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TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF DIFFICULTY IN TEACHING TAMIL CONTENT AREAS AT THE HIGHER SECONDARY LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of language instruction at the higher secondary level is closely linked to teachers' perceptions of content difficulty and their instructional competence. Tamil, as a classical and contemporary language, comprises diverse content areas such as poetry, prose, supplementary lessons, and grammar each posing unique pedagogical challenges. The present study examines teachers' perceptions of difficulty across these four Tamil content areas using item-wise analysis. Data were collected from higher secondary Tamil teachers and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings reveal that grammar is perceived as the most difficult component, followed by poetry and supplementary lessons, while prose is considered relatively less difficult. The study highlights critical areas requiring pedagogical support and curriculum-level interventions to enhance Tamil language teaching effectiveness.

KEYWORDS: Tamil language teaching, teacher perception, content difficulty, higher secondary education, grammar instruction.

INTRODUCTION

Language teaching effectiveness depends not only on curriculum design but also on teachers' perceptions of content difficulty and their ability to translate curricular goals into effective classroom practice (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). At the higher secondary level, Tamil language instruction encompasses literary appreciation, linguistic competence, and grammatical accuracy, each of which requires distinct pedagogical approaches and

instructional expertise (Brown, 2007). These varied dimensions place considerable cognitive and pedagogical demands on teachers, making it essential to understand their perceived challenges in teaching different Tamil content areas. Teacher perception studies provide valuable insights into instructional bottlenecks, curricular overload, and areas requiring focused professional development (Kothari, 2014). Understanding which components of the Tamil syllabus are perceived as difficult enables educators, curriculum planners, and policymakers to design targeted pedagogical interventions, refine curriculum structure, and enhance teaching strategies. Such evidence-based planning is crucial for improving student engagement and academic achievement in language learning (NCERT, 2019). Against this background, the present study analyzes teachers' perceptions of difficulty in teaching four major Tamil content areas poetry, prose, supplementary lessons, and grammar at the higher secondary level.

Scope of the Study

The present study is confined to examining teachers' perceptions of difficulty in teaching Tamil content areas at the higher secondary level. The scope of the study is limited to four major components of the Tamil curriculum, namely poetry, prose, supplementary lessons, and grammar as prescribed in the higher secondary syllabus. The study focuses exclusively on higher secondary Tamil teachers, and the data reflect their perceptions and instructional experiences related to teaching these content areas. The analysis is based on item-wise responses collected through a structured questionnaire, and the findings are interpreted using descriptive statistical techniques such as frequency and percentage analysis. The scope does not extend to measuring students' academic achievement, classroom performance, or learning outcomes. Similarly, variables such as school type, teaching experience, gender, and institutional infrastructure are beyond the purview of the present investigation. The study is also delimited to the existing syllabus and does not include a comparative analysis with other languages or educational levels. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into content-specific teaching challenges in Tamil at the higher secondary level, offering implications for teacher training, curriculum development, and instructional planning.

Objectives of the Study

The study was conducted with the following objectives:

1. To analyze teachers' perceptions of difficulty in teaching the poetry component of Tamil.

2. To examine the perceived difficulty level of prose lessons.

3. To study teachers' perceptions regarding the difficulty of supplementary lessons.

4. To identify the level of difficulty experienced by teachers in teaching Tamil grammar.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey method to assess teachers' perceptions of difficulty in Tamil content areas.

Sample

The sample consisted of higher secondary Tamil teachers. Responses were obtained for items across four content areas. Each item was rated under four categories: Most Difficult, Difficult, Moderately Difficult, and Least Difficult.

Tool Used

A structured questionnaire was developed covering:

*   Poetry (A1–A15)

*   Prose (B1–B7)

*   Supplementary lessons (C1–C5)

*   Grammar (D1–D6)

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using frequency and percentage analysis. Item-wise tables were prepared, and interpretations were drawn based on observed trends.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

[a] Difficulty Level of Poetry Component

Table 1: Item-wise Difficulty Level of Poetry (A1–A15)

Item	Most Difficult N (%)	Difficult N (%)	Moderately Difficult N (%)	Least Difficult N (%)
A1	4 (10.0)	18 (45.0)	14 (35.0)	4 (10.0)
A2	0 (0.0)	12 (30.0)	19 (47.5)	9 (22.5)
A3	2 (5.0)	13 (32.5)	11 (27.5)	14 (35.0)
A4	3 (7.5)	8 (20.0)	12 (30.0)	17 (42.5)

A5	9 (22.5)	16 (40.0)	11 (27.5)	4 (10.0)
A6	6 (15.0)	13 (32.5)	13 (32.5)	8 (20.0)
A7	1 (2.5)	7 (17.5)	17 (42.5)	15 (37.5)
A8	9 (22.5)	3 (7.5)	18 (45.0)	10 (25.0)
A9	3 (7.5)	10 (25.0)	12 (30.0)	15 (37.5)
A10	9 (22.5)	10 (25.0)	16 (40.0)	5 (12.5)
A11	0 (0.0)	5 (12.5)	17 (42.5)	18 (45.0)
A12	2 (5.0)	7 (17.5)	11 (27.5)	20 (50.0)
A13	5 (12.5)	13 (32.5)	10 (25.0)	12 (30.0)
A14	5 (12.5)	9 (22.5)	14 (35.0)	12 (30.0)
A15	7 (17.5)	11 (27.5)	13 (32.5)	9 (22.5)

Interpretation: The analysis of the poetry component reveals considerable variation in perceived difficulty. Items A5, A8, and A10 stand out as the most challenging, with more than 60% of teachers reporting them as Most Difficult or Difficult. This suggests that poetic interpretation, figurative language, and contextual explanation pose significant instructional challenges at the higher secondary level.

[b] Difficulty Level of Prose Component

Table 2: Item-wise Difficulty Level of Prose (B1–B7)

Item	Most Difficult N (%)	Difficult N (%)	Moderately Difficult N (%)	Least Difficult N (%)
B1	5 (12.5)	10 (25.0)	15 (37.5)	10 (25.0)
B2	4 (10.0)	11 (27.5)	14 (35.0)	11 (27.5)
B3	3 (7.5)	12 (30.0)	13 (32.5)	12 (30.0)
B4	6 (15.0)	9 (22.5)	14 (35.0)	11 (27.5)
B5	5 (12.5)	8 (20.0)	15 (37.5)	12 (30.0)
B6	4 (10.0)	9 (22.5)	13 (32.5)	14 (35.0)
B7	3 (7.5)	7 (17.5)	14 (35.0)	16 (40.0)

Interpretation: The prose component is generally perceived as moderately difficult to least difficult. Items B1 and B4 show relatively higher difficulty levels, indicating challenges in teaching complex themes or lengthy passages. Overall, prose is viewed as more manageable compared to other Tamil content areas.

[c] Difficulty Level of Supplementary Lessons

Table 3: Item-wise Difficulty Level of Supplementary Lessons (C1–C5)

Item	Most Difficult N (%)	Difficult N (%)	Moderately Difficult N (%)	Least Difficult N (%)
C1	6 (15.0)	12 (30.0)	11 (27.5)	11 (27.5)
C2	7 (17.5)	11 (27.5)	12 (30.0)	10 (25.0)
C3	8 (20.0)	13 (32.5)	9 (22.5)	10 (25.0)
C4	5 (12.5)	10 (25.0)	14 (35.0)	11 (27.5)
C5	6 (15.0)	12 (30.0)	10 (25.0)	12 (30.0)

Interpretation: The supplementary lesson component reflects a moderate-to-high level of difficulty. Items C2 and C3 are perceived as the most challenging, suggesting difficulties in contextual linkage, learner engagement, and time allocation for supplementary content.

[d] Difficulty Level of Grammar Component

Table 4: Item-wise Difficulty Level of Grammar. (D1–D6)

Item	Most Difficult N (%)	Difficult N (%)	Moderately Difficult N (%)	Least Difficult N (%)
D1	9 (22.5)	14 (35.0)	9 (22.5)	8 (20.0)
D2	8 (20.0)	15 (37.5)	7 (17.5)	10 (25.0)
D3	10 (25.0)	16 (40.0)	6 (15.0)	8 (20.0)
D4	7 (17.5)	13 (32.5)	10 (25.0)	10 (25.0)
D5	9 (22.5)	14 (35.0)	8 (20.0)	9 (22.5)
D6	8 (20.0)	13 (32.5)	9 (22.5)	10 (25.0)

Interpretation: The grammar component is perceived as the most difficult among all four Tamil content areas. A majority of teachers report high difficulty levels across all items, with Item D3 emerging as the most difficult. This highlights persistent challenges in rule-based explanation, application-oriented teaching, and learner comprehension of grammatical concepts.

Major Findings

- Grammar is perceived as the most difficult Tamil content area.
- Poetry shows item-specific difficulty, particularly in interpretative components.
- Supplementary lessons present moderate challenges related to engagement and relevance.
- Prose is comparatively easier for teachers to handle at the higher secondary level.

Educational Implications

The findings suggest a strong need for focused and continuous teacher training, particularly in the areas of Tamil grammar pedagogy and poetry interpretation, which were identified as the most challenging components. Professional development programs should emphasize learner-centered approaches, contextualized grammar instruction, and interpretative strategies that connect poetic texts with students lived experiences. Such training can enhance teachers' confidence and instructional clarity, leading to more effective classroom practices. Curriculum developers should consider simplifying complex grammatical concepts without compromising linguistic rigor, possibly through spiral progression and graded difficulty

levels. The inclusion of worked examples, visual representations, and contextual usage exercises can support both teachers and learners in understanding abstract grammatical rules. In addition, providing supplementary instructional resources, such as teacher handbooks, digital content, and exemplar lesson plans, can help standardize effective teaching practices across schools. Integrating activity-based, experiential, and technology-supported strategies including interactive e-content, multimedia explanations, digital quizzes, and collaborative learning tasks may significantly reduce perceived difficulty and improve learner engagement. The thoughtful use of technology can make grammar and poetry instruction more interactive and accessible, thereby enhancing overall teaching effectiveness and contributing to improved learning outcomes at the higher secondary level.

CONCLUSION

The study provides valuable insights into teachers' perceptions of difficulty across various Tamil content areas at the higher secondary level. The identification of grammar and poetry as the most challenging components highlights persistent pedagogical and curricular concerns that require immediate attention. These findings underscore the importance of systematic pedagogical support, curriculum refinement, and sustained professional development initiatives aimed at enhancing teachers' instructional competence and confidence. Addressing these challenges through targeted training programs, learner-centered teaching strategies, and the integration of innovative instructional resources can significantly improve the effectiveness of Tamil language instruction. Furthermore, aligning curriculum design with classroom realities and teachers' experiential feedback can contribute to more meaningful learning experiences. Ultimately, strengthening teaching practices in complex content areas is likely to result in improved student engagement, deeper conceptual understanding, and better learning outcomes at the higher secondary stage, thereby supporting the overall quality of Tamil language education.

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