

**THE PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS TOWARDS THE USE OF  
CODE SWITCHING IN ENGLISH CLASSROOM IN MBOONI WEST SUB COUNTY,  
KENYA**

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**ABSTRACT**

The study looks into the perception of students and teachers towards the use of code switching in English classroom in Mbooni West Sub County. The study applied Communication Accommodation Theory developed by Giles and Coupland (1991). The study adopted a descriptive Survey Research design. The area of study was 15 selected schools in Mbooni west Sub County. The methods of collecting data were: an observation schedule, teachers and students' questionnaires. The target population for this study was the teachers and students in 41 public schools in Mbooni West Sub County. The sample size of the study was 300 students and 60 teachers of English from 15 schools that were sampled through purposive and simple random sampling methods. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were applied in the analysis of the data. The findings of the study also show that while students had positive perceptions towards Code Switching, teachers had both positive and negative perceptions. They also show that Code Switching has both positive and negative impact on the performance of English. Therefore, the study recommends that, teachers need to use Code Switching wisely, and also maximize the exposure to English language in the classrooms. The Stakeholders in education should be made aware on the presence of Code Switching to determine whether it should be incorporated into the curriculum designed. It is hoped that the findings of this study inform teachers and students on how to navigate through Code Switching as a communicative strategy and as an important technique in learning of the English Language.

**Keywords:** Code switching, English classroom, Perceptions.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Kenya is a highly multilingual country. The use of mother tongue, Kiswahili, English and a switch between the three languages for instruction has always been challenged as well as supported by parents, teachers, scholars and other stakeholders in the education sector. For a long time English has been the subject of instruction across all the subjects except Kiswahili although Kenya being a multilingual society most of the time the local languages and Kiswahili as well usually find their way into the classrooms. English commands as a language of technological innovations, the international market and various fields in the world which makes stakeholders feel a need to acquaint the students with the language in the employment sector. In

a classroom setup both teachers and students are prone to code switching during the teaching learning exercise, the major reason as to why the study clearly focuses on the feeling of both the students and the teachers about the use of code-switching in English classroom. Weinreich (1953) was the first person to define CS. In which he defines CS bilingual people as “individuals who switch from one language to the other according to appropriate changes in speech situation”. McClure (1977) uses the term CS to cover code-changing and code-mixing. In McClure’s definition, Code-changing is the alternation of languages at the level of the major constituents (e.g. NP, VP, and S). Importantly, McClure sees code -changing as involving a complete shift to another language system, in that all function words, morphology and syntax are abruptly changed. CS is defined by Auer (1984) as —language alternation at a certain point in conversation without a structurally determined (and therefore predictable) return into the first language, whereas —transfer is defined as language alternation for a certain unit with a structurally provided point of return into the first language. Milroy and Muysken (1995) consider CS as the alternative use by bilinguals of two or more languages in the same conversation. They use code-switching as a cover term under which different forms of bilingual behaviour are subsumed. Muysken, (1995) states that sometimes code-switching occurs between the turns of different speakers in the conversations or sometimes between utterances within a single turn. It can even occur within a single utterance. Code switching in this particular study is the alternating use of English and Kiswahili in English classes by the teachers and students.

Myers-Scotton (1999) states that the phenomenon of code-switching persists because interlocutors are required to play more than one role, participate in more than one single social relationship at any one time, and also because they belong to more than one single group within the society itself. Therefore, in the case of the classroom the interlocutors are able to regulate social relations among themselves through the use of code-switching and different code choices. This then implies that CS is rule- governed and, therefore, it is not “a deficit to be stigmatized nor is it a sign of semilingualism. Moreover, there are linguistic constraints that govern the notion of CS, and legitimize its existence, such as the equivalence constraint compounded (cf. Poplack, 1981), whereby the switch is observed to occur at a point in the sentence where it does not violate the grammar of either language. The linguistic constraints suggest that CS is not a sign of interference, while recent sociolinguistic evidence suggests that it is a meaningful conversational resource used to define social relations and to enhance communication. It is against this observation that the proposed study looks at CS in a neutral perspective. Musyken (2000) defines CS as the alternative use of two or more languages in alternation within a single discourse, sentence, or constituent. Musyken (2000) further observes that CS is a natural phenomenon and it is linguistically governed by grammatical rules, which in turn means that it is not a sign of linguistic deficit. As such, the circumstances leading to its existence in bilingual conversation may be examined in the light of its sociolinguistic context.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study applied Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) developed by Giles and Coupland (1991). The theory is about convergence and divergence in accommodation, and states that communicators are likely to accommodate the person they are speaking with by adopting

their mode of communication. Accommodation is performed for seeking approval, inclusion, affiliation, or interpersonal goals,” while nonaccommodation serves to highlight differences between people (Soliz, Thorson, and Rittenour, 2009). Divergent communicators maintain their own way of communicating, and then the communication differs from the other communicator. Convergence is sensory where people tend to over adapt to others who are perceived as limited in their abilities. Divergence is dependency, where the person who is talking, speaks to others as if they’re in a lower status than them. Lastly, intergroup occurs when the speakers place listeners in cultural groups without acknowledging individual uniqueness (Hordila-Vatamanescu et al. 2010). Noteworthy, CAT occurs within a context, as always, and that there is always negotiation of relationships within a conversation, including power within a relationship, when communicating. This paper focused on teacher and student perceptions on the use of CS as an accommodating strategy in classroom.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study area for this study was Mbooni West sub-county. Mbooni west Sub County is an area located in Makueni County. Mbooni West sub-county is near many ethnic communities that use different languages; schools from this region also admit students of different ethnic backgrounds who speak different languages. It is thus supposed that these students do code switch due to their different first languages. The study adopted descriptive survey design merges both qualitative and quantitative methods. Descriptive survey research as a primarily exploratory research is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions and motivations (Cresswell, 2012, 2013). This design was appropriate in this study because it allowed collection and examination of in-depth data on the issue of CS in language classes and its influence on the teaching and learning of English. Qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were applied in the collection of data on teachers and learners perception on CS. The target population is the larger group to which the researcher hopes to generalize the findings. The target population for this study was the teachers and students of English in secondary schools in Mbooni West Sub County. Mbooni West Sub-County has a total of forty five (45) secondary schools. These comprises of four (4) private schools and forty one (41) public schools (MOE, Mbooni West Sub County). This study targeted teachers of English and students in all the forty one (41) public secondary schools. 300 students and 60 teachers of English from 15 schools of the 41 schools were sampled through purposive and simple random sampling methods. The researcher developed questionnaires for both the teachers and students together with the observation schedule which eased the data collection process.

### **4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The study sought to find out the various functions of code switching in English language classroom in selected schools in Mbooni West sub-county, Kenya.

#### **4.1 Students’ perception towards use of Code-Switching in English classroom**

The researcher tries to figure out the students’ perception on the use of code-switching in English classroom. The researcher tries to find out the feeling of the students about the teachers who use code-switching in English classroom, whether it helps students in learning English or

not. The data was collected from the close-ended questionnaire as shown in table 18. From the close-ended questionnaire, it could be known that most of the students feel that the use of code-switching in English classroom is useful for learning English. Table 18 below describes the data collected from close-ended questionnaire.

**Instruction:** Place a tick ( ) in the columns provided

1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Strongly Agree 4=Agree 5=Neutral(Statements 1-2 are rated based on the above scale)

No of students: 300

**Table 1: Students perception towards use of code-switching in English classroom**

NO	Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Strongly disagree	Disagree
1	The use of Kiswahili or Kamba language by the teacher in English classroom helps you in learning English	40(13%)	200(67%)	60(20%)	0	0
2	The use of Kiswahili or Kamba language by the teacher in English classroom makes you easy to understand the material given by the teacher.	50(17%)	220(73%)	30(10%)	0	0
3	The use of Kiswahili or Kamba language by the teacher in English classroom makes you easy to understand new vocabularies in English.	80(27%)	180(60%)	40(13%)	0	0
4	The use of Kiswahili or Kamba language by the teacher in English classroom helps you to be fluent and accurate on your English speaking skill.	60(20%)	90(30%)	50(17%)	0	0

5	The use of Kiswahili or Kamba language by the teacher in English classroom makes eases your English writing skill.	40(13%)	164(67%)	96(30%)	0	0
6	The use of Kiswahili or Kamba language by the teacher in English classroom makes you understand toward the meaning of every sentence which is explained by the teacher.	270(90%)	20((7%)	10(3%)	0	0
7	The use of Kiswahili or Kamba language by the teacher in English classroom makes you understand something faster and it helps your teacher in managing the time in explaining thing	240(80%)	40(13%)	20(7%)	0	0
8	The use of Kiswahili or Kamba language by the teacher in English classroom makes you confused to learn English.	0	0	0	254(85%)	46(15%)

The results in table 1 cumulatively shows that most of students showed their positive perceptions toward each of the statement given on the questionnaire which implied that they have a positive attitude towards the use of CS in class. Statement 1 asked students whether the use of Kiswahili or Kamba language by the teacher in English classroom helps them in learning English. The findings of the study revealed that while 40(13%) strongly agree with the statement, 200(67%) agreed and 60(20%) were neutral about the statement. The responses of this statement 1 indicate that students prefer to use code switching since it simplify their learning processes. On the other hand CS occurs intentionally as initiated by the teacher to make the students understand the learning material.

Statement 2 asked students whether the use of Kiswahili or Kamba language by the teacher in English classroom makes them to understand the material given by the teacher. The findings in table 1 reveal that while 50(17%) strongly agree that the use of Kiswahili or Kamba language by

the teacher in English classroom makes them understand the material given by the teacher, 220(73%) strongly agreed while 30(10%) were neutral. Cumulatively, all students find CS as an important tool that eases their understanding of English materials. This then implies that the use of CS in English classroom by the teachers offers psychological support to the students.

Statement 3 asked students whether the use of Kiswahili or Kamba language by the teacher in English classroom makes them to understand new vocabularies in English easily. While 80(27%) strongly agreed with the statement, 180(60%) agreed and 40(13%) remained neutral. The findings clearly indicate that the use of planned CS can contribute to a more efficient understanding of a specific topic or be a part of the (L2) learning for instance vocabularies. This then implies that CS seems to increase the amount of cognitive processing made by students. This is because CS eases the cognitive effort required to process words when an explanation is done in the students' L2 and a translation into the students' L1. This also implies that students will learn new vocabulary more thoroughly.

Statement 4 asked students whether the use of Kiswahili or Kamba language by the teacher in English classroom helps them to be fluent and accurate in English speaking skills. While 60(20%) of the students strongly agreed, 150(50%) agreed while 90(30%) neutral. Therefore, the findings of the study reveal that use of code-switching can also help students to be fluent and accurate to speak in English. Fifth statement reveals that 40(13%) students strongly agree while 164(67%) agree with the statement saying that the use of Kiswahili or Kamba language makes students easy in English writing skills, while 96(10%) students were neutral. The findings of the study reveal that most of the students are helped by the use of code-switching in their English writing skills.

The findings of Sixth statement reveal that while 270(90%) students strongly agreed the use of Kiswahili or Kamba language makes them easy to understand the meaning of every sentence given by the teacher, 20(7%) of the students agreed and 10(3%) neutral. The findings show that code-switching when used it help students to understand the meaning of every sentence given by the teacher in English classroom. Thus, the findings reveal that both grammar and vocabulary learning can also be facilitated by code-switching. In their response to the open ended questions the teachers reported that when giving grammar instruction they used code-switching to make the instructions clearer. This was done by teachers drawing upon students' L1 grammar knowledge. The findings of statement seven in table 1 reveal that 240(80%) of the students strongly agreed that the use of Kiswahili or Kamba language by the teacher in English classroom them understand something faster and it helps their teacher in managing the time in explaining thing. 40(13%) agreed with the statement while 20(7%) remained neutral. The findings show that the use of code-switching from English to Kiswahili or Kamba or vice versa can help both students understand the material faster and teachers manage the time in explaining the materials.

The last statement asked the students whether the use of Kiswahili or Kamba language by the teacher in English classroom makes them confused to learn English. While 254(85%) strongly disagreed with the statement, 46(15%) disagreed. The findings therefore reveal that



code-switching does not make them confused at all rather it helps them a lot in learning English. In summary therefore the results on the students' questionnaire and explanation above indicate that students have a positive perception on the use of code-switching in English classroom. And that if well utilized CS supports the process of learning English.

**4.2 Teachers' perceptions towards use of code-switching in English classroom**

This section focuses on teachers' general views and their opinions on code-switching. The analysis also in cooperates when they code-switched and whether they had a specific purpose in doing so. The analysis therefore is based on the teachers' general views on code-switching as summarized in table 2 below:

**Table 2: Teachers general views on the use of code-switching in English classroom**

Questionnaire	TEACHERS VIEWS
What are your general views on the use of code-switching in English classroom?	<p><b>Positive</b></p> <p>For better understanding of the students and correspondences.                      Helps in learning English language in a simplified way.                      It helps students to express themselves than using English only.                      It is the best way to make students understand instructions.                      Makes student to follow my lesson                      Helps me deal with weak learners who are yet to grasp grammatical rules                      Saves time and you avoiding repeating yourself as you try to explain something                      It helps students to know the meaning of other words which are not familiar.                      It helps some students to know different vocabularies of different words.                      Code switching is good for communicating knowledge                      Makes learning clear and for emphasis Re-voice, to calling attention</p> <p><b>Negative</b></p> <p>Hinders English proficiency                      Increases over dependency on the teacher                      English is the target language and I normally tell the children that when they enter the classroom English is the only language allowed. Although they codeswitch                      Slows down learning                      It limits learners to use English language                      Code-switching may affect fluency, vocabulary and competence negatively                      Leads to students using sheng in class Direct translation</p>

Table 2 above clearly shows that the teacher's views regarding the use of code-switching in English classrooms are divided into positive and negative perceptions.

**4.3 Positive Perceptions**

The findings of the study reveal that CS may be used as a pedagogical tool in facilitating English language acquisition. Among their views as shown in table 19 teachers revealed that code switching helped in facilitating the language acquisition by making the input become more

comprehensible by using Kiswahili or Kamba to explain the meaning of English words. Among their views were:

*CS: For better understanding of the students and correspondences.*

*Helps in learning English language in a simplified way*

Therefore, the use of code-switching into first language (L1) might be a valuable strategy for target language acquisition enhancement. This also implies that code-switching is as a strategy for teaching and learning process. Other teachers also feel that CS makes the subject of discussion clear. In this case, CS is believed to facilitate second language learning and helping the students to relate their first language (L1) with second language (L2). Table 19 clearly shows that the teachers agreed that the use of code-switching would make the students understand better. The students also follow their lessons without shutting down. CS is also seen as a mean that ease the understanding of grammatical instructions. Thus, CS is helpful in L2 classes as it leads to student's better comprehension especially when providing equivalent comprehension as well as giving classroom procedures.

Code switching is also perceived by teacher positively as an effective teaching and learning resource. For instance the teacher's sentiments below show CS as a good teaching and learning resource:

*CS: Saves time and you avoiding repeating yourself as you try to explain something*

Basing on the sentiments above code-switching would be able to facilitate the language learning process and is seen as an efficient as well as time-saving method. Moreover, CS seems to be a solution for weak learners as expressed below:

*CS: Helps me deal with weak learners who are yet to grasp grammatical rules*

Code switching is thus a useful strategy in teaching English as it utilizes the shortest and easiest route to teach a topic especially in grammatical points. The above findings also clearly reveal that code-switching should be utilized with students who have low English language proficiency, but not with the high proficiency students. Moreover, CS helped the students to gain understanding towards the lessons, concepts and tasks better as shown with the sentiments from table 3 below:

*CS: It helps students to know the meaning of other words which are not familiar.*

*It helps some students to know different vocabularies of different words. Code switching is good for communicating knowledge*

*Re-voice, to calling attention*

In this sense CS is seen as a means that would help the weak learners to understand the meaning of difficult vocabularies, tasks and lessons. The teachers also believed that weak learners needed code-switching more as compared to the more proficient ones. Moreover, the above sentiments clearly reveal that CS allows English classroom to run smoothly. In this case CS teachers view CS as a positive scaffolding tool used in second language classrooms. Moreover, CS is seen as a repair of trouble or silence in classes when teachers use it for attention calling. Code switching



could thus be said to be appropriate when used for socializing and organizing the class. Some teachers noted that speaking English only sometimes could not get the students' attention, but they showed to pay more attention when the teacher switched to Kiswahili or Kamba. In this sense CS is seen to facilitate learners' understanding and build their vocabulary knowledge. The study therefore suggests that CS should only be used when necessary. Thus, CS can be a useful tool in assisting English language teaching and learning process. Moreover, code switching allows the effective transfer of information from the senders to the receivers.

#### 4.4 Negative Perceptions

In table 3 some of the teachers views towards the use of CS practice in English class were negative. The data collected clearly reveals that the teachers expressed their concern that the use of code-switching could hinder the students' progress in learning the target language proficiently as shown below:

*CS: Slows down learning*

*It limits learners to use English language*

*Code-switching may affect fluency, vocabulary and competence negatively*

The data above shows that some teachers believed that CS did not really help the low proficiency students in acquiring the target language in the long term. This is because the use of code-switching reduced the chances for the students to use the target language in the classroom as seen by one teacher's sentiments below:

*English is the target language and I normally tell the children that when they enter the classroom English is the only language allowed. Although they code switch*

The sentiments above reveal that the use CS in class limits maximum exposure to English language and this may hinder students L2 acquisition. Therefore code-switching should be used as a last resort to teach English in the classroom as expressed by some sentiments below:

*Teachers should not code switch throughout the whole lesson, but instead, it should only be done when necessary.*

*Code switching should not be done word by word as it is time-consuming but it should only be done to emphasize important messages or used to explain difficult content during lessons.*

*Code switching should be used as a last resort in teaching. Code switching should be used only when necessary.*

The data above clearly indicates that as much as code switching may have some benefits; it should be moderate code switching as it may interfere with the essential processes of learning itself. The teachers also raised the concern over CS being a precursor of use of **Sheng** in class which may lead to the decline in the standards of English. Moreover, CS hinders the opportunity for the students to develop into independent learners as shown by the sentiments below:

*CS: Increases over dependency on the teacher*

The above sentiments may be due to students over dependency on the teachers to give explanations for the English words and expressions in the first language to enhance their understanding.

The teachers also expressed the concern of direct translation due to CS. This is caused by the interference of the student's first language. CS encourages the students utilize the grammatical rules of the first language to English language which results to interference. Thus, some teachers believed that English should be taught in an English only environment. And some teachers felt that constant repetition of the correct usage for spoken English should be used instead of overreliance on L1. However, most teachers explained that the decision to use code-switching was influenced by the student's language proficiency which was low.

In summary, the findings from English language teachers' perceptions reveal that teachers have neutral or mixed perceptions regarding the use of code-switching in English classrooms. The findings revealed that most teachers agree that code switching is important in English language learning process as makes the students understand the lessons better and they use it to give grammatical instructions. This implies that the use of code-switching indeed facilitate the language learning process. Moreover, code-switching was an efficient, time-saving technique. However, some of the teachers expressed their concerns that the use of code-switching would cause the students reliance and dependency on their first language which would lead to L1 interference. The teachers believe that when code switching is used during English lessons, the students were prone to rely more on their first language.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study was set to establish the perception of students and teachers towards the use of code switching in English Language classroom in Mbooni west Sub County, Kenya. The findings of the study show that while students had positive perceptions towards Code Switching, teachers had both positive and negative perceptions. They also show that Code Switching has both positive and negative impact on the performance of English. The study therefore concludes that, teachers need to use Code Switching wisely, and also maximize the exposure to English language in the classrooms.

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