25

Tamil IT for Education:
Tamil language website - CHIJ (Kellock) School

Miss Thanaselvi Krishnan

Tamil Teacher, CHIJ (Kellock) Primary School, Singapore

Synopsis

Tamil language, a language that was commonly spoken in the Indian families of then, is now becoming a "rare commodity". Has it ever occurred to us as to why this decline over these recent years? Why is it that hardly Tamil speaking pupils speak the language or even take the initiative to read books or articles in Tamil? Reading of stories to enhance a person's language proficiency has always been encouraged by many educators around the world. "Language *is a powerful tool and important aspect of culture and ethnicity".* [13]It plays a very important role in the development of a child and is one of the essential skills in any language development and yet the readership for Tamil books when compared with English books is always minimal. This paper examines on how the web can be harnessed as a tool to motivate reading and learning for the pupils of the coming generation.

Background

The pupils of this generation are very different from our times. In those days, Tamil language was one's own language for the Tamil speaking Indians but now, the situation has totally changed. To most of the Tamil pupils now, Tamil has become a foreign language.

In addition with many of today's Tamil students coming from mixed marriages, it is becoming a greater challenge for Tamil language educators to ensure that the pupils have an adequate competency in the Tamil language when many of these pupils hardly speak the language at home.

Bearing the current situation in mind, the team formed, shared a common goal and the main objective was to deliver well-crafted Tamil stories online for children aged between seven and twelve years old and for pupils in the Learning Support Programme (LSP) in Singapore. [14] The team also wanted to create a sense of belonging for Tamil language in the Tamil speaking pupils and establish a good readership for Tamil stories by engaging the web. "*By the turn of the century, teachers and pupils will use multimedia and the Internet for teaching and learning."[15]*

---

[13] Paul Eggen and Don Kauchak, 1999, pg.124
[14] Refer to Appendix 1
[15] Christopher S Ward and Willy A Renandya, 1998, pg i

Furthermore, the team wanted to strengthen pupils' reading skills and understanding in Tamil language and to enable students with low ability to learn the Tamil language as well.

Having these objectives in mind, the team decided to create a website catering to the needs of the Tamil speaking students for the Tamil language.

Research findings

Based on the team's findings, local websites targeted for the specific needs of the Tamil-speaking students are rather rare. Due to this a website structure was conceived by a Tamil language teacher and in collaboration with an IT expert from the IT industry was also involved to ensure that IT-pedagogical approaches to the creation of the website were well thought through.

A questionnaire was prepared in order to find out the pupils interest level in reading and to compare their reading preference in English books to Tamil books. A total of 84 pupils across primary levels one to six took part in this survey and the results are as follows:

CHIJ (Kellock) Primary School Total number of Tamil speaking pupils = 84			
Level & Age of pupils	No. of students	Reading preference in English Books	Reading preference in Tamil Books
Primary 1 (7 yr old)	19	15	4
Primary 2 (8 yr old)	15	10	5
Primary 3 (9 yr old)	7	5	2
Primary 4 (10 yr old)	20	16	4
Primary 5 (11 yr old)	14	12	2
Primary 6 (12 yr old)	9	5	4

A recent survey done with Tamil speaking students in CHIJ (Kellock) Primary School during the first 2 months to gauge their readership level for Tamil storybooks. The survey showed that the students preferred reading English storybooks rather than Tamil storybooks. The primary reason for this was that they were unable to comprehend the Tamil text as easily as the English text. Furthermore, the lower primary pupils found the stories in English storybooks more interesting and colourful than the Tamil storybooks.

Looking at the results, the team then embarked on the creation of the website.

The Website

The website (www.elearntamil.com) contains stories with colourful pictures accompanied by audio files for the pupils to assist them in reading the stories. These stories also have structured vocabulary lists that are bilingual. By using this approach of teaching the Tamil Language through the use of English, a student will be able to better comprehend the meaning of the

words used in the stories and will not hesitate to read due to the lack of understanding. Every age group has different stories that will be updated every two to three weeks by the team's Tamil language teacher. The stories in this site cover a wide range of topics that go beyond the textbook-based curriculum. The website also hopes to inculcate good moral values through some of these stories.

A pupil will only need a computer, internet browser, internet connection and no hassle of downloading Tamil fonts would be required to view this website as dynamic fonts are used. Although downloading fonts is not a difficult task, it would refrain a pupil from viewing the site, especially the low ability pupils. Being such, any pupil will be able to access the website anytime, anywhere thus allowing the flexibility in learning at his or her comfortable pace.

Moreover, this website not only allows Tamil pupils to learn Tamil but it also extends "its service "to the other races who may be keen to know the basics of the Tamil language. The team's aim is to instill a sense of belonging to the Tamil language for Indian students in Singa-pore and an opportunity for non-Indians to know Tamil as well.

Evaluation

Being a 1st attempt, the team took this as a pilot project for CHIJ (Kellock) Primary School and that is why all surveys were done using the same pupils. On completion of the website the pupils were intro duced to the website by the Tamil teacher and were explained about the site during curriculum.

An evaluation form was prepared in order to find out about the pupils opinion of the website, to know if their interest level in reading Tamil stories has changed after viewing this site and to know if com-prehension of the Tamil language had become any easier with the help of the bilingual vocabulary lists.

A total of 84 pupils across primary levels one to six took part in this survey again and the results are as follows:

CHIJ (Kellock) Primary School Total number of Tamil speaking pupils = 84				
Level & Age of pupils	No. of students	Liking of the Website	Reading preference in Tamil Books	Easier to understand Tamil Language
Primary 1 (7 yr old)	19	18	15	12
Primary 2 (8 yr old)	15	13	12	11
Primary 3 (9 yr old)	7	5	6	6
Primary 4 (10 yr old)	20	17	16	14
Primary 5 (11 yr old)	14	12	11	10
Primary 6 (12 yr old)	9	8	7	8

This survey showed that the pupils do like the website. After viewing and reading the e-stories available, the pupils were motivated to read Tamil storybooks. The pupils also found it easier to comprehend the Tamil language with the help of the bilingual vocabulary lists. as easily as the English text.

These results do show an improvement when compared to the earlier table.

Conclusion

Educators around the world are working very hard to keep the Tamil language abreast among the younger generation and the only way to do it is to give them what they need. *'Reading plays a key role in the socialization of children.*[16]*'* Just as how IT is used in this growing world of trends to propagate the language, it is equally important that it reaches out to all around the world efficiently and easily today.

Further development

At this moment the website contains stories with colourful pictures and the team would like to go a step further from here by creating animated Tamil language stories online made available to one and all at no cost at all. We will also be embarking on more language materials for the pupils in time to come.

Bibliography

Paul Eggen and Don Kauchak (1999) *Windows on Classroom. Educational Psychology*

Christopher S Ward and Willy A Renandya (1998) *Computers and Language Learning*

http://www.booksforfundraising.com/reading.html (07.07.03)

References

International Council for Tamil Learning (1993) The Journal of Tamil Learning

Michael D. Williams (2000) Integrating Technology into Teaching and Learning Concepts and Applications

Jon Saphier and Robert Gower (1997) The Skillful Teacher Building Your Teaching Skills

Jason Tan and S. Gopinathan and Ho Wah Kam (1997) Education In Singapore A Book of Readings

K. Ramiah (1998) A Study of the Errors Made by Students in Tamil Language

Reference Web pages

http://www.scholastic.com/schoolage/experts/learning/9_12_impofreading.htm

http://www.saferchild.org/reading.htm

http://libres.curtin.edu.au/libres13n1/ilanogovan.htm

http://www.infitt.org/tamilnet97/jaya_speech.html

(All mentioned web pages were viewed on 07.07.2003)

---

[16] http://www.booksforfundraising.com/reading.html