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*Educational Research for Resilience:  
Embracing Change and Navigating Challenges*

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## **The Role of Teachers in Pedagogical Knowledge Practices and Approaches in Tamil Language Teaching**

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### **Abstract**

This Study explores the role of Teachers in Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) practices and approaches in Tamil language Teaching. In today's technologically advanced educational environment, teachers must create meaningful learning experiences for students and adjust their teaching methods accordingly. In this regard, knowledge-based teaching methods are a key tool for improving students' higher-level conceptual skills and language proficiency. This study is being carried out, focusing on their impact on student engagement and achievement. In an era of rapid technological advancement, effective integration of pedagogical strategies with ICT is essential for meaningful language learning. The primary objective is to investigate the role of teachers in relation to pedagogical content knowledge-based approaches and practices in Tamil language teaching, and to propose recommendations for improvement. The research employed a descriptive survey and qualitative design, involving 60 Tamil language teachers from 35 secondary schools in the Kandy district. Data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, and were analysed thematically. Findings revealed that although teachers possessed strong content knowledge, many relied predominantly on traditional lecture-based approaches. This reliance, along with limited ICT skills and inadequate resources, reduced classroom interactivity and hindered students' learning outcomes. Teachers who applied activity-based strategies and incorporated technology were more successful in fostering student participation, motivation, and critical thinking. Significant challenges identified included time constraints, lack of technical facilities, and insufficient professional training. The study concludes that continuous professional development, targeted ICT training, and improved infrastructural support are crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of Tamil language teaching. Strengthening PCK practices will enable teachers to move beyond traditional methods and create learner-centred environments that improve achievement and language proficiency.

**Keywords** - Pedagogical knowledge, Tamil language teaching, teacher role

### **Introduction**

Language learning plays a vital role in shaping students' intellectual development, cultural identity, and communication skills (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Tamil, being one of the world's oldest and richest languages, holds a unique position in Sri Lankan education. However, the effectiveness of Tamil language teaching depends not only on teachers' subject knowledge but also on their pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), the ability to integrate content with appropriate teaching strategies. In this context, a complete learning activity occurs only when a teacher integrates not only content knowledge but also pedagogical knowledge of how to teach it. This type of knowledge is referred to as Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) (Shulman, 1986).

In today's educational methods, technology plays a key role in language learning and teaching. New advancements in the education sector have created a need to continually improve the skills of teachers teaching Tamil and the strategies they employ in their teaching. Content teaching and technological experiences are fundamental in Tamil language teaching. Currently, technology is advancing very rapidly in the education sector.

Teachers need to adapt their teaching methods to accommodate this advancement. Practical learning technology skills, learning approaches, and curricula require significant changes

and adaptations (Ansari, 2020; Rahmatullah, 2022). Language is essential for the development of human thought and cognitive expansion. Language proficiency is a fundamental aspect of human personality development. Based on these, language teaching in school education is prioritised. The primary goal of language learning and teaching is to develop language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Although the policy of education through the mother tongue in secondary schools in Sri Lanka has been followed for many years, the lack of significant constructive changes in the method of teaching the mother tongue has been a major shortcoming.

Despite such theoretical advancements, many Tamil language teachers continue to rely heavily on traditional lecture-based methods, which limit student engagement and higher-order thinking (Anthiya Krosier, 2017; Hurtley, 2014). Research also indicates that teachers' professional qualifications, years of experience, and training have a strong influence on their classroom practices and students' outcomes (Ball, Thames, & Phelps, 2008; Grossman, 1990). At the same time, challenges such as insufficient ICT facilities, lack of teacher training, time constraints, and low student participation hinder the effective use of innovative teaching methods (Sivakumar, 2020; Yusoff et al., 2022). These issues have contributed to a noticeable decline in the efficiency and quality of Tamil language teaching (Murugaiya, 2020). The modern world is considered a high-speed highway for the transmission of information. Although teachers possess online search and information retrieval skills, they have not received any formal training in the use of information technology (Chamani Paranamanage, 2020). The Tamil language has been ancient and rich. However, due to temporary variations in education systems, new achievements and technologies are being used in language teaching.

This necessitates evaluating the skills of teachers and how they utilise them. The purpose of this study is to investigate how Tamil language teachers apply pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) in their classroom practices, to analyze the influence of their experience, qualifications, and training on teaching practices, to identify the challenges they face in integrating modern pedagogical approaches and ICT tools, and to evaluate the impact of their pedagogical practices on students' learning outcomes.

## **Research Aim and Objectives**

### **Research Aim**

To examine the role of teachers in teaching-related knowledge-based approaches and practices in Tamil language teaching and to make recommendations for improving it.

### **Objectives**

1. To examine how Tamil language teachers apply pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) in classroom teaching.
2. To analyse how teachers' experience, educational qualifications, and training affect their Pedagogical practices.
3. To identify the challenges faced by teachers in implementing pedagogical approaches and integrating ICT in Tamil language teaching.
4. To evaluate the impact of teachers' pedagogical practices on students' participation, engagement, and learning achievement.

### **Literature Review**

Teaching the Tamil language is a process with the idealistic goal of developing students' language skills. In this context, teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and approaches play a vital role.

## **Theory of Pedagogical Content Knowledge**

(PCK) Shulman (1986) introduced the theory of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK). He emphasises that a teacher needs intelligence not only in what to teach but also in how to teach it. Following this, Grossman (1990) and Ball et al. (2008) proposed that teachers need to implement classroom activities according to the needs of the students. Based on this, Koehler and Mishra (2006) introduced the TPACK (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) model. By incorporating technological knowledge, TPACK expands upon Shulman's (1986) concept of content knowledge. It includes three main components.

1. Technological Knowledge (TK)
2. Pedagogical Knowledge (PK)
3. Content Knowledge (CK) TPACK (Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge) is the knowledge that must encompass the above three types of knowledge in a combined manner. Furthermore, according to Chai & Koh (2014), language learning and teaching principles include:
  - Constructivism (Piaget & Vygotsky) – Students construct knowledge themselves. The teacher acts as a guide.
  - Communicative Language Teaching (CLT): Language usage is important. Learning through quizzes, dialogues, and activities.
  - Task-Based Learning (TBL): Learning improves based on activities.

## **TPACK Model and Its Application in Tamil Language Teaching**

By integrating the three components of the TPACK model (Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge) in Tamil language teaching, it is possible to increase student engagement and learning achievement (Muniasamy & Thenappan, 2021). This study highlights that although many teachers are aware of TPACK, their ability to apply it in the classroom is limited.

## **Approaches and Practices**

Approaches are frameworks for how teachers design learning. In Tamil teaching, two methods are found: traditional approaches and modern approaches. In multilingual environments, teachers modify the curriculum to suit the students, as noted by Grondin (2019).

## **Technology, Classroom Practices, and Challenges**

Modern strategies, such as Blended Learning, the Flipped Classroom, and Individualised Learning, are being introduced in Tamil language teaching. However, in various places, teachers are unable to fully utilise these strategies due to a lack of necessary equipment (Suthanthiran, 2022). This is a key discipline that integrates technology, teaching, and pedagogical knowledge. Furthermore, studies related to the Tamil language (Rajendran, 2018; Murugaiya, 2020) indicate that only a few teachers apply their TPACK knowledge in a practical context. In particular, Teachers face numerous problems and challenges in leading the teaching profession. A lack of technological knowledge and skills makes it impossible to achieve a high level in the teaching field (Yusoff et al., 2022). Furthermore, language teachers play a crucial role in enhancing students' language skills. Also, new teaching approaches in Tamil are essential. The younger generation lags in Tamil reading and comprehension (Thamilarasan et al., 2021).

Teachers cite a lack of time, resources, expertise, and support as reasons for their reluctance to handle technology. They also pointed out the positive and negative effects of technology on education in their study (Sutha & Yoganarasimhan, 2018). Regarding teachers' teaching methods, M.S. Anthiya Krosier (2017) suggests that the lecture-based teaching method should be replaced with a student-centred approach, as this method, which is currently widely used, is insufficient for students' learning development. He also points out Hurtley's (2014) view that the

lecture method is a cause of students' negative attitude. Teachers should adopt various teaching methods that develop students' critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, and 4C skills. A deep understanding of language and its cultural context is essential for effective teaching and student engagement (Bhagyalakshmi, 2021).

The ability to effectively utilise information technology equipment in the classroom significantly impacts student engagement and learning outcomes. This study, titled "Content Knowledge and Pedagogical Knowledge of Teachers in Rural Schools in Tamil Nadu," examines the extent to which teachers working in rural schools in Tamil Nadu possess content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. The study assesses teachers' skills in curriculum, teaching according to the curriculum, and evaluation. This field study found that while teachers possess subject-related knowledge, they often lack educational techniques and the ability to understand and cater to students' individual needs, and that the use of ICT is very low. The study suggests that rural teachers require access to technology training and professional development programs.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the role of teachers in applying pedagogical content knowledge in Tamil language teaching. The qualitative approach was considered appropriate as it allowed for an in-depth understanding of teachers' classroom practices, experiences, and challenges in real educational contexts. The study was conducted in thirty-five Tamil-medium secondary schools situated in the Katugastota and Wattedgama education zones of Kandy District. These schools represented diverse categories, including 1AB, 1C, and Type II, thereby providing a range of institutional contexts. From this population, a purposive sample of sixty Tamil language teachers teaching at the junior secondary level was selected, as they were directly involved in shaping students' language learning experiences.

Multiple data collection methods were used to obtain rich and reliable information. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers to capture their perspectives on pedagogical approaches, experiences, and professional needs. Classroom observations were conducted to examine how teachers applied pedagogical content knowledge in practice, focusing on teaching strategies, student engagement, and the utilisation of resources. Additionally, relevant documents, such as lesson notes, teaching plans, and curriculum materials, were analysed to provide further insights into teachers' planning and instructional practices.

The data gathered from these sources were analysed using thematic analysis. Interview transcripts, observation records, and documents were carefully coded and categorised under three main themes: content knowledge, teaching strategies, and challenges. Triangulation across multiple data sources was employed to enhance the validity and credibility of the findings. This approach provided a comprehensive understanding of how Tamil language teachers integrate content and pedagogy, the barriers they face, and the potential areas for improvement in language teaching.

### **Data Collection Tools and Data Analysis**

- Interview – Questions related to the curriculum.
- Classroom Observation – Teaching practices of teachers.
- Document Analysis – Lesson notes, syllabus.

The collected data were analysed using the Thematic Analysis method. This was divided based on three main themes.

1. Content Knowledge
2. Teaching Strategies
3. Challenges

To ensure internal validity, the study employed triangulation by using multiple data collection methods, including interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis (Creswell, 2014). Thematic coding was conducted systematically, and the emerging themes were verified through peer debriefing and member checking, where selected participants were invited to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. These strategies helped minimise researcher bias and enhance the credibility of the findings. To establish external validity, purposive sampling was employed to select 60 Tamil language teachers from 35 schools, representing different school types (1A, 1 B, Type II) within the Kandy district. This diversity of school contexts and teacher experiences increases the transferability of the findings to other Tamil-medium secondary schools in Sri Lanka. However, the study acknowledges that generalisation beyond the district should be made cautiously, given contextual variations.

## **Results and Discussion**

The data collected through interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis were analysed thematically under three major dimensions: content knowledge, teaching strategies, and challenges faced by Tamil language teachers.

### **Content knowledge**

The analysis revealed that all participating teachers demonstrated sound knowledge of Tamil grammar, literature, and reading skills. Senior teachers in particular were more likely to differentiate their lessons according to students' needs and cognitive levels, whereas less experienced teachers tended to rely on uniform, lecture-based methods. Although teachers' subject expertise was strong, this strength was not always translated into effective classroom practices, suggesting a gap between content mastery and pedagogical application.

### **Teaching Strategies**

A limited number of teachers incorporated activity-based learning strategies, such as storytelling, group discussions, role-playing, and the use of ICT tools (PowerPoint presentations and YouTube resources). In these classrooms, students displayed higher levels of motivation and engagement. However, the majority of teachers continued to adopt teacher-centred lecture methods, which restricted opportunities for critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity. This indicates that pedagogical practices remain largely traditional, with only isolated examples of innovative teaching. The findings also support previous studies (Anthiya Krosier, 2017; Bhagyalakshmi, 2021) that emphasise the need to shift from lecture-dominant approaches to student-centred learning.

### **Challenges**

Several barriers were identified that limited teachers' ability to effectively implement pedagogical content knowledge. Time constraints and overloaded curricula reduced opportunities for activity-based teaching. Many schools lacked adequate ICT infrastructure, including projectors, smartboards, and reliable internet facilities. Moreover, some teachers reported receiving insufficient training and lacking confidence in integrating technology into their lessons. These challenges led to reduced student participation and a decline in the effectiveness of Tamil language teaching.

### **Findings**

The findings highlight an apparent paradox: while teachers possess strong subject knowledge, their reliance on traditional teaching practices and limited access to resources significantly reduce the quality of classroom learning. Effective use of pedagogical content knowledge was observed only among a few innovative teachers who combined subject mastery with student-centred approaches and ICT integration. These insights underline the urgent need for continuous professional

development, targeted ICT training, and infrastructural improvements in schools. Addressing these areas will help enhance student engagement, improve learning outcomes, and strengthen the overall effectiveness of Tamil language education. All teachers possessed competence and knowledge in areas such as literature, grammar, and reading.

However, some teachers taught only through the lecture method. In particular, senior teachers categorised their lessons according to the students' mindsets and needs. Furthermore, regarding teaching strategies, some teachers used activity-based teaching methods using storytelling, classroom group discussions, and ICT technological equipment (PowerPoint, YouTube videos). Approaches provided by the NFE (National Forum for English), such as promoting dialogue through short stories, Student-Centered Learning, and learning activities with the use of ICT, were carried out. In addition, challenges such as time constraints, lack of technical facilities, and low student participation were observed.

### **Recommendations**

1. Continuous Reinforcement - CPD (Continued Professional Development) activities and practical teaching strategies for teachers teaching Tamil should be emphasized.
2. ICT Training - Teachers should be provided with appropriate training to acquire technological knowledge.
3. Improving Technological Facilities - Schools should be provided with facilities with appropriate infrastructure (Projector, Smart board, Internet access) for classroom teaching.
4. Conducting Classroom Assessment Effectively - Monitoring how teachers implement their classroom teaching through internal assessment and providing advice.
5. Time allocations should be made for activity-based learning, and restrictions should be removed. In addition, activity-based learning approaches that increase student participation should be encouraged.

### **Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that although Tamil language teachers possess adequate content knowledge, their pedagogical practices remain limited and traditional, reducing the effectiveness of student learning. Teachers who applied PCK through activity-based and ICT-supported approaches achieved higher levels of student engagement and deeper understanding, while others faced difficulties in determining learning outcomes.

The teaching methodological knowledge that teachers adopt in Tamil language teaching enhances the quality of learning and the abilities of students. This study reveals how teachers implement their TPK (Teaching Pedagogical Knowledge) in the classroom. Despite the challenges, appropriate training and personality-based approaches strongly support the development of Tamil language education.

In conclusion, the study highlights that the future success of Tamil language teaching depends on the ability of teachers to balance content mastery with innovative pedagogical approaches. Addressing challenges in training, infrastructure, and classroom practices will enable Tamil language education to evolve into a more engaging, student-centered, and outcome-driven process.

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