

Mrs Sumathy Thirumaran tries her best to make learning Tamil relevant to a student's future plans.

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MARK CHEONG



Tamil teacher who got students to produce newsletter lauded

Marsiling Secondary Tamil teacher Sumathy Thirumaran asks her students each year to put together a Tamil newsletter that features articles written by lower secondary students and edited by their upper secondary peers.

Twice a year, it showcases fictional stories, reports on Tamil festivals in school and even exam tips, and is meant to empower students in learning about their mother

tongue. It is also meant to show students how the language can be relevant in future for jobs, said Mrs Sumathy, 41, who has been teaching for more than 17 years.

She told The Straits Times that she tries her best to make learning Tamil relevant to a student's future plans, especially as it is becoming less common for children to speak the language often at home.

Mrs Sumathy was one of five people recognised for being the most inspiring Tamil teachers this year. They were from primary and secondary schools as well as pre-university institutions.

Three retired teachers – Mr Kumarasamy Chandramoorthy, 76, Dr Sivakumaran Ramalingam, 67 and Mrs Subramaniam Tamilarasi, 63 – were recognised for their contributions over 40 years of teaching, and given Lifetime Achievement awards. Miss Ravathy Gunasegaran, 25, received the Best Trainee Teacher award.

The awards are jointly organised by Tamil Murasu and the Singapore Tamil Teachers' Union, as well as the Tamil Language Learning and Promotion Committee. They were given out by Education Minister Chan Chun Sing on Sept

18 at a ceremony at the Umar Pulavar Tamil Language Centre in Beatty Road.

Mr Chan spoke about the importance of preserving Singapore's mother tongue languages, and the challenges teachers face today.

Teachers have been constantly putting in the effort to find new ways of engaging students, he added.

Mr Chan said: "When teachers develop themselves and gain new knowledge, they create engaging resources and programmes that support students in becoming more confident learners."

The awards were first given out in 2002.

Mrs Sumathy said her efforts begin with creating an immersive environment for her students.

"If anyone speaks in English in my classes, I just reply in Tamil. I also speak to the parents to try and get them to use the language more at home."

She added that teaching is about passing on the language and its literature, and the joy of learning.

"One of my former students recently became a teacher herself, and I was so very proud," she said.

Ng Wei Kai