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Codeswitching in the Ghanaian Multilingual
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ABSTRACT

Codeswitching (CS) as a linguistic strategy available to the multilingual teacher in a multilingual classroom is usually undermined despite a good body of literature available outlining its pedagogical relevance. Though some research has been done in Ghana on codeswitching, not much has been done on how the medium of instruction inhibits teachers and learners' efforts in employing CS to bring life into the classroom. This paper has examined the reactions of both teachers and learners towards CS in the Ghanaian multilingual classroom. Accidental ethnography was employed as a method and the research instruments employed were observations and directed conversation. It was revealed that both teachers and learners employ codeswitching because they feel confident and comfortable expressing their ideas. CS is not a predetermined linguistic pedagogical resource but a situational linguistic pedagogical strategy that brings the multilingual classroom to life. Despite that CS brings about linguistic inclusivity and mostly brings the class to life, there are instances of linguistic exclusivity in complex multilingual contexts. Policy makers were considered to be detached from the realities that prevailed in the classroom. This work argues for language policies that are appropriate for African multilingual classroom situation. This work contributes to the discussion of teachers utilising CS in multilingual contexts to meet learners' needs.

Keywords: *codeswitching, Ghanaian multilingual classroom, medium of instruction, directed conversation, accidental ethnography*

Introduction

In a multilingual and a multicultural context, cultural concepts, belief systems and linguistic appropriateness are possibly made meaningful through many linguistic strategies. Paramount among them is codeswitching, an unavoidable linguistic tool, employed in education, politics and even in legal services. The acceptance of codeswitching (CS) as a natural and potentially helpful linguistic strategy is acknowledged by researchers such as Avery (2013) and Ortega (2017). According to Kirkpatrick (2014) CS is a natural means of interacting among bilinguals. It is seen as a sequential action in languages in a multilingual classroom. Besides its naturalistic tendency, the effortlessness that accompanies codeswitching mostly makes it an obvious linguistic strategy available to all categories of bilinguals.

Additionally, codeswitching provides an array of communicative dynamism in several social and

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cultural situations. Despite the numerous linguistic benefits outlined by some researchers (Camilleri, 1998; Cahyani, de Courcy, & Barnett, 2018;) in other contexts in the world especially in the area of education, little attention is given to this seemingly pervasive communicative strategy and linguistic practice in the multilingual Ghanaian classroom especially its usage by teachers in the Ghanaian educational sector. Whilst some teachers view CS positively, others have reservations about the linguistic competence of those who rely on it to explain concepts. It is also not uncommon for teachers to receive queries from their supervisors when they code-switch in the classroom. The supervisors' queries are normally rooted in the medium of instruction language policy of Ghana which, in itself, keeps changing.

The main purpose of this paper is to assess how language policies affect the multilingual learner and to advocate for realistic language practices that empower the multilingual learner to function effectively. The paper seeks to address the following research questions:

1. Under what circumstances do teachers and learners resort to codeswitching as a pedagogical tool in the Ghanaian multilingual classroom?
2. What are the possible impediments against codeswitching in Ghana?

Literature Review

This section reviews literature of peer reviewed articles relevant to the topic of codeswitching in a multilingual context.

Which Way: Policy or Practice

Most African countries are almost always torn between the use of indigenous language or the ex-colonial language: English, French or Portuguese (Ansah, 2014). Some of the practices are described as linguistic genocide. A case in point was the action of the Kenya government in 2000 which banned the use of any other local language in the media except English. The action in itself is a denial of many people from their linguistic rights. One thing that is normally forgotten by the leaders of Africa is the identity crisis created for their people especially in the area of education. The multilingual child, whose experiences are multifaceted, is subtly compelled to rely on a language that appears alien and incapable of making him/her express fully those experiences and concepts.

Aside the learner, the teacher who is expected to implement the policy is confronted with policy and reality. What seems to compound the problem of the teacher as well as the learner is the vacillating nature of the language policy in education (Ansah, 2014; Agbedor, 1994). The vacillating nature of the language-in-education since Sir Gordon Guggisberg's era has made stakeholders in education, especially the curriculum implementers, to be torn between policy and practice. There are instances

where a learner is full of ideas but such a learner more or less is denied to use the language that can best express his/her ideas. The very teacher who denies the learner the opportunity to use his/her mother tongue is heard codeswitching; voluntarily or involuntarily. The willful or unwilful actions of teachers can be attributable to a number of reasons that are yet to be significantly explored in the Ghanaian context.

However, one thing that stands out in African countries about language policy and its implementation is the confusion. Examining the language policies in both South Africa and Tanzania, Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir (2004) noted as follows: "...the language policies of Tanzania are described as confusing, contradictory, and ambiguous, ..." The challenges normally put the teacher in a fix. Even if they employ an L1, code-mixing or codeswitching as a pedagogical resource, English, in the Anglophone context, becomes the language of examination (Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir, 2004). How examining bodies in these nations view code-mixing as a linguistic tool in expressing culturally embedded concepts creates further confusion in the minds of teachers.

Furthermore, teachers are often scolded by their superiors if they are found adopting communicative strategies that apparently depart from the medium of instruction policy. To avoid unfavorable comments and possible punishment from superiors, the teacher struggles to explain concepts that could easily be explained through the use of learners' L1. Explanations rendered by teachers finally end up being circuitous. In the name of policy, hurdles are placed in a natural and practical utilization of appropriate linguistic strategies in a second language classroom. Both the teacher and the learner(s) silently suffocate in the name of policy. Should the bilingual/multilingual who has an array of linguistic resources be made to suffer the fate of a mono-lingual? Linguistic rights are called to question when language policies lack respect to learners' choice of language to express themselves. According to Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (1995), one significant right that is upheld by United Nations as an 'inalienable norm Rights' is linguistic human rights. In education, the medium of instruction must give the multilingual learner and educator equal linguistic rights. They reiterate:

...the right to education through the medium of the mother tongue, is seen as a means to contribute to a reduction in societal conflict It is therefore a challenge to applied linguists to see how education systems can contribute to the promotion of more just multilingual societies (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995:483).

The aim of policies is to practice and, as much as possible, be confusion free. However, language policies and practices in Africa appear more conflicting. Stakeholders in education are left in the balance. What looks realistically practical contravenes set down language policies. CS in Ghana is one practice that apparently goes on in the Ghanaian classroom but that practice departs from the language-in-education policy.

The next section takes a look at the multilingual African classroom and how CS is employed as a linguistic resource.

The Multilingual African Classroom

The use of African languages in complementary and equitable fashion, alongside other languages, will be part of the full development of Africa's own genius and of the continent's search for its own path of development (Robinson, 1996:180).

If the African child has to genuinely develop cognitively, and independently find solutions to the needs of the continent, a language that the African child can relate to has to be the starting point. But to make the African child benefit globally, there is the need to find an alternative way of meeting the African child's language needs in the classroom. This is the point that codeswitching seems to find space that can be functionally effective in the African classroom. As stated by Nelson Mandela, the former South African president, "If you speak to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head, if you speak to him in his language, that goes to his heart."

The English only medium of instruction in most African multilingual classrooms apparently is a language that finds space in the heads of African learners but does not go to their hearts. In vain teachers might be laboring, and in vain learners might be struggling to make meaning. However, when teachers and learners explore and utilize the linguistic resources available to the multilingual teachers and learners, there is the likelihood of all of them benefitting. Concepts that might appear complex and circuitous can easily be explained; active learners' participation will increase; and there is the possibility of critical thinking and analytical reasoning to be realized. All these benefits are attainable because a language that goes to the learner's heart is employed.

Should the multilingual suffer the same fate of a monolingual? Apparently, no. The multilingual is gifted with an array of linguistic resources. The African multilingual classroom has to properly manage the linguistic resources available to them. The classroom has to be stimulated and that seems possible when African leaders and stakeholders formulate language policies that are relatable and linguistically realistic. Linguistic relativity, according to its proponents, Sarpi-Whorf and others, hold the view that "speakers of different languages think differently" (Wolff and Holmes, 2010:253). Reiterating the different world view, Ludwig Wittgenstein states; "If we spoke a different language, we would perceive a somewhat different world." These differences ought to be catered for when leaders in multilingual contexts have to formulate language policies. Considering that the first language of learners normally becomes the building blocks upon which second language learning occurs (Pandey, 2014; Haspelmath, 2020; Mendívil-Giró, 2021), a familiar language is needed as a medium of instruction for a multilingual classroom.

The multilingual learner needs a language that will not limit their world of thinking. Pandey (2013) quoted Ludwig Wittgenstein as follows to show how language limits people: “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.” The Ghanaian child sometimes is limited in most of his activities within the classroom because English is used as the medium of instruction. Though some arguments have been advanced for the use of English as a medium of instruction (Mohr & Barasa, 2024; Yallem et al., 2021; Webb, 2004), some researchers within the Ghanaian context have shown that there is usually low learner participation when English-only medium of instruction is strictly followed by teachers; and the use of L1 or a mixture of L1 and L2 yields greater learners’ involvement in classroom activities (Opoku-Amankwa, 2009; Owu-Ewie, 2006; Owu-Ewie & Eshun, 2015).

Having examined CS in a multilingual African classroom, attention is now turned to how people react to codeswitching in multilingual context.

Attitudes and Perceptions of People towards Codeswitching

What we don't want is for young people to be taught in Chinglish rather than either English or Chinese and that's what we are trying to avoid at the moment, said [former] Governor Chris Patten (South China Morning Post, May 13, 1994).

The above quotation by Lin (1996:181) is representative of most colonial governments’ attitudes towards the use of English that seems to depart from what they consider as ‘standard’. This attitude is always carried down and carried out by the colonized. The language alarmists are often quick to criticize people who are using English in a socially realistic context. These criticisms keep promoting negative attitudes and perceptions towards the use of L1 and other forms of communicative strategies that are employed in a second language classroom.

Governments and policy makers, in one way or the other, contribute to the fueling of negative attitudes when innovative strategies are emerging from socially realistic situations. Policy makers appear dogmatic. They hardly examine what was passed on as a policy to them with little or no attention given to the linguistic reality, as well as cultural variations, of the people who are learning a second language. The following quotation suggests how governments take actions to promulgate monolithic ideology of language learning and thereby leading to ill-feeling against what seems to be known as a policy.

“What we must ban in the classroom is mixed-code, commonly known as ‘Chinglish’--that’s not language at all,” Director of Education Helen Yu Lai Ching-ping said (Lin, 1996:181).

Should there not be a variety of English that is relatable to its users? Decisions and actions that are taken to disadvantage a bilingual/multilingual child from grasping concepts taught in a second language classroom is injurious. Literature on the English only medium of instruction points to the fact

that the L1 medium of instruction plays a critical role in the explanation and grasping of concepts (Yip et al., 2003; Cheng, 2022). Based on the importance of the use of L1 medium of instruction, Hong Kong finally implemented a ‘fine-tuning’ language policy that permitted both L1 and L2 medium of instruction to co-exist. Having examined the ‘fine-tuning’ language policy, Cheng (2022) suggests that the English medium of instruction go hand-in-hand with the L1, but the L1 should be used judiciously. The problem that arises is how one can judge what is judicious and what is not. The abuse of the use of L1 in the classroom is seemingly looming. That possibly leads to some of the unfavorable attitudes towards codeswitching.

In Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), Clegga and Simpson (2016:359) point out the harrowing experiences that learners go through when English is the medium of instruction. They lament: “Pedagogical and organizational expertise appropriate to education for learners working in a second language is available both in Africa and other parts of the world, but rarely widely applied in SSA.” The apparent feet dragging as shown in the quote leads to low performance of learners’ little or no participation in classroom activities and pedagogical language support seems absent. To ease the burden of both the teacher and learners, codeswitch, a combination of African language and English (in the case of the Anglophone Africa) in the SSA classroom becomes a better linguistic alternative.

Within the Ghanaian context, Osei-Boateng’s (2022) work on the perception of teachers on the use of English as a medium of instruction shows that teachers are fully aware of the English medium of instruction; yet, they combine both L1 and L2 in the classroom. He states:

... teachers mostly used bilingual medium of instruction rather than using the L1 as the dominant medium in the ESL classroom as they perceived bilingual education to be most effective in achi[vi]ng their teaching and learning outcomes. Teachers perceived that the L1 plays a significant role in ESL learning. It was suggested that the L1 translation offered learners an easy understanding of the English language, improved learners’ motivation to learn the language, and enhanced learners’ interaction as compared to the use of only the TL/L2 (Osei-Boateng, 2022:2).

From the above, teachers’ pedagogical efforts seem to yield results because an appropriate linguistic approach is employed. Their realistic approach to the situation has produced the desired results such as improved comprehension, effective learners’ involvement in lessons, and increased learner motivation. Since teachers have positive perception and attitude towards the combination of L1 and L2 (codeswitching), it suggests that CS is a useful linguistic resource that teachers in multilingual contexts can employ to attain the needed outcomes. If translation leads to easy understanding of the English language as indicated above, it possibly portrays that both teachers and learners view CS positively. Language is only useful and meaningful when its users benefit from it. CS, in general, cannot be considered subtractive. It is a useful tool in a multilingual classroom and

must be considered as a communicative strategy in education.

In a nutshell, the multilingual child cannot be denied the equal opportunity and the inalienable linguistic human rights to interacting meaningfully, actively and with ease in a multilingual classroom.

Pedagogical Relevance of Codeswitching as a Communicative Strategy

Pedagogy plays an important part in the teaching and learning process. A teacher with a good pedagogy without an appropriate linguistic communicative strategy might find himself/herself being a frustrated professional. However, when a common ground is established through the choice of a language, both teachers and learners are more likely to react positively in the learning process. In other words, when the language used in the classroom is relatable to both the teacher and the learner, they both see the relevance of the activities being carried out in the learning context. CS comes in to play this crucial role in a multilingual classroom.

One of the pedagogical relevance of CS in the Malaysian and Turkish context is portrayed by Lin (2019) and Seedhouse (2005) respectively. They contend that the English medium of instruction is made more accessible when teachers resort to CS. Put differently, concepts that are not easy to grasp are simplified when a language the learner understands is used. Learners sometimes willingly ask teachers if they can use their L1. It appears common to meet students at the Ghanaian pre-tertiary level asking the teacher whether they can use the L1 to answer questions posed by the teacher. Due to policy, it is not surprising that such students are denied the opportunity to speak in a language they think their ideas can be expressed better. The request of students is usually not granted due to some reservations that linger on since students are usually required to use the L2 in examination situations. But it appears far better that learners are able to comprehend concepts and find a way of conveying the idea in the target language than to miss the real concept.

Code-switching, normally, functions as a tool of scaffolding that provides linguistic support in circumstances where no other strategy could help. Across all multilingual contexts, as shown by some researchers, bilingual education scaffolding is a necessary process that allows learners participate actively and fully in content-based knowledge acquisition. Ertugruloglu, Mearns and Admiraal (2023:100550) indicate that supporting language development is an effective way of contributing to “both discipline specific content knowledge and language acquisition.” The pedagogical role of CS as a scaffolding tool in a multilingual classroom context is critical and has to be considered as a pragmatic approach to bringing life in the classroom.

From the Ghanaian context, Yevudey (2013), through classroom observation, questionnaires and interviews established that teachers mostly engage in CS for the purposes of explaining concepts,

correction of pupils' language errors, introduction of new concepts and lessons in general, acknowledging and calling on learners' attention and for facilitating vocabulary acquisition and general understanding. To this end, CS in the classroom pedagogic process certainly is immeasurable in terms of its value in language and content acquisition.

A multilingual classroom is often made of learners with varying degrees of language proficiency. When code-switching is employed, it can foster inclusivity. Learners, whose linguistic repertoire is limited and would have been left out when a familiar language is not used, are more likely included when teachers codeswitch. When a teacher switches to the students' L1, they try to ensure that each learner has the opportunity to participate in the classroom activities. Thus, a sense of belonging is created in each learner since their linguistic identities are recognized. This activity of linguistic validation contributes largely to an inclusive learning environment. Examining linguistic inclusivity, Joubert and de Jong (2023:172) indicate that linguistic inclusivity does not only encompass "just the acknowledgement of the pupils' backgrounds but also the teachers who fear feeling left out by a multilingualism that goes beyond what they are familiar with." CS seems to bridge the gap of being left out in a multilingual classroom.

As much as we acknowledge the pedagogical relevance of CS, there is the need to equally take a look at the challenges that confront its usage. Firstly, language policies are promulgated to favour the monolingual. The socio-cultural, sociolinguistic variants of the multilingual, when brought to play, are mostly considered sub-standard. It is not surprising that some parents and other stakeholders, especially governments kick against the use of L1 alongside the L2.

Secondly, the multiplicity of languages in certain multilingual areas makes it difficult to find a common language for the purposes of codeswitching. There are usually situations that the teacher and the learners do not share a common language. In some cosmopolitan parts of Ghana, studies have revealed classrooms with a mix of children with diverse linguistic backgrounds. It becomes worse when the teacher in the classroom is not proficient in the local language of the community where the school is situated (Yiadom, Anku & Ansah, 2022; Nkrumah & Erinosh, 2024, Owu-Ewie & Eshun, 2019). As much as CS could have assisted both the teacher and the learners, there is apparently a linguistic barrier that prevents the practice of CS. In this jurisdiction where the medium of instruction at the lower primary is the L1, there is a caveat that states that a major Ghanaian language within a locality is used. This caveat seems to compound the issue of linguistic marginalization. Speakers of minority languages are stepped aside and this is affront to the United Nations policy guidelines on minority languages which stipulates among other things that persons belonging to linguistic minorities have the right to enjoy, practice and use their own language, in private and public life, freely and without interference or any form of discrimination. Ill feelings are likely deep seated in the people

whose languages are not acknowledged. CS that does not cover all learners in a multilingual classroom might bring about exclusion.

Drawing from the above literature on the benefits and challenges of CS, one is more inclined to argue that the pedagogical relevance of CS cannot be ignored because of the challenges. CS as a pedagogical tool and strategy needs to be considered in multilingual classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Gibson's (1997/1998) Affordance Theory as its theoretical framework. Originally developed within the field of ecology, the theory has since been extended to other domains, including education and multilingualism, for its emphasis on the relationship between individuals and their environments. In essence, the theory of affordances focuses on the opportunities (or possibilities for action) that an environment provides to an individual, depending on their abilities, needs, and the context in which they operate.

In the context of multilingual education, Aronin and Singleton (2018) argue that Affordance Theory provides a powerful ecological lens for understanding how linguistic resources such as learners' home languages function as potential tools for learning. They explain that educational authorities and policymakers must constantly evaluate which linguistic affordances exist within a learning environment and determine which affordances should be enhanced, maintained, or removed to promote effective teaching and learning.

Viewing the classroom as a dynamic and interactive environment, this framework acknowledges that learning occurs through the co-construction of meaning among teachers and learners using the linguistic and cultural resources available to them. Every classroom interaction offers potential affordances, possibilities for understanding, participation, and identity construction, mediated by language. Hence, teachers' strategic use of code-switching (CS) can be understood as the activation of linguistic affordances that enable comprehension, inclusion, and engagement.

Applying Affordance Theory to this study, code-switching is conceptualized as a pedagogical affordance, a communicative strategy, that offers learners access to both content knowledge and linguistic development. By recognizing and utilizing learners' home languages as part of the instructional process, teachers expand the range of linguistic affordances available in the classroom. This not only supports cognitive understanding but also affirms learners' linguistic identities and cultural backgrounds.

Ultimately, the adoption of the Affordance Theory provides a conceptual basis for interpreting how code-switching contributes to inclusive and effective pedagogy in multilingual classrooms. It

helps explain how teachers and learners dynamically use available linguistic resources to create opportunities for participation, scaffold understanding, and transform multilingualism from a perceived barrier into a rich educational asset.

Methodology

As Fujii (2015:525) observes, “*observations of daily life are the bread and butter of ethnography.*” In this study, the concept of accidental ethnography is adopted. Fujii (2015:525) explains that accidental ethnography entails giving systematic attention to unplanned and spontaneous moments that occur beyond formal research settings such as interviews or surveys. During such instances, the researcher may encounter unexpected narratives or everyday scenes that had previously gone unnoticed but hold significant ethnographic value.

Codeswitching is a daily communicative tool employed by almost all Ghanaians. The politician employs it, the market woman uses it, and the educator finds it as a pedagogical tool readily available. The prevalence of the phenomenon has made it to be described as a third linguistic force of the bilingual (Forson, 1979), a bilingual asset (Brobbe, 2015) a type of skilled performance but not an alternative strategy (Myers-Scotton, 1993). In fact, codeswitching is a necessary communicative strategy in the life of almost all bilinguals/multilinguals. In gathering data, observations and directed conversations were used. Directed conversation is akin to Kato’s (1986) method of verbal data collection. Unlike Kato’s method which centered on question asking protocols, the method employed here was intentional and systematic conversations which centered on the use of CS in the Ghanaian classroom. The target group was practicing teaching in English, Science and Mathematics. These subjects became the point of focus because are the core subjects. When a student fails in any of these subjects, their progression in the academic ladder is either truncated, impeded or delayed. Subject teachers in these areas are likely to employ any methodological strategy they deem helpful to them and their learners

The aim of using directed conversation was to enable the participants share their experiences, emotions and views on how CS has been employed personally by them or other practitioners whilst they (research participants) were participant observers/on-looker observers. The interactants freely participated in the conversation. The researcher noted down salient points that brought out teachers and learners’ opinions on the use of codeswitching in Ghanaian classrooms. For the purposes of triangulation, the researcher’s personal observations were made. Observations are a naturalistic phenomenon that goes on in a situation whereby the needed information can properly be ascertained. As stated by Fujii above, observations are the bread and butter that can help a researcher obtain hidden information that other methods might have failed.

Because accidental ethnography was used, the directed conversation with participants were accidental. There was no particular way of sampling the population but the researcher made sure that all the participants were practicing teachers. The total population was sixteen (16); six (6) female practicing teachers who are or were in Ghanaian senior high schools as full-time teachers and ten (10) male practicing teachers who were or are still in some secondary schools in Ghana. Though the teachers were basically to share their experiences and observations on CS in secondary schools, some of them shared information that was relevant to the topic but not exclusively in the secondary school context. Some of the relevant data, though not experienced at the secondary school, they were used in the data presentation and discussion because they are crucial to policy making.

The motivation for the choice of secondary level education was grounded on the fact that such a level bridges the gap between the basic level and the tertiary level. It is also a place where learners of different Ghanaian languages and even cultural experiences find themselves in the same classroom. In a situation where the teacher is unable to codeswitch or able to codeswitch, what are the challenges arising and what might be the reaction of learners who are unable to make meaning out of the codeswitching are likely to be revealed through the choice of the level.

Based on the notes, comments and sentiments that sparked similar reactions, attitudes and perceptions have been grouped for the discussion of this work.

Research Results

Distribution of Participants by Area of Specialisation

<i>Code</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Specialization</i>	<i>School Context</i>
<i>F1</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>SHS</i>
<i>F2</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>SHS</i>
<i>F3</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Mathematics</i>	<i>SHS</i>
<i>F4</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Science (Integrated Science/Biology)</i>	<i>SHS</i>
<i>F5</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>SHS</i>
<i>F6</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Science (Chemistry)</i>	<i>SHS</i>
<i>M1</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>SHS</i>
<i>M2</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Mathematics</i>	<i>SHS</i>
<i>M3</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Science (Physics)</i>	<i>SHS</i>
<i>M4</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>SHS</i>
<i>M5</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Mathematics</i>	<i>SHS</i>
<i>M6</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Science (Biology)</i>	<i>SHS</i>
<i>M7</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>SHS</i>
<i>M8</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Mathematics</i>	<i>SHS</i>
<i>M9</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Science (Integrated Science)</i>	<i>SHS</i>
<i>M10</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>SHS</i>

Gender Within Specialization

<i>Specialization</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>English</i>	3	3	6
<i>Mathematics</i>	1	3	4
<i>Science</i>	2	4	6
<i>Total</i>	6	10	16

Categorization of Responses Based on Themes

THEME 1: Pedagogical Necessity

General Pattern: 13 of 16 participants framed CS (code-switching) as a pedagogical tool rather than linguistic weakness.

Representative Responses

F1:

“Sometimes when explaining abstract grammar concepts, switching briefly into a familiar language ensures comprehension. Without that, some students remain silent.”

F3:

“Even outside SHS, I have observed that strategic switching builds conceptual clarity. It is not about lowering standards; it is about scaffolding.”

M2:

“If I insist strictly on Standard English, weaker students disengage. Code-switching bridges the gap.”

M5:

“In literature classes especially, drawing parallels in local languages deepens interpretation.”

F5:

“I see it as a transitional strategy. Once understanding is secured, we return to Standard English.”

M8:

“In teacher training sessions beyond SHS, facilitators also switch. So, it is clearly a pedagogical reality, even if unofficial.”

M9:

“Pedagogically useful, yes—but it must be controlled. Otherwise, students become too dependent.”

THEME 2: Policy Fear

General Pattern: 11 participants expressed some degree of policy anxiety, especially regarding examinations and institutional expectations. Their responses are presented below:

F2:

“There is always fear that supervisors may interpret switching as incompetence.”

F4:

“WAEC expectations influence us strongly. We prepare students for exams, so we feel pressured to maintain strict Standard English.”

M1:

“Officially, there is no written ban, but the culture discourages mixing codes.”

M3:

“The hidden curriculum is clear: speak ‘proper English’ at all times.”

F6:

“Even when it works pedagogically, I sometimes avoid it because I don’t want students thinking it is acceptable in exams.”

M7:

“Policy documents talk about global competitiveness, which indirectly discourages local linguistic integration.”

M10:

“As long as outcomes are good, no administrator has questioned my approach.”

THEME 3: Student Engagement

General Pattern: 14 participants linked CS directly to improved engagement, confidence, and participation.

Representative responses are shown below.

F1:

“Participation increases immediately when students realize they are allowed to draw from their linguistic background.”

M4:

“When I clarify a difficult point in a familiar language, hands go up instantly.”

F5:

“Shy students contribute more when the environment feels linguistically inclusive.”

M6:

“Classroom energy changes when students feel understood.”

M2:

“In mixed-ability classes, engagement depends on linguistic flexibility.”

F3:

“Even in workshops outside SHS, engagement rises when facilitators acknowledge linguistic diversity.”

M9 (more cautious view):

“Engagement increases, but we must gradually transition back to Standard English.”

Thematic Distribution Summary

Theme	Strongly Affirmed	Moderately Affirmed	Cautious/Qualified
Pedagogical Necessity	13	2	1
Policy Fear	8	3	5 (low fear)
Student Engagement	14	1	1

Presentation of results based on directed conversations and observations

As indicated in the methodology section that directed conversation and observations were employed to gather the data, the results that seem relevant are present here for the purposes of the study and the discussion that follows this section.

Participant 1

Researcher (RS): Have you ever taught in a secondary school?

Participant (PT): Yes.

RS: Did you code-switch and why?

PT: I did. If you don't you will be wasting your time. I can remember this story. When we were in the university, we went on a voluntary mission to teach in a primary school in a remote village. We were using English. Whenever we asked, "Do you understand? They responded: "Yes Sir". However, their faces didn't show that they understood the lesson. At a point, we turned to the L1 and asked:

Mo te aseε (Do you understand?). They responded: Yεn nteaseε. (We have understood nothing). But mo kaa se aane (But you responded yes).

They replied: The answer to “Do you understand” is yes.

Participant 2

PT: When I was in the training college in the Volta Region [name of college withheld], some of the tutors used CS a lot. I couldn't understand the L1 (Ewe). Mostly, I felt angry because I was left out. I was neglected. They seemed to have said within themselves; ‘Who brought you here?’

RS: How did you cope up with then?

PT: I used to ask my mates to translate to me.

Participant 3

PT: Many of us feel that our explanations can better be expressed in the L1. When you don't even intend to codeswitch, the facial expressions of the students alone will compel you to

rescue them through the use of their mother tongue – Twi. Some openly ask us to speak Twi. You see, even in staff meetings, the L1 is a great asset in presenting issues that would have been difficult to convey in the face of authorities.

RS: Does it mean teachers are incompetent in using English to deliver their lessons?

PT: Not really. No one will tell you to codeswitch if the policy makers themselves are asked to implement the policy they themselves formulated.

Comment from a learner:

Ɛbɛyɛ den na m'anya fahodie wɔ bere a me nimdeɛ wɔ kasa a me tumi kyerɛ m'adwene wɔ ho yie no, w'asi me kwan? Ɛdeen nti na Nkrumah kɔ gye fahodie maa Ghana nanso Abrɔfo kasa deɛ ɔgyae no?

(How can I feel free when I am denied to free my mind in a language I think I can best express my ideas? Why did Nkrumah [Ghana's First President] fight for the independence of Ghana but left this English language to stay?)

Findings Based on Themes

As indicated in the methodology section, data were generated through ethnographically grounded directed conversations and classroom-related observations. The directed conversations allowed participants to narrate lived experiences of code-switching (CS) within Ghanaian secondary school contexts, while observations provided contextual sensitivity to how language practices are embedded in everyday institutional life.

This section presents findings organized under three interrelated themes:

1. Pedagogical Necessity
2. Policy Fear
3. Student Engagement

The findings incorporate participant narratives, interactional excerpts from the directed conversations, and one learner comment that powerfully captures the ideological tensions surrounding language use in schools.

Theme 1: Pedagogical Necessity

Thirteen (13) of the sixteen (16) participants framed code-switching as a pedagogical tool rather than a linguistic weakness. Across English, Mathematics, and Science classrooms, CS was described as a necessary instructional scaffold for ensuring comprehension and conceptual clarity.

Code-Switching as Comprehension Rescue

Participant 1 narrated a powerful incident that illustrates the pedagogical urgency of CS.

Reflecting on a voluntary teaching experience in a rural school, the participant explained that students consistently responded “Yes Sir” when asked whether they understood. However, their facial expressions revealed confusion. When the question was reframed in Twi, “Mo te asee?”, students admitted: “Yɛn nte asee” (We have not understood).

The exchange exposed what may be termed performative understanding. Students rather respond correctly to the expected linguistic formula than demonstrating actual comprehension. The participant concluded: “If you don’t code-switch, you will be wasting your time.”

This narrative reveals CS as a mechanism for uncovering hidden misunderstanding and restoring epistemic honesty in the classroom.

Facial Expressions as Ethnographic Evidence

Participant 3 emphasized that even when teachers do not intend to code-switch, students’ facial expressions compel intervention. The participant explained:

“When you don’t even intend to code-switch, the facial expressions of the students alone will compel you to rescue them through the use of their mother tongue.”

This description situates CS as a response to embodied classroom signals rather than theoretical preference. Observationally, students’ silence, hesitation, and visual confusion functioned as triggers for linguistic mediation. CS is a spontaneous pedagogical strategy for a multilingual classroom teacher whose linguistic repertoire appears more of an asset than a disadvantage.

The participant further clarified that this practice does not imply incompetence in English delivery. Instead, it reflects responsiveness to learner realities. The statement, “Many of us feel that our explanations can better be expressed in the L1”, highlights that CS enhances precision rather than diluting rigor. Circuitous expressions and explanations that might cause confusion are better captured when CS is resorted to.

Scaffolding Rather than Substitution

Several participants conceptualized CS as transitional. F5 described it as:

“a transitional strategy. Once understanding is secured, we return to Standard English.”

Similarly, F3 noted that strategic switching builds conceptual clarity and should not be interpreted as lowering standards. This framing positions CS within a scaffolded pedagogy where comprehension precedes formal consolidation.

Even the cautious voice (M9) acknowledged its usefulness:

“Pedagogically useful, yes - but it must be controlled. Otherwise, students become too dependent.”

Thus, even dissenting perspectives affirmed pedagogical value while emphasizing regulation.

Theme 2: Policy Fear

Eleven (11) participants expressed some degree of policy anxiety, particularly regarding examinations and institutional expectations.

Policy Fear did not emerge from explicit written prohibitions but from what participants described as institutional culture and examination pressure.

Examination Regimes and Linguistic Surveillance

Participant 4 explicitly referenced West African Examination Council (WAEC) expectations, noting that exam preparation pressures teachers to maintain strict Standard English. The concern was that students might transfer informal classroom practices into examination scripts. Participant 6 echoed this concern:

“Even when it works pedagogically, I sometimes avoid it because I don’t want students thinking it is acceptable in exams.”

These narratives reveal a perceived tension between classroom pragmatism and assessment ideology.

Participant 1 described a “hidden curriculum” where teachers are expected to speak “proper English at all times.” Although no participant cited a formal ban, several described implicit professional surveillances, particularly during supervision or classroom observation.

Cultural Discouragement and Institutional Image

Participant 2 narrated a contrasting experience from teacher training in the Volta Region. Tutors frequently code-switched into Ewe, leaving the participant feeling excluded. The experience illustrates that CS can both include and exclude, depending on linguistic alignment. This account deepens the complexity of Policy Fear. It is not only about English dominance but also about linguistic power dynamics within multilingual settings.

Participant 7 suggested that policy discourse emphasizing “global competitiveness” indirectly discourages local linguistic integration. The implication is that English is symbolically tied to modernity and upward mobility.

However, not all participants expressed high anxiety. Participant 10 stated:

“As long as outcomes are good, no administrator has questioned my approach.”

This suggests variation in institutional climates and individual confidence.

Theme 3: Student Engagement

Fourteen (14) participants directly linked CS to improved engagement, confidence, and participation.

Participation and Confidence

F1 observed:

“Participation increases immediately when students realize they are allowed to draw from their linguistic background.”

M4 similarly noted that clarifying difficult points in a familiar language may lead to immediate classroom participation. These accounts suggest that linguistic recognition reduces fear and fosters cognitive risk-taking.

F5 highlighted the inclusion of shy students:

“Shy students contribute more when the environment feels linguistically inclusive.”

M6 described a noticeable shift in classroom atmosphere:

“Classroom energy changes when students feel understood.”

Engagement was thus described not merely as increased talk but as affective transformation.

Linguistic Freedom and Ideological Resistance

The learner comment recorded during observation provides powerful insight:

Ɛbɛyɛ dɛn na m'anya fahodie wɔ bere a me nimdeɛ wɔ kasa a me tumi kyere m'adwene wɔ ho yie no, w'asi me kwan? (How can I feel free when I am denied the freedom to express my mind in the language I know best?)

The learner's invocation of Kwame Nkrumah and Ghana's independence reframes classroom language policy as an issue of intellectual freedom. The rhetorical question, why independence from colonial rule did not include linguistic emancipation, reveals how deeply students internalize language ideology. This feeling is likely a representation of almost all Ghanaians.

This comment illustrates that CS is not only a pedagogical issue but also a symbolic one, touching on identity, autonomy, and postcolonial consciousness.

Thematic Distribution Summary

Theme	Strongly Affirmed	Moderately Affirmed	Cautious/Qualified
Pedagogical Necessity	13	2	1
Policy Fear	8	3	5 (low fear)
Student Engagement	14	1	1

The data demonstrate a strong correlation between Pedagogical Necessity and Student Engagement. Policy Fear functions as a moderating force but does not eliminate CS practice.

Teachers, therefore, operate within a negotiated professional space. They do not reject Standard English, nor do they abandon CS. Instead, they strategically balance both.

The findings position code-switching in four folds:

1. a comprehension rescue mechanism;
2. a scaffold for conceptual clarity;
3. a catalyst for engagement; and
4. a site of ideological tension.

Ultimately, CS in Ghanaian secondary schools emerges not as incompetence or deviation but as a context-sensitive pedagogical strategy shaped by multilingual realities and institutional pressures.

Discussion

The experience shared by the mathematics lecturer, who now teaches at a Ghanaian university, sets the tone for this discussion. The classroom episode in which learners repeatedly responded “Yes Sir” to “Do you understand?” yet later confessed in Twi, *Yɛn nteaseɛ* (“We have not understood anything”), illustrates the pedagogical illusion that may accompany exclusive L2 instruction. What appears humorous is, in reality, deeply revealing. It demonstrates how learners may comply linguistically without comprehending conceptually. As the lecturer noted, once he switched to the L1, authentic understanding emerged. This supports the thematic finding that 13 out of 16 participants framed code-switching (CS) as a pedagogical tool rather than linguistic weakness.

To illustrate the relevance of Pedagogical Necessity, participants repeatedly emphasized the instructional value of CS. For instance, F1 stated:

“Sometimes when explaining abstract grammar concepts, switching briefly into a familiar language ensures comprehension. Without that, some students remain silent.”

Similarly, M2 remarked:

“If I insist strictly on Standard English, weaker students disengage. Code-switching bridges the gap.”

These reflections confirm that teachers perceive CS as a scaffold that connects complex content

to learners' linguistic realities. This aligns with Camilleri's (1998) assertion that CS facilitates elicitation, allowing learners to express difficulties. More recent research supports this perspective. Amanda et al. (2025) found that teachers strategically switch codes to clarify meaning and reinforce understanding in English language classrooms. Likewise, Chean (2025) argues that CS enhances instructional clarity and conceptual reinforcement in multilingual settings.

Participant F5 further characterized CS as transitional rather than permanent:

"I see it as a transitional strategy. Once understanding is secured, we return to Standard English."

This comment reflects what Datokarama et al. (2025) describe as strategic bilingual mediation, where CS is used temporarily to reduce cognitive overload while maintaining long-term L2 development goals. Thus, the Ghanaian data support emerging scholarship that positions CS as a controlled pedagogical scaffold rather than a replacement for English-medium instruction.

Closely related to pedagogical necessity is Theme 3: Student Engagement, where 14 participants directly linked CS to increased participation and classroom vitality. F1 observed:

"Participation increases immediately when students realize they are allowed to draw from their linguistic background."

Similarly, M4 stated:

"When I clarify a difficult point in a familiar language, hands go up instantly."

These statements echo the classroom observation that the class "came to life" when the teacher code-switched. Engagement here is not merely behavioral but affective and cognitive. Rapuleng (2024) found that CS increased interaction and reduced anxiety in multilingual classrooms, leading to greater learner involvement. The Ghanaian findings mirror this pattern, especially where learners expressed confidence and willingness to contribute once linguistic inclusivity was established.

However, the data also introduce complexity. Under Theme 2: Policy Fear, 11 participants expressed concern regarding institutional expectations. F4 stated:

"WAEC expectations influence us strongly. We prepare students for exams, so we feel pressured to maintain strict Standard English."

Similarly, F2 noted:

"There is always fear that supervisors may interpret switching as incompetence."

These reflections reveal a tension between pedagogical effectiveness and institutional compliance. Although teachers acknowledge the utility of CS, they remain cautious due to examination culture and professional evaluation. This finding aligns with Osei-Boateng (2022), who notes that Ghana's English-medium policy exerts implicit pressure on teachers to maintain linguistic purity. It also supports García and Wei's (2014) argument that multilingual classroom practices often diverge from official monolingual policies, creating a policy–practice gap.

The exclusionary potential of CS also emerged in the directed conversations. One participant

lamented his experience in a multilingual training college:

“Some of the tutors used CS a lot. I couldn’t understand the L1 (Ewe). Mostly, I felt angry because I was left out. I was neglected.”

This narrative tempers the overwhelmingly positive perception of CS. While CS empowers when the teacher and learners share linguistic resources, it can marginalize others in heterogeneous settings. Cheng (2022) cautions against excessive reliance on one L1 in linguistically diverse classrooms, emphasizing the need for balanced and inclusive application. The Ghanaian data reinforce this caution: CS must be judicious and context-sensitive to avoid reproducing linguistic exclusion.

The emotional dimension of language policy surfaced vividly in the overheard learner comment invoking Kwame Nkrumah and Ghana’s independence:

“How can I feel free when I am denied to free my mind in a language I think I can best express my ideas?”

This statement transcends pedagogy and enters the realm of linguistic identity and postcolonial consciousness. It suggests that language choice in the classroom is not neutral; it carries symbolic meaning tied to freedom, empowerment, and cultural legitimacy. Contemporary translanguaging scholarship (García & Wei, 2014) similarly frames multilingual practices as acts of identity affirmation and cognitive empowerment. Although the teachers in this study spoke in terms of “code-switching” rather than “translanguaging,” their lived practices reflect the same integrated use of linguistic repertoires.

Finally, subject specialization did not appear to determine CS usage. While one participant claimed, “My teachers never codeswitched. It may be so because I offered Literature-in-English,” observational data revealed varied practices across disciplines. This supports Redinger’s (2010) view that attitudes toward CS are shaped more by ideological beliefs than subject boundaries. The Ghanaian evidence suggests that CS is situational, influenced by learner needs, teacher judgment, and classroom composition rather than curriculum area alone.

Integrating the thematic findings with recent scholarship reveals four key conclusions:

1. CS as Pedagogical Scaffold: Participants overwhelmingly affirmed that CS ensures comprehension and conceptual clarity, supporting findings by Chean (2025) and Amanda et al. (2025).
2. CS as Engagement Catalyst: Teachers linked CS directly to participation and confidence, echoing Rapuleng’s (2024) findings on classroom interactivity.
3. CS as Context-Sensitive Practice: The exclusionary experience reported by one participant confirms Cheng’s (2022) caution that injudicious CS may marginalize learners.

4. Policy–Practice Tension: Teachers navigate institutional expectations shaped by examination bodies and national language policy, consistent with Osei-Boateng (2022) and García and Wei (2014).

In effect, the Ghanaian classroom data both confirm and extend contemporary research. Code-switching is not a deviation from pedagogical standards but a dynamic, reflective, and context-bound instructional strategy. When strategically employed, it bridges comprehension gaps, enhances engagement, and affirms linguistic identity. When mismanaged or suppressed, it risks fostering exclusion or perpetuating silent misunderstanding.

The central finding of this study, therefore, is that code-switching in Ghana’s multilingual classrooms functions as a negotiated pedagogical reality, shaped by necessity, constrained by policy, and sustained by teachers’ professional discretion.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper concludes by reiterating the enduring relevance of the *Asmara Declaration* on African Languages and Literature as a moral and intellectual guide for language policy and practice in Africa. It serves as a timely reminder to African leaders, policymakers, and educators of the urgent need to revisit their commitments to linguistic equity and inclusivity in education. As cited in Bokamba (2015), two key principles from the declaration remain particularly instructive:

- i. The vitality and equality of African languages must be recognized as a basis for the future empowerment of African peoples.
- ii. All African children have the unalienable right to attend school and learn in their mother tongues. Every effort should therefore be made to develop African languages at all levels of education.

Recognizing the linguistic rights of learners in multilingual contexts is central to achieving equitable education. Code-switching (CS), as a communicative and pedagogical strategy, provides a viable means of bridging linguistic gaps in classrooms where multiple languages coexist. Abgedor (1994) rightly observes that when excessive emphasis is placed on English, large sections of the population are effectively excluded from access to “vital information on matters that could otherwise promote the economic, social, and political well-being of the people.” This observation directly applies to the Ghanaian educational context, where rigid English-only practices often limit learners’ comprehension and participation. As a result, many students fail to benefit fully from classroom instruction, contributing to high dropout rates and underachievement.

The persistent disconnect between language policy and actual classroom practice reflects a broader ideological gap between policymakers and educational realities. To promote meaningful

learning and social inclusion, there is a pressing need for governments, particularly within African multilingual societies, to re-examine inherited colonial language ideologies and to design policies that are contextually relevant, culturally grounded, and pedagogically sound. Code-switching, already a natural feature of everyday communication across Ghanaian society, can serve as an effective transitional linguistic strategy toward more inclusive and functional multilingual education.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

Generative AI tools were employed exclusively for language editing, grammatical refinement, and enhanced readability. The authors bear full responsibility for all intellectual content, including study design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation of findings.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no competing interests.

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