



CLASSROOM LINGUISTIC PRACTICES AND THE LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION QUESTION IN KENYA

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Abstract:

This study explores the linguistic practices used in Comprehensive Schools in Kenya and examines the extent to which the official English-medium policy reflects the linguistic realities of teachers and learners. The study adopted a qualitative ethnographic design that involved classroom observations of 72 lessons from six subject areas, focus group discussions with teachers and students and document analysis in rural, peri-urban and urban public Comprehensive Schools. The results reveal a discrepancy between policy and practice: official policy requires that English be the sole language of instruction, but only 15% of observed lessons used English exclusively. Most (79%) involved deliberate switching between English and Kiswahili, with 6% using mother tongue languages. Code-switching had varied pedagogical roles: clarifying complex ideas, bridging vocabulary gaps, reducing language anxiety, emphasizing critical information, catering to different proficiency levels, and assisting in classroom management. Teachers employed three types of code-switching – inter-sentential, intra-sentential and tag switching – strategically in different subjects and contexts. The study demonstrates that code-switching is sophisticated communicative competence and culturally responsive pedagogy, not a linguistic deficiency. The findings indicate that the education language policy in Kenya needs to be reviewed to allow strategic code-switching as pedagogical scaffolding that supports rather than undermines English language acquisition, given the multilingual realities in Kenya. The study contributes to the scholarly debate on translanguaging in postcolonial African contexts and has practical implications for policy reform, teacher education and curriculum development.

Keywords: language of instruction, multilingual education, translanguaging and code-switching

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1. Introduction

Language of instruction refers to the medium through which curriculum content is communicated, assessed, and understood by learners in educational settings (UNESCO, 2003). Globally, the choice of instructional language is anchored in educational, cognitive, cultural, and socio-economic considerations that reflect the critical role language plays in facilitating learning and promoting equity (UNESCO, 2023). Research has consistently shown that learners acquire literacy and foundational skills more effectively when taught in a language they understand well, especially in early schooling – a principle known as “*mother tongue-based multilingual education*” (Ball, 2011; Benson, 2017). Policy-making in countries such as Finland, Ethiopia and New Zealand has been successful in emphasizing initial instruction in local or national languages before the gradual addition of second or foreign languages to improve learning and bilingual competence. In multilingual contexts, language of instruction is particularly important as it has implications for both access to education and the efficacy of learning. When instruction is offered in a language which the learner knows, the chances of active participation of the learner, easy understanding of the concepts and better academic performance increase (Benson, 2004). Yet many education systems face the challenge of balancing local linguistic realities with global competitiveness, particularly where international languages such as English or French are perceived as gateways to higher education, global trade, and economic mobility (Ouane & Glanz, 2011).

Kenya is a case in point for this complexity, with a colonial past that made English the official language and a linguistic map composed of over 40 indigenous languages – a map which is inherently multilingual and layered. The current language of instruction policy, as stated in the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (BECF) of 2017 and Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005, provides that the mother tongue or the language of the catchment area should be used in lower primary (Grades 1-3), and English becomes the main medium of instruction from Grade 4 to university level (Republic of Kenya, 2017). In 2017, the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) was introduced, and it emphasizes the importance of using the home languages of learners at an early stage of education to develop the fundamental skills before developing competence in English and Kiswahili, Kenya’s two official languages. By the time learners are in secondary school, they are supposed to be taught in English for all subjects. The policy is entrenched in the colonial legacy, the goals of national integration, and the economic value of English as a global lingua franca. However, secondary school classrooms are found in multilingual communities whose linguistic repertoires include indigenous languages, Sheng (an urban youth vernacular), Kiswahili and different levels of English proficiency on the part of both learners and teachers. There is a tension between official policy expectations and the lived linguistic realities of classroom practice.

1.1 Problem Statement

The policy mandate for English as the medium of instruction in Kenyan Comprehensive Schools is clear, but the alignment between policy and actual practice in the classroom is

under-explored and problematic. English is an additional language and not a home language for many learners. Their linguistic grounding is from mother tongues and Kiswahili. Comprehension, expression and conceptual clarity in English are heavily reliant on prior exposure and quality of instruction (Bunyi, 2008). English competence among teachers varies widely according to their educational backgrounds, professional preparation, and the linguistic environments of the schools in which they work. This results in a classroom situation where the language of instruction imposed is often not the linguistic tool which the learner brings to school. In rural and peri-urban areas, teachers habitually use code-switching, translation, paraphrasing and the strategic use of local languages to fill in gaps in understanding. This creates a gap between official policy – which aims to promote national unity, access to world knowledge and standardization of academic evaluation – and pedagogical realities, where authentic learning relies heavily on multilingual practices.

Every day, teachers in Mathematics, Biology, History and Literature in English walk a tightrope between policy and pedagogical necessity. Students may not have trouble with the computational procedures in Mathematics but with the English vocabulary of word problems. In Biology, the use of abstract terms such as “phototropism” and “osmoregulation” as the only presentation in English adds an extra cognitive load. In History and Literature, narrative comprehension and critical engagement often improve when teachers use Kiswahili or indigenous languages to link content to the cultural knowledge and lived experiences of the learners (Trudell & Piper, 2024). This tension raises fundamental questions about the efficacy, equity and sustainability of the English-only language of teaching policy in Comprehensive Schools. English is the central language of education and socio-economic mobility in Kenya, but how this policy is implemented in the classroom, and the pedagogical strategies used by teachers to achieve meaningful learning are inadequately documented. Understanding actual linguistic practices in Comprehensive School classrooms is key to informing evidence-based language policy reform.

1.2 Research Objectives

This study sought to investigate the language of instruction used in Comprehensive Schools in Kenya and how it aligns with official language of teaching policy. The study aimed to:

- 1) Establish which language of instruction is used in Comprehensive Schools in Kenya.
- 2) Examine how the language of instruction aligns with the linguistic realities of learners and teachers in the classrooms.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study have wide-reaching implications for language policy, pedagogy and educational equity in Kenya and other similar multilingual contexts. It provides empirical evidence about language use in real classrooms in Comprehensive schools, which can inform the development of more realistic and contextually sensitive

language-in-education policies. In contexts where linguistic diversity is the rule rather than the exception, policymakers require evidence-based understanding of how official language policies are enacted in classroom practice.

The study also adds to the current debate on the role of English in African educational settings. The findings reveal the cost of English-only policies when they are at odds with learners' linguistic resources and cognitive development. Grasping these dynamics is vital to the development of inclusive curricula that draw on, rather than suppress, learners' multilingual competencies.

Furthermore, the study provides practical implications for teacher education and professional development. The findings highlight teachers' multilingual strategies to support comprehension and engagement and may inform pre-service and in-service training programs in preparing teachers with pedagogical approaches based on translanguaging and code-switching as *legitimate instructional tools* rather than as *deviations from policy*.

Likewise, the study raises questions of educational equity. Language barriers are particularly acute for learners from rural, low-income and linguistically marginalized communities who have little or no exposure to English outside of school. This study contributes to the call for policies that reconcile global ambitions with local linguistic realities by documenting how language policies may inadvertently reinforce inequalities, so that all learners have equitable access to quality education.

It also contributes to the general academic debate on language of instruction in post-colonial African contexts - the interplay between inherited *colonial language policies* and *contemporary educational goals, linguistic diversity and cultural identity*. The findings are relevant beyond Kenya for other multilingual African countries with similar tensions between official language policies and classroom linguistic practices.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Language Acquisition Theories and Language of Teaching Policy

Kenya's language of instruction policy is based on theoretical foundations of language acquisition and learning that highlight the salient role of the first language (L1) in cognitive development and the staged acquisition of other languages. It is a useful background to the discussion of how policy intentions are realized in the classroom to understand these theoretical underpinnings. Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis provides a theoretical lens through which to understand Kenya's transitional bilingual approach. According to Cummins (2021), the second language (L2) proficiency is "*at its core, a function of first language development*". He suggests that skills such as reading comprehension, critical thinking and vocabulary are transferred from L1 to L2 when learners have a strong foundation in their mother tongue. This theory directly supports Kenya's policy of using the mother tongue or language of the catchment area in Grades 1-3 before transitioning to English from Grade 4 onwards (Republic of Kenya, 2017). The policy acknowledges that cognitive and literacy skills developed in the L1 create a robust

platform for subsequent English language learning, particularly in rural contexts where learners have minimal pre-school exposure to English.

Krashen's Input Hypothesis further clarifies the pedagogical rationale for mother tongue instruction in early schooling. Krashen's theory, as revisited in contemporary multilingual education scholarship (García & Kleyn, 2023), emphasizes that language acquisition occurs most effectively when learners receive comprehensible input—linguistic content slightly above their current proficiency level but within their zone of understanding. Premature immersion in a language that is unknown leads to cognitive overload, frustration and lower learning outcomes. Kenya's LOI policy is consistent with this theory in that it provides early primary instruction in a language that children understand, thus providing truly comprehensible input that supports both content mastery and foundational literacy. The gradual transition to English in upper primary grades theoretically allows for progressive L2 acquisition once basic literacy competencies are established.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory provides an important socio-cognitive dimension to understanding language learning in context. Modern applications of Vygotsky's framework (Lantolf & Poehner, 2024) claim that language development is inherently social, formed by interaction within one's cultural and linguistic environment. Language is a communication tool and a tool for cognitive scaffolding and knowledge construction. This sociocultural awareness is reflected in Kenya's recognition of "*the language of the catchment area*" as the initial medium of instruction, based on the understanding that learning is most meaningful when it is contextualized in learners' own linguistic and cultural experiences. In theory, this approach supports active participation in the classroom, identity formation and the integration of local knowledge systems in formal education.

UNESCO's Position on Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) is an international policy guidance that reinforces Kenya's LOI framework. UNESCO (2023) emphasizes the significance of using the mother tongue in the early years of schooling to teach children. They argue that children learn best when they understand what is being taught to them. The use of MTB-MLE has been shown to improve learning outcomes and to provide equitable access to education, particularly for marginalized communities. Kenya's policy prescription of L1 instruction in lower primary is consistent with UNESCO's recommendations and puts the country within a global movement towards linguistically responsive education that aims to bridge access gaps and uphold linguistic diversity.

2.2 Global and Local Dimensions of English

The policy on language of instruction in Kenya must be understood in the wider context of English as a lingua franca (ELF) - the use of English as a common communicative medium between speakers who do not share a native language. Colonial histories, economic globalization, and the ongoing expansion of Anglo-American cultural and political power (Jenkins & Leung, 2024; Baker & Sangiamchit, 2023) have made English the world language of education, commerce, diplomacy, technology, and media. English

is central to life in Kenya, connecting local multilingual realities with global communication networks and opportunities.

English is a vital gateway to global knowledge and academic mobility (Altbach & de Wit, 2023). Most theses, dissertations and teaching materials in Kenyan universities are written in English, consolidating the role of English in higher education and academic communication (Kiramba & Norris, 2023). Globally, high-impact journals in medicine, engineering, and the social sciences publish only in English. English literacy is therefore essential for access to research and contribution to international scholarly discourse (Rose & Galloway, 2024). English serves as the lingua franca of learning, integration, and professional networking among Kenyan students involved in international academic exchanges (Macaro, 2023).

English functions as the language of negotiation, documentation, and cross-border economic interaction in business and trade (Pennycook & Makoni, 2024). For instance, Kenya's horticultural exporters negotiate and arrange shipments with European distributors in English, and global E-commerce platforms operate in English by default, which enables Kenyan entrepreneurs to participate in international digital markets (Kiramba & Norris, 2023; Baker & Sangiamchit, 2023). The documents produced by financial institutions for investors and international agreements are in English to attract foreign capital and partnerships (Macaro, 2023). This economic dimension further feeds parental and societal perceptions of English as a language of opportunity and upward mobility, which in turn influence attitudes towards language of instruction policies.

Furthermore, English is the language of science, technology and innovation. English proficiency is closely linked to digital literacy as programming languages such as Python and Java rely on English syntax (Rose & Galloway, 2024). English is the primary language used in international patent applications, digital learning platforms like Coursera and YouTube, and technical documentation, making it the language of access to STEM knowledge and global technological engagement (Jenkins & Leung, 2024; Baker & Sangiamchit, 2023). In diplomacy and governance, Kenya's engagement with multilateral bodies such as the African Union, Commonwealth and United Nations is largely dependent on English, allowing for representation and engagement in international policymaking (Pennycook & Makoni, 2024). For multilingual societies like Kenya, this global dominance of English creates both opportunities and tensions. English proficiency opens doors to higher education, international careers and global participation, yet an exclusive focus on English as the medium of instruction risks marginalizing learners whose home languages differ substantially from English, posing barriers to understanding and reinforcing educational inequality (Trudell & Piper, 2024). What Kenya's education system needs to do is to strike the right balance between the evident instrumental value of English and the cognitive, cultural and pedagogical benefits of mother tongue instruction.

2.3 Sociolinguistic Setting in Kenya

Multilingualism, the ability of an individual or community to use more than one language in daily life, forms the general sociolinguistic setting in which Kenya's language policy is

immersed. Most Kenyans are bilingual or multilingual, speaking their mother tongue, Kiswahili as the national language and English as the official language of government, education and formal communication (Wa Thiong'o, 2022). This layered linguistic range informs identity, social interaction and access to opportunity. Multilingualism is at the same time a cognitive resource and a practical challenge. There is a large body of research that shows how multilingual competence supports cognitive development, improves intercultural communication and broadens access to social and economic participation (García & Kleyn, 2023). Individuals who have been exposed to more than one language are likely to have good metalinguistic awareness and to become more skilled in learning more languages and understanding meaning in different contexts. Children starting school in their first language develop better foundational literacy skills, making it easier to transition into second and third languages such as Kiswahili and English (Heugh, 2023). In this sense, when properly used through additive language policies, multilingualism enhances rather than compromises academic achievement.

Kenya's language-in-education policy is an institutional attempt to harness this linguistic diversity. The policy advocates for the use of the mother tongue or the dominant language of the catchment area in lower primary schooling, Kiswahili as a compulsory subject throughout basic education and English as the main medium of instruction from upper primary and above (Republic of Kenya, 2017). This framework theoretically recognises the pedagogical benefits of learners' home languages and simultaneously renders Kiswahili and English as tools for national integration and global participation, an additive multilingual model where new languages are learnt without displacing the mother tongue. But multilingualism has implementation challenges that make policy implementation even more difficult. In urban and linguistically diverse regions, identifying a single "local language" for early instruction becomes difficult when classrooms comprise children from multiple ethnic groups (Kiramba & Norris, 2023). Teachers often lack adequate training in multilingual pedagogy, and instructional resources in indigenous languages remain scarce or nonexistent. Furthermore, persistent societal beliefs about English as the language of prestige and economic advancement can erode support for mother tongue-based education, leading parents and even teachers to favor premature or exclusive use of English despite policy prescriptions to the contrary (Commins & Miramontes, 2022).

Several indigenous Kenyan languages face endangerment due to the dominance of English and Kiswahili, accelerated by urbanization, intermarriage, and media influence. In urban areas, the emergence of Sheng — a hybrid urban vernacular blending Kiswahili, English, and indigenous languages — further complicates linguistic dynamics, sometimes diluting mastery of both standard English and Kiswahili (Wa Thiong'o, 2022). These sociolinguistic realities create tensions between official policy goals and lived linguistic practices, particularly in Comprehensive Schools where English is mandated as the sole medium of instruction despite students' varied linguistic backgrounds and competencies.

2.4 Gaps in Existing Research

There is a wealth of research on language policy formulation and the theoretical advantages of mother-tongue instruction; However, there are gaps in understanding the actual linguistic practices in the classroom in Kenyan Comprehensive Schools. Much of the existing literature has focused on policy intentions, language attitudes, or primary school contexts, with the implementation in Comprehensive Schools under-examined (Kiramba & Norris, 2023; Trudell & Piper, 2024). There is limited empirical documentation of how teachers negotiate the tension between English-only policy mandates and students' multilingual realities in different subject areas. This study fills these gaps by investigating the actual languages of instruction in the Kenyan Comprehensive Schools and how teachers and learners deal with the linguistic demands of English medium education in their multilingual contexts. The research documents linguistic realities in the classroom across a variety of subjects, providing empirical evidence to inform contextually responsive language-in-education policies that balance global aspirations and local linguistic resources.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study applied a qualitative research design. It adopted an ethnographic descriptive approach to investigate the actual language of instruction in Kenyan Comprehensive Schools. It also aimed to determine the degree of alignment of the language of teaching with the linguistic realities of teachers and learners. Ethnography was particularly appropriate for the study because language use is embedded in social interaction and cultural practice. To understand classroom communication, we need to observe naturally occurring behaviours over time rather than self-reports (Creswell & Poth, 2019). This methodological approach allowed the researcher to capture the dynamic and context-dependent processes of code-switching, translanguaging, meaning negotiation and discourse practices that characterized multilingual educational settings (García & Wei, 2024). The ethnographic lens provided a way of describing the linguistic realities of the classroom in rich detail: not only what languages were used, but also how, when, why and what the pedagogical and social consequences were. This understanding was crucial for revealing possible disconnects between the official language policy, which stipulated that English be the sole medium of instruction in Comprehensive Schools, and the multilingual practices teachers and learners adopted to aid comprehension and meaningful learning.

3.2 Study Location and Sample Size

The study was carried out in selected public Comprehensive Schools from different linguistic and socio-economic settings in Kenya; rural, peri-urban and urban areas. This geographical diversity was important since language practices, linguistic resources and degrees of exposure to English varied significantly with the sociolinguistic and economic conditions (Kiramba & Norris, 2023). Rural schools generally taught learners who had

little contact with English outside the classroom and who had a sound knowledge of indigenous mother tongue(s). Peri-urban schools served students from diverse linguistic backgrounds, including indigenous language speakers and urban Kiswahili-dominant communities. Urban schools had a greater likelihood of enrolling learners with greater exposure to English and a more diverse home-language profile, including speakers of Sheng and other hybrid urban vernaculars.

The study involved subject teachers of English, Kiswahili, Mathematics, Sciences (Biology, Chemistry, Physics) and Humanities (History, Geography). The sampled disciplines had varying linguistic demands and conceptual complexities. Teachers were purposefully selected based on their experience in teaching linguistically diverse classrooms and their willingness to participate in the study. The learner participants were from Grade 7 and Grade 8, as the learners had significant experience with English medium instruction. Stratified sampling ensured that learners reflected a range of home-language backgrounds, socioeconomic profiles and academic performance and therefore different linguistic experiences and competencies. The sample comprised 15 teachers from the selected schools and 50 students in focus groups. The sample size was in line with qualitative research requirements where depth and richness of data are of importance rather than statistical representation (Etikan, 2020).

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Data collection employed three complementary methods: *classroom observation*, *focus group discussions*, and *document analysis*, to ensure triangulation and extensive understanding of classroom linguistic realities.

3.3.1 Classroom Observation

Classroom Observation documented real-time communication styles, spontaneous linguistic choices and contextual linguistic practices that could not be fully accessed through interviews or surveys alone (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2019). The researcher conducted 72 lesson observations in the subject areas of English, Kiswahili, Mathematics, Sciences, History and Geography to examine:

- Patterns of teacher-learner interaction and communicative exchanges,
- Frequency, contexts and purposes of code-switching between English, Kiswahili and indigenous languages,
- Teachers' ways of clarifying complex concepts, scaffolding comprehension and managing linguistic barriers,
- Learners' linguistic responses, rates of participation and strategies for navigating English-medium instruction,
- Subject-specific patterns of language mediation and the relationship between linguistic and conceptual demands.

Using a structured observation checklist, indicators such as *communicative intent*, *episodes of clarification*, *challenges in comprehension*, *instances of code-switching* and *strategies of linguistic scaffolding* were systematically recorded. In addition to the checklist, unstructured field notes captured spontaneous behaviours, classroom culture, teacher-

student rapport, *enforcement or non-enforcement of language policy*, and contextual nuances that structured tools were unable to fully capture. This dual approach combined systematic data collection with ethnographic receptiveness to emergent phenomena. Observational data were particularly useful in understanding how teachers mixed English with Kiswahili or mother tongues to make concepts comprehensible in concept-heavy subjects like Mathematics and Sciences, as an instructional strategy.

The observations revealed to what extent the official English-only policy was put into practice as intended, or if teachers pragmatically employed multilingual strategies to bridge gaps in understanding.

3.3.2 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Focus group discussions also explored the *perspectives, attitudes, beliefs and lived experiences of teachers and learners* in relation to English-medium instruction. FGDs enabled participants to build upon each other's opinions, yielding richer and more complex data than individual interviews performed in isolation (Krueger & Casey, 2022). The focus groups were participatory, reflecting the *collaborative, dialogic aspect of communication in the classroom*, making this method particularly ideal for the investigation of language practices.

A. Teacher FGDs recognized the following significant themes:

- Challenges in the use of English as a medium of instruction,
- Pedagogical motivations and justifications of code-switching or multilingual practices,
- Language practices and perceived learning outcomes,
- Teachers' understanding of official language policy and their beliefs about feasibility and appropriateness,
- The methods used by teachers to balance policy adherence with pedagogical effectiveness.

Teachers' perspectives were critical since their *attitudes, beliefs, and linguistic competence* had a great influence on how language policies were interpreted and enacted in the classroom (Commins & Miramontes, 2022). The teachers' conscious use of language illuminated the gap between policy prescription and classroom reality.

Complementary themes investigated in learner FGDs from the student perspective included:

- Confidence and self-perceived competence in English,
- Special problems in learning through English in different topic areas,
- Preferred explanations and language patterns that limit or facilitate comprehension,
- Experiences of being included or excluded in language use in the classroom,
- Perceptions of which languages offered more insight into topic.

Learners' voices were significant as they showed how language policies and practices affected *participation, comprehension, engagement and academic achievement* where English proficiency levels were quite varied (García & Kleyn, 2023). Students could

articulate what linguistic strategies helped them to understand difficult topics, and which were impediments to their learning.

Therefore, FGDs provided a complementary perspective to observations, helping to unpack why teachers and learners adopted certain linguistic practices and how they perceived the relationship between policy expectation and communicative necessity.

3.3.4 Document Analysis

To establish the official policy context and compare mandated expectations with actual classroom practices, the study analyzed relevant documents including:

- Curriculum guidelines and national language-in-education policy documents,
- School-specific language policies or directives,
- Teachers' lesson plans and schemes of work,
- Textbooks and instructional materials for all subjects,
- Evaluation instruments and examination questions.

The use of document analysis added *methodological triangulation* to the study and offered more clarity about the consistency or inconsistency between policy intention and pedagogical reality.

3.4 Data Analysis

Classroom observations and focus group discussions data were thematically analyzed, which was suitable for qualitative linguistic research as it allowed for meaningful patterns to develop naturally from rich textual and observational data, without the need to impose preconceived analytical categories, as supported by (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The stages used were:

- Transcription of focus group discussions, review of observation notes, and reading of documents to become deeply familiar with the data.
- Developing descriptive codes that captured particular linguistic behaviours, expressed attitudes, policy references, and pedagogical strategies.
- Grouping codes by themes such as types and functions of code-switching, linguistic demands of subject matter, learners' comprehension strategies, teachers' beliefs about language policy, and conflicts between policy and practice.
- Review themes against the data to check if they accurately represented patterns across observations and FGDs.
- Discussing themes in relation to the research objectives, theoretical framework and existing literature to generate meaningful insights.

Patterns between methods were systematically compared to increase credibility and validity. Document analysis was integrated throughout to contextualize observational and interview findings in the official policy framework, including where classroom practices aligned with, negotiated with, or departed from the policy mandates.

4. Findings and Discussion

The findings are presented thematically based on patterns that emerged from classroom observations, focus group discussions with teachers and learners, and document analysis. The data are presented as descriptive statistics, illustrative excerpts from classroom interactions, quotes from the participants, and visual representation when appropriate. The discussion contextualizes these findings within the theoretical framework and existing literature to illustrate the complexity of the relationship between language policy and classroom linguistic practice in Kenya.

4.1 Language of Instruction Used in Comprehensive Schools in Kenya

4.1.1 Policy and Classroom Practice

Analysis of the documents on the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (Republic of Kenya, 2017) and language policies of the schools showed that the only medium of instruction in Kenyan Comprehensive Schools is English, except in Kiswahili language lessons. This policy expectation was constantly reinforced through notice boards, staff circulars and departmental meeting minutes in schools. Some schools had prominent signs such as “Speak English” or “English is our official language of communication”. However, classroom observation showed a wide gap between policy prescription and actual linguistic practice. Table 1 summarizes the languages observed during 72 lessons across six subjects in rural, peri-urban, and urban Comprehensive Schools.

Table 1: Languages Used During Teaching Across Learning Areas

Subject Area	English Only	English + Kiswahili	English + Kiswahili + Mother Tongue	Total Lessons Observed
Mathematics	2 (17%)	9 (75%)	1 (8%)	12
Biology	1 (8%)	10 (83%)	1 (8%)	12
Chemistry	3 (25%)	9 (75%)	0 (0%)	12
Physics	2 (17%)	10 (83%)	0 (0%)	12
History	1 (8%)	10 (83%)	1 (8%)	12
Geography	2 (17%)	9 (75%)	1 (8%)	12
Total	11 (15%)	57 (79%)	4 (6%)	72 (100%)

As Table 1 indicates, only 15% of observed lessons were taught solely in English. The vast majority (79%) involved deliberate code-switching between English and Kiswahili, while a further 6% involved the use of mother tongue languages alongside English and Kiswahili. The findings indicate that multilingual classroom practices are the norm rather than the exception in Kenyan secondary schools, regardless of official policy mandates.

4.1.2 Variation by School Location

Language use patterns differed significantly in rural, peri-urban and urban school settings, mirroring differences in learners' linguistic backgrounds and their contact with English outside of school.

Figure 1: Frequency of Multilingual Instruction by School Location

Rural Schools (n=24 lessons)

- ├— English Only: 8% (2 lessons)
- ├— English + Kiswahili: 75% (18 lessons)
- └— English + Kiswahili + Mother Tongue: 17% (4 lessons)

Peri-Urban Schools (n=24 lessons)

- ├— English Only: 13% (3 lessons)
- ├— English + Kiswahili: 83% (20 lessons)
- └— English + Kiswahili + Mother Tongue: 4% (1 lesson)

Urban Schools (n=24 lessons)

- ├— English Only: 25% (6 lessons)
- ├— English + Kiswahili: 75% (18 lessons)
- └— English + Kiswahili + Mother Tongue: 0% (0 lessons)

Rural schools had the highest incidence of multilingual teaching, with 92% of lessons involving code-switching and 17% using mother tongue languages. Teachers in the rural areas said that many learners had little exposure to English before secondary school and found it difficult to cope with English-only instruction. One rural Mathematics teacher said:

“Most of my students studied in primary schools where they spoke their mother tongue until Class 4. I explain everything in English, and I see blank faces. But when I say it in Kiswahili or even use Kikuyu for a difficult concept, their eyes light up – they understand.”

Similar patterns were observed in peri-urban schools, with 87% of lessons involving code-switching but less frequent use of mother tongue (4%). Urban schools had the highest proportion of English-only lessons (25%), but even in these contexts, three-quarters of lessons involved code-switching to Kiswahili. This implies that even relatively more exposed learners to English benefit from multilingual instruction.

4.1.3 Subject-Specific Language Practices

The frequency and nature of code-switching varied across subject areas, influenced by the conceptual complexity, specialized terminology and linguistic demands of different disciplines:

- **Sciences (Biology, Chemistry, Physics):** These subjects exhibited the highest rates of code-switching (83-92%), particularly when introducing new terminology, explaining abstract concepts, or linking theoretical knowledge to everyday experiences. Teachers frequently presented technical terms in English, then provided Kiswahili explanations or analogies to ensure comprehension.
- **Mathematics:** Code-switching occurred in 83% of Mathematics lessons, primarily during word problem interpretation and procedural explanations. Teachers often

introduced problems in English, then translated or paraphrased in Kiswahili to clarify what the question was asking before guiding students through solution steps.

- **Humanities (History, Geography):** These subjects also showed high code-switching rates (83-92%), particularly when discussing culturally specific content, interpreting historical narratives or connecting abstract concepts to Kenyan contexts. Teachers used Kiswahili to make content more relatable and to encourage student participation in discussions.

These patterns confirm that code-switching is most prevalent in subjects with high conceptual demands or specialized vocabulary, where linguistic barriers can impede content comprehension.

4.2 Code-Switching and Translanguaging as a Pedagogical Strategy

4.2.1 Prevalence and Systematicity

The results revealed that code-switching was not a haphazard divergence from policy but a systematic and deliberate educational method employed by teachers to bridge the divide between the learners' linguistic competencies and the demands of the curriculum. The study frames code-switching as a complex communicative behaviour that embodies teachers' multilingual ability and pedagogical responsiveness, in contrast to the portrayals of code-switching as an indication of linguistic deficit or inadequate instruction. The findings are in line with the notion of translanguaging as suggested by García and Kleyn (2023), where multilingual people employ their full repertoire of languages flexibly to construct meaning, rather than seeing languages as separate systems. In Kenyan classrooms, teachers employ English, Kiswahili and sometimes mother tongues as complementing tools to assist learning and not as competing alternatives. This method is also consistent with Cummins' (2021) theory of linguistic interdependence, which holds that learning concepts and skills in one language will transfer to other languages when learners have a sufficient base of comprehension. This notion is exemplified in the use of Kiswahili or the mother tongue by teachers to convey difficult English-medium content. Comprehension through familiar linguistic routes facilitates later engagement with the same content in English.

4.2.2 Types of Code-Switching Observed

Analysis of classroom observation data identified three primary types of code-switching, each serving distinct communicative and pedagogical functions: inter-sentential switching, intra-sentential switching, and tag-switching.

Table 2: Types of Code-Switching Observed and Their Functions

Type of Code-Switching	Definition	Function	Example from Data
Inter-sentential	Language alternation at sentence boundaries	Emphasis, repetition, concept reinforcement, instruction-giving	"Pay attention. Sasa tusome shairi hili." (Now let's read this poem.)
Intra-sentential	Embedding elements of one language within another language's sentence structure	Spontaneous explanation, clarifying terminology, aligning technical concepts with everyday language	"He is <i>msumbufu sana</i> these days." (He is very stubborn these days.)
Tag-switching	Inserting discourse markers, fillers, or short phrases from one language into another	Classroom management, rapport-building, softening directives, adding emphasis	"We must keep time, <i>sawa?</i> " (okay?)

4.2.2.1 Inter-sentential Code-Switching

Inter-sentential Code-Switching occurred when teachers alternated languages at sentence boundaries, typically to provide parallel explanations or reinforce instructions. This type was particularly common in Literature, History, and Religious Education lessons, where teachers transitioned between English instruction and Kiswahili clarification. For example, a Literature teacher explaining symbolism stated:

"The author uses rain to represent cleansing and renewal. Mvua hapa inawakilisha maisha mapya na kuondoa dhambi." (Rain here represents new life and the removal of sin.)

This parallel presentation allowed learners to access meaning through both languages, reinforcing comprehension and demonstrating how literary concepts function across linguistic contexts.

4.2.2.2 Intra-sentential Code-Switching

Intra-sentential Code-Switching involved embedding words or phrases from one language within the grammatical structure of another. This type was most frequent in Sciences and Mathematics, where teachers spontaneously inserted Kiswahili terms or explanations into English sentences during real-time instruction. A Physics teacher explaining electrical circuits provided this example:

"The electric current flows through the conductor, ambayo inapotokea electron drift." (which is when electron drift occurs.)

Such switches enabled teachers to maintain instructional flow while providing immediate linguistic scaffolding for technical concepts that learners might not fully grasp in English alone.

4.2.2.3 Tag-Switching

Tag-Switching involved brief insertions of discourse markers, rhetorical questions, or emphatic expressions from one language into discourse conducted primarily in another. Teachers used tag-switching extensively for classroom management, motivation, and building rapport. Examples included:

"*You know, huyu mtoto ni mwerevu.*" (this child is intelligent.)

"*This calculation is very important, sawa?*" (okay?)

"*We're running out of time, basi tuendelee haraka.*" (so let's continue quickly.)

Tag-switching served important socio-emotional functions, creating linguistic familiarity and warmth that encouraged student engagement while maintaining the official status of English as the primary instructional language.

Figure 2: Distribution of Code-Switching Types Across Learning Areas

	Inter-sentential	Intra-sentential	Tag-switching
Mathematics	25%	50%	25%
Sciences	20%	55%	25%
Humanities	40%	35%	25%
Languages	45%	30%	25%

As Figure 2 illustrates, intra-sentential switching dominated in Mathematics and Sciences (50-55%), reflecting the need for spontaneous, real-time linguistic support during concept explanation. Inter-sentential switching was more common in Humanities and Languages (40-45%), where teachers provided more structured, parallel explanations. Tag-switching occurred consistently across all subjects (approximately 25%), underscoring its universal role in classroom management and social interaction.

4.3 Rationale for Code-Switching: Teachers' and Learners' Perspectives

Focus group discussions with teachers and learners revealed multiple, interconnected reasons for code-switching, reflecting both pedagogical necessity and socio-emotional considerations.

4.3.1 Enhancing Comprehension of Complex Content

The most frequently cited rationale for code-switching was to enhance learner comprehension of difficult, abstract, or technical content. Teachers across all subjects reported that when learners struggled to understand concepts presented exclusively in English, switching to Kiswahili or mother tongue often produced immediate comprehension breakthroughs.

4.3.1.1 Classroom Illustrations:

- **Physics:** *"The electric current flows through the conductor, ambayo inapotokea electron drift na inasababisha heating effect."* (which is when electron drift occurs and causes a heating effect.)
- **Biology:** *"Photosynthesis happens in the chloroplasts; inawezekana kwa sababu ya pigments kama chlorophyll ambayo huchukua light energy."* (it is possible because of pigments like chlorophyll, which absorb light energy.)
- **Geography:** *"Tectonic plate collisions cause earthquakes, ambayo hutoa seismic waves zinazoathiri ardhi."* (which send out seismic waves that affect the earth.)
- **Chemistry:** *"When we mix an acid and a base, tunakuwa na neutralization reaction inayozalisha salt na water."* (we have a neutralization reaction that produces salt and water.)

A Chemistry teacher explained:

"Some terms like 'exothermic' or 'endothermic' are completely foreign to students. When I say 'inatoa joto' (it releases heat) or 'inachukua joto' (it absorbs heat), they immediately connect it to their everyday experience of things feeling hot or cold. Then they can remember the English term better."

Student focus groups confirmed this perspective. A student stated:

"Sometimes the teacher uses big English words that we have never heard. When she explains in Kiswahili, we understand the idea quickly. Then when we go back to English, we know what she is talking about."

This finding supports Krashen's Input Hypothesis as applied in multilingual contexts (García & Kleyn, 2023) — comprehensible input is more important than linguistic purity, and code-switching makes input comprehensible when English alone would create cognitive overload.

4.3.2 Bridging Vocabulary Gaps

Teachers and learners acknowledged that they sometimes lacked precise English equivalents for certain concepts, particularly technical terminology, culturally specific ideas, or everyday objects discussed in practical subjects. Code-switching filled these lexical gaps, enabling communication to continue without disruption.

4.3.2.1 Classroom Illustrations:

- **Business Studies:** *"The balance sheet must show assets, liabilities & equity—mali, madeni na usawa."* (property, debts, and balance.)
- **Agriculture:** *"Use manure instead of synthetic fertilizer—hii ndiyo secret ya soil fertility na crop health."* (this is the secret of soil fertility and crop health.)

- **English Literature:** *"In this poem, the sense of nostalgia ni strong kumaanisha childhood memories, hisia za ukumbusho."* (is strong in terms of childhood memories, feelings of remembrance.)

A Biology teacher noted:

"Sometimes I know the Kiswahili word but I'm not 100% sure of the exact English term, or I know students won't understand it. So, I mix them. It's about getting the science across, not just English vocabulary."

This pragmatic approach prioritizes content mastery over linguistic uniformity, recognizing that disciplinary understanding can be developed multilingually and subsequently refined in English for examination purposes.

4.3.3 Reducing Language Anxiety and Promoting Participation

Exclusive use of English can create intimidating classroom environments, particularly for learners from rural backgrounds or those with limited English proficiency. Multiple teachers and students reported that code-switching created more inclusive, psychologically safe spaces that encouraged participation.

4.3.3.1 Classroom Illustrations:

- **History:** *"Who can tell me what 'colonialism' meant, ama nionyeshe kwa mfano wa Kenya?"* (or shall I show you using Kenya's example?)
- **Christian Religious Education:** *"Faith ni kuamini, lakini doubt pia ina sehemu — hakuna mtu asiyekuwana maswali."* (Faith is believing, but doubt also has a place — there is no one who doesn't have questions.)
- **Mathematics:** *"Don't be nervous; let's work this together — unajua hiyo formula ya area ya circle?"* (do you know that formula for the area of a circle?)
- **Geography:** *"Describe the water cycle. Nani anaweza kuanza, hata kwa Kiswahili?"* (Who can start, even in Kiswahili?)

Student responses in focus groups were particularly revealing:

"When the teacher speaks only English, I feel afraid to answer because I might make a mistake. But when she mixes with Kiswahili, I feel like she is talking to me, not testing my English." (Form Two student)

"In some subjects like Physics, the concepts are already hard. If we also have to struggle with English at the same time, it becomes too much. When teachers explain in Kiswahili first, we relax and can think about the physics, not the language." (Form Three student)

These testimonies align with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as interpreted through contemporary multilingual education scholarship (Lantolf & Poehner, 2024), which emphasizes that learning is fundamentally social and that linguistic familiarity reduces affective barriers to cognitive engagement.

4.3.4 Emphasizing Critical Information

Teachers strategically switched languages to signal emphasis, particularly when highlighting examination-critical content, procedural steps, or safety instructions. The shift in language served as a rhetorical device that captured student attention and marked importance.

4.3.4.1 Classroom Illustrations:

- **English:** *"Remember: punctuate your sentences correctly, hii ni muhimu sana kwa exam. Hamtapata marks bila punctuation."* (this is very important for the exam. You won't get marks without punctuation.)
- **Chemistry:** *"Stoichiometry calculations zina rules — lazima muangalie mole ratios vizuri. This will appear in Paper 2."* (have rules — you must look at mole ratios carefully.)
- **Biology:** *"During dissection, handle the scalpel carefully. Siyo mchezo — mnaweza jikata."* (It's not a game—you can cut yourselves.)

A Mathematics teacher explained:

"When I want students to really pay attention — maybe it's a formula that always appears in exams — I repeat it in Kiswahili with emphasis. They know when I switch, it means 'this is important, write it down.'"

This strategic use of code-switching demonstrates teachers' metacognitive awareness of how language choice can structure attention and signal pedagogical priorities.

4.3.5 Accommodating Mixed English Proficiency Levels

Classrooms typically contain students with heterogeneous English competencies, ranging from highly proficient speakers to those with significant language barriers. Teachers reported using code-switching as an equity strategy to ensure that weaker English speakers were not systematically excluded from learning.

4.3.5.1 Classroom Illustrations:

- **Mathematics:** *"Solve for x — nani anataka kufanya hii na mimi? Who wants to work through this with me?"* (who wants to do this together with me?)
- **Biology:** *"Describe the digestive system. Someone explain kwa Kiswahili first, tusaide wenzetu. Then we translate to English together."* (in Kiswahili first, let's help our colleagues.)
- **History:** *"Explain the causes of World War I. I'll mention some terms in Kiswahili first so everyone can follow, then we build the English vocabulary."*

A History teacher articulated this equity concern:

"In my class, I have students from different backgrounds. Some went to good primary schools in town and speak English confidently. Others come from rural schools where

English was rarely used. If I teach only in English, I'm really only teaching half the class. Code-switching allows everyone to access the history content."

Students from rural backgrounds particularly appreciated this approach:

"In primary school, we used mother tongue until Class 4, then Kiswahili and English. Coming to secondary school where everything should be in English was very difficult. Teachers who explain in Kiswahili help us catch up." (Form Two student from rural school)

This finding underscores how code-switching functions as a tool for inclusive pedagogy, aligning with UNESCO's (2023) emphasis on equitable access to education in multilingual contexts.

4.3.6 Classroom Management and Social Rapport

Beyond cognitive and content-related functions, code-switching served important roles in classroom management, discipline, and relationship-building. Teachers used familiar linguistic expressions to manage behavior, issue instructions, create warmth and establish solidarity with students.

4.3.6.1 Classroom Illustrations:

- **General instruction:** *"Sit down, tafadhali tulia. We need to start the lesson now."* (please settle down.)
- **English lesson:** *"You guys, akili zenu ziko wapi? Where are your minds today?"* (where are your minds?)
- **Science practical:** *"Put your lab coats on properly. Endelea na experiment kwa utaratibu, please."* (Continue with the experiment carefully.)
- **Motivational:** *"You can do this. Mnaweza! Don't give up on this problem."* (You can!)

Teachers acknowledged that these switches, while seemingly minor, helped maintain classroom climate and student-teacher relationships:

"When I use Kiswahili or even a local expression, students see me as someone who understands them, not just as a distant teacher. It creates connection. Then when I need them to focus or behave, they respond better." (Geography teacher)

This social-relational dimension of code-switching aligns with research on classroom discourse showing that language choices shape power dynamics, identity negotiation and community formation (García & Kleyn, 2023).

4.3.7 Summary of Rationales

Table 3: Summary of Code-Switching Rationales and Their Functions

Rationale	Primary Function	Subjects Most Affected	Teacher/Learner Perspective
Enhancing comprehension	Cognitive scaffolding	Sciences, Mathematics	Both strongly support
Bridging vocabulary gaps	Lexical supplementation	Technical subjects, practical subjects	Both acknowledge necessity
Reducing anxiety	Affective support	All subjects	Learners especially value
Emphasizing key points	Rhetorical signaling	All subjects, especially exam-focused	Teachers strategically deploy
Accommodating proficiency levels	Equity and inclusion	All subjects	Teachers prioritize; learners appreciate
Classroom management	Social regulation and rapport	All subjects	Teachers view as essential

4.4 Alignment of Policy and Practice

4.4.1 The Policy-Practice Gap

The findings reveal a substantial misalignment between Kenya's official language-of-instruction policy and actual classroom linguistic practices. While policy documents mandate English as the sole medium of instruction in Comprehensive Schools (Republic of Kenya, 2017), classroom observations demonstrate that 85% of lessons involve deliberate code-switching between English and other languages, mostly Kiswahili.

This gap reflects a tension between several competing forces as summarized:

- Policy idealism vs. pedagogical pragmatism,
- Linguistic nationalism vs. global aspirations
- Standardization vs. contextualization

4.4.1.1 Policy Idealism vs. Pedagogical Pragmatism

Policy assumes sufficient English proficiency among secondary learners, while classroom reality reveals significant variation in competence that necessitates multilingual support. *Linguistic nationalism vs. global aspirations*: Policy prioritizes English for international competitiveness, while teachers prioritize comprehension and equity through multilingual instruction.

4.4.1.2 Standardization vs. Contextualization

Policy seeks uniform practices across schools, while teachers adapt instruction to local linguistic ecologies.

Teacher focus groups revealed awareness of this tension. One English teacher stated:

"We are told to teach only in English. But when I see my students struggling, when I see them giving up because they can't understand, what am I supposed to do? My job is to

teach them English Literature, yes, but also to ensure they actually learn something. Sometimes I have to choose between following policy and being effective."

4.4.2 Teachers' Strategies for Navigating Policy Constraints

Teachers used a number of ways to negotiate the conflict between official policy and pedagogical necessity:

- **Selective compliance:** While teachers continued to teach in English as the primary language, they intentionally adopted Kiswahili when they believed that comprehension was compromised.
- **Compartmentalization:** Many teachers distinguished between "formal teaching" (primarily in English) and "informal explanation" or "student support" (which permitted multilingual communication).
- **Justification through outcomes:** Teachers justified code-switching by pointing to increased understanding, participation and eventually examination results.
- **Covert practice:** In schools with strict English-only enforcement, some teachers code-switched in secret or portrayed it as temporary scaffolding rather than systematic practice.

As one Biology instructor put it:

"I don't advertise that I use Kiswahili. If the principal walks in, I'm speaking English. But when we're working through difficult concepts, I do what works. My students' exam results show they're learning, so the method must be working."

4.4.3 Learners' Experiences of the Policy-Practice Gap

In general, students liked the ability to learn in multiple languages and were annoyed when teachers were inflexible about English-only policies. Focus group discussions indicated that learners believed that code-switching teachers were more effective, caring, and student-focused.

But some high-achieving students raised concerns about the impact of excessive code-switching on their English development:

"I understand why teachers use Kiswahili, because it helps many students. But sometimes I worry we are not getting enough practice in English, which we need for university and jobs." (Form 3 student, urban school)

This comment highlights the challenge of balancing the demands of immediate understanding with the needs of long-term language acquisition. This tension is inherent in transitional bilingual education models.

4.5 Subject-Specific Linguistic Challenges

Different subject areas had different linguistic challenges, and this affected code-switching patterns and pedagogical approaches:

- **Mathematics:** The main difficulty was not math calculations but understanding word problems given in English. Many teachers would interpret the problem scenarios into Kiswahili before taking students through the solution procedures so as to make the context more understandable.
- **Sciences:** Abstract language and conceptual density posed serious problems. Teachers explained phenomena using familiar analogies in Kiswahili before introducing technical English terms, and in this way taught concepts bilingually.
- **Humanities:** Interpretive and discussion-based subjects gained from code-switching when linking content to Kenyan contexts or encouraging student voice. Sometimes the English-only instruction transformed a deep historical or geographical understanding into shallow memorization.
- **Languages:** Code-switching took place even in English and Literature classes, when analyzing figurative language, discussing themes, or explaining grammatical concepts. This shows that metalinguistic discussion occasionally requires the use of students' stronger languages.

Such discipline-specific patterns show that code-switching is not a uniformly distributed phenomenon but rather is sensitive to the particular linguistic and cognitive demands of different disciplines.

The results confirm that code-switching in Kenyan Comprehensive Schools is not a sign of linguistic deficiency, pedagogical failure or policy resistance. Rather, it is a sophisticated type of communicative competence, in which multilingual teachers and learners strategically exploit their entire linguistic repertoire to achieve educational goals. This is consistent with the current theory in multilingual education that reframes code-switching (or translanguaging) as a natural and useful practice in multilingual contexts, rather than as a problematic deviation from monolingual norms (García & Wei, 2024; Cummins, 2021). The teachers' flexible language use reflects their dual expertise in both content knowledge and sociolinguistic awareness — they understand not only what to teach but how to make it accessible within their students' linguistic realities.

The study also shows that the English-only policy, despite being intended to improve language development and standardisation, might unintentionally create barriers to learning for students whose English skills are still developing. The evidence suggests that rather than hindering English acquisition, Kiswahili and mother tongues act as cognitive bridges to facilitate content understanding and ultimately deeper engagement with English-medium academic discourse.

5. Conclusion

The findings show that classrooms in Comprehensive Schools in Kenya are marked by systematic multilingual instruction in spite of official English-only policies. Code-switching is used by teachers in a strategic way to: *enhance comprehension, bridge vocabulary gaps, decrease language anxiety, highlight significant concepts, accommodate varying proficiency levels and manage classroom dynamics.*

This practice reflects the multilingual context of Kenyan society and is a pragmatic teacher response to the tension between policy ideals and learner needs. Code-switching appears to be a form of *scaffolding* that helps learners access curriculum content as they develop their competence in English rather than undermining the development of the English language. The significant gap between policy and practice indicates a need for more *contextualized and evidence-based language-in-education policies* that acknowledge and utilize *Kenya's linguistic diversity as an educational resource*, not as a problem to be solved.

6. Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed to address the misalignment between language policy and classroom linguistic realities in Kenyan Comprehensive Schools:

6.1 Policy-Level Recommendations

- **Revise the National Language Education Policy:** The Ministry of Education should revise the language education policy to legitimize the strategic use of Kiswahili and mother tongues as cognitive scaffolding (supporting learners' mental processes and thinking skills as they work through complex cognitive tasks) while retaining English as the central instructional language. Policy should adopt an *additive multilingual framework* that views *code-switching as pedagogically sound rather than as a policy violation*.
- **Align Assessment Practices:** The Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) should provide bilingual glossaries for technical terms in national examinations, especially in Sciences and Mathematics, and use clear English in examination questions to lessen the linguistic barriers to demonstrate content knowledge.
- **Allocate Resources:** The government should fund the development of bilingual teaching materials, subject-specific dictionaries for translation of technical terms into Kiswahili and *digital resources* to promote multilingual instruction.

6.2 Teacher Education Recommendations

- **Integrate Multilingual Pedagogy in Pre-service Training:** Teacher training colleges and universities should include coursework on translanguaging theory, code-switching research and strategic multilingual instruction as legitimate pedagogical skills.
- **Establish In-Service Professional Development:** The Teachers Service Commission (TSC) and Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) need to put in place training programmes that give practicing teachers clear frameworks for strategic code-switching, subject-specific guidance and opportunities to share effective multilingual practices.

6.3 School-level Recommendations

- **Create Supportive Professional Contexts:** School leaders should endorse multilingual pedagogy, facilitate conversations among teachers about language strategies without fear of reprisal, and recognize effective multilingual instruction in performance reviews.

6.4 Curriculum and Materials Development

- **Produce Multilingual Learning Resources:** Publishers should produce textbooks with bilingual glossaries, additional materials in Kiswahili for difficult topics and digital resources with multilingual explanations, especially in Sciences and Mathematics.
- **Provide Teacher Guides with Multilingual Strategies:** Suggest code-switching strategies for key concepts, identify terminology that needs a Kiswahili explanation, and use rubrics to separate content knowledge from language proficiency

6.5 Teacher Practice Recommendations

- **Employ Strategic Code-Switching:** Teachers should switch between languages intentionally to meet specific pedagogical goals, maintain English as the dominant language, and regard other languages as a form of scaffolding to develop learners' metalinguistic consciousness.
- **Differentiate Instruction:** Assess learners' English language proficiency, provide additional support for those with limited English backgrounds.
- **Practice Reflective Thinking:** Document the reasons and times of code-switching, seek feedback from learners, work with colleagues and join professional learning communities related to language in education.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest with respect to: research, authorship and publication of the article.

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