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## GRAMMAR CONTENT KNOWLEDGE OF TAMIL LANGUAGE AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

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### Abstract:

The study aims to identify the level of knowledge of grammar content among Tamil language teachers at the secondary school level in aspects of phonology, morphology, syntax and morphophonemic. This study uses a quantitative research survey in the form of a descriptive design carried out in Selangor. A total of 160 Tamil language teachers in secondary schools in the state of Selangor were selected as a random sample. Questionnaires were used as instruments in this study. The data obtained were analyzed using SPSS software version 22.0. The findings of the study showed that secondary school Tamil teachers had a moderately high perception of the Tamil grammatical content of Form Four (M = 3.23, SP = .697). The study also found that the level of knowledge of Tamil grammar content was moderately low (M = 2.98, SP = .334) by following phonology (M = 3.26, SP = .560), morphology (M = 3.14, SP = .589), syntax (M = 2.85, SP = .716), and morphophonemic (M = 2.67, SP = .585). The implication obtained through this study is that the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) is proposing to emphasize the importance of aspects of Tamil grammar, namely phonology, morphology, syntax, and morphophonemic. As a result of this, teachers who teach Tamil will be able to realize the importance of mastering the content of Tamil grammar.

### Keywords:

Content Knowledge, Grammar Content Knowledge, Language Teacher, Tamil Grammar

## Introduction

Content knowledge is an in-depth understanding of the list of content based on the subject taught by teaching accurately according to the curriculum specification or the syllabus of the subject (Shulman, 1986). Moreover, content knowledge is defined as knowledge regarding a topic, rules, structures of certain disciplines, and underlying theories; knowledge based on values and the requirements of a specified table of content; knowledge of the latest changes in discipline; knowledge of the use of supporting evidence; disputes; and building a claim (Shulman, 1986).

Bartos, Lederman and Lederman (2014) stated that the knowledge that has been expressed by Shulman (1987) is a unique knowledge that should be possessed by educators to explain a concept or the content of a subject more deeply and in an easier method. Teachers who do not emphasize the content aspect of knowledge of a subject result in a loss of paradigm in the education field (Shulman, 1986). Furthermore, the structure of knowledge content varies according to the field of a subject (Shulman, 1986). Lafayette (1993) says that content knowledge is a “specialist component” in the education of a language teacher; a language teacher has to master the knowledge of culture, language, linguistics and literature”.

In this regard, this knowledge is widely seen as core knowledge in the awareness of language teachers (Teacher Language Awareness). This is because high awareness of grammatical content knowledge is one of the most important aspects of the implementation of effective language teaching (Jimmy & Peter, 2021; Komila Sayfiyeva, 2022; Myhill, Watson, & Lines, 2013). At the same time, the lack of content knowledge creates teaching problems in the field of language education (Oleg, Kim, Ward, Curtner, & Li, 2016). According to Jain Chee, Mariani, Abdul Jalil Othman, and Nor Mashitah (2017), the lack of understanding of grammar content knowledge amongst the teachers will result in an impact on the explanations or unclear skills and affect effective communication between the teachers and students. Borg (2001), Borg (2003), and Sanchez and Borg (2014) stated that the understanding of the relationship between grammar content knowledge and the practice of language teaching has yet to develop. With this, they asserted that research related to knowledge of grammatical content in relevant language contexts is difficult to obtain.

In the context of Tamil language education, grammatical aspects have received extra attention because grammar is very important to be applied in the process of good communication (Alagesan 2020 & Bavani, 2020). Grammar teaching is also important for writing skills that prioritize grammatical elements, functions, and the meaning of grammar in a sentence (Abduazizova, 2023; Larsen Freeman, 2019 & Nosirova, 2023). Therefore, the aspect of grammar should be taught from Form One through stages in secondary school, as the teaching enables students to identify the function of grammar, namely the variation of meaning, the use of accurate remuneration, grammatical errors, the construction of grammatical sentences, and so on (Bavani, 2020; Usha Rani & Manonmani Devi, 2016).

However, concerns have emerged among language critics regarding grammar teaching at primary and secondary levels. One of the complaints that is often expressed is that students are not interested in the learning of grammar because teachers do not give priority to the teaching of it (Kumayas & Lengkoan, 2023). This statement is supported by the research of Awang Sariyan (2015), Komathy (2016), Malathy (2016), and Saraswathy (2017). They suggested that grammar is often considered as an element that is boring among students. This is because

grammar only consists of language laws, such as the subject of mathematics. Teaching objectives will not be achieved when the students are bored with the aspect of teaching Tamil language grammar (Bavani, 2020 & Manonmai Devi, 2015). In regard to this, Gnana Oslin (2015) asserted that every teacher has to understand the content knowledge of Tamil language grammar, as grammar plays an important role in expanding the existing potential of students in the Tamil language.

### **Problem Statement**

Teaching actions depend on the teacher's knowledge, which should be extensive in the field of education (Iserbyt, Ward, & Li, 2017; Metz, 2018). Knowledge serves as a guide for teachers in making decisions, particularly during teaching and learning sessions (Mitton Kukner & Murray Orr, 2015). Grossman (1990) and Kumayas and Lengkoan (2023) have emphasized that teachers cannot efficiently teach without a fundamental, adequate grasp of the subject. Therefore, teachers should strive to enhance their understanding of content in every subject.

However, issues persist regarding the lack and weakness of grammatical content knowledge among teachers. Previous studies, such as those by Alderson and Horak (2011), Alderson, Clapham, and Keluli (1997), and Bloor (1986), have revealed that language teachers often possess limited grammar knowledge, particularly concerning terminology and grammatical terms. Borg (2001) further highlighted that insufficient grammatical knowledge among teachers significantly influences their teaching style. Moreover, the deficiency in grammatical content knowledge leads to teachers being more confident in teaching at the textual level alone, displaying less confidence in understanding grammar laws (Andrews, 1994; Kumayas & Lengkoan, 2023; Williamson & Hardman, 1995; Wray, 1993).

Moreover, many language teachers hold negative perceptions, experience frustration, and find grammar tedious due to its nature as a rigid set of rules that must be followed (Kacani & Mangelli, 2013; Kacar & Zengin, 2013; Nosirova, 2023). Benjamin and Berger (2013) and Myhill (2000) have highlighted that anxiety and misconceptions among teachers hinder effective grammar instruction. Consequently, Tamil language teachers often present grammar forms in a manner that fails to engage students, resulting in less attractive lessons (Bavani, 2020 & Manonmai Devi, 2015).

According to a report by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2014 and 2015 by the State Board of Inspectors and Quality Assurance, the report on the quality of answers of Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) Tamil Language in 2016 and 2017 as well as the findings of several recent studies identify that there is a lack of grammar content knowledge among secondary school-level Tamil language teachers.

The report of the State Board of Inspectors and Quality Assurance for 2014 and 2015 explains that there is still content knowledge among secondary school-level Tamil language teachers, which is still at a low level, from the aspect of understanding the content of the syllabus and the syllabus description of the subject, especially in the grammatical aspects (Ministry of Education, 2014 and 2015). The State Board of Inspectors and Quality Assurance report for 2014 and 2015 shows that there are 83 (77.6%) Tamil language teachers who are less concerned with the grammatical aspect during the teaching and learning process (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2014 and 2015). This situation directly affects the learning quality of students in the aspect of proper grammar mastery. The statement is in line with the findings of Bavani, Abdul

Jalil Othman, Mohana Dass (2019), and Manonmai Devi and Ani Omar (2019), which stated that the lack of Tamil language grammar content knowledge causes many teachers to commit grammatical errors in teaching. If the problem persists, then it would create huge confusion among the students who learn Tamil language grammar (Bavani, Abdul Jalil Othman, and Mohana Dass, 2019).

However, this depends on how the teachers adapt to the content knowledge of the subject syllabus to avoid mistakes in teaching grammar. Kumutha (2012) suggested that teachers should have deep knowledge about the content of grammar because that knowledge helps them in teaching and learning grammar. She further stressed that teachers need to gain more exposure to grammar, not only for the teaching process but also to improve their mastery of the Tamil language.

If this problem is not given serious attention, it may affect students' concentration during learning sessions throughout their entire school period. Thus, having a high sensitivity towards knowledge can help avoid grammatical errors (Manomani Devi, 2016). Therefore, there is a need to study the level of Tamil grammatical content knowledge among secondary school-level Tamil language teachers to deliver more effective teaching. Tamil language subject teachers who fail to master grammatical content knowledge cause the quality of educators to regress as a whole.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the perception of teachers towards the grammatical content knowledge among secondary school-level Tamil language?
2. What is the level of teachers knowledge of the grammatical content of the Form Four Tamil language from the aspects of phonology, morphology, syntax, and morphophonemic?

### **Research Methodology**

This study is survey-based quantitative research through questionnaires with the purpose of thoroughly identifying the level of grammar content knowledge of Tamil language secondary school teachers. The justification for survey study selection is to directly receive information from a group of individuals by using questionnaires (Dane, 1990). A survey study is also one of those very useful approaches when the researcher's objective is to explain the characteristics of a large group.

In this study, the total respondents were 279 Tamil language teachers, all of whom teach Tamil language subjects in secondary schools around the state of Selangor. In relation to that, in this study, the researcher determined the sample size of the study by following the calculation of Krejcie and Morgan (1970) by listing the compact sample size with the population size of the study. Based on the sample size determination table by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), if there are a total of 280 respondents, then the suitable number of study sample selections is 162. With that, the researcher chose 160 samples from the study population using a simple random sampling method. This is because the researcher has given the same opportunity to every subject in the population study.

The instrument used is appropriate for the study's method and procedure. This study is a quantitative study that uses questionnaires as the main tool for the data collection process. The

study instrument used is a questionnaire that was developed by the researcher with the agreement of experts in the related field. The developed questionnaire form consists of three parts, which are Part A is to know the demographic background of the respondent; Part B is about the teacher's perception of Tamil language grammar; and Part C is to know the teacher's level of knowledge of the grammar contents of Form 4 Tamil language. The list of items in the questionnaire is as in Table 1:

**Table 1: The Questionnaire Items**

Part	Aspects	Number of Items
A	Demographical Background	5
B	Perception towards Tamil Grammar	15
C	Level of content knowledge towards Tamil Grammar	63

Each item in Part B and Part C of the instrument has five answer choices following the five-point Likert scale, whereby Level 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. After conducting a pilot study, the obtained Alpha Cronbach value is 0.954. This means the questionnaire items have a very high level of trustworthiness. For that reason, this questionnaire is appropriate to be used in the actual study.

The questionnaire data obtained in this study is processed using descriptive analysis of the 'Statistical Package for the Social Sciences' version 22.0 (SPSS). Mean and standard deviation statistics were used in the descriptive analysis. Descriptive analysis is used in this study to explain the level of grammar content knowledge in aspects of phonology, morphology, syntax, and Form Four morphophonemic among the secondary school Tamil language teachers. To answer the question, the researcher used the mean score interpretations (Nunnally, 1967), as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Mean Score Interpretations Nunnally (1967)**

Mean Score	Mean Score Interpretations
1.00 – 2.00	Low
2.01 – 3.00	Medium Low
3.01 – 4.00	Medium High
4.01 – 5.00	High

## Results

This section is to answer the objectives of the study through a survey questionnaire involving 162 Tamil teachers as respondents. The data were analysed by descriptive analysis using the mean and standard deviation.



*Demographical Background***Table 3: Demographic of Respondents**

Demographics	Description	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	45	28.1
	Female	115	71.9
Age	20 – 20 years old	22	13.8
	31 – 40 years old	43	26.9
	41 – 50 years old	83	51.9
	51 – 40 years old	12	7.5
Academic Qualifications	Cert/Degree	-	-
	Degree	139	86.9
	Master	21	13.1
	Doctor of Philosophy	-	-
Teaching experience	1 - 5	19	11.9
	6 - 10	42	26.3
	11 - 15	23	14.4
	16 and above	76	47.5
Number of Courses	Never	12	7.5
	1 to 2 times	30	18.8
	3 to 4 times	88	55.0
	5 to 6 times	24	15.0
	7 times or more	6	3.8

Table 3 shows the demographics of teacher respondents involved in the study, namely gender, age, academic qualifications, number of years of experience teaching Tamil language subjects, and number of courses related to Tamil grammar content ever attended. The findings of the study showed that the majority of teachers involved in this study were female teachers, which is 115 people (71.9%), followed by male teachers, which is a total of 45 people (28.1%). The majority of teachers involved in this study were between 41 and 50 years old, which is 83 people (51.9%), followed by 31 and 40 years old, which is 43 people (26.9%). The majority of teachers involved in this study have at least a bachelor's degree, which is 129 people (80.6%), compared to the holders of a master's degree, which is 21 people (13.1%). Most of the teachers involved in this study have more than 16 years of teaching experience, namely 76 people (47.5%), followed by 6 to 10 years (42 people), 11 to 15 years (23 people), and 1 to 5 years (19 people). Most of the teachers were found to be involved in courses related to Tamil grammar content at least 3 to 4 times, with a total of 88 people. Only six teachers were involved seven times or more in courses related to Tamil grammar content.

*The Teachers Perceptions of Tamil Grammar Content***Table 4: Teachers Perceptions of Tamil Grammar Content**

Number	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
1	The grammatical content elements of Tamil in the Curriculum and Assessment Standards Document are important.	3.46	1.302	Medium High
2	The grammatical content aspects of the Tamil language contained in the secondary school Curriculum and Assessment Standards Document are simple.	3.56	1.056	Medium High
3	The grammatical content of Tamil in secondary school Curriculum and Assessment Standards Document is arranged from easy to difficult level.	3.65	1.023	Medium High
4	The descriptions of Tamil grammatical concepts in the secondary school textbooks are appropriate.	3.56	1.014	Medium High
5	The descriptions of the content rules of Tamil grammar in the secondary school textbooks are appropriate.	3.74	.973	Medium High
6	The examples given for each Tamil grammar content in the secondary school textbooks are appropriate.	3.29	.993	Medium High
7	The descriptions of the content concepts in the secondary school Tamil grammar handbooks are appropriate.	2.67	1.120	Medium Low
8	The description of the content rules in the secondary school Tamil grammar handbooks are appropriate.	3.11	1.085	Medium High
9	The examples given for each of the contents in the secondary school Tamil grammar handbooks are appropriate.	2.94	1.054	Medium Low
10	There are various reading materials/ resources/ books on Tamil grammar to improve grammar proficiency.	2.91	1.057	Medium Low
11	Tamil grammar reading materials/ resources/ books are easily available.	2.91	1.063	Medium Low
12	Teachers face problems in understanding the content concepts of secondary school Tamil grammar.	3.01	1.124	Medium High
13	Teachers face problems in understanding the content rules of secondary school Tamil grammar.	3.09	1.129	Medium High

14	Pupils face problems in understanding the content concepts of secondary school Tamil grammar.	3.16	1.236	Medium High
15	Pupils face problems in understanding the content rules of secondary school Tamil grammar.	3.41	1.194	Medium High
<b>Overall Mean</b>		<b>3.23</b>	<b>.697</b>	<b>Medium High</b>

Table 4 shows teachers perceptions of Tamil grammar content. The majority of these items have reached a moderately high level, i.e., a total of 11 items, and only 4 items show a moderately low mean. But overall, the mean for teachers perceptions of Tamil grammar content was at a moderately high level, with a mean of 3.23 (SD =.697). The highest mean indicates that “the descriptions of the content rules of Tamil grammar in the secondary school textbooks are appropriate” with a mean value of 3.74 (SD =.973), followed by the item “The grammatical content of Tamil in the secondary school Curriculum and Assessment Standards Document is arranged from easy to difficult level” with a mean value of 3.65 (SD = 1.023). The third mean is indicated by two items, namely “The grammatical content aspects of the Tamil language contained in the secondary school Curriculum and Assessment Standards Document are simple” and “The descriptions of Tamil grammatical concepts in the secondary school textbooks are appropriate,” with a mean value of 3.56. The lowest mean is indicated by the item “The descriptions of the content concepts in the secondary school Tamil grammar handbooks are appropriate,” with a mean value of 2.67 and a standard deviation of 1.120. There are two items that show the same mean in the low-medium level with a mean value of 2.91, namely “There are various reading materials, resources, and books on Tamil grammar to improve grammar proficiency” and “Tamil grammar reading materials, resources, and books are easily available”.

### *Level of Tamil Grammar Content Knowledge among Secondary School Teachers*

**Table 5: Grammar Content Knowledge of Secondary School Tamil Teachers**

Number	Aspects	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
1	Phonology	3.26	.560	Medium High
2	Morphology	3.14	.589	Medium High
3	Syntax	2.85	.716	Medium Low
4	Morphophonemics	2.67	.585	Medium Low
<b>Overall Mean</b>		<b>2.98</b>	<b>.334</b>	<b>Medium Low</b>

Table 5 shows the Tamil grammar content knowledge of the secondary school Tamil language teachers in the aspects of phonology, morphology, syntax, and morphophonemics. The highest mean indicates that Tamil language teachers have knowledge in the aspect of phonology with a mean of 3.26 (SD =.560), followed by the aspect of morphology with a mean value of 3.14 (SD =.589). However, the levels for both of these aspects are only moderately high. Mean values for syntax and morphophonemic aspects showed 2.85 (SD =.716) and 2.67 (SD =.585) with moderately low levels. The findings of the overall study for the Tamil grammar content knowledge of secondary school teachers in the aspects of phonology, morphology, syntax, and morphophonemics are at a moderately low level, with a mean value of 2.98 (SD =.334).



## Discussion

The findings of this study found that the perception of Tamil language teachers on Tamil grammar is at a moderately high level ( $M = 3.23$ ,  $SD = 0.697$ ). The findings of this study are in line with the findings of Borg (2001), that is, teachers who have a high perception of grammar have high confidence when delivering grammar, which encourages students to be actively involved in the process of teaching and learning. Meanwhile, teachers who have a low perception have less confidence in teaching; for example, they do not give grammar drills and often postpone discussions so as not to teach grammar systematically.

The findings of the study also found that the level of knowledge of Tamil grammar content among Tamil language teachers as a whole is at a moderately low level ( $M = 2.98$ ,  $SD = 0.334$ ). The findings of this study are in line with the opinions of Shulman (1986) and Bavani, Abdul Jalil Othman, and Mohana Dass (2019), Bavani (2020), who reinforce the statement that the importance of a teacher's content knowledge of the subject is taught more in depth and that a teacher should know various disciplines to stand out as an expert teacher.

This also supports a previous study by Nosirova (2023) who found that when teachers have a deep understanding of the subjects taught, they are more likely to ask high-level questions to encourage students to explore further explanations of the topic. This is agreed upon by Abdul Shukor Shaari (2010), Jain Chee, Mariani, Abdul Jalil Othman, and Nor Mashitah (2017), Siti Mistima Maat, and Effandi Zakaria (2014); that is, teachers in-depth knowledge allows them to explain something better and is willing to answer student questions accurately.

Lafayette (1993) states that language teachers need to be a "specialist component" in language education; for example, they should have knowledge in culture, language, linguistics, and literature. Such knowledge is also one of the determining aspects of teachers trust in the process of teaching and learning in the classroom (Mahat Afifi, 2014; Pazilah, Hashim, Yunus, 2021). Such an opinion is also in line with the statement of Mitton Kukner and Murray Orr (2015), who hold the view that a teacher needs to have specialized knowledge of a specific topic that helps implement the process of teaching and learning effectively. Kola and Sunday (2015) again support the above view. Teacher knowledge influences student engagement in classroom activities. Thus, a teacher's content knowledge can improve student achievement levels (Baumert et al., 2010; Jimmy & Peter, 2021; Nahar & Jimaan Safar, 2017).

## Conclusion

The uniqueness of the Tamil grammar curriculum is that the teaching is implemented throughout the year, and the effect can only be seen over a long period of time. The grammar component of Tamil is important for teachers to achieve the rules contained in the Curriculum and Assessment Standards Document set by the Ministry of Education. In-depth understanding of the content of the lesson helps teachers process the content creatively and innovatively in their presentations to the students. The content provided for each subject based on the curriculum can be understood by teachers in more detail in terms of topics, objectives, and concepts before the teaching is implemented in the classroom.

Consequently, the Tamil grammar curriculum planning needs to be more detailed in the preparation of more comprehensive content in terms of information and broader examples according to the rules of Tamil grammar. Thus, stakeholders need to take into account all aspects carefully in the preparation of the Tamil grammar curriculum in order to realize the

goals of national education. Thus, this study gives implications for teachers about the importance of understanding the curriculum fully. Extensive knowledge of grammatical content has major implications for classroom teaching practice.

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