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THE IMPACT OF STM MODULE: A PILOT STUDY IN NATIONAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS AMONG NON-NATIVE STUDENTS

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Abstract

Malaysia is a place where many languages are spoken, and Tamil is one of them. Speaking Tamil well is essential for keeping cultural traditions alive and bringing different communities together. This article presents the findings of a pilot study conducted in a national primary school in Pasir Gudang District, focusing on the impact of a Spoken Tamil module. This article presents the findings of a pilot study conducted in national primary schools in Pasir Gudang District, focusing on the impact of a Spoken Tamil module. The study aimed to assess the effectiveness of the module in enhancing spoken Tamil language skills among non-native learners and fostering cross-cultural understanding. The Spoken Tamil module was designed to introduce basic conversational skills of Tamil language in school. research method employed was the quasi-experimental research with pre and post-tests. The study employed interviews, surveys, and classroom observations to collect data over a month period. The results indicate a significant improvement in students' spoken Tamil language proficiency, and positive attitudes towards multilingualism. The findings highlight the importance of interactive and culturally integrated language learning approaches in promoting inclusive education. Recommendations include professional development programs for teachers and the integration of technology-based tools. The study emphasizes the need for further research and collaboration to expand the module's impact to different regions and student groups, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and diverse educational system. The research findings show significant impact towards the students' communication skills.

Keywords: spoken; Tamil; national primary, communication, module

1. Introduction

Language plays a crucial role in fostering cultural diversity and promoting inclusive education (Ng, 2019). Malaysia is a nation renowned for its cultural diversity and a harmonious blend of

various ethnicities, languages, and traditions (Lino, 2020). Among its vibrant linguistic landscape, Tamil, a Dravidian language, has a deep-rooted history in Malaysia (Malaysia Education Blueprint,

2013). Traditionally spoken by the Tamil ethnic community, the Tamil language has extended its influence beyond heritage speakers, attracting a growing community of non-native Tamil learners (M.A.S.T Goonatileke1, M.W.G Jayampath2, 2020). These learners, while not having Tamil as their native tongue, exhibit a profound interest in acquiring proficiency in this culturally and linguistically rich language.

In Malaysia, where multiculturalism is celebrated, it is essential to provide opportunities for students to learn and appreciate different languages (Lino, 2020). This article explores the impact of a pilot study conducted in a national primary school, focusing on the Spoken Tamil module among Malay students. The study aims to assess the effectiveness of this module in enhancing language skills and fostering cross-cultural understanding (Lakshmi, 2016).

2. Research Problem

Spoken Tamil delves into the complexities and challenges associated with the acquisition, usage, and proficiency of spoken Tamil among non-native Tamil students residing in Malaysia. This demographic faces a unique set of linguistic, cultural, and educational circumstances that influence their engagement with the Tamil language.

Firstly, the linguistic diversity among non-native Tamil students in Malaysia poses a significant challenge. Many of these students come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, speaking languages other than Tamil as their first language. This diversity can impact the acquisition of spoken Tamil, as students may encounter difficulties in phonetics, vocabulary, and grammatical structures that differ from their native languages.

Secondly, the limited exposure to Tamil-speaking environments outside of formal education settings poses a barrier to the development of spoken Tamil proficiency among non-native students. Unlike native Tamil speakers who may have ample opportunities for immersion in Tamil-speaking communities, non-native students may have restricted access to such environments, hindering their language acquisition process.

Thirdly, educational factors play a crucial role in shaping the proficiency levels of spoken Tamil among non-native students. The availability and quality of Tamil language instruction within Malaysian schools, as well as the teaching tools employed, can significantly impact students' language acquisition and proficiency levels. Additionally, the lack of resources, qualified teachers, and suitable teaching materials tailored to the needs of non-native Tamil learners may further impede their progress in spoken Tamil.

Furthermore, cultural factors influence the attitudes, motivations, and identities of non-native Tamil students towards learning and using the language. Factors such as societal perceptions of Tamil, the significance of Tamil language and culture within the students' social circles, and the students' own cultural backgrounds can affect their engagement with spoken Tamil.

Overall, the statement of the problem aims to comprehensively address the multifaceted challenges faced by non-native Tamil students in Malaysia in acquiring, using, and developing proficiency in spoken Tamil. By understanding these challenges, the research seeks to propose a spoken Tamil module to enhance the teaching and learning of spoken Tamil among non-native students, thereby promoting linguistic diversity, cultural appreciation, and community integration within Malaysian society.

3. Objective of Research

The aim of this pilot study is to assess the effectiveness of the Spoken Tamil Module in improving language proficiency among non-native Tamil students in a national primary school. Firstly, this study seeks to assess the extent to which participation in the Spoken Tamil Module (STM) influences the spoken proficiency levels of non-native Tamil students, particularly in terms of speaking, and listening skills. It aims to measure any observable improvements in students' spoken Tamil abilities as a result of their engagement with the module.

Secondly, the study aims to explore the impact of the STM on the cultural integration of non-native Tamil students within the school environment. It seeks to understand how participation in the module affects students' attitudes towards their interactions with Tamil-speaking peers and teachers, and their overall sense of belonging within the Tamil community.

Lastly, the study intends to investigate the perceptions and experiences of non-native Tamil students and teachers regarding the implementation of the Spoken Tamil Module (STM). It aims to gather feedback on the effectiveness of the module, identify any challenges encountered during its implementation, and propose recommendations for its improvement and future implementation in educational settings. Overall, the objective is to provide valuable insights into the potential benefits and challenges of incorporating Spoken Tamil Module (STM) in national primary schools to support the linguistic and cultural needs of non-native Tamil students.

4. Research Questions

- a) How does the Spoken Tamil Module (STM) influence non-native Tamil students' motivation towards learning spoken Tamil?
- b) What impact does the Spoken Tamil Module (STM) have on the improvement of spoken Tamil among non-native Tamil students?
- c) What are the perceptions and experiences of non-native Tamil students and teachers using the Spoken Tamil Module (STM) for spoken Tamil?

5. Literature Review

The Tamil language has its history of standardization in South Asia, having been codified by 'Tolkappiyanaar' in the early centuries of the Common Era. It has changed radically over time, and subsequent standard written forms have evolved, the most recent being the codification by the grammarian Pavanandi in the 13th century (Schiffman, 1998). Spoken Tamil language proficiency holds paramount importance in Malaysia for several compelling reasons, as it plays a pivotal role in the country's cultural, social, and economic.

Proficiency in spoken Tamil enables effective and meaningful communication within the Tamil-speaking communities in Malaysia (Schiffman, 1998). In a multicultural nation like Malaysia, where multiple languages are spoken, being fluent in Tamil fosters strong interpersonal relationships among family members, friends, and colleagues. It facilitates day-to-day interactions and strengthens bonds within the community. In addition, Tamil language proficiency is intricately tied to the preservation of Tamil culture and heritage in Malaysia. Language serves as a vessel for passing down traditions, customs, and oral histories from one generation to the next. By mastering spoken

Tamil, individuals contribute to the preservation of their cultural identity, ensuring that customs and practices are carried forward.

Besides that, Many cultural and religious activities within the Tamil community in Malaysia are conducted in the Tamil language. Proficiency in spoken Tamil is essential for active participation in these rituals, ceremonies, and festivals. It deepens one's cultural engagement and spiritual connection. Proficiency in spoken Tamil promotes inclusivity and social cohesion within the Tamil-speaking community and beyond. It allows individuals from diverse backgrounds, including non-Tamil Malaysians married into Tamil families, to feel included and integrated into the community. This inclusivity strengthens the multicultural communities of Malaysia (Lino, 2020).

Spoken Tamil language skills open doors to various professional and educational opportunities in Malaysia. Many jobs and educational programs, particularly in fields such as education, media, and the arts, require proficiency in Tamil. Proficiency in spoken Tamil can significantly enhance one's career prospects and broaden educational horizons. Malaysia's linguistic diversity is enriched when individuals are proficient in multiple languages, including spoken Tamil. Multilingualism contributes to better communication and understanding among different linguistic and cultural groups, promoting harmony and tolerance in society (Tomblin, 2019).

At the same time, proficiency in spoken Tamil facilitates cross-cultural understanding. It allows individuals to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps, promoting dialogue and cooperation between Tamil-speaking and non-Tamil-speaking communities. This understanding is crucial for building a united and harmonious Malaysia (Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2013). Proficiency in spoken Tamil can serve as a catalyst for cultural exchange and diplomacy. It allows individuals to represent and share their culture and heritage with others, fostering goodwill and collaboration between nations and communities. In conclusion, spoken Tamil language proficiency is not just a skill; it is a gateway to cultural preservation, effective communication, social cohesion, and numerous opportunities in Malaysia. It exemplifies Malaysia's commitment to embracing and celebrating its linguistic and cultural diversity, making it an integral part of the nation's identity and strength.

6. Methodology

In this study, a qualitative research approach was adopted to explore the challenges faced by non-native Tamil learners in Malaysia when it comes to speaking spoken Tamil. Qualitative methods are well-suited for understanding complex human experiences (Creswell, 2018). This study has used a purposive sampling to select participants who are non-native Tamil learners in Malaysia, representing a diverse range of backgrounds, ages, and learning experiences.

Therefore, in this study the researcher chosen 10 non-native learners, specifically students aged 10 selected to be the sample of the pilot study from two different national primary schools . The participants also given consent to ensure they understand the purpose of the study and their roles. Data has been collected through semi-structured interviews with participants (Creswell, 2018). These interviews should encourage participants to share their experiences, challenges, and perspectives related to speaking spoken Tamil before and after using the Spoken Tamil Module

(STM). The researcher also focused on detailed field notes during observations and interviews to capture contextual information.

The Spoken Tamil module was developed with the objective of introducing basic conversational skills in Tamil among Malay students (Star, 2022). The module incorporates interactive learning methods, such as dialogues, role-plays, and audio visual aids, to engage students and make language learning enjoyable. It also focuses on cultural aspects to familiarize students with Tamil traditions, customs, and values.

In this study, data has been analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns in the data. This involves coding the data, creating categories, and identifying key themes related to spoken Tamil challenges. This qualitative methodology allows for a deep exploration of the challenges faced by non-native Tamil students, providing valuable insights into their experiences and contributing to a better understanding of the spoken Tamil learning process in a multicultural context.

7. Findings and Results

The pilot study revealed several positive outcomes. Firstly, there was a notable improvement in students' spoken Tamil language proficiency. Through interactive activities, students gained confidence in speaking spoken Tamil and demonstrated a better understanding of the language. Non-native Tamil students who participated in the Spoken Tamil Module (STM) demonstrated significant improvements in their Tamil language proficiency compared to those who did not participate. This was evidenced by higher scores in speaking and listening assessments.

Secondly, the module contributed to increased cultural awareness. It has enhanced cultural integration. The pilot study revealed that participation in the Spoken Tamil Module positively influenced the cultural integration of non-native Tamil students within the school community. Students reported feeling more connected to Tamil culture and traditions, and there was increased interaction with Tamil-speaking peers and teachers.

Lastly, the module fostered positive attitudes towards multilingualism, encouraging students to embrace different languages and cultures in Malaysia. The positive feedback from non-native Tamil students regarding their experience with the Spoken Tamil Module (STM) was predominantly positive. Many students expressed enjoyment and interest in learning spoken Tamil, attributing it to the interactive nature of the lessons and the supportive learning environment created by teachers.

a) Spoken Tamil Module (STM) influence non-native Tamil students' motivation towards learning spoken Tamil

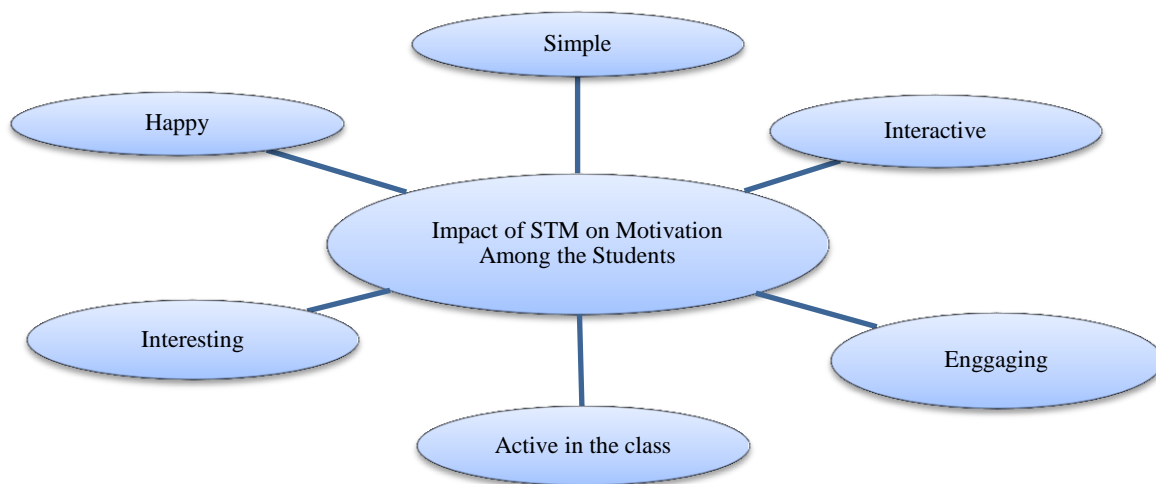


Figure 1: Impact on Motivation Among the Students

Figure 1 shows the impact of The Spoken Tamil Module (STM) on motivation to use spoken Tamil among the students. significantly increased non-native Tamil students' motivation towards learning spoken Tamil. Based on the interview it showed that the students reported higher levels of interest and enthusiasm for participating in spoken Tamil activities within the module. The interactive and engaging nature of the module's activities positively influenced students' intrinsic motivation to learn spoken Tamil.

b) Impact on the improvement of spoken Tamil among non-native Tamil students through the Spoken Tamil Module (STM)

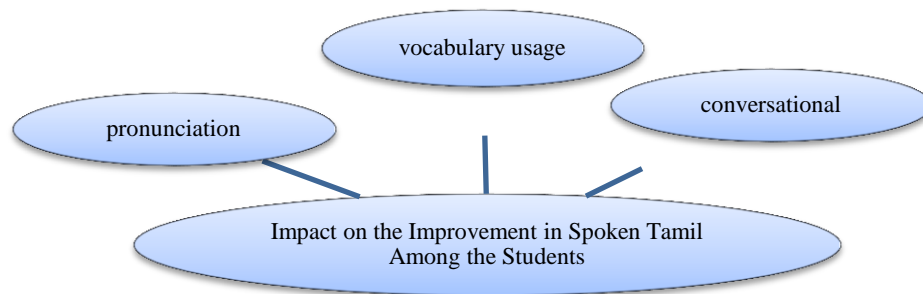


Figure 2: Impact on the Improvement in Spoken Tamil Among the Students

Figure 2 shows the impact on the improvement in spoken Tamil among the students through the Spoken Tamil Module (STM). The module led to noticeable improvements in non-native Tamil students' spoken Tamil skills. The students who involved in this research demonstrated enhanced proficiency in pronunciation, vocabulary usage, and conversational fluency after participating in the module. In addition, the structured approach of the module, coupled with regular practice sessions, contributed to the students' measurable progress in spoken Tamil.

c) Perceptions and experiences of non-native Tamil students and teachers using the Module

Based on the interview both students and teachers expressed positive perceptions and experiences regarding the Spoken Tamil Module (STM). The students reported feeling more confident and comfortable speaking Tamil after engaging with the module's

activities. Teachers noted an increase in student engagement and participation during spoken Tamil lessons, as well as improvements in students' overall simple spoken skills. Students also appreciated the supportive learning environment created by teachers within the module, which encouraged them to actively engage in spoken Tamil practice.

Based on the findings, the results suggest that the implementation of a Spoken Tamil Module (STM) in a national primary school setting can have a beneficial impact on non-native Tamil students. It not only enhances their language proficiency but also fosters cultural integration and positive perceptions towards Tamil language and culture. These results highlight the potential of integrating such modules into mainstream education to support the linguistic and cultural needs of non-native Tamil students. Further

research and larger-scale studies may be warranted to validate and expand upon these preliminary findings.

8. Discussion

The findings of this pilot study hold significant implications for language education in Malaysia. The Spoken Tamil Module (STM) showcases the effectiveness of an interactive and culturally integrated approach to language learning (Adikesavalu, 2007). By introducing such module, the education system can promote inclusivity and provide opportunities for students to develop proficiency in languages other than their mother tongue. The module's effectiveness can be compared to existing language learning approaches in the national curriculum. Traditional methods often focus solely on grammar and vocabulary, while the Spoken Tamil Module (STM) emphasizes conversational skills and cultural understanding. By incorporating elements of the module into the curriculum, educators can enhance language learning outcomes among students from diverse backgrounds.

Based on the pilot study, several recommendations can be made to improve the Spoken Tamil module. Continuous professional development programs for teachers can be organized to enhance their pedagogical skills in teaching Tamil as a second language in National Primary schools in Malaysia. Additionally, incorporating technology-based tools, such as language learning apps and online resources, can further engage students and make learning more accessible.

Moreover, the success of the pilot study warrants the expansion of similar studies to different regions and student groups. By conducting larger-scale research, the long-term impact of the module can be assessed, and its potential for nationwide implementation can be explored. Collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including language experts, educators, and policymakers, is crucial for the sustainable integration of the module into the national primary school curriculum.

9. Conclusion

The pilot study on the impact of the Spoken Tamil Module (STM) among Malay students in a national primary school has shown promising results. The module not only enhanced language proficiency but also fostered positive attitudes towards multilingualism.

The findings indicate that participation in the STM led to notable improvements in students' spoken Tamil skills, including pronunciation, vocabulary usage, and simple conversational fluency. Additionally, the module fostered a greater sense of connection to Tamil culture among non-native students, with increased interest in Tamil traditions and customs observed. Moreover, both students and teachers reported positive perceptions and experiences with the STM, highlighting its effectiveness in creating a supportive learning environment conducive to language acquisition.

These findings underscore the importance of incorporating targeted language module like the STM into primary school curricula to support the linguistic and cultural needs of non-native Tamil students. Moving forward, further research is warranted to assess the long-term effects of the STM on students' language proficiency and cultural integration, as well as its scalability and applicability in diverse educational contexts.

Overall, by incorporating interactive and culturally integrated language learning module, Malaysia can create a more inclusive education system that celebrates diversity and promotes multilingualism. The findings of this study emphasize the importance of providing students with opportunities to learn different languages and cultures, ultimately fostering a more cohesive and harmonious society.

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