United States*, suggests teacher supply impinges directly on the availability and quality of world language education, yet, "categories of certificates and licenses vary widely from state to state and are difficult to navigate, align, and compare. These non-standardized categories and requirements create confusion and a lack of portability from state to state. Prospective teachers may have difficulty obtaining accurate information about requirements..." (p. 15). As of 2014, the NFLC estimated that 41% of language teachers in the U.S. are currently interested in obtaining certification.

In the Spring of 2014, HADI-CLASSRoad, a non-profit education/technology initiative and leader in online professional development for world language teachers, obtained the STARTALK Infrastructure Building Initiative Grant to develop LangCred.org, a first-of-its-kind interactive resource website displaying world language teacher certification routes from 50 states, districts and territories. CLASSRoad has provided numerous STARTALK summer teacher programs to hundreds of language professionals, and enthusiastically sought to help address the credentialing challenges faced by U.S. K-12 world language teachers.

The CLASSRoad research team traveled to conferences, colleges, and public and private schools, consulting with numerous K-12 world language teachers, administrators and personnel. Feedback revealed a dominant theme: although state agency websites are informative, they lack explicit, "step-by-step" instructions, and the complex language and layout can be "intimidating." Additional comments from world language teachers and administrators include:

- I don't understand all the regulations.
- English is fine with me but [I] need to have simple [,] direct steps on how to apply...
- This will be so helpful to teacher candidates, but also to school districts needing to figure out how to get their candidates moving through the process based on their current education and experience.
- A resource website would be a treasure house of useful information as well as a travel guide on the path to language teaching.

- I think that...[a website like LangCred] would help develop capacity, resulting in more ease of staffing. The more potential teacher candidates we have, the better we will be able to staff our programs in the middle and high schools...

Arabic Language Teacher Credentialing

CLASSRoad surveyed hundreds of K-16 Arabic language professionals in the U.S. regarding Arabic language teacher credentialing. Approximately 80% of Arabic teachers were working in private, mostly religious, schools. Regarding credentialing, 13% of respondents held general U.S. teaching credentials, and 17% held a U.S. Arabic language teaching credential. Approximately 19% held Arabic teaching credentials from outside the U.S. and expressed interest in degree equivalency. Of the respondents, only 9% were enrolled in a traditional or alternative teacher preparation program issuing an Arabic language teaching credential. Common challenges cited by Arabic language teachers were Arabic program access, availability, and cost. Many also indicated that employing agencies such as private and religious schools do not require certification and provide little incentive and, or support toward certification.

Arabic language teachers and other teachers of the Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs)¹ greatly benefit from a resource like LangCred that simplifies complex state procedures for certification.

On LangCred.org Arabic language teachers can search, save and compare potential credential routes, discuss critical issues on the LangCred Community forum, and find a suitable teacher preparation program close to their home.

The California Example

California (CA) credential issuance is based entirely on an applicant's academic and professional background, and private school experience is valued. To obtain an initial, traditional, five-year Preliminary Single Subject Teaching Credential, teachers must have a bachelor's degree (or equivalent), passing scores on a basic skills (English, Math) exam such as the:

- CBEST
- CSU Exams
- AP English/Literature and AP Calculus I or AP Calculus II
- SAT
- ACT

Applicants must provide evidence of subject matter proficiency through successful passing of a content language or subject matter exam. In California, the California Subject

¹ All languages except English, French, German, and Spanish,

Examinations for Teachers (CSET) in Arabic is required. Applicants must also complete a state-approved teacher preparation program for formal training, including a clinical, or student teaching component. Exam scores, Grade Point Average (GPA), and letters of recommendation determine admission into many programs. In many districts, internship options exist and teachers are well supported. Upon completion of a program or internship, the program sponsor must apply directly to the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) for the credential. Employment is not required for the Preliminary Single Subject Credential.

Private School Teachers

Prospective teachers with three or more years of private school teaching experience in an accredited private school, may qualify for the Preliminary or subsequent, Clear Single Subject Teaching Credential. Teachers may apply directly to the CCTC, granted they meet the following requirements: background check, basic skills, subject matter, U.S. Constitution, reading, technology, First Aid, CPR, and English Language Learner (ELL) authorization.

To obtain the alternative, Sojourn Certificated Employee Credential, requirements include the following: one year of employment as an Arabic language teacher in a CA public school prior to applying, at least 90 units of college coursework (transcript evaluation required), a district administered Basic Skills exam², and Subject Matter exam³. One must also obtain confirmation from the employing school district that they are biliterate-bilingual in Arabic. The Sojourn is renewable every two years and consistent employment under the Sojourn leads to a Preliminary Single Subject Teaching Credential.

An induction period or program is required for all teachers holding Preliminary Single Subject Teaching Credentials who seek the subsequent Clear Single Subject Credential. The CCTC does make exceptions and an applicant's academic and professional background is evaluated carefully. Both the aforementioned traditional and alternative credentials guarantee the individual an authorization to teach the Arabic language in California public schools.

LangCred.org

Upon completion of research into traditional and alternative routes in California, Michigan and Illinois, CLASSRoad identified a series of steps for language teacher certification:

Step 1: Possess a minimum academic background of a bachelor's degree.

² A one-year non-renewable credential is offered to those who have not yet completed the Basic Skills exam.

³ Teachers educated outside the U.S. can request a waiver of subject matter requirements if the language of instruction in their college outside the U.S. was in the content language they desire to teach.

Step 2: Fulfill general and content language pedagogy requirements via exams, courses, experience, and/or degree evaluation.

Step 3: Apply to the state for certification as an individual, via a traditional or alternative TEP, or through an employing agency.

CLASSRoad's team designed a relational database to enable standardization of state-specific data. After standardizing collection of unique procedures and multiple credential routes in each state, and obtaining expert feedback from world language professionals, we developed the website, LangCred.org, launched in March of 2015.

Each state credential route on LangCred.org details the following:

1. State Agency Contact Information, Credential Identification
2. Minimum Academic Background Requirements
3. Pedagogy and Content Language Requirements
4. Oral Language Proficiency and English Language Proficiency Requirements
5. Background Check, First Aid, Transcript Evaluation Requirements
6. Application Procedures, Fees
7. Renewal Procedures, Fees
8. Unique State Requirements

LangCred.org, is a first-of-its-kind interactive resource website for world language teacher certification. Teachers can search for routes from the 50 states, DC, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. After making a user account teachers can search, save and compare credential routes, upload documents, and participate in the LangCred Community forum. A rich resource section with a glossary of terminology and articles related to world language teacher certification is available on the site.

Recognizing that world language teachers with degrees from outside the U.S. must obtain transcript evaluations to determine if they are eligible to pursue certification, CLASSRoad also developed a detailed list of state approved transcript evaluation agencies. CLASSRoad hopes to conquer roadblocks to world language teacher certification by developing much needed resources and simplified information for language teachers.

CLASSRoad has obtained the STARTALK Infrastructure Building Initiative Grant in 2015 once more and is currently updating LangCred with new features and enhancements launching in March 2016.

Conclusion

LangCred is the first site to ever deploy such a plethora of information on world language teacher certification in one location. While particularly exciting for teachers of Arabic, the

website has been of tremendous value to all world language teachers, program administrators, and personnel. Individual language teachers should no longer feel alone hitting roadblocks on their path to certification.

The work presented here has profound research value for future studies of language teacher certification and preparation, and we are confident it will play an important role in alleviating the problem of the dearth of highly qualified language teachers.

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