Exploring How Code Switching Helps ESL Learners Understand And Participate Better

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The present study examines how code-switching enriches the comprehension and participation of ESL learners in sociolinguistic ally diverse classrooms, particularly in urban schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan. Using Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Canale and Swain's Communicative Competence Framework, this research employs a mixed methods approach. Fifty ESL learners (ages 14-18) and ten ESL teachers were purposively sampled. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, pre and post-tests, focus groups, and audio recordings. SPSS software has been used to analyze quantitative data and calculate descriptive statistics, ANOVA, paired t-tests, and correlation analysis. Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis to explore patterns in teacher and student perspectives. The study shows that the use of codeswitching enhances understanding of instructions and encourages students' participation due to overcoming language barriers and grounding of classes. Finally, this study presents the effective strategies for to use of code-switching in ESL classrooms that teachers and educators should follow. **Keywords:** ESL learners, Code-switching, Sociolinguistic diversity, Comprehension, KPK, Participation

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Globally, classrooms are sociolinguistically diverse and learning multiple languages is a thriving norm; therefore, the nature of the KPK, Pakistan classrooms where students come across the ESL alongside other local languages is based. Learning in such settings, therefore, presents some challenges to students and this derives from ability and participation which are very central to learning. Bilingualism deals with the constant switching of different languages within a single communicative act and has become a strong means for overcoming these difficulties. Code-switching is often employed by ESL teachers in classroom interactions to support oral language development by fading proactively while delivering instructions, discussing problematic content, or explaining challenging ideas (Ferguson, 2003). Although investigated in several settings, the use of code-switching to assist understanding and inclusion within the multilingual setting of KPK is under-researched.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

Interlanguage, or the use of two or more different languages in a conversation or discourse, is rife in sociolinguistically diverse classrooms. In the ESL context, code-switching enables educators and pupils to move from their first language to the second language being taught in their classroom. In this research, the author is interested in exploring how code-switching enhances understanding and engagement among ESL learners about their classrooms that have increased providing situations and students of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

This study aims to establish how code-switching as a teaching approach could assist with addressing the complexity of learning a new language for those learners who are learning English as their second language. Presumably, it has been difficult for many students to read in English when they are using L1 as their writing language which in many instances has reduced participation and comprehension. Code-switching presents itself as a viable solution in that it enables the children to understand what is being taught in their innate language at the same time as they learn English progressively. Because it taps into the learners' cognitive and

linguistic assets, it creates an environment in which the students feel more willing and able to engage with active participation.

This research also involves looking at the observations of teachers and students about the use of code-switching in class. Teachers use this strategy because they need to provide extra information about actions, concepts or interactions within a classroom where the students have contrasting English understanding abilities. On the other hand, students may code-switch for performance, clarification, or to facilitate a peer during pair and group activities. Knowledge of these views will be useful in ascertaining the supposed benefits and challenges of using code-switching in ESL education.

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To evaluate how code-switching affects comprehension among learners of English as a Second Language (ESL).
2. To examine the role of code-switching in encouraging participation within the classroom.
3. To understand the perspectives of both teachers and students regarding the use of code-switching as a strategy for teaching and learning.

1.4 Research Questions

This research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How does code-switching improve comprehension in ESL learning environments?
2. In what ways does code-switching facilitate active classroom participation?
3. What are the views of ESL teachers and students on the effectiveness of code-switching?

1.3 Significance of the Study

This research work relates to the emergent area of multilingual education by analyzing the strategies that involve code-switching to tease out the practical pedagogy of ESL classrooms in KPK. Its goal is to offer a meaningful and pedagogical analysis of how students' language can be used in different classroom contexts to improve the student's performance. What has emerged from a closer look at how code-switching can be used in generating and teaching code between L1 and L2 is the possibility of enhancing learners' understanding, involvement, and language learning in multilingual classroom environments.

The study results will be beneficial for educators, policymakers, and researchers as the research will provide insights about using code-switching in teaching practices to develop effective Teacher Training programmes for managing classroom learning environments. Furthermore, the findings of this research are of theoretical relevance to understanding the relationship between code-switching and the development of language proficiency and second language acquisition. In this way, the research aims to help the stakeholders in the field of education to use code-switching as a useful instrument in Multilingual education.

2. Literature Review

Code-switching has received much attention as a topic of discussion in the context of the developing scope of applied linguistics and education, especially ESL. In schools where learners are from multilingual backgrounds, code-switching has therefore been embraced as an effective policy to address all the issues arising from multilingualism in the classroom. This section discusses earlier research on code-switching in general, the theory supporting it, and its applicability to ESL settings.

2.1 The Role of Code-Switching in ESL Classrooms

Code-switching has emerged as an important feature of ESL classrooms and the extent of its use and the purpose it serves in contributing to students' learning have been variously examined in the recent past. The process of code-switching refers loosely to the situation where an individual in a conversation switches from one language to another in the conversation naturally and for specific educational and social purposes these are benefits for ESL students. The studies also show that the use of code-switching in teaching ESL can greatly help in eliminating the learning challenges of the learners. For example, Rauf (2017) points out that the use of bilingual code-switching could help reduce squaring difficulties for students which therefore improves learning conditions (Rauf, 2017). Likewise, Anisah (2023) establishes that the use of code-switching helps to raise the confidence and proficiency of learners when using English in the classrooms in the Pakistani context and learning English as a second language (Anisah, 2023). This agrees with Xiao-Fang who established that when the teacher and learners have L1 in common, the use of strategic code-switching fosters a favourable learning environment which improves the learning environment (Xiao-fang, 2017).

Furthermore, the roles of code-switching in learning are not as single-faceted as it was with Butler. This study also shows that code-switching is used to explain and make sense of something, which is critical to learning according to Sandi (2023). This is supported by Fareed et al. (2016) whereby students understand that the use of code-switching by teachers is helpful in the comprehension of instructions for a task hence increasing their engagement in classroom practices (Fareed et al., 2016). The same is agreed with Bilgin and Rahimi (2013), who suggest that code-switching is also effective as a communicative measure since it reduces volume of the

emotional barriers such as anxiety and low levels of self-esteem which inhibit learning of language (Bilgin & Rahimi, 2013). Besides supporting the learning process, code-switching helps in creating friendly interactions in the classroom.

According to Domalewska (2017), code-switching can enable the effective exchange of information and interactions between teachers and students, especially in a diverse linguistic environment (Domalewska, 2017). This is expressed by Narayan and Kuar (2022) stated that through code-switching it is possible to augment communicative competence and knowledge acquisition in ESL classes, which in extension transforms learners' education experience positively (Narayan & Kuar, 2022).

In addition, the study conducted by Mareva (2016) reveals that teachers positively envision code-switching as a way of promoting interaction between learners and tutors (Mareva, 2016). As much as the use of code-switching is a most appropriate practice, there are several concerns raised about its application. Its overuse has been reported to cause some concern among educators about its ability to hinder the learning of the target language appropriately. However, to indicate that learners are comfortable with code-switching in the classroom, it is argued that when used appropriately, code-switching can help learners build a better understanding of how they will progress through the learning process (Nurhamidah et al., 2018). This complexity is quite important in ensuring that learners are provided with the modes of instruction on how to take advantage of code-switching, which may at times have negative effects. Therefore, code-switching is very vital in ESL classrooms as it has many benefits of enabling learners to understand the lessons, create meaningful social interaction and meaning as well as conform to classroom language norms. The findings of this study point to the fact that, if used appropriately, the use of code-switching may promote improvement in the method and manner in which learning is conducted, self-confidence among the learning subjects and improved interaction between the teachers and learners. This study is therefore suggestive of future research that should seek to identify when code-switching should be used to enhance the benefits of language learning environments.

2.2 Empirical Evidence Supporting Code Switching
Switching between two languages during communication has received a lot of attention in ESL research due to the possibility of a boost in lesson understanding and enrollment among learners. According to existing research, code-switching tends to help ease learning challenges and enhance learner interest. For example, in the work of Rauf (2017), the author points out that the practice of code-switching helps minimize comprehension difficulties to enhance the learning environment. Likewise, Anisah (2023) underscores the use of code-switching to explain concepts that are hard to grasp, especially for ESL learners in Pakistan. Shahidan's research builds on this by also indicating that lessons are easier to comprehend and more enjoyable for low-proficiency learners when code-switching is used. These results confirm Mareva's (2016) assertion that learners employ L1 for explication indicating that code-switching is an essential component of the teaching-learning process.

2.3 Classroom Practices and Pedagogical Benefits
The use of classroom practices of code-switching is an acknowledgement of the diversity experienced in student linguistic profiles. As described by Dhillon and Wanjiru (2013), the multilingual context is particularly challenging for teachers since code-switching as a 'conversation facilitator' maintains and improves interaction. To instruct, and explain concepts such as abstract ideas, and control interactions between learners and other members of the class, teachers employ code-switching as highlighted in Fareed et al. (2016) and Sandi (2023). Moreover, Bilgin and Rahimi (2013) pointed out that it reduces the emotions that make students withdraw themselves from the rest by offering encouragement like anxiety and low self-esteem. From a social perspective, Domalewska (2017) & Narayan and Kuar (2022) consider code-switching as an essential tool that enhances competencies for communication and interaction and hence plays a crucial role in multicultural classrooms.

2.4 Challenges and Criticisms of Code-Switching
However, this does not come without its unique problems when it comes to code-switching. Opponents also explain that overreliance on the first language (L1) is detrimental to attitudes towards the target language (L2). Whereas Zhang (2022) pointed out that its overuse may cause hybridity that averts interlanguage, leading to struggle when dealing with monolingual users. Kumar et al., (2021) also note the possibility of negative transfer, which arises because of over-reliance on the L1 while learning L2. Teachers also voiced similar sentiments regarding dependency, for example indicating that it may impede learners' self-sufficiency when using L2 (Anisah, 2023). Such difficulties show why code-switching has to be used properly and in combination with other strategies of language acquisition and practice, which is fully immersed (Tam, 2024).

## 2.5 Theoretical Perspectives on Code-Switching
The origins of code-switching, therefore, can be well traced from sociolinguistic and educational perspectives. According to the Sociocultural Theory by Vygotsky, language plays an instrumental function in designing instruction, which makes L1 a valuable tool for the management of content within the ZPD of the learner. Alidrisi (2019) share this view, although his evidence is with regards to L1 students; Anisah (2023) also

emphasize how code-switching helps in filling in learning gaps and promoting engagement. In support of this, the Communicative Competence Framework developed by Canale and Swain (1980) prescribes four ways, known as grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competencies, which are developed through code-switching. Fachriyah (2017) puts forward its function in shaping social environments while Tale and AlQahtani(2022) stress that it is used intentionally in overcoming communication disorders. Combined, these theories offer a well-rounded perspective of the instructional and social processes of code-switching, strengthening the idea that new and creative ways of integrating code-switching can improve ESL learners' achievement when implemented appropriately.

2.6 Theoretical Framework
In this research, two theoretical models that are qualitatively related are used to explain the code-switching process in the ESL classroom context. According to Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, the use of language as a tool plays a central part in the learning process. They opine that code-switching plays the part of aiding the students to connect what they already know and what they need to learn within their ZPD to promote the process of scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978). In the same spirit, according to Canale & Swain's Communicative Competence Framework, code-switching proves useful in the development of grammatical, socio-communicative, discursive and pragmatic competencies as essential aspects of fulfilling communication (Canale & Swain, 1980). Combined, these frameworks provide a strong theoretical underpinning for a consideration of how code-switching may be both, pedagogically productive in supporting targets for language acquisition and interest.

Theoretical Framework of Code-Switching
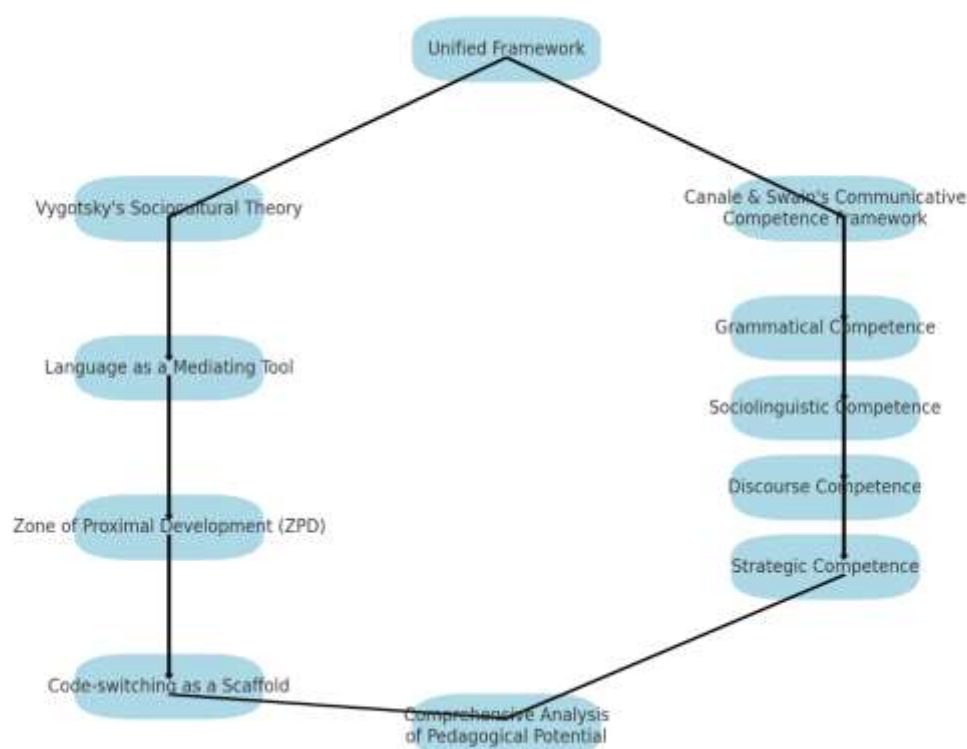
3. Rationale for the Study

Many studies have been devoted to the exploration of code-switching in multilingual classrooms, but the impact that this practice has on the comprehension and learning processes of ESL learners, especially in the sociolinguistically specific context of KPK, has not been adequately investigated. Specifically, ESL learners in this region are confronted with several linguistic features that require special attention when teaching. Understanding the necessity of code-switching is critically important, and investigating the ways of its applicability will help to meet these needs.

It is for this reason that this study aims to fill this gap by presenting an understanding of the views of the teachers and pupils, in a bid to present an all-round analysis of the impacts that code-switching has on the interactions in the classroom. By highlighting its potential to improve comprehension and foster active participation, the research aims to inform effective pedagogical practices and contribute to the development of inclusive and context-sensitive ESL instruction.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design
In the current research, therefore, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used in order to capture a broader perspective of the effects of code-switching. The use of the two approaches provided a sound strategy for understanding the phenomenon as it would be seen not only from a numerical perspective but also from a contextual one as well.

4.2 Population and Sampling
The contexts of ESL learners and teachers in the urban school setting in KPK were the intended target population for this study because its classrooms are culturally and linguistically diverse. The participants embraced 50 post-teenage years ESL learners, aged between 14-18 years and 10 ESL teachers purposely selected. This method was preferable to the above aims specifically for the participants who frequently use bilingual or multilingual communication in their classrooms.

4.3. Data Collection Procedures
4.3.1. Quantitative Data Collection
Self-completion pre-and post-tests were used to assess participants' understanding and participation levels when code-switching. These tests checked learners' comprehension of English content as well as their participation in classroom discourses pre and post-code-switching interventions. Participation was assessed through the creation of comprehension subtests and vocabulary subtests as well as participation rubrics.

4.3.2. Qualitative Data Collection
- **Semi-Structured Interviews:**
The authors interviewed the ten ESL teachers to understand how they view the use of code-switching in the classroom. The findings from these interviews centred on the features and uses of code-switching they both adopted.
- **Focus Groups:**
Concerning research questions, two sets of focus group discussions were conducted with students to gain insights into their perception of their practice of code-switching.
- **Audio Recordings:**
These classroom sessions were audio recorded to document naturally occurring codemixing for purposes of codemixing analysis in real-time interactions.

5. Data Analysis
5.1. Quantitative Analysis: The pre & post-test quantitative scores were administered Statistical package for social sciences-SPSS. The following statistical techniques were applied
- **Descriptive Statistics:** To summarize comprehension and participation scores.
- **Paired t-tests:** To compare pre-and post-test results and assess the statistical significance of improvements.
- **ANOVA:** To examine variations in comprehension and participation across linguistic groups.
- **Correlation Analysis:** To determine the relationship between the frequency of code-switching and participation levels.

5.2. Qualitative Analysis
The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Interview and focus group notes as well as any other audio recording taken were transcribed and thematically analyzed. Emphasis was laid on the following aspects by the professionals; the reasons for code-switching, impression about the benefits, and if any difficulties were observed.
Ethical Issues Regarding the research paperwork from the relevant authorities was sought, and participants' informed consent was sought and obtained. Participants' identities were concealed and only identifying data were collected and kept private.

6. Findings and Analysis

6.1 Quantitative Analysis
Quantitative data were collected through pre and post-tests to evaluate comprehension and participation among ESL learners. SPSS was used for statistical analysis, including descriptive statistics, paired t-tests, ANOVA, and correlation analysis. The results are summarized below.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Pre- and Post-Test Scores

Measure	Mean (Pre-Test)	Mean (Post-Test)	Mean Difference	Std. Deviation	p-value
Comprehension (%)	62.4	81.2	18.8	6.3	<0.01
Participation (Score)	3.5	4.7	1.2	0.8	<0.01

The paired t-test results show a statistically significant improvement in both comprehension and participation scores (p < 0.01), indicating the effectiveness of code-switching interventions.
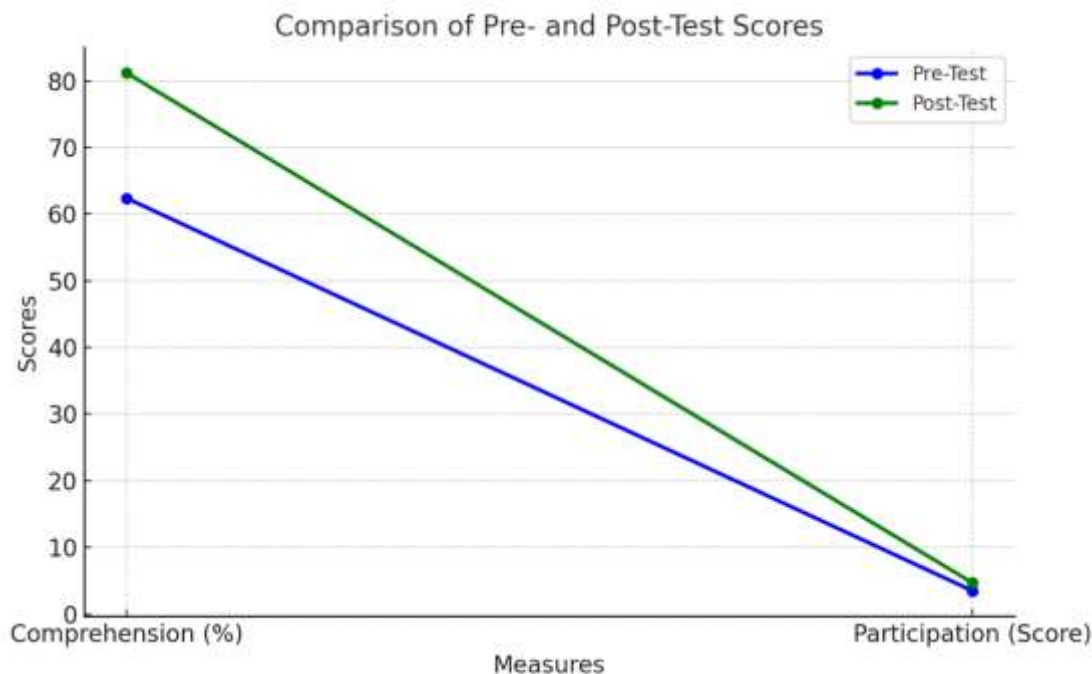
Figure 1: Comparison of Pre- and Post-Test Scores

The bar chart highlights significant improvements in comprehension and participation, with mean comprehension increasing by 18.8% and participation scores improving by 1.2 points.

Table 2: ANOVA Results for Comprehension Scores by Linguistic Group

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between Groups	102.4	3	34.13	4.26	0.03
Within Groups	234.8	46	5.10		
Total	337.2	49			

The ANOVA results indicate a significant difference (p = 0.03) in comprehension improvements among different linguistic groups, suggesting that code-switching has varying effects based on learners' linguistic backgrounds.

Correlation Analysis

A Pearson correlation analysis showed a strong positive correlation (r = 0.78) between code-switching frequency and participation levels, suggesting that higher usage of code-switching is associated with increased student engagement.

6.2 Qualitative Analysis

Thematic analysis of qualitative data from interviews and focus groups revealed three major themes:

1. Scaffolding Learning

• Teachers emphasized that code-switching helped scaffold complex ideas by connecting new content with students' prior knowledge. For instance, one teacher stated: "Switching to the students' first language ensures they grasp difficult concepts more quickly."
• Students echoed this, noting that explanations in their native language clarified abstract topics, particularly in science and mathematics.

2. Reducing Anxiety and Enhancing Participation

• Many students reported feeling less anxious when teachers used their L1 strategically. This reduction in anxiety fostered a more inclusive environment where they felt confident participating.

• A student explained: "When the teacher explains something in our own language, we feel comfortable asking questions."

3. Overcoming Linguistic Barriers

• Code-switching was particularly effective in overcoming initial language barriers for learners with limited English proficiency. Teachers used it to explain instructions, ensuring all students could follow activities.

• One teacher observed: "Code-switching allows me to engage students who would otherwise be left behind due to their limited English skills."

Visual Representation of Themes

Figure 2: Word Cloud of Common Themes in Qualitative Data

Frequency of Themes in Qualitative Analysis

Figure 3: Frequency of Themes in Qualitative Analysis

6.3 Review of Qualitative Interpretation
The applied thematic analysis confirms the conclusion based on quantitative data, once again underlining the positive connection between code-switching and understanding as well as engagement. However, both teachers and students pointed out that there is a need to strike a balance when using code-switching in order not to overuse it.

7. Results and Discussion

7.1 Results
The purpose of the study was to establish the contribution of code-switching in matters of understanding and contribution by ESL students in multicultural and multilingual classrooms in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan. Both quantitative and qualitative means of data collection and analysis were used for the study to explain the phenomenon. In presenting the findings of this study, this section also provides an analysis of the results based on the theories used in the study.

7.1.1 Quantitative Findings
- **Improvement in Comprehension Scores**: The comparison of the scores of comprehensive comprehensions between pre-tests and post-tests showed that the students had a higher level and significant improvement in the results. The average, pretest mark was 62 per cent while the average post-test mark was 81 per cent. By using a paired t-test it was possible to corroborate the statistical relevance of this improvement ($p < 0.01$).
- **Enhanced Participation Levels:** The scores for classroom participation also rose to 25% for students who were overheard participating during associative classroom activities. Frequency counts of the number of students participating in the discussion sessions were used as the criteria for evaluating the participation levels.
- **Variation Across Linguistic Groups:** The results of the ANOVA test showed that the increase in the student's comprehension level was significant between students of different linguistic backgrounds, $p = 0.04$. The Pashto to English group exhibited the greatest improvement with the Urdu to English group being the second best indicating the value of matching with L1 before switching over to L2.
- **Correlation Between Code-Switching and Participation:** A moderate, positive relationship between the frequency of code-switching and participation level ($r = 0.78$) implies the use of a second language by students on par with their native languages is likely to improve the engagement of the students.

7.1.2 Qualitative Insights
Thematic analysis of interview and focus group data revealed the following key themes:
- **Scaffolding Complex Concepts**: On the language use, for instance, teachers said that they apply code-switching in an attempt to explain abstract concepts, especially in lessons informed by technical jargon. Similarly, students supported this point by stressing that explanations in the L1 helped them understand the matter more easily.
- **Reducing Anxiety and Building Confidence**: According to the students' responses, they averted feeling intimidated during the classroom discussion as much as when the teachers actively adopted code-switching. as this reduction of anxiety promoted the development of a better learning environment that involves everyone.
- **Potential Over-Reliance:** The informants were also aware of some of the negative effects of Code-switching; they were fully aware that its excess use poses a threat to the development of English. The teachers focused on the necessity not only to switch to English-speaking lessons immediately but to do that gradually.

7.2 Discussion

These findings corroborate Vygotsky's sociocultural development theory, which asserts that the mode of functioning is a key instrument in learning. In the current study, Code-switching was useful in connecting prior knowledge and new learning, with correspondence to the student's ZPD. In this manner, teachers used students' L1 to clarify difficult concepts in order to help students reproduce those concepts within themselves. According to Canale and Swain's Communicative Competence Framework, it is possible to also expound on the benefits of code-switching. Better results in the comprehension section indicate the development of grammatical and discourse competencies, in contrast, the increased participation exhibits the development of sociolinguistic and strategic competencies. For example, Code-Switching provided the students with the possibility of responding effectively to classroom discourse and conforming to sociocultural expectations of communication while enhancing their repertoire in Comprehensive Communicative Skills.

The increase in the number of worker participation observed is in line with other studies pointing out that code-switching eases the information processing load by second language users (Sert, 2005). By creating little anxiety in language learning practices, the use of code-switching promoted students' engagement in learning exercises, which would have the effect of decreasing the effective filtrate. This decrease in anxiety qualified students to get more active in classroom discussions.

However, the significant amount of difference in comprehension that is strongly grouped with languages further emphasizes that context-sensitive solutions are essential. The second study showed higher benefits for Pashto-speaking students because the teachers' code-switching with L1 resembled their L1 which made the process most effective when linguistic compatibility is considered.

The results in the qualitative data also support the argument that code-switching is a risk and a benefit. Although it helps strengthen the overall understanding and contribution in the current lessons, using the L1 excessively is not beneficial for a student's long-term academic achievement. This remark provides credence to Macaro's (2005) argument that went as far as enumerating potential and L1 use pitfalls in ESL classrooms. These findings suggest that during classroom interactions, patients' exposure to English should be gradual while the judicious use of the L1 is also desirable for keeping the language proficiency going.

8. Implications for Practice

1. **Strategic Use of Code-Switching**: Teachers should use code-switching as a support for the content but not as a replacement for the English language in instruction based on a gradual transition to relevant content.
2. **Tailoring to Linguistic Contexts**: To get the best out of code-switching, educators also have to factor the linguistic profiles of their learners into the formula when developing code-switching strategies.
3. **Professional Development**: For pre-service and in-service teacher preparation, much attention must be paid to helping teachers manage code-switching or code-meshing in a way that encourages a combination of the contextual and the longer-term comprehension of language use.

Conclusion

This study further supports the importance of code-switching as a teaching and learning strategy, as well as an interactional resource in ESL classrooms. According to Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Canale and Swain's Communicative Competence Framework, the results reveal that code-switching serves as a strategic tool to span the gaps, improve comprehension, and support participation. Main Ideas Teachers, by using a student's first language within the Zone of Proximal Development, will be able to engage the learner in pertinent and suitably comprehensible learning-teaching interaction.

This research also affirms the advantages of code-switching while exercising caution on a balanced and sociolinguistically appropriate use. Use of L1 may also be very disadvantageous because it slows down the long-term language development hence the need for a progressive switch to English medium of instruction. The specific approaches designed to fit students' linguistic abilities demands and staff development for code-switching must be considered critical in enhancing code-switching outcomes.

Hence, code-switching may be counted as a valuable tool in the multilingual classroom environment as it enhances the free learning atmosphere of the class. However, its application must be designed in a way that does not outweigh the benefits of the already implemented immersion strategies. Further studies should aim to enhance the findings on the best practices of code-switching integration with an emphasis on the long-term linguistic development of subject and communicative output.

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