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## **PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS ON CODE-SWITCHING APPROACH TOWARDS LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper explores how code-switching can be meaningfully used as an empowerment approach towards improving learners' performance in the English language. In cultures with people using more than one language for communication, code-switching exists. Bilinguals as speakers of many languages, code-switch, using their languages resourcefully at conveying meaning in a variety of ways. Code-switching occurs every day during teaching and learning as most subjects in the curriculum are offered in the English language. Teaching and learning the English language in South Africa is characterized by serious challenges because the government is advocating for use of home languages for all subjects of lower grades in primary schools. However, teachers still*

*encounter challenges when using English as a medium of instruction in preceding grades because learners fail to comprehend challenging concepts and terminologies presented to them in a language besides their home language. This qualitative study revealed that using code-switching can be a worthwhile approach for use in bilingual classrooms. A possible recommendation is that English language teachers should utilize code-switching as an approach to assist language development as learners in schools investigated emanate from diverse cultures, underpinned by different linguistic backgrounds and linguistic constituencies.*

### **Keywords**

Code-Switching, Teaching, Learning, Language, Acquisition, Development, Bilingual

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## **1. Introduction**

Language, with its characteristic of communication used by an individual nation or community, is involved in every feature of our lives, therefore playing a significant role in developing human personality (Timor, 2012). Teachers offering additional languages in bilingual classrooms are faced with a difficult task to engage in code-switching as learners emanate from different linguistic constituencies (Hobbs, Matsuo & Payne, 2010). Learners in these types of classrooms lack the confidence to use a second language because they hesitate to commit errors and this deters vocabulary growth in languages to be learned as per the prescribed school curriculum (Flores & Chu, 2011).

In the sites investigated, the English language was regarded as a medium of instruction, yet learners emanated from diverse linguistic complexities and constituencies, wherein isiXhosa was mainly their home background language (Lesaux & Kieffer, 2010). Learners encounter the English language only during schooling hours, this implying that English is taught as an additional language. As these learners experience some difficulties in language aspects like reading, writing, and speaking throughout their schooling levels, with lacking improvement in English enhancement in the preceding grades, teachers resort to explaining terms and words in learners' home language. This approach proved to be somehow beneficial as there were indications of some improvement when teachers embarked on using the code-switching approach (Mart, 2013; Lin, 2013). Deceptively, it was anticipated by schools that limited interpretation of most English words or terminologies leads to hindered language development. This is of a similar view by Makena & Mpiti (2019) as they revealed, in their study on role played by the library to promote a culture of

reading among learners, that for learners to be acquisition in learning a language unfamiliar to them, strategies like exposure to a wide range of reading material improves reading culture and as well. Their study further argues that proficient reading is a gateway to academic enrichment, thus leading to developing confident learners who can effectively and efficiently comprehend any given text. Indeed, we also note that understanding the meanings of words or concepts is amongst the fundamental skills required for lifelong language acquisition.

Correspondingly, exploration of language attainment reveals that social communications are a prerequisite as they provide comprehensiveness in language dimensions (Gort, 2011). Pérez (2004) concurs by arguing that a bilingual environment climaxes social collaboration practices in the teaching and learning of non-mother tongue languages. Teaching languages in this type of setting is vital for skills transfer, literacy development, and broadened language acquisition (Lin, Meng-Ying, Ramirez, Shade & Geva, 2012). Learning bilingual languages is perceived by Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz (2005) to be an essential strategy as it exposes learners to speakers of varying languages, thereby improving literacy skills. For teachers exposed to this form of teaching environment, they opt for the code-switching strategy to help align a new language to be learned (Turnbull & Dailey-O’Cain, 2009).

Our inquiry intended to determine code-switching encounters on language development by Secondary School English language teachers as engaging with learners from South African rainbow nation with its linguistic diversities. Suck (2017) agrees that there are features likely to impact behavior traits in learning an unfamiliar language, inclusive of bilingual language competencies coupled with sociolinguistics. English teachers seem to be faced with a great challenge as learners’ home language in the community studied differs from the English language used as a medium of learning. As authors of this manuscript, we, therefore, premise this current inquiry on the supposition that as a resource for language development, code-switching in diverse classrooms is a necessity.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

Underpinning this study is the perspective on bilingual development. As knowledge for this cohort of people ranges in-between two languages, it has been observed that two distinct languages depend on each other to be regarded as resourceful. This approach allows such bilingual speakers to share information as they switch between the two languages (Malakoff & Hakuta,

1991). In aligning with the current study, we observed that this was the same exercise in the investigated sites, as teachers seemed to resort to switching to learners' home language whenever new or difficult words were to be unpacked (Martinez, Navarro-Torres & Dussias, 2020). Hence, learners from diverse communities began to actively engage during English language learning sessions (Martinez, 2010; Gort, 2008).

### **3. Methodology**

In this section, we outline the adhered to research procedures. For this qualitative inquiry five Secondary School, English language teachers were randomly selected to represent the larger group as using the entire group was generally not feasible. The scope of this inquiry was narrowed down to these identified teachers as it could not be practical for researchers to nominate all English language teachers from the Eastern Cape Education District where schools were located. Moreover, this investigation was undertaken for approximately five months. The randomly selected participants offered the English language in grades ranging from eight to ten. As such, authors of this manuscript could not generalize findings hence participants emanated only from a few schools of the entire district. The envisaged objective of this paper was to identify whether code-switching logistics had any significant contribution towards the development of the English language for learners who had a different home language and more so that schools were noted to have enrolled a series of bilingual learners.

We thereby collected data through semi-structured interviews. As a way of addressing how English language teachers perceived the code-switching approach on the development of a language, we embarked on using the interpretive approach as a way of obtaining greater scope on the case under investigation (Fisher, 2003, Maree, 2008).

As we used semi-structured interviews as a way to allow participants to engage with open-ended responses, we made it a point that we focus on how these teachers interpreted and tabled their understandings of the challenges they encountered when handling bilingual classrooms. During the interviews, we allowed participants to share with us their human experiences with regards to their social context of being teachers in such diverse environments (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). As we continued engaging with these language teachers, we could then perceive some authenticity as we were listening to them making us understand the types of classrooms they handled. Without using this interpretive approach, we could have made a blunder to separate these

teachers from their knowledge of the content being investigated. As such, we could sense a vibrant relation between the subject investigated and us as investigators (Collins, 2010).

Through constructing logic of the numerous interpretations and clarifications, as researchers, we then grouped data into various categories and classifications (Fick, 2015). Applying this approach proved to be a valuable method for this investigation as it established a resolute theory bound by the case studied.

## **4. Findings**

Responses from all teachers who were participants in this inquiry were equated by the researchers, as a way of deducing similarities. As data was presented then analyzed, emerging themes were identified (Fick, 2015). As per the findings revealed, we deduce that using code-switching can be a worthwhile approach to be used in bilingual classrooms. In the same vein, we propose taking into cognizance that codeswitching variances not only influence language capabilities, however, have also been observed to intercede in between some aspects of intellect and language (Kroff et al., 2018; Beatty-Martínez et al., 2019). Argued below are the themes that emerged: professional development logistics, policy-making, and limited interaction in the English language as a teaching and learning medium.

### **4.1. Professional Development Logistics**

With regards to capacitation, participants reported limited or no training whatsoever on how to handle classes with learners whose home language differed from the language of instruction. For this divulged theme one participant responded: The Department of Education ensure they invite teachers to several training and workshops across each year, nevertheless, amongst items for training, there has never been a consideration to include strategies to be put into practice to assist at handling classes with a separate home language as most of the schools around where I teach adopted using the English language as a medium of instruction. Further than that, the prescribed CAPS documents require us as teachers to conduct teaching and learning processes in an English medium for most subjects underpinning the curriculum at the secondary schooling level. To curb the predicament, they found themselves in, teachers designed their strategies of translating some English words, terms, or phrases, into isiXhosa (Kieffer, 2012). These teachers reported on spending the most time on translations, code-switching, and assisting learners to

interact with bilingual dictionaries, thus resuming time for engaging with the actual content of the lesson learned (Lucas, 2011).

Nevertheless, observance of practicing code-switching strategy seemed to bear constructive fruits as learners in such classrooms showed some indications to develop a love for the English language. Although at first teachers were bothered by the not-so-convincing pace during their English teaching and learning sessions, they were somehow pleased to observe emerging signs of language development among learners (Debreli & Oyman, 2015). We, therefore, opine that professional development in varying teaching and learning strategies for bilingual communities be considered as of uppermost importance by the language subject advisers. Mpahla & Makena (2020) are of the same view that lack or limited professional development in specified subject aspects is likely to cast light on poor performance by learners and achievement levels as most subjects studied are underpinned by the English language medium.

#### **4.2. Policy Making**

As the previous finding divulged issues on non-training nor proper handling of bilingual classrooms where code-switching occurs, this leads us as authors of this manuscript to reveal that we found some essence for policymakers to take into cognizance bilingual realities. As participants were asked to share some experiences about the individual school designed language policies, one participant responded: As we make it a practice to refine all policies, it has never dawned to us as language teachers that we voice out our opinions to include a clause on bilingual realities versus code-switching. Redesigning supply policies about language learning can stimulate positivism towards multilingual learning.

Curriculum designers are faced with the huge task of putting more emphasis on the appropriate improvement of teaching and language learning resources (Markus, 2012). As such, the curriculum should be designed such that it allows some flexibility of switching languages, hence the promotion of teaching some subjects in vernacular languages. This finding is in line with the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for learning and teaching in South African schools as this policy advocates for transforming the curriculum previously bestowed upon the inhabitants, thereby granting permission for home language teaching in specified grades (Government Publications, 2014).

### **4.3. Limited Interaction in the English Language as a Teaching and Learning Medium**

Another finding was centered around limited communication in the English language between learners and teachers. Learners were observed to be experiencing difficulties communicating with their teachers in instances when code-switching was prohibited (Tzagari & Diakou, 2015; Neokleous, 2017). Makena (2020) and Kieffer (2012) had similar findings through observing that teaching an unfamiliar language needs an English language teacher to engage in a wide range of strategies that would enhance an additional language learned. As such, English language teachers argued that as they normally resort to translating in isiXhosa, this being learners' home language, they noticed conducive learning environments as learners could easily engage and debate issues without displaying attitudes relating to shyness and nervousness. On the other hand, when learners begin to perform well in English as a subject underpinned in the prescribed curriculum, as well as other subjects hence, learned in the English medium, teachers are then saved from accounting for below the expected average learner performance (Geva & Massey-Garrison, 2013).

## **5. Conclusion**

As articulated in the discussions above, not embarking on using the only prescribed language of teaching and learning, in this case, the medium in question being the English language, proved as an approach that teachers can utilize towards English language enhancement. It stemmed out from the discussions that for teachers who embarked on a code-switching strategy in their bilingual classrooms, learners indicated greater acquisition of the English language which is not their home language. As authors we, therefore, support the infusion of home languages to enhance learning, thus catering to learners from diverse linguistic constituencies. From our study, it is established that teachers interviewed was non-conflicting with isiXhosa and English both regarded as instruction languages. In this regard, proposed future studies might consider investigating a wide range of schools across various Education Districts as well as engaging the department officials as participants to discuss production logistics of well-trained language teachers for capacitation at handling bilingual or multicultural classes.

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