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The Role of Code-Switching in Enhancing Learners' Understanding of Social Sciences in the Mopani East District, Lulekani Circuit, Limpopo Province, South Africa

Amon Nkuna¹, Habasisa Molise², Mapule Segooa³

Abstract

This qualitative case study examines the impact of code-switching on learners' understanding of Social Sciences concepts in Grade 7 classrooms in the rural Mopani East District of Limpopo Province, South Africa. Rooted in the interpretivist paradigm, the study aims to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of both teachers and learners concerning the use of code-switching during classroom instruction. A case study focusing on the role of code-switching was conducted, guided by grounded theory. Participants were intentionally selected to take part in the study, consisting of 4 social sciences educators and 4 Grade 7 learners from a class of 44 learners and 9 educators. Each group included 8 participants. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews and observations. All data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The results showed that code-switching acts as a bridge connecting learners who felt disconnected from their teachers in the classroom due to language barriers. Additionally, the findings indicated that code-switching helps learners become more engaged during lessons. The researcher concluded that code-switching is vital in content subjects as it boosts learners' participation in class. The study recommends that the school, along with the SGB and community, consider the needs of the school when developing language policies. Finally, educators should practice code-switching when appropriate during lessons.

Keywords: Code-Switching, Social Sciences, Proficiency, Translation, Quality Teaching.

Introduction

Grade 7 learners continue to encounter significant challenges in mastering Social Sciences concepts, particularly when it comes to definitions and extended writing tasks. In formative assessments such as controlled tests, many learners do not perform well in questions that require precise definitions, often leaving blank spaces where responses are expected. Similarly, when tasked with writing longer answers worth higher marks, learners frequently struggle to produce meaningful paragraphs. In many instances, learners copy unrelated text from sources simply to avoid leaving blank spaces on the test paper, indicating both a lack of comprehension and a strategy to conceal their difficulties from teachers. This challenge is particularly concerning because the concepts learners fail to define are those already taught in class, suggesting a gap between classroom instruction and learners' ability to make sense of explanations or study material.

A central factor contributing to this difficulty is learners' limited proficiency in English. Many learners are unable to speak confidently, engage in classroom dialogue, or fully grasp the conceptual demands of Social Sciences. In such contexts, code-switching becomes a useful

¹ Department of Education Studies, University of Limpopo, Email: vincent.molise@ul.ac.za

² Department of Education Studies, University of Limpopo, Email: vincent.molise@ul.ac.za

³ Department of Education Studies, University of Limpopo, Email: vincent.molise@ul.ac.za



pedagogical strategy, as it allows educators to alternate between English and learners' home languages to enhance comprehension. Although code-switching is sometimes confused with translation, the two are distinct. MacSwan and Christian (2020) describe code-switching as language mixing that occurs either within sentences or between sentences, highlighting its long-standing role in the study of bilingualism since the 1950s. Translation, by contrast, involves rendering spoken or written words from one language into another without altering the intended meaning. Mar (2023) traces the term "translation" to its Latin roots, meaning "to carry across," and defines it as the interpretation of one language through another. While translation focuses on preserving meaning across languages, code-switching functions as a dynamic and immediate classroom tool for meaning-making, involving both intra-sentential and inter-sentential alterations (Novianti & Said, 2021).

In the classroom setting, code-switching plays a crucial role in facilitating communication between teachers and learners. Altun (2021) explains that classroom code-switching occurs when either teachers or learners use more than one language in school interactions. This includes instances where language is mixed within or after sentences but still serves the same communicative purpose. Olivera (2021) further stresses that effective code-switching requires fluency in both languages, underscoring that it is not a skill available to all speakers. According to Muysken (2020), code-switching occurs not only between English and home languages but also among indigenous languages. In Botswana, Jones (2023) reports that some communities have pushed for the recognition of multiple indigenous languages in the public domain to ensure inclusive participation without reliance on interpreters. However, these requests were denied due to concerns about the excessive burden on schools to accommodate multiple languages, which conflicted with the national language policy (Jones, 2023).

Despite its relevance, there is limited research on code-switching within the South African education context, particularly in Social Sciences classrooms in Mopani East District, Limpopo Province. Learners in this district face persistent difficulties in reading for meaning and comprehending content subjects, which negatively affects their performance in summative assessments. The present study seeks to fill this gap by examining the role of code-switching as a strategy to enhance learners' understanding of Social Sciences concepts. Practically, the study aims to inform educators about how code-switching can be integrated into content subjects to improve learner engagement and performance. Theoretically, it underscores the importance of aligning school language policies with learners' needs to ensure equitable learning opportunities. The purpose of the study is therefore to encourage schools to adopt flexible language practices that allow educators to use code-switching where learners struggle with comprehension, particularly with complex concepts or terminology. This approach not only fosters better understanding but also empowers learners to participate actively in lessons. Beyond the school, the study contributes to the wider educational discourse on code-switching, offering insights that can benefit researchers and community members alike. The research specifically focuses on the Mopani East District, Lulekani Circuit, with the aim of investigating the extent to which code-switching enhances learners' understanding of Social Sciences concepts and assists in addressing broader concerns highlighted in the Minister of Basic Education's (2023) diagnostic report, which emphasized poor learner performance in content subjects. Based on the above, this study poses the following research questions:

- Does code-switching enhance learners' understanding in content subjects such as Social Sciences?

- To what extent would Code Switching improve learners' understanding of Social Sciences Concepts?
- Under what circumstances could code-switching be applied in the classroom?

Literature review

Code switching as a concept

Sinaga and Hutahaean (2020) state that code switching refers to the use of two dialects' code by either educators or learners at school. From the given explanations above, code switching can also be explained as a language mixing that happens between speakers of two or more dialects. Sinaga and Hutahaean's description of code switching is equivalent to defining code switching as a communicative strategy used in different settings during formal or informal occasions using two or more languages to ensure a smooth transition of dialogue. The work of Goodman and Tastanbek (2021) divulges that code switching occurs between two languages, and these languages should be used in the same sentence to make the discussion flow. In addition, the explanation above signifies that in any code-switching practice, there must be at least two languages that are in use, this can be either within a sentence or at the end of the in the same conversation where speakers are mixing these languages to ensure that the dialog does not break (Muthusamy, Muniandy, Kandasam, Hussin, Subramaniam & Farashaiyan, 2020). In a class situation, this could mean that the teacher, together with the learners, would be using code switching to confirm that all pupils are at the same level in terms of making sense of what the teacher is presenting to them using languages that they understand.

Situation in which teachers and learners could apply CS

Changing topic

Topic switch occurs when the topic necessitates a switch; this act can be done at the beginning of the lesson, where the teacher and learners are brainstorming (Muysken, 2020). A good example of a topic switch is when a teacher is giving grammar instruction, which learners should take into consideration when constructing sentences. In this instance, the teacher switches from LoLT into the home language to ensure that pupils have comprehended the language rules.

Maintaining order in class

Again, code-switching is practiced by educators to stipulate how they feel and to create a bond with learners, and express a sense of inclusion and connection. If it happens that some learners face some emotional challenges, it can be at home or an incident that took place in the class and ended up creating tension between learners, the teacher can be forced to switch to express his or her emotions about how he or she feels. Also, the teacher switches to the home language to ensure that learners understand the content, make sense of the material used during the lesson, and to make sure that the teacher and the learners are at the same level of understanding. Furthermore, the teacher can also change languages when giving instructions to ensure that all learners understand them and can be able to execute any task given in the classroom or as homework by just following the explained instructions (Sinaga and Hutahaean, 2020)

Theoretical framework

This study used grounded theory. Grounded theory is defined by Makri and Neely (2021) as a research method concerned with the generation of a theory that is grounded in data, which has been systematically gathered using interviews and observations, and the data should have been analysed. Deering and Williams (2024) indicate that this theory permits the researcher to discover things such as social relationships and behaviours of groups known as social processes. Grounded

theory is further explained as the generation of a theoretical model through the experience of observing a study population and developing a reasonable analysis of their speech and behaviour. This theory's goal is to rationalise how and why an event occurs or how and why people behave in a certain way, which can be in a general sense or a school setting. Luo, He, and Li (2024) say that by observing the population, a researcher using grounded theory can then formulate a theory to explain the phenomena of interest underscored by participants. Guided by this theory, the researcher was able to study the responses of sampled participants to acquire new theories based on the collection and scrutiny of real data and discuss the ideas that emerged from data as more data was gathered and appraised. Moreover, Urquhart (2022) indicates that it is crucial to signify that grounded theory is different from the traditional scientific model of research, where the researcher chooses an existing theoretical framework, develops hypotheses derived from that framework, and only then can the researcher collect data to assess the validity of the hypotheses. The researcher was very theoretically sensitive by doing an in-depth reading of many kinds of literature to be able to develop a theory that is grounded and cohesive.

Methodology

In this study, the researcher used a qualitative methodological approach, which Borgstede and Scholz (2021) explain as a type of research approach that investigates and offers immersed insights into real-world problems. Taherdoost (2022) continues to elucidate the qualitative research approach as one that encompasses collecting and analysing non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences of humans. Taherdoost further outlines that the qualitative research approach can be used to collect in-depth perceptions of a problem or generate new ideas for a study. Butler (2023) says that qualitative research is also an ideal approach to gather participants' experiences, perceptions, and behaviour. In a qualitative approach, data is not usually experimental; hence, it is not assessed mathematically. Instead, the data is analysed by observing, classifying, comparing, and evaluating it. The researcher used a qualitative research approach to find out teachers' and learners' perceptions about the use of code-switching in Social Sciences classes to promote understanding of concepts (Gladovic, Tai & Dawson, 2022).

Research paradigm

This study employed the interpretivism paradigm. According to Nickerson (2024), a paradigm is a collection of concepts and viewpoints that offer a framework or model that a researcher can adhere to. A paradigm defines existing knowledge, the nature of the subject to be studied, suitable research techniques, and the proper analysis and interpretation of data. Additionally, Khatri (2020) characterises an interpretivism paradigm as a social science method that maintains that decoding the meaning of the evidence that may be gathered surrounding a phenomenon requires an understanding of the beliefs, motives, and reasoning of persons in a social environment.

3.4. Research design

An explanatory design, as its name suggests, was used to report the findings about the effectiveness of code-switching in promoting learners' understanding of Social Sciences concepts in Mopani East District. The study used a case study that took an explanatory form; hence, it was referred to as an explanatory case study. According to Headley and Plano Clark (2020), a case study research design in a qualitative approach is a detailed examination of a specific subject, such as a person, group, place, event, organisation, or phenomenon. Headley and Plano Clark claim that this is an appropriate research design that is superior to gain concrete, background, and in-depth knowledge about a specific real-world subject.

Research Site

This study took place at Mopani East District, Lulekani Circuit, Limpopo Province, South Africa.

The participants were selected from a primary school which is located in a deep rural area of Ba-Phalaborwa Municipality, where the majority of learners are not proficient in speaking English. The school is surrounded by farms where most of the learners admire working on when they grow up.

Sampling

The participants of this study consisted of 4 social sciences educators and 4 Grade 7 learners who were sampled from the class of 44 learners and 9 educators. The experiment and control groups consisted of 8 participants respectively. Sampling implies choosing a representative group from a larger population; hence, selecting the right sampling approach to gather representative and appropriate data is essential. A purposive sampling method, which is explained by Hossan, Dato'Mansor, and Jaharuddin (2023) as a method that is used to select respondents who are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information, was used to select learners and educators to take part in the research.

Data collection

This study used semi-structured interviews and non-participant classroom observations within an interpretivist case study framework. Interviews are valuable for exploring participants' experiences and practices (Knott, Rao, & Summers, 2022). Of the three interview types, the semi-structured format was selected for its balance of flexibility and structure (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Magaldi and Berler (2020) add that it allows participants to respond in their own words and language, enhancing authenticity. In this study, face-to-face interviews with teachers and learners were conducted using a guide, scheduled during breaks and after school. Complementing this, classroom observations were undertaken to capture authentic teaching and learning practices. Kumar and Sharma (2023) describe observation as systematically recording behaviours in real time, while Uwamusi and Ajisebiyawo (2023) argue it reduces bias by documenting events as they occur. Power and Velez (2020) highlight its usefulness in studying complex issues such as multilingual practices, and Dzwigol and Barosz (2020) emphasise its role in bridging gaps between reported and actual practices. Together, interviews and observations enriched findings, offering a holistic understanding of how code-switching supports learners' comprehension of Social Sciences concepts.

Data analysis

The data collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were analysed using thematic analysis, which was applied to arrange, scrutinize, and present findings systematically. Thematic analysis is widely recognised as a flexible method for interpreting qualitative data by identifying themes and patterns of meaning. Dawadi (2020) defines it as a technique that involves examining data sets to locate recurring ideas and describes it as a reflexive process shaped by the researcher's subjective experience. Braun and Clarke (2023) highlight its appropriateness when the aim is to understand participants' experiences, behaviours, and perspectives. Given that this study generated rich accounts from teachers and learners, thematic analysis was considered suitable for capturing nuanced meanings. The researcher coded and recorded data from interviews and observations separately to ensure accuracy. Guided by grounded theory, coding served as the first step, enabling the systematic organisation of data and helping to verify whether the challenges outlined in the problem statement were evident in participants' responses. This process supported the refinement of understanding by grouping similar patterns together. As Caulfield (2022) explains, thematic analysis is often applied to interview transcripts to identify recurring ideas and common themes. In this study, it was used to meticulously examine responses, extract repeated patterns, and build coherent themes that

illustrate how code-switching shapes learners’ comprehension of Social Sciences concepts.

Findings

Table 1: Overview of findings on code-switching in social sciences classrooms

Theme	Category	Sub-Category	Description
1. Does code-switching enhance learners' understanding in content subjects such as Social Sciences?	Challenges in the classroom	Understanding concepts	Learners fail to grasp key concepts when lessons are conducted solely in English, especially abstract or subject-specific vocabulary.
		Use of English only	English-only instruction leads to frustration, passive participation, and low performance in assessments.
	Teachers' experiences	Teaching strategies	Teachers with experience in rural schools use code-switching to clarify complex ideas and ensure learners stay engaged.
2. To what extent would code-switching improve learners' understanding of Social Science concepts?	Learners' experiences	Understanding and participation	Learners confirm that code-switching improves comprehension and allows them to participate more actively and confidently in lessons.
		Academic impact	Conceptual clarity and retention
	Affective impact	Confidence and inclusion	Learners feel included and less afraid of making mistakes, enhancing

			motivation and engagement.
	Teachers' perspectives	Effective instruction	Teachers believe code-switching enables efficient content delivery, maintains lesson flow, and aids in scaffolding understanding for struggling learners.
	Learners' perspectives	Home language as a learning tool	Learners relate better when the home language is used alongside English, as it reflects their linguistic reality and community interactions.
3. Under what circumstances could code-switching be applied in the classroom?	Teaching and learning needs	Learner confusion	Code-switching is used when learners appear confused, cannot respond to questions, or show signs of misunderstanding.
		Clarifying difficult content	Teachers use code-switching to explain complex terms, instructions, or questions that are beyond learners' English proficiency level.
	Encouragement by teachers	Motivation to other educators	Teachers recommend code-switching as a valid pedagogical tool, especially in rural primary schools where English proficiency is generally low.
	Communication and consensus	Shared understanding	Code-switching fosters a shared understanding of concepts between

			teachers and learners, supporting both engagement and learning outcomes.
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	Teachers' experiences	Teaching strategies	Teachers with experience in rural schools use code-switching to clarify complex ideas and ensure learners stay engaged.

Does code-switching enhance learners' understanding in content subjects such as Social Sciences?

From what the researcher has observed in social sciences subjects in grade 7, it appears that code switching plays an enormous role in teaching and learning. In the classroom during the lesson, the majority of learners who cannot speak English fluently struggle to make interpretation of what has been written in their textbooks, the spoken information by the teacher, as well as speaking with their peers using LoLT. Some of them depend on language mixing, meaning if the teacher presents the lesson in English only without mixing it with Xitsonga, as the majority's home language, it means for that lesson, they could not grasp anything from the lesson. These results suggest that code switching is essential in primary school more special in rural areas.

a) The challenges of understanding concepts

On the first observation during a social science lesson for history, the teacher asked the learners to make a recap of what they have learnt the day before the teacher spoke in English. Out of 44 learners in the class, no one could rescue the teacher just to show that they had a lesson on the day in question. After a long silence, the same question was asked again, a few started whispering with an impression to give it a try, but it seems like they were not sure of what they were supposed to say related to the word recap. The teacher then asks them to tell him the interpretation of the recap. All of them asserted that they do not know.

b) Challenge of using English only during lessons

On the fourth observation, the researcher observed a lesson by a female teacher where she was

teaching geography, part of the social sciences. The greeting was in English as usual, and a new topic was introduced. Learners were listening very attentively, as there was no one who was attempting to do something that was not uncalled for. The teacher continues facilitating the lesson using LoLT only. Learners were responding by saying “yes,” and it was as if all of them were understanding what the teacher was presenting, until there was a time of assessment. As they were writing the activity majority of learners looked frustrated as if they were not in the class while the teacher was teaching. The teacher then asked them if they were finishing, and they said “no”.

She then prob with their answer, the response was, “ma’am, we did not understand”. That was evident as the majority of them only copied the questions and left blank spaces where they were supposed to provide answers. These results suggest that learners encounter challenges when it comes to understanding written and spoken information. As such, they perform poorly in class activities, tests, and examinations, as well as speaking. It was also clear that most of the learners did not understand the questions. Code switching is the only hope in the classes that the researcher has visited to collect data.

c) Teachers’ experiences with code switching

The experiences that teachers have about code switching are of great importance in addressing the theme that has been formulated above. Teachers who have been working for more than ten years show tolerance when it comes to code switching during the lessons. Educator 4, who is the male DH in the school, acknowledges that he does practice code switching to ensure that the majority of learners in his class make sense of what he is teaching in his lessons. Below is his response to support the notion that has been presented above.

“Yes, I do change languages when teaching social sciences, in a situation where learners struggle to make sense of my lesson or struggle with some.”

This response indicates that code switching is not something new to Educator 4, as he has been applying it in his lessons for years now. His response also matches what the researcher has observed during the lesson on day 3 of observation. Educator 1 shared her experience, too, which is more similar to that of Educator 2. Educator 2 uttered:

“Yes, I do code-switch when teaching social science in both geography and history, as this saves me time when presenting my lesson.”

The above experience is shared by educator 2, who believes that code switching saves time and allows the flow of teaching during lessons. Below, I have presented the response by educator 1, which shares the same thought as educator 2.

“As an educator, I do code switching more often in the classroom because it helps learners quickly understand their material and what I am teaching about.”

Their sentiments reveal that code switching is very effective, particularly in social sciences. The participants believe that applying code switching assists in numerous ways that including getting learners involved during the lesson. Also, they believe code switching saves time. For example, in a case where learners take time to grasp information, the teacher uses code-switching to hasten their understanding, and that takes a short period. Educator 3 shares the most prominent inside that underpin the effectiveness of code switching when she states that:

“Yes, I do code-switch when teaching more especially when teaching the geography part. It brings a thorough and clear understanding to learners for effective learning.”

This response indicates that most of the teachers know about the effectiveness of code switching; hence, many of them, whether directly or indirectly, use code switching to better learners’

understanding and for learning to take place. These results suggest that code switching is very important and helpful in a situation where learners are faced with the challenge of not being able to make sense of the material presented to them. The responses imply that code switching improves teaching and learning in the classroom.

d) Learners' experiences with code switching

In the previous theme, the researcher dealt with what educators have experienced with regard to code switching in content subjects. In this section, the presentation is about learners' experiences with code switching. The responses shared were from the sampled learners in the study. The learner's responses to a greater degree support what the educator shared about their experiences. This shows the consistency and trustworthiness of the educators in their responses. Learner A shares her view of code switching by saying:

“Yes, my teacher does apply code switching when he realizes that we do not know some of the English words that are difficult.”

The response of learner A confirms that code switching is not a monster, and it is used almost every day when there is a need to do so. What is interesting about the response of learner A is that it also reveals that code switching is not something that teachers just think of doing; instead, there must be a need to code switch. According to the response of Learner A, the practice of code switching improves learners' understanding and makes the lesson flow. Furthermore, learners B, C, and D also acknowledge that the practice of code switching, especially in a situation where they struggle to understand what the teacher is presenting during the lesson.

“Yes, when we do not understand exactly what Sir wants us to do, he mixes English with Xitsonga, so we understand quickly.”

This response reveals that learners grasp the meanings quickly in social sciences when LoLT is used interchangeably with learners' home language. As I have mentioned in the interpretation of the observation results, learners become more active during the lessons only when they are afforded an opportunity to express themselves in their home language. These results imply that code switching rescues them on words that appear to be difficult for them. All participants view code switching as their hero in the classroom during the lesson. These results suggest that skills in speaking and understanding English have an effect on code switching in social sciences classes. The majority of the learners code-switch as that is the only means that enables them to participate and become part of the lesson as the immediate recipient of the content. Though code switching might have its negativeness in terms of learners' competency when compared to other learners who use English only in their schools, in the case of the sampled school, code switching is the only way to ensure teaching and learning take place.

To what extent would Code Switching improve learners' understanding of Social science concepts?

In this theme, the researcher presents the extent to which code switching improves learners' understanding of concepts in social science at Mopani East District, Limpopo Province, South Africa. The researcher noted that the role that code switching plays in the classroom is more significant in rural areas where the majority of learners are not proficient in English. It is also important to state that code switching does not resemble incompetence; it is just another way of making learners learn and become part of the lesson, particularly in primary school. If applied accordingly, code switching has the potential to lift to a greater extent those who take time to understand to the same level as those who quickly comprehend concepts. Also, it should be clarified that not all learners need this form of scaffolding, but when applied, it puts them at more

advantage to have a deeper understanding of the lesson. As I have stated above, code switching does not benefit learners only; instead, it also helps educators to connect with their learners during the lesson. This connection enables them to reach a common goal, which is to ensure that the lesson's objectives are met and well-received. The researcher also noted that after code switching, learners appear to be following as the lesson unfolds, and at the end, they can perform excellently in class activities. These results suggest that code switching can be used as a scaffold to uplift learners' potential for understanding social science concepts.

a) Teachers' view

This section presents teachers' views on the degree to which code switching can play in social science classes. Educator 1 acknowledges that code switching can be very helpful when used acceptably. It should be considered that code switching is not translation; therefore, if the teacher code-switches with the aim to ensure learners' participation, that cannot be condemned as it does not replace LoLT. Educator 1 state:

“During the process of teaching and learning, when I code switch, the lesson content is clearly explained to the learners, and they can quickly understand the meaning of the words.”

The response above supports what the researcher has presented in the observation section above. This common perception reveals the positive impact of code switching.

Educator 2 gives his ideas, guided by the years of experience applying code switching during his lessons. He said:

“I have noticed that code switching is effective in teaching and learning. It enhances a good understanding of content, and it makes learning easier.”

This remarkable experience reveals the extent to which code switching can be in improving learners' understanding and the facilitation of the lesson. Educator 3 also shares the same view as the rest of the sampled educators in the study. She outlines her view by saying:

“Learners tend to get more involved in the lesson when I code switch. The majority of them have a clear understanding of the concepts that I explain to them, and it is easy for them to apply my lessons in real situations.”

The response of educator 3 is supported by educator 4 when he said:

“What I have noticed during switching English with Xitsonga is that learners become more active during a lesson. Even those who struggle to speak English become active participants.”

These responses marry each other in the sense that they share the same sentiments. This suggests that code switching is a game changer in content subjects more special when learners are struggling with making sense of the word within a sentence in the same speech.

b) Learners' opinion

This section presents the learners' view with regard to code switching. The response presented is about the degree to which code-switching helps them to enrich their comprehensive understanding of concepts and involvement in the class during the lessons. Learner A revealed that code switching plays an important role in her learning and in being an active participant in the classroom during the lessons. Below is her view regarding code switching:

“When the teacher does code switching, it makes me understand what the teacher is about very fast. Also, it makes me understand and answer questions without being afraid of answering wrongly.”

Learner A made it clear that code switching is her impactful tool that enables her to understand what the teacher is teaching very quickly. She further indicates that code switching helps her to understand questions and be able to answer them correctly with confidence. Learner B gives a very insightful argument, which is very important to note. Learner B said:

“When the teacher does code switching, we understand what the teacher is teaching very fast because the language that the teacher switches to is our home language, which we understand very well.”

The interesting part about learner B’s opinion is that he brought the issue of language background, which I have touched on in passing, to say these learners speak their home language at home with their families, friends, and they also interact with their community members with Xitsonga as their home language. Therefore, when they are at school, they partially engage in English only in special events such as talking with their English teacher in the classroom and with the principal when visiting the office. As such, in their learning, they relate much when LoLT is mixed with their home language, and that improves their understanding.

Learner C and B share a common understanding about the extent to which code switching helps them in their learning. Because of the similarities in both views, the researcher presented the opinion of learner C. Learner C uttered:

“In class, the teacher uses English and Xitsonga when we don’t understand. When he does that, I understand very fast because the terms or the concepts that are difficult to understand are explained in my home language, so it becomes easy to understand.”

The response of learner C indicates that the use of code switching in the class is of greater importance. Learners who are not good at English through code also feel part of the lesson and eventually become active participants. Code switching goes to an extent of advancing learners’ confidence. These results suggest that learners should be allowed to express themselves in English, mixing it with their home language, as that makes them feel included during the lessons.

Under what circumstances could code-switching be applied in the classroom?

a) Learners struggle to understand the teacher

Reflecting on the fourth observation that the researcher has observed during the lesson, in most instances, code switching was applied when the teacher realized that learners looked frustrated as the lesson unfolded. At times, the teacher would ask them if they understood, and they would say “yes”, but when they were asked to explain what they had understood majority would fail. These results indicate that code switching should be applied when learners struggle to understand certain concepts and when there is a need to make clarification. Lastly, code switching can also be applied when answering questions that appear to be complicated to learners to better their understanding.

b) Would you encourage code switching

Though it appears that all sampled educators encourage code switching, each participant gave their reasons. This section presents the reasons why code switching should be encouraged in other content subjects. Educator 1 shared her reason by saying:

“Yes, because when you code switch, it enables both the teacher and the learners to have a common understanding of the concepts.”

Educator 1 is of the view that code switching enables both the teacher and the learners to reach the same consensus about the meaning of a certain word. In addition, Educator 4 gives his reason behind being motivated to encourage other educators to practice code switching when a need arises. Educator 4 stated:

“Yes, because code switching makes learners actively take part during the lesson. Again, most learners find it easy to answer most of the questions in their home language at the primary school level.

Looking at the responses of both teachers, there is tangible evidence of code switching, which cannot be avoided. Code switching plays an important role in content subjects in enabling

346 *The Role of Code-Switching in Enhancing Learners' Understanding of*
learners to take part during lessons.

Discussion of findings

This study explored how code-switching influences learners' comprehension and participation in Grade 7 Social Sciences classrooms in rural Limpopo, South Africa. The results reveal that code-switching, particularly between English and Xitsonga, is a pivotal pedagogical tool used by teachers to mediate learning and ensure inclusion of learners who struggle with the language of learning and teaching (LoLT).

Does code-switching enhance learners' understanding in content subjects such as Social Sciences?

The data that has been presented has been rigorously interpreted and revealed that code switching plays an important role in enhancing learners' understanding during the lesson in social sciences subjects. Through the use of code switching, both teachers and learners can connect as they share a common understanding of the lesson as it unfolds. Learners feel so comfortable speaking in English when they know they are not going to be penalised when they mix it with their home language. Most learners look so frustrated when the teacher presents the lesson in English only, but when English is mixed with Xitsonga majority of learners become more active and begin to engage with the teacher. When code switching during the lesson learning takes place, even those who take time to grasp information end up having acquired something at the end of the lesson. Learners' inability to interpret key terms such as "recap" and to meaningfully engage in assessments conducted solely in English demonstrates the cognitive barrier imposed by English-only instruction. According to Altun (2021), code-switching reinforces learning by making abstract or complex L2 (second language) concepts more accessible through L1 (first language) scaffolding. This aligns with Macswan & Faltis (2020), who argue that code-switching is not a deficiency strategy but a legitimate communicative practice that aids in meaning-making and deepens conceptual understanding. Classroom observations where learners failed to respond to questions or complete activities when lessons were delivered in English alone reflect the limitations of exclusive L2 instruction in rural settings. These findings correspond with Dzwigol & Barosz (2020) and Farid (2022), who emphasize the value of observational methods in capturing real-time learner engagement and instructional challenges. Observations here confirm what Fauziati et al. (2020) found: that learners often resort to code-switching or remain passive when instructional language exceeds their competence.

The degree to which Code Switching improves learners' understanding of Social Sciences Concepts.

Teachers described code-switching as a time-saving, effective strategy for ensuring learner understanding and engagement. Bonyadi et al. (2021) support this, noting that teachers perceive code-switching as essential for classroom management, conceptual clarity, and learner motivation. Atas & Sagin-Simsek (2021) further highlight that teacher-initiated code-switching serves both discourse and pedagogical functions, particularly when clarifying content, providing instructions, or managing classroom behavior. The experiences shared by your study's teachers underscore code-switching as a form of responsive teaching rather than as linguistic interference. Learners affirmed that they understood lessons better and participated more confidently when code-switching was employed. This resonates with Olivera (2021), who found that code-switching boosts learner confidence and reduces anxiety, especially in low-L2-proficiency environments. Additionally, Brdarevic-Celjo et al. (2024) report that attitudes towards code-switching are generally positive in multilingual contexts where the home language remains dominant. The learners' voices in your study indicate that code-switching bridges the cognitive

and linguistic gap between school and home language environments. The use of code switching helps learners to a greater extent. This includes being able to understand questions when writing activities, be it a test or an examination. Code switching lifts learners' confidence as it allows them to express themselves without being scared of what would happen if they ran out of words in English. Through the use of code-switching, learners can ask questions and make follow-ups for more clarity. Learners who are good at English it gives them more advantage in expressing themselves too without struggling. Code switching ensures that all learners are catered for regardless of their proficiency in English, which hinders them from being active participants in the classroom. These results indicated that it is through code switching that the teacher can be able to answer questions that appear to be complicated for learners in a manner that the majority of them would understand much better.

The circumstance that makes teachers apply code switching in the classroom.

The study found that teachers code-switched primarily when learners failed to understand instructions or appeared disengaged. This supports Temesgen & Hailu (2022), who identified a lack of comprehension as the most common motivation for teachers to code-switch. Assali (2023) further categorizes classroom code-switching into intra-sentential and inter-sentential types, both of which were observed in your study. These switching styles enable real-time clarification without disrupting the lesson flow. In rural contexts where Xitsonga dominates the learners' linguistic repertoire, switching to English exclusively may alienate learners. Goodman & Tastanbek (2021) advocate for a translanguaging lens that sees all of a learner's linguistic resources as valuable tools for learning. Your study's findings support this view, as learners identified code-switching as the only way they felt truly included in classroom discourse. The teachers revealed that code switching is applied when they realise that learners are struggling to make sense of the lesson or when there are concepts that they do not know their meaning of in their presentation. Code switching is also practiced when the teacher wants to emphasize an emphasis within the sentence or at the end of the sentence. In the learners' case, they code-switch when they want to put their opinion, but are not sure how to put it in English, when asking questions for clarity, and when giving answers.

Conclusion

The findings of this study affirm that code-switching is a critical pedagogical strategy in multilingual, rural classrooms where learners face significant barriers due to limited proficiency in the LoLT, which is English. In the Grade 7 Social Sciences classrooms observed, the strategic alternation between English and Xitsonga by teachers was found to enhance comprehension, promote participation, and support learner confidence. Learners who previously appeared disengaged or confused during English-only lessons became more responsive and demonstrated better understanding when their home language was incorporated. Teachers reported that code-switching allowed them to clarify abstract or complex concepts, save instructional time, and ensure that all learners could keep pace with the lesson. Far from being a sign of poor teaching or learner deficiency, code-switching emerged as an intentional and effective practice, especially when applied judiciously and in response to learners' needs. Furthermore, learners' testimonies highlighted that code-switching fostered a sense of inclusion and cultural relevance, which increased their motivation to learn. In this context, the use of learners' home language acts as both a cognitive scaffold and a social bridge between the school and the learners' communities. This study thus concludes that code-switching should not be dismissed as a linguistic compromise, but rather embraced as a linguistically and pedagogically responsive approach to education in diverse classrooms. In multilingual contexts such as rural South Africa, where

language remains a key barrier to equitable education, supporting the informed use of code-switching is essential to achieving inclusive and meaningful learning. Based on these findings, the study recommends that education policies support context-sensitive language practices and that teacher training programmes incorporate modules on multilingual pedagogies. Further research is encouraged to examine the long-term academic benefits of code-switching across different content subjects and educational settings.

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- 350 *The Role of Code-Switching in Enhancing Learners' Understanding of*
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