Teaching Of Tamil Through Computers in Primary Schools in Singapore

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"Computers cannot replace principals and teachers. Computers
are tools for the principal, for teachers and for the students to
enhance their work and facilitate learning."

RADM Teo Chee Hean, Minister for Education and 2nd Minister
For Defence, Singapore

INTRODUCTION

The IT Masterplan was implemented by the Ministry of Education in 1997. Since its implementation, all schools have been equipped with computers and the government has made it possible for every teacher to have an internet account . For a start, schools integrated 10% of the curriculum time to IT based lessons. Today schools integrate about 30% of the curriculum time to IT based lessons.

As a Tamil Language Curriculum Specialist, I was entrusted with the task of sharing with the Tamil Language Teachers in the Primary Schools on using IT as a resource and teaching tool. So I had to demonstrate sample IT integrated lessons. It was a great opportunity for me to exercise my creativity to devise some strategies using Powerpoint and Internet to teach Tamil.

Later I made visits to some schools to monitor the progress made in the use of IT in the teaching of Tamil Language in the primary schools. During my visits and discussions with Tamil teachers I came across teachers using very simple, but interesting techniques for conducting lessons such as reading, cloze, comprehension, conversation and children٭s songs. Pictures from the Clipart gallery were used to enhance the presentation of these lessons. Relevant pictures and information were also downloaded from various websites and useful information was translated to Tamil.

This paper focuses on some of the basic techniques adopted in the teaching of Tamil Language through IT in primary school pupils.

CHILDRENS SONG

Most often, teachers have been teaching songs using the CD ROMS provided by the Curriculum Planning and Development Division. But now many teachers are also

incorporating music via Powerpoint presentations to teach children's songs. A song entitled "Saapidu" for Primary 3 pupils is featured here (Annex 1). Picture from Clipart gallery, Freeform lines and Basic shapes from Autoshapes have been used very cleverly to create cartoonic figures. The song has also been inserted into the Powerpoint presentation. This presentation starts with a dialogue between the teacher and a pupil. It can also be used for a conversation lesson. This technique has captivated the children's attention and activated their interest to learn the song.

READING (PRIMARY 6EM2)

This reading lesson entitled "Malathiyin Arangettam" is from the "Valar Tamil" Tamil textbook / 6B. This lesson was for pupils who are studying Tamil as a second language. In this lesson, difficult words and phrases were introduced using the "word splash" technique. Using Powerpoint, words were introduced with "drop in" animation effect and the phrases were introduced with the "camera" animation effect. Meanings of words were also taught at the same time. Comical pictures like the "Screen beans" from the Clipart gallery were added to set a light hearted mood. This method helped to sustain pupils' interest throughout the lesson.

CLOSE PASSAGE (PRIMARY 6EM2)

This lesson was also catered for pupils who are studying Tamil as a second language and it is from the 6B "Valar Tamil" workbook. This lesson focuses on introducing written exercises. The grammatical item "Subject and Predicate" was re-inforced through this lesson. Three cloze passages were introduced. One is a guided cloze and the other two are open cloze. The two passages are about musical instruments namely a flute and a guitar and the third passage is about dancing.

Animated pictures were inserted from the Clipart gallery. All three passages were narrative. The first three passages are narrated by a cow and a donkey and a female dancer respectively. Pupils watched the animation pictures with facination.

To add variety to the cloze exercises, the first passage was designed to be a hands-on activity. The hands-on activity boosted the pupils' interest in doing the grammar exercises. The second passage has two types of activities. One without answers and the other was with answers. Once pupils had attempted the exercise, the next slide was flashed to pupils to check their answers. However, no answers were provided for the last passage.

READING AND COMPREHENSION (PRIMARY 6EM1)

This lesson was for pupils who are learning Tamil at first language level (Higher Tamil). The lesson is about Nepoleon Bonaparte (Annex 2). This topic was introduced using the communicative approach, which advocates highly interactive activities. Facts gathered from the lesson were introduced in a question and answer form. The questions and answers appear in a custom animation form. This method prompted pupils to be more attentive during lesson.

As pupils are studying Higher Tamil, additional information and pictures of Napoleon Bonaparte from the Internet were also presented in bullets. Children loved the presentation.

CONCLLUSION

Today many of the teachers have become very highly skilled and creative in the use of IT. IT, used with discretion and shaped by creativity and imagination has made the teaching and learning of Tamil Language enlightening, more interesting, challenging and fun. The use of IT has motivated the pupils to learn Tamil with more zest and pride. IT has also enhanced their learning , creativity and thinking skills.

Many in house exhibitions on pupils IT presentations and IT based competitions are being held regularly in schools. Moreover IT Camps are also being organised in many schools. This year a National IT- based Tamil Language competition was held on the 1st of April by the Tamil Internet Steering Committee of Singapore and about 400 pupils took part in this competition. Pupils who took part are very IT savvy. 10 to 12 year old pupils created their own Powerpoint presentation based on the pictures given. Many pupils created animated Powerpoint slides. It is indeed good to note that teachers are constantly keeping themselves updated with new trends to interest their students.

30.6.2001