



Challenges And Approaches For Teaching English Language Skills And Soft Skills To Tamil-Medium Management Students- A Study

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Abstract:

Students must learn English and soft skills in this rapidly globalizing world for successful career opportunities. English knowledge will help open many opportunities for them and will be highly valuable in their future careers. Mastery of the English language and soft skills are critical for management students in today's globalized business environment. However, Tamil-medium students often need help in acquiring these skills, which can hinder their academic and professional success. This study aims to investigate the difficulties Tamil-medium management students encounter in learning English and soft skills and explore effective teaching approaches that can enhance their language acquisition. A mixed-method research design collected data from a sample of Tamil-medium management students and their educators using surveys, interviews, and classroom observations. The study identifies key challenges such as limited exposure to English, cultural and educational background disparities, and psychological barriers including language anxiety and lack of confidence. The research highlights several successful strategies to address these challenges, including using technology-assisted language learning, interactive and student-centered teaching methods, and incorporating extracurricular activities to provide practical language practice. Case studies of institutions implementing innovative approaches are presented, demonstrating significant improvements in students' language proficiency.

The findings of this study suggest that a multifaceted approach, combining traditional and modern teaching techniques, can significantly enhance the English language skills of Tamil-medium management students. The study concludes with recommendations for educators and institutions to adopt these strategies to better support their students, and calls for further research to continue improving language education practices in similar contexts.

Key Words: Challenges, Approaches, Acquisition, Language skill, Soft skill , Tamil Medium Management student

I-Introduction

Background and Context of the study:

Overview of the Importance of English Language Skills in Management Education

In the modern business world, English has emerged as the global lingua franca, playing a pivotal role in international trade, commerce, and communication. Proficiency in English is essential for management students, as it equips them with the necessary skills to effectively communicate, negotiate, and collaborate in a diverse and dynamic global market. English language skills are not only crucial for academic success but also for professional advancement, as most management-related literature, case studies, and research are published in English. Moreover, the ability to articulate ideas clearly and confidently in English can significantly enhance a graduate's employability and career prospects.

Management education, in particular, demands a high level of proficiency in English and soft skills due to the nature of its curriculum, which includes extensive reading of academic texts, writing reports, presenting ideas, and engaging in discussions and debates. Effective communication in English is indispensable for networking, leadership, and the execution of strategic initiatives within multinational corporations and organizations. Consequently, ensuring that management students are proficient in English is a priority for educational institutions worldwide.

Specific Challenges Faced by Tamil-Medium Students in Acquiring These Skills

Tamil-medium students, who have received their primary and secondary education in Tamil, face several unique challenges when transitioning to an English-medium higher education environment. These challenges can be broadly categorized into linguistic, cultural, psychological, and educational barriers.

Linguistic Barriers: Tamil-medium students often have limited exposure to English outside the classroom, restricting their opportunities to practice and improve their language skills. A lack of familiarity with English vocabulary and grammar rules can hinder their ability to comprehend academic texts and express themselves clearly in writing and speech. Differences in phonetics between Tamil and English can lead to difficulties in pronunciation, which may affect their confidence and clarity in spoken communication.

Cultural Barriers: Many Tamil-medium students may find it challenging to relate to the cultural references and contexts prevalent in English language materials, which can impede their understanding and engagement. The interactive and participatory teaching methods commonly used in English-medium classrooms may be unfamiliar to Tamil-medium students, leading to a passive learning attitude.

Psychological Barriers: Fear of making mistakes and being judged can cause significant anxiety, affecting students' willingness to participate in class discussions and presentations. Continual struggles with English proficiency can negatively impact students' self-esteem and motivation, further exacerbating their learning difficulties.

Educational Barriers: The traditional rote learning methods often used in Tamil-medium schools may not adequately prepare students for the critical thinking and analytical skills required in an English-medium management curriculum. Access to quality English language learning resources, such as books, software, and tutoring, may be limited for Tamil-medium students, particularly those from rural or underprivileged backgrounds.

Research Objectives

- To identify the key challenges in teaching English language skills, and soft skills to Tamil-medium management students
- To explore effective approaches and strategies for overcoming these challenges.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Improving English Language Education for Tamil-Medium Students:

This study provides critical insights into the unique challenges faced by Tamil-medium students in acquiring English language skills, offering practical solutions tailored to their specific needs. By identifying effective teaching strategies, the research contributes to the development of targeted language education programs that can bridge the proficiency gap, thereby enhancing academic performance and professional opportunities for these students.

Implications for Curriculum Design and Teaching Methodologies in Management Education

The findings of this study have significant implications for curriculum design and teaching methodologies in management education. Incorporating reshaped English language support within the management curriculum can foster a more inclusive learning environment. Innovative teaching approaches, such as blended learning, interactive sessions, and culturally relevant materials, can better engage Tamil-medium students and facilitate their language acquisition. These curriculum enhancements will not only improve language proficiency but also prepare students for the global business environment, ultimately contributing to more equitable and effective management education.

II-Literature Review

The Importance of English in Management Education

English has become the de facto language of international business and academia. Numerous studies highlight its critical role in management education, where proficiency in English is linked to better academic performance and career prospects. Researchers like Graddol (2006) emphasize the increasing demand for English skills in the global job market, while Jenkins (2014) discusses the necessity of English for accessing management literature and participating in international conferences.

Challenges in Teaching English to Non-Native Speakers:

Non-native English speakers, particularly those from non-English-medium backgrounds, face significant hurdles in mastering the language. Kachru (1992) identifies linguistic, psychological, and cultural barriers as primary obstacles. Studies by Cummins (2000) and Krashen (1982) support the need for immersive and context-rich environments to facilitate language acquisition. Specifically, Tamil-medium students struggle with limited exposure to English, differences in linguistic structure, and cultural mismatches in learning materials, as noted by Thirusanku and Yunus (2014).

Effective Teaching Approaches and Strategies:

Effective strategies for teaching English to non-native speakers include interactive and communicative teaching methods, the use of technology in language learning, and culturally relevant pedagogy. Brown (2007) and Richards and Rodgers (2014) advocate for student-centered approaches that encourage active participation and practical usage of the language. Case studies from India demonstrate the success of blended learning and peer-assisted learning in improving language proficiency among Tamil-medium students (Nunan, 1999; Sharma, 2012).

III- Research Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a mixed-method research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively explore the challenges and approaches for teaching English language skills to Tamil-medium management students.

Quantitative Methods

Surveys: A survey was done to gather data on the proficiency levels, learning experiences, and perceived challenges of Tamil-medium management students.

Participants: A representative sample of Tamil-medium management students from 2 institutions in the same district Tamil Nadu State.

Instrument: A structured questionnaire with Likert-scale questions covering aspects such as language proficiency, learning habits, and perceived barriers was prepared and data collection was done.

Assessments: To objectively measure the English language proficiency of students.

Instrument: Standardized language proficiency tests focusing on reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills.

Qualitative Methods

Interviews: Interviews were conducted to gain in-depth insights into the personal experiences and challenges faced by students and educators

Participants: A purposive sample of students was collected.

Instrument: Semi-structured interview guides with open-ended questions to explore themes such as instructional strategies, student engagement, and institutional support were collected.

Classroom Observations:

To observe teaching methods and student interactions in real-time.

Observation checklists to systematically record instructional practices, student participation, and classroom dynamics.

Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative Data Analysis:

Statistical Analysis: Descriptive statistics was carried out to summarize survey results and proficiency test scores.

Demographics of Students: A survey was conducted from 2 colleges of undergraduate BBA sports Management students, and data were collected and analyzed. The Age group of participants was 18 to 22.

For both Male and female students, gender bias was not considered for the measurement

Challenges Faced by the respondents were:

- ❖ Difficulty in Understanding English
- ❖ Lack of Exposure to English
- ❖ Limited Vocabulary
- ❖ Pronunciation Issues
- ❖ Difficulty in Grammar

Approaches Used for the Improvement of English

- ❖ Use of Bilingual Teaching
- ❖ English Language Workshops
- ❖ Interactive Learning Methods
- ❖ Peer Learning
- ❖ Use of Technology

Effectiveness of Approaches:

- ❖ Improvement in Comprehension
- ❖ Increase in Vocabulary
- ❖ Better Pronunciation
- ❖ Improved Grammar
- ❖ Overall Improvement in English Proficiency

Student Feedback:

- ❖ Satisfaction with Teaching Methods
- ❖ Suggestions for Improvement

The table shows the Mean score value of proficiency level in English and the percentage of challenges faced by Tamil-medium students and the approaches implied.

Category	Tamil-Medium	English-Medium
Student Count	70	80
English Proficiency Score Mean	58.6	74.7
English Proficiency Score StdDev	8.9	9.76
Challenges - Vocabulary	70	40
Challenges - Grammar	60	30
Challenges - Pronunciation	80	50
Challenges - Comprehension	75	45
Teaching Methods - Interactive Sessions	4.2	4.5
Teaching Methods - Multimedia Tools	3.8	4.1
Teaching Methods - Peer Learning	4	3.9

The data was collected from the 150 students across the two colleges. Each column represents a specific parameter analyzed, providing a comprehensive view of the challenges and approaches related to teaching English language skills to Tamil-medium management students. The data was collected through surveys, tests, and feedback forms to ensure accuracy and reliability.

Qualitative Data Analysis & Outcomes:

Interview Results: From the interviews conducted with 70 Tamil-medium management students, several key themes emerged regarding their experiences and challenges in acquiring English language skills:

- ❖ **Limited Exposure to English:** Many students reported that their primary exposure to English was within the classroom, with minimal practice outside of academic settings. Less practice for improving speaking, Students expressed difficulty in finding opportunities to converse in English, which hindered their speaking and listening skills development.
- ❖ **Cultural and Educational Background:** Students highlighted that their prior education in Tamil-medium schools did not emphasize English language proficiency, leading to foundational gaps in grammar and vocabulary. Cultural differences in learning styles were noted, with many students struggling to adapt to interactive and discussion-based learning environments typical in English-medium education.
- ❖ **Psychological Barriers:** A significant number of students mentioned feeling anxious and self-conscious when speaking English, fearing judgment from peers and instructors. This anxiety often resulted in a reluctance to participate in class discussions and presentations, further limiting their language practice.

Perceived Ineffectiveness of Current Teaching Methods:

Students felt that traditional lecture-based teaching methods were ineffective in helping them grasp practical language skills.

There was a strong preference for more interactive and immersive teaching techniques that encourage active participation and real-life language use.

Classroom Observation Results

Classroom observations of the 70 Tamil-medium students revealed several important insights into their learning environment and behaviors:

Passive Participation: Observations indicated that Tamil-medium students were generally less active in classroom discussions compared to their peers from English-medium backgrounds. Many students preferred to remain silent or minimally engage, even when encouraged by instructors.

Struggles with Comprehension: Students frequently exhibited signs of difficulty in understanding lecture content delivered in English. This was evident through their body language, such as confused expressions and hesitation in responding to questions.

Group Work Dynamics: During group activities, Tamil-medium students tended to form groups with peers who shared similar linguistic backgrounds, limiting their exposure to English communication. Within these groups, conversations often reverted to Tamil, reducing opportunities for English practice.

Positive Response to Interactive Methods: When instructors employed modern technologies and interactive methods such as role-playing, group discussions, and multimedia resources, there was a noticeable increase in student engagement and enthusiasm. Students showed greater willingness to participate and use English in less formal, more supportive settings.

The qualitative results from interviews and classroom observations underscore the significant challenges faced by Tamil-medium management students in acquiring English language skills. Key issues include limited exposure to English, foundational gaps from prior education, psychological barriers such as anxiety, and the perceived ineffectiveness of traditional teaching methods. However, the positive response to interactive and immersive teaching techniques suggests potential pathways for improving language acquisition among these students. These findings highlight the need for continuous instructional strategies that address both the linguistic and psychological needs of Tamil-medium students to enhance their English language proficiency and overall academic success.

Implications and Recommendations

Implications for Educators and Institutions

Instructional Strategies: The study highlights the need for educators to adopt teaching methods that cater specifically to the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of Tamil-medium students. Interactive and immersive teaching techniques, such as role-playing, group discussions, and multimedia resources, have proven effective in engaging these students and improving their language skills.

Enhanced Support Systems: Institutions must provide additional support to Tamil-medium students through language labs, tutoring services, and peer-assisted learning programs. These resources can help bridge the proficiency gap and provide a more supportive learning environment.

Curriculum Design: The findings suggest that curriculum design should incorporate more practical language use and culturally relevant materials. This approach can help students relate better to the content and apply their language skills in real-world contexts.

Teacher Training and Professional Development:

Continuous professional development programs for teachers should focus on equipping them with strategies to address the unique challenges faced by Tamil-medium students. This includes training in culturally responsive teaching and innovative language instruction techniques.

Recommendations

Integration of Technology:

Imply technology to create interactive and engaging language learning experiences. Online platforms, language learning apps, and virtual exchange programs can provide students with additional practice opportunities and exposure to native English speakers.

Peer-Led Initiatives:

Encourage the formation of peer-led study groups and language clubs where students can practice English in a less formal setting. These initiatives can help reduce language anxiety and build confidence in using English.

Extracurricular Activities:

Promote participation in extracurricular activities such as debates, public speaking clubs, and cultural exchange programs. These activities provide practical language practice and help students develop confidence in their communication skills.

Cultural Sensitivity: Develop culturally sensitive teaching materials that resonate with the experiences and backgrounds of Tamil-medium students. This can enhance their engagement and make the learning process more relatable and effective.

Feedback and Assessment: Implement regular formative assessments and provide constructive feedback to help students track their progress and identify areas for improvement. Personalized feedback can motivate students and guide their learning journey.

Policy Implications: Policymakers should consider the unique needs of Tamil-medium students when designing educational policies and frameworks. This includes allocating resources for language support programs and ensuring equitable access to quality education for all students.

Conclusion : Addressing the challenges faced by Tamil-medium management students in acquiring English language skills requires a multifaceted approach that combines various instructional strategies, enhanced support systems, and innovative teaching methods. By implementing these recommendations, educators and institutions can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment, ultimately improving the academic and professional outcomes for Tamil-medium students. This study underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity and practical language use in enhancing English language education and calls for continued research and development in this area.

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