

Challenges in the Teaching of Speaking Skills in Tamil Subject among the Indian Students at the National Primary School

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Abstract— Mastering all the four language skills has been the topmost priority among both first and second language learners all over the world. Apparently, speaking skills remain to be the most challenging among other skills in which many learners are still struggling to speak proficiently. Speaking is also considered as one of the most wanted language skills to acquire. There are many ways to improve speaking skills among primary school students. However, the emphasis of these speaking skills in Tamil language among National Primary school Indian students has been less prioritized by parents and students. In addressing the issue mentioned, this paper discusses the constraints in executing speaking skills in Tamil lessons from the aspects of teachers, students, school atmosphere and facilities. In addition, several recommendations and suggestions were proposed to overcome the aforesaid obstacles. This paper concludes that the teachers should be optimistic in embracing the changes and transformations taking place particularly in the effort of upholding the status of this subject to be of indispensable importance as other subjects in schools. Teachers also should determine the appropriate learning method, teaching materials, and instructional tools. It can be concluded that several recommendations and suggestions will improve speaking skills in Tamil among the Indian students at the National Primary school in Malaysia.

Keywords— speaking skills, Tamil, National Primary schools, Teaching, challenges

I. INTRODUCTION

Mastering all the four basic language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing have been the topmost priority among both first and second language learners all over the world. National Schools (SK), Chinese National-Type Schools (SJK(C)), and Tamil National-Type Schools (SJK(T)) are commonly enrolled by Malaysian students. These schools use different languages as their medium of instruction. For instance, SK implements Malay language, SJK(C) implements Chinese language, and SJK(T) implements Tamil language as their medium of instruction.

Since 2007, the Ministry of Education has offered the Postgraduates Teaching Course (in Malay, known as Kursus Perguruan Lepas Ijazah, (KPLI)) to produce qualified teachers to teach Chinese and Tamil as elective subjects in the SKs. Hence, better education can be delivered to students who have a strong desire to learn Mandarin and Tamil by having teachers with better qualifications to teach these elective subjects in the National Primary Schools. Teaching Speaking skills in Tamil as a second language to the Indian students at the National Primary school is full of challenges. What is more challenging is teaching the language to very young learners whose command of the first language is still very tender. Tamil speaking skills is one of the language skills that should be improved by the Indian students in National Primary schools, especially those taking Tamil as a second language.

However, based on preliminary research by the researcher at National Primary schools, it was found that the students are struggling to learn Tamil, particularly when they are required to express their opinions in class. According to experts, this is attributable to several factors such as students having a restricted vocabulary (Peng, 2019). As a result, they are afraid of speaking Tamil during their Tamil classes. Second, speaking Tamil while learning Tamil is discouraged by their friends. They're ashamed and worried of being laughed at by their friends while conversing. Third, the researchers believe that students in National Primary school regard Tamil as a difficult and not a very important subject to learn because it is just an elective with restricted time allocation. As a result, they are uninspired to study Tamil. Therefore, speaking skills in Tamil among the Indian students at the National Primary school will not produce the desired results if the implementation process still lacks due attention from teachers and parents. Therefore, this concept paper explores and discusses aspects of implementation challenges as well as suggestions to overcome them to improve the effectiveness of implementing speaking skills in the Tamil subject among the National Primary school Indian students.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF SPEAKING SKILLS

Speaking is a crucial technique in everyday life since it affects how individuals connect with one another. It is important in the language classroom not just as speaking skills, but also as a way of facilitating targeted language acquisition and academic content learning. According to Shabani and Ghodrati (2018), experts believe that among the four skills, listening and speaking should be taught and learned sequentially. According to his study, speaking is the greatest way to begin acquiring other language abilities. Learning a foreign language through conversation is a natural approach to do so.

Communication is critical for success in today's global environment. Language is a means of communication. Without the use of a language, effective communication is impossible. Additionally, people cannot accomplish their purposes, objectives, and goals without effective communication. As a result, a language is required to communicate with individuals around the world.

Speaking skills is the most critical and essential of the four major language abilities when it comes to learning a foreign or second language. According to Ariyanti (2016), "speaking is the most important skill on which students will be evaluated in real-world

circumstances." Regardless of its importance, teaching speaking skills has been devalued, and the majority of first or second language instructors continue to teach speaking competence in the same way they teach memorization of dialogues or repetition of exercises.

Nonetheless, the contemporary world requires that learners and English teachers develop communication skills to enhance their ability to speak and perform well in real-world situations (Wulandari, 2019). Speaking ability is sometimes disregarded in today's first or second language education environment, even though employment is more dependent on communication than on technology. As relatively little emphasis has been placed on the critical components of speaking skills. Thus far, greater emphasis has been placed on reading and writing abilities. After recognizing the importance of speaking ability, a greater focus is now placed on improving the students' speaking skills for them to succeed in their studies and excel in their areas once they complete their education. Ultimately, English is the language of opportunity for work and achievement in achieving life goals.

According to Shabani and Ghodrati (2018), "speaking is one of the most challenging skills that language learners must master" (p .4). It is regarded as the most critical of the four English language abilities. Even students spend years learning the language. They have difficulty communicating in real-time circumstances when it is required. There are several causes for this. To begin, students should recognize the value of oral communication skills and work to develop them, since they will be required to succeed in today's competitive world.

Among the four fundamental skills of the English language, speaking appears to be the most challenging since speakers must generate sentences on the spot (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). It is extremely difficult for foreign or second language students to create sentences without first mastering the necessary grammatical structures and acquiring sufficient vocabulary. As a result, English language learners, whether first or second language, frequently have difficulties while speaking grammatical phrases in English. Because speaking abilities are so important in communication, individuals strive to develop them in order to communicate effectively with the entire global community.

Additionally, the speaking abilities benefit learners when they are required to settle down in their professions. In today's world, it has become fairly usual for applicants to demonstrate their abilities during job interviews, and many choices are made based on the

candidate's performance during the interview. Job candidates must engage in and demonstrate their abilities in debates and group discussions in which their performance or oral communication skills are largely evaluated. Furthermore, professionals are required to provide oral presentations in order to advertise their products or businesses or to teach their colleagues. Moreover, a good speaker may excite the audience greatly, command the audience's entire attention, and keep the same tempo throughout his/her speech. Thus, the listener becomes totally absorbed in the speaker's discourse, to the point that they occasionally lose track of time and focus exclusively on the speech. Having said that, speaking abilities are critical, as everything is contingent on how individuals express their messages to one another.

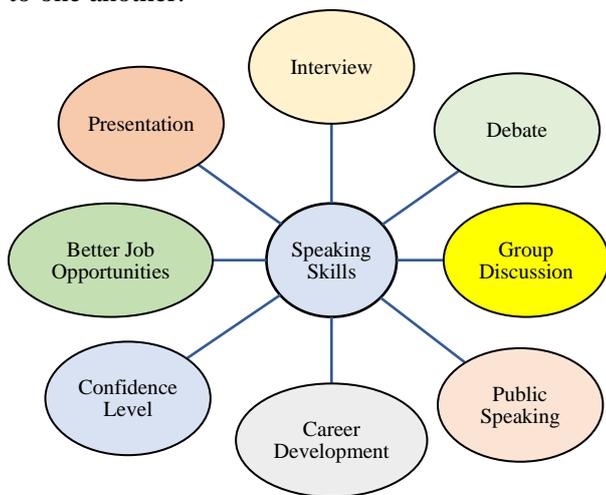


Figure 1: The Importance of Speaking Skills

Speaking skills are critical for learners who desire to improve their career, expand their business, boost their confidence, obtain better employment prospects, deliver public speeches, attend interviews, engage in debates, and group discussions, and carry out presentations, among other things. Everything is connected to speaking skills in today's modern society. Mastering speaking skills can enable someone to communicate with others from various countries (Ariyanti, 2016). Effective communication is the path to increased work opportunities. Modern interviews assess job candidates' true abilities through their performance in group discussions, debates, and presenting skills. As a result, job applicants must have strong oral communication skills in order to compete for better chances. Once learners practice these speaking abilities in their first or second language classrooms, they develop knowledge of them and perform well in classroom and extracurricular activities. Next, we will discuss the model related to the implementation of speaking skills in Tamil among the National Primary school Indian students in Pasir Gudang.

III. MODELS RELATED TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SPEAKING SKILLS

This concept paper refers to the Intervention Model (Fraser-Thomas & Beaudoin, 2002) in the context of the implementation of a subject in the classroom. The model states that there are five factors that influence the implementation of a subject, namely the factors of presage, program, process, context, and product. The five factors are interrelated with each other as shown in the following figure:

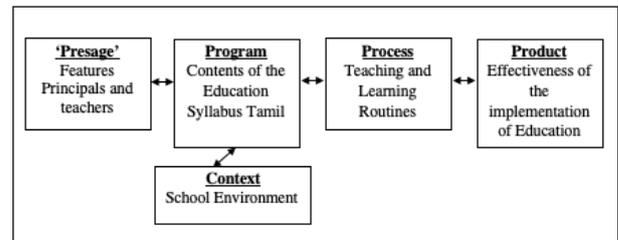


Figure 2: Intervention Model (Fraser-Thomas & Charlotte Beaudoin, 2002)

Based on the above model, the 'presage' factor refers to the role of the principal as a monitor of curriculum implementation in the school while the teacher plays a role as a presenter and implementer of Speaking Skills in teaching. Program factors are related to the content and syllabus of Speaking Skills in the subject. Context factors refer to the school environment such as classroom facilities, equipment, sources, and other resources available in the school. The process factor is the presentation session or routine of the teaching and learning process practiced by the teacher while teaching. While the product factor refers to the effectiveness of the implementation of teaching and learning through the speaking skills and appreciation of values by students towards speaking skills in Tamil language. Therefore, this Intervention Model is relevant to a concept paper that explores the challenges of implementing Tamil Speaking Skills among National Primary school Indian students based on these five factors.

IV. CHALLENGES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SPEAKING SKILLS IN TAMIL SUBJECT

A. Teacher's Factor-Knowledge and Skills

Teachers have a critical role in transferring knowledge and skills to students. As a result, the efficacy of instruction is dependent upon the teacher's degree of expertise and competency (Katheges Ponniah, 2019). Teachers' proficiency levels are impacted by their backgrounds, including their qualifications as well as their experience in teaching Tamil subjects, particularly speaking skills. Teachers' abilities can be evaluated on

the basis of their creativity and skills in developing teaching activities, selecting approaches and techniques that are suited for students' varying levels of intellect, and fostering a positive learning environment (Peng, 2019).

Experienced teachers will be able to maintain order and inspire students to continue learning and mastering the speaking skills through positive reinforcement. Teachers can use a variety of new educational tools to ease the teaching and learning process. According to a study conducted by Nur Ilianis Adnan, Syahirah Ramli and Isma Noornisa Ismail (2021), students were able to use the TikTok application as an educational tool in their listening and speaking in a very interesting way.

Teachers' experience also has an effect on the success with which speaking skills are implemented in the classroom. In comparison to experienced Tamil language teachers who have advantages in terms of knowledge, skills, and class organization, new teachers are typically less experienced in planning strategies, selecting approaches, and modifying their teaching to the students' level of ability. Nonetheless, teachers acquire experience through their interactions with students and the real world of teaching (Katheges Ponniah, 2019). Thus, in teaching Tamil speaking skills, the teachers must be capable of mastering the lesson's topic, assessing students' strengths and weaknesses, and then providing positive feedback to students during the speaking skills instruction.

Teachers who are qualified and have options in Tamil Education for National primary schools with the capacity to manage speaking skills would be able to present class content more effectively. According to Smyrnaiou (2020), pedagogical expertise and the capacity to create a motivating learning environment is crucial. Therefore, teachers should design activities that foster and improve students' attention, awareness, comprehension, and confidence in their ability to follow through on what is written in a curriculum. As a result, the element of teacher creativity is critical. In addition, teachers' efficacy in implementing school-based assessment (PBS) for Speaking skills activities is similarly low, despite the fact that PBS has been in place since 2011.

B. Student's Interest Factor

Based on the preliminary study by the researcher, the involvement of students in learning speaking skills-based activities in national primary schools is still at a low level. According to them, speaking skills especially in Tamil language among the Indian students at the National Primary schools is experiencing instability,

which is less popular among them. In fact, based on preliminary study by the researcher, firstly, all the teachers mentioned that most of the students have very limited vocabulary in Tamil. These students will mostly communicate in Malay and English language as the medium of interaction. Only a few students can speak well. Having limited vocabulary affects the students' confidence in speaking the language.

Secondly, the students were discouraged by their friends from talking in Tamil while learning Tamil. They were afraid of being laughed at. Therefore, the students are always very quiet and shy to raise their hands or answer questions asked by teachers. They found that Indian students in the National Primary schools are less motivated and speak more in Malay or English language during their Tamil classes. Commonly observed in the language classroom are related to student's personalities and attitudes to the learning process and learning speaking in particular such as the students' fear of making mistakes, losing face, criticism and shyness during speaking-based activities in the classroom.

Thirdly, the teachers assumed that students considered speaking in Tamil as difficult to master and it is not important for their future. Only a few students stated that speaking Tamil is "Very Important" for their next generation and culture. Most National Primary school students who are taking Tamil as a second language are less interested in speaking in Tamil because they think that Tamil subjects have no academic value in National Primary schools. Such excuses have been used by students to avoid engaging in Tamil classes in school and as a result they are less motivated to speak in Tamil.

The findings of preliminary study by the researcher shows that most students gave many reasons for less interest during the Tamil classes. Such a situation has caused frustration among teachers who teach the Tamil subject in schools.

C. School Resources Factor

The effective and efficient implementation of Tamil as a second language in National primary schools is highly dependent on the school environment and appropriate classroom facilities (Smyrnaiou, 2020). Unfortunately, the lack of facilities and resources based on Tamil speaking skills along with the curriculum raise another challenge to the implementation of Tamil subjects, particularly speaking skills. A study by Peng (2019) found that the lack of facilities resources is one of the obstacles to the implementation of Tamil subject especially speaking skills among Indian students in the National Primary schools. Besides, most of the

resources used by the teachers come from countries such as India and Singapore which have a different culture and curriculum as compared to the Malaysian Indian students who are studying in the National Primary schools. As a result, the teachers need to develop their own materials according to the level of students, which is time consuming.

Additionally, primary schools continue to encounter difficulties acquiring the newest technology, equipment, and classrooms for Tamil instruction (Katheges Ponniah, 2019). According to teachers, some of them spend time looking for a classroom to teach Tamil. The teachers stated that each school should include a class specialized for the teaching of the Tamil language. Other teachers concur that classrooms are required for Tamil lessons, complete with adequate equipment and resources to enable teachers to manage Tamil classes efficiently in the National primary schools.

D. School Management Support Factor

School administrators play a very important role in relation to the implementation of language subjects in schools (Barghi, 2017). A committed school principal will allocate and use financial resources appropriately for facility purchases, schedule teacher development workshops for Tamil subjects in the school calendar, monitor teacher instruction, and provide constructive feedback to improve the quality and effectiveness of Tamil subject instruction, mainly on Tamil speaking skills.

However, some school administrators continue to place a lower priority on the implementation and supervision of Tamil subjects since they are viewed as less essential and are not assessed in exams such as the UPSR. The scenario is consistent with the findings of a study by Barghi (2017) which found that school administrators are more concerned with other core subjects than elective subjects and are less concerned when taking appropriate actions on teachers' problems in implementing the teaching process, even after supervision.

E. Parents Support Factor

Constraints on the implementation of speaking skills in Tamil also occur due to the attitude of parents who are more concerned about other subjects tested in public examinations (Peng, 2019). A study by Arora and Singh (2017) found that one of the contributing factors to the decline in students' academic achievement is parents' support. Halipah Hamzah and Hazlam Shamin Ahmad's (2021) study further reported that the difficulty in obtaining parental cooperation has caused

students to miss online learning sessions, resulting in learning objectives not being met.

According to preliminary studies, some parents agreed that the Tamil subject as a second language is not so important as it does not help in exams and does not guarantee the future. They also argue that their children's time and energy should be used for English-based speaking classes rather than spending on the Tamil subject as a second language in National schools. In fact, according to teachers these parents send their children to National Primary schools which give less importance to the Tamil subject compared to the SJK(T) schools.

The preliminary studies also showed that some of the parents prefer their children to speak in the English language rather than Tamil. All these clearly shows that parents are more concerned with academic excellence than mastery of speaking skills in Tamil through Tamil Education.

IV. RECOMMENDATION

A. Improve Tamil Language Teacher's Knowledge and Skills

Teachers must have the knowledge and skills to produce effective teaching methods and be able to organize programs that suit the needs of students. Educators should be prepared to hold a revolution in learning that can change the way students form and develop knowledge, especially in terms of interest and mastery of a skill (Hussein, 2020). Therefore, to cope with all the frequent syllabus changes, teachers should have a passion for continuous learning and always be willing to attend in-service courses to further improve pedagogical skill and content delivery.

There are various approaches educators can implement to further improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning of speaking skills. Among them is a teaching session with peer teachers (peer coaching) where this method involves new teachers who will teach while being observed by a coach consisting of expert, excellent or experienced teachers and vice versa. Feedback, reflection, and discussion sessions regarding the teaching delivery process will be discussed after both parties complete the teaching session. Through this peer coaching both parties will be able to give direct feedback. In addition, demonstration processes in teaching, peer support systems and collaborative teaching can be integrated (Gahlot, 2021).

New teachers teaching the Tamil subject can also use the 'lesson study' method which is one of the methods of implementing teaching and preparation activities collaboratively among Tamil subject teachers. They

need to sit together to discuss issues and plan activities to be carried out to find solutions before implementing a teaching and learning activity. The teaching session will be conducted by one of the teachers while the others will act as the facilitator. This method can increase the motivation and confidence level of new teachers teaching the Tamil subject mainly on speaking skills.

B. Attract Student's Interest

While conducting speaking skills-based teaching activities, teachers need to approach and provide equal opportunities to all students. This method can arouse the subsequent interest of continuous fun to the students to make the teaching process more effective. Students will have fun when they are able to master on their own every skill learned through student-centered methods.

A study by Diantari and Tirtayani (2020) also found that teachers who are friendly and carry out fun activities are able to engage students in the language subjects. In the national schools in which the Tamil subject is less popular, teachers need to clearly explain the objectives of a lesson, master the content well and be able to deliver it easily and effectively. The teaching process should be diversified with more creative activities to engage students in the speaking-based activities. In addition, Tamil language teachers also need to regularly interact with students while implementing the teaching and learning process. According to Diantari and Tirtayani (2020), the interaction process with students will enable teachers to gain knowledge, improve skills and effectiveness of their teaching.

C. Improvement in School Resources

Constraints in schools such as inadequate classrooms and the lack of facilities also pose great challenges to the Tamil subject teachers and students during their Tamil lesson. Schools also need to proactively raise funds and apply for contributions through the Parent Teacher Association (PIBG) and Corporate Bodies to help contribute to the purchase of projectors and other resources for this second language.

Timetable for this elective class and the use of facilities must be carefully planned to avoid clashes of use for the purpose of teaching Tamil language, especially for schools that operate on two sessions with a large number of students. The school also needs to monitor the condition of resources and teaching aids so that they are in usable condition which will ultimately reduce the risk of wasting time among students during its use. Immediate repair and improvement actions must be

taken if there are facilities, and equipment that are damaged or no longer safe to use. This can help the teachers to prepare an alternative way of teaching.

D. Support from School Management

School headmasters need to show seriousness and full commitment to support the comprehensive implementation of the Tamil subject in schools equivalent to the other core subjects by emphasizing monitoring of teachers' teaching, obtaining feedback, and disseminating the importance of Tamil subjects to the students.

School administrators also need to distribute the task of teaching the Tamil subject based on the experience and interest of teachers in the subject so that it can bring the desired learning outcomes to attract students and also increase parents' confidence on the importance and impact of teaching the Tamil subject to their children. School headmasters also need to ensure that the teachers evaluate the skills achieved by the students in language skills to ensure high validity and reliability for each mark given to students. Teachers of Tamil options with extensive experience should also be encouraged to share knowledge through In-Service Training (LDP) in schools or through best practice sharing sessions.

E. Support from Parents

The negative perception of parents that Tamil subjects are just a waste of time and does not guarantee the future can be corrected by the school management. This can be done by providing information on the importance of the implementation of Tamil subjects through the distribution of posters, pamphlets and providing detailed explanations during parent consultation sessions.

Learning Tamil may help students acquire confidence in their speaking skills. The Tamil language can also be utilized to improve students' vocabulary, structure, and context, as well as stimulate engagement and cultural exchange. Tamil Language is also a subject that can motivate students to come to school. In this regard, parents need to think positively and always support children in taking Tamil Language classes because it is able to help students invigorate physically and mentally in the classroom.

To overcome the negative perception of parents that Tamil Language is not a public examination subject, schools need to disseminate information and the importance of active involvement of students in Tamil Language will be recorded in the latest School -Based Assessment System (SBA). Each aspect of this

assessment must be explained in depth to all parents to increase their awareness of the importance of implementing the Tamil Language subjects rather than just by the number of A's earned by children.

V. CONCLUSION

To produce well-balanced students in terms of physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual and personality, the Tamil Language subject should not be neglected. Creativity and diversity in teaching methods will be able to motivate students to continue to strive to master a skill taught. Therefore, school administrators need to have a clear vision and mission to place the importance of effective and comprehensive implementation of Tamil Language subjects in schools.

To maintain the enjoyment and overall involvement of students in Tamil Language activities, structural factors such as access to adequate sports facilities, spacious and safe field conditions, easily available information, and reduced congestion of equipment must be taken into account and addressed immediately by the school. Parents also need to change negative perceptions about the importance of the implementation of Tamil Language subjects, always provide support and encouragement to their children to attend Tamil Language classes and be a role model to them by engaging with children by carrying out leisure activities.

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In conclusion, Tamil Language plays an important role in educating and improving Tamil culture and literature, among Indian students. However, it will not be achieved easily if there are still constraints to effectively implement the teaching and learning of Tamil Language in schools. Therefore, every party such as school administrators, teachers and parents need to clearly understand the challenge mechanism that has been discussed to ensure that students are more motivated to engage in the implementation of Tamil speaking skills-based activities. Hopefully, the importance, implementation challenges and recommendations presented in this concept paper can provide a comprehensive picture to policy makers on the issue of implementation of Tamil Language in secondary schools and then consider all these factors to further improve the effectiveness of its implementation at school level.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank Mr Muthu Nedumaran (CEO of Murasu Anjal) and management of SJK(T) Masai for their assistance in obtaining data and great cooperation.

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