



# INFLUENCE OF CODE SWITCHING ON MASTERY OF ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KWANZA SUB-COUNTY TRANS-NZOIA COUNTY, KENYA

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# **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to look at the influence of code switching in the teaching of speaking skills in secondary schools in Kwanza Sub-County. The study was based on Krashen Model of affective filter hypothesis (Krashen, 1985) which states that a number of affective filter variables play a facilitative role in second language acquisition. In addition Lev Vygotsky's social Development Theory (Crawford, 1996) which states that learning contexts play an active role in language learning. The study used descriptive survey design research. The sample was drawn from eleven secondary schools in Kwanza Sub-County. The sample size in this study consisted of eleven (11) secondary schools from a population of 36 secondary schools. They were selected through stratified random sampling. Eleven (11) principals were purposively selected to the sample and 22 teachers were randomly selected with each school giving two teachers. Teachers were also randomly drawn to serve as sample members in the study. The study found that code switching may lead to corrupting the use of English language; which could eventually lead to code mixing resulting into unstable forms like Sheng'. However, it is worth noting that secondary school students' English language competence is still developing and their performance aspect involves code switching. Nevertheless, in using code switching in speaking to students, teachers encourage them to code switch in their conversations. This enhances communication but could undermine the mastery of English language especially in written communication. It may hamper development of the learner in expressing himself or herself in written communication. Thus code switching provides an avenue for those who cannot express themselves in one language. Ultimately, the speaker develops speaking skills in the languages involved code switching. Code switching enhances learning of speaking skills especially at secondary school level. Therefore, secondary school students will improve their speaking by use of code switching. We should keep in mind that by code switching, the development of skills of a speaking in the target language is likely to take longer that if the skills were entirely taught or learnt in the language itself. It is worth noting that, with code switching, performance in English grammar, composition and speaking skills is adversely affected. This in turn affects the general performance in academics as most examinations are set in English.

Key words: code, switching, speaking, skills, Sheng'

# **Background to the Study**

Code switching is a normal practice among bilingual and multilingual speakers in relation to situational factors, such as setting and social relations, as well as speaker motivations (Wolfram & Schilling, 2015). Code switching has thus become an ever-increasing reality within English language societies, throughout the world, and thus inside the classroom as well. Since independence in 1963, in Kenya the expansion of learning institution has been one of the greatest achievements in the education sector. Kenya has achieved an impressive



increase in literacy. The substantial expansion of education has generally resulted in an increased participation by groups that previously had no little or no access to schooling. Literacy levels in Kenya are based on two very important language skills. Reading and writing today's rapidly growing economies depend on the creation, distribution and use of knowledge and this requires an educated and skilled population.

This lack of flexibility in the Language of Instruction (LoI) forces teachers to use and pedagogical practices, such as chorus teaching, repetition, rote-learning, code-switching and safe talk, which undermines the teachers' effort to teach and the students' effort to learn. Furthermore, teachers tend to do most of the talking, while the students remain silent or passive, during most of the classroom interactions. Probyn (2001 & 2005) suggests that students may feel alienated from the subject content, when it is not expressed in their mother tongue.

It is assumed that the English taught in Kenyan schools is the Standard British Variety (SBE). Teachers are assumed to be capable of teaching the SBE effectively. This assumption is significant nowadays especially to language educators. Research has revealed that there is a disconnect between the assumed norms and actual language behavior especially in the school system (Kioko, 2001; Muthwii, 2001) Related to this issue is the concerns raised by the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) about the poor English results posted by Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) candidates (KNEC 1994). Currently, there is almost no model of the target variety and thus it is difficult for learners to attain the required proficiency. It has now long been recognized in both first language (L1) and sociolinguistic research that individuals learn and master the variety of language spoken in their speech community (Bokamba, 1994). Worth nothing is the fact that error analysts view English spoken by a majority of the Kenyan elite as one riddled with "incorrect" Forms (Nyamasyo 1992). However, Ogutu (1993) observes that it is almost impossible to drill a speech community out of its established language habits.

The Koech commission (Republic of Kenya 1999) evolved the concept of Totally Integrated Quality Education and Training (TIQUET) to reflect the holistic and inclusive nature under which the problems facing the education sector were to be addressed. Unfortunately the review report failed to address the language issue apart from advocating for the status quo. Currently, some of the wastage in Kenya's education sector can be blamed on the LOI in the country, since the MOI has a great impact on a pupil's success in other subject areas. This is an area that the Kenyan Education Act needs to reflect on. A second matter is the lack of a well —documented Language Policy (LP) for Kenya. The last comprehensive piece of research to be carried out on the language in Kenya was by Whiteley (1974). Barasa (2005) asserts that what the country needs is a policy document that is responsive to the language needs of the country and without broad —based information from such a study it will remain hard to evaluate the roles of our indigenous language in education.

Language is an important tool for learning especially in a student's early life. It can be facilitated by a teacher's effort to switch codes consciously depending on the needs of learners. Currently, there is a lot of rote learning in the teaching of English in secondary schools. The possibility of learners failing to express themselves especially when their linguistic abilities are put to test (KNEC, 1994) is almost nil. The issue here is not about a learner's mental competence, but the linguistic mismatch between the language of their thought processes and the imposed language on their lessons.



## **Statement of the Problem**

By the end of the secondary course, the learner should be able to communicate fluently, independently and accurately in everyday life. Specifically, the learner should have acquired speaking skills to be able to use correct pronunciation, stress and intonation s that their speech is understood, to express needs and feelings, convey information and relate experiences.

Code switching may be seen as a usable tool in order to assist the English language teaching and learning process at the foundation level, especially where it is a skill being introduced to the students living in multilingual speaking environments. At functional level, studies have demonstrated that the first language can serve a number of goals for learners of English as a second or foreign language, including developing strategies and approaches to make a difficult task more manageable, a head start in achieving effective.

Code switching involves the interplay of two languages and as well as serving linguistic functions, it has social and psychological implications. In the context of English language teaching, these psychological implications reveal themselves as teachers' thought processes. Many research have been done on code switching (Auer, 1988; Adendorff, 1996; Lawson and Sachdev, 2000; Macaro, 2001; Rolin-Ianziti and Brownlie, 2002; Wei, 2002; Ferguson, 2003; Liebscher and Dailey-O"Cain, 2005; Üstünel and Seedhouse, 2005; Lin, 2008; Xu, 2010), none has focused mastery of speaking skills in Kwanza Sub-County of Trans-nzoia County.

#### **Literature Review**

Since the 1970s there has been a debate as to whether Kenya has a clear language policy. The debate was mainly triggered by absence of any document that one could quote to prove the existence of an official policy. However, some language educators and policy makers insist that language use can be used as the indicator of the national language policy. To that extent one can confidently say that the Kenya has a policy that promotes multi-lingualism and linguistic rights of minorities. In this case Kenya has classified language use as follows: official language-English, national language-Kiswahili and mother tongue-Community languages.

In the Kenyan language policy each of these languages is allocated space in official communication (Mutahi, 2006). In the case of radio broadcasts, the government policy has always been allocated space in official communication. Mutahi also identifies other areas where language policy is in force. These are parliament, schools and public offices. This position is not shared by other language educators. There is significant evidence to the effect that policy, training and the practice of teachers of English in Kenya are not in harmony (Barasa, 2005). For instance, the Kenyan the catchment area policy is vague. It gives room for loose interpretations during the implementation phase (Okombo, 1996).

Moreover, Sridhar (1996) explains that multilingualism can be divided into two types in a country that is made up of diverse language groups. Hall (1995) defines bilinguals, in the context of schooling, as students who live in two languages, who have access to or need to use two or more languages at home and at school. He goes on to describe the categories of bilingual students from a large group learning a second language because the schools offer it as a more prestigious since it is a world language. An example is English in Kenya which is the official language, and is considered prestigious than Kiswahili and indigenous African languages.



The terms bilingualism and multilingualism have been defined differently by many writers and researchers. Although some researchers use the two concepts interchangeably, for the purpose of this study we shall focus on bilingualism. Williams and Snipper (1990) define bilingualism as a person's ability to process two languages in each of the four skills of language (i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing). They elaborate further by making a distinction between being bilingual and biliterate. People are bilingual if they can process two languages with regards to understanding the message and being able to speak and respond in each of the languages in a manner that is appropriate to the situation. They are considered biliterate if they can read and understand a written message and can write in two languages. William and Snipper (1990) assert that the more adept people are at processing the four skills in each of the languages, the greater their level of bilingualism.

According to Sridhar (1996) the term bilingualism refers to the knowledge or use of more than one language by an individual or a community. (Baker 1996) views bilingualism or multilingualism as an individual phenomenon, as well as a group or societal possession. Appel and Muysken (1990) explain that individual bilingualism refers to a state where one speaks two or more languages. On the other hand, societal bilingualism occurs when in a society, two or more languages are spoken.

There are various ways in which being a bilingual or multilingual could influence pupil's acquisition of English (De Klerk 1995). It is important to understand that there is no inherent or genetic difference between a monolingual and a multilingual. All children are born with the potential to be multilingual and have the potential to learn many languages without being confused. However if a child is born into a society that is predominantly monolingual s/he will certainly end up being monolingual. Similarly, if a child is born into a society that is multilingual s/he will equally end up being multilingual. Hence, environmental factors are important in determining whether a child will end up being monolingual or multilingual. Some of the issues attendants to this argument are discussed below.

A child is regarded as being creative, imaginative, supple, versatile and free in thinking when she/he can conveniently provide varieties of valid answers to a given question. However, educational styles are dynamic and the most modem forms of education lays solid emphasis on creativity and analytical thinking, flexibility, problem-solving skills and meta-cognitive awareness. The bilingual children scored better than monolingual children on all. Consequently, Baker (1996) summarizes on the underlying hypothesis concerning creative thinking and bilingualism that;

"The ownership of two or more languages may increase fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration in thinking".

This research finding shows that, (a) the knowledge of more than one language gives students access to extensive knowledge and skills available among the millions of speakers of those languages, especially in an educational setting where students are expected to discover knowledge, rather than having knowledge being passed on to them by the teachers, (b) the ability of the students to think creatively will put the students at an advantage.

The secondary aim of any educational enterprise is to prepare students for life - including the present. To achieve this aim, the enterprise has to incorporate certain teaching approaches and strategies in the classroom. One of such approaches that can improve teaching and learning is code switching, which is a method for experimenting with multiple languages. For the purpose of this study we will look at people's views on code switching, types of code



switching, reasons for code switching, functions of code switching, code switching in language classrooms and constraints related to code switching.

Code switching can either be inter sentential or intra sentential. Jnter sentential code switching involves switches from one language to another between sentences. This is seen most often between fluent bilingual speakers (Myers-Scotton, 1993). For example, when a teacher talks about the weather conditions may code switch as follow, *I think its going to rain mvuayamawe*" (it is going to rain heavily). In intra sentential code switching, the switch occurs within the same sentence, with no interruptions, hesitations or pauses indicating a shift. This type of code switching is also known as code mixing (Myers-Scotton, 1993). For example, a language student talking about disasters facing the country can code switch as follows. "Unaona vile madisasterzinatuface?" Lipski (1982, cited by Monte-Alcala, 2001:197) makes a distinction between inter sentential and intra sentential code switching. He relates inter sentential code switching to the so-called compound bilinguals (those who learned both languages at the same time or in the same context) and intra sentential code switching to coordinate bilinguals (those who learned their two languages in different times or contexts).

Gurmperz (cited in Setati, 2002) maintain that code switching is a verbal strategy whereby a teacher can, for instance use the first language of a student as a code for encouragement. Merritt, Cleghorn, Abagi, and Bungi (cited in Setati, 2002) claim that code switching could be motivated by cognitive and classroom management factors, which could help to regain students' attention or reinforce lesson materials. (Meyer, 1997) affirms that most Africa student has not been taught in their mother tongue, instead teachers use different model in class such as code- switching, to make student understand the content which is written in English(Sert, 2005)citing Mattson and Bureenhult (1999) lists the functions of teacher code switching as topic switch, affective, and repetitive functions. In topic switching, the teacher alters his/her language according to the topic being taught and shifts his/her language to the students' first language. In this case students' attention is directed towards the new knowledge. That is, a bridge from first language to second language is constructed to transfer new content to the student in a more meaningful way that will influence their academic success. Affective functions are important in the expression of emotions and to build solidarity and intimate relationships with students. In repetitive functions, a teacher codeswitches to clarify the meaning of a word in the students' first language and stresses the importance of the second language for efficient comprehension.

Eldridge (1996, in Sert, 2005) outline functions of student code switching as equivalence, floor-holding, reiteration and conflict control. Equivalence serves as a defensive mechanism for the student and gives him/her the opportunity to communicate without gaps resulting from incompetence in a second language. Floor- holding is used when a student cannot remember a word in the second language and s/he uses his/her first language to avoid a break in communication. Reiteration helps the student to understand the content of the subject by given meaning to it in his/her first language. She/he may not be able to transfer the meaning exactly into the second language. Conflict control can be used to avoid a misunderstanding when the student does not know the correct meaning of a word in a communication; the student code- switches to transfer the intended meaning.

# Methodology

The sample was drawn from eleven secondary schools in Kwanza Sub-County. The sample size in this study consisted of eleven (11) secondary schools from a population of 36



secondary schools. They were selected through stratified random sampling. Eleven (11) principals were purposively selected to the sample and 22 teachers were randomly selected with each school giving two teachers. Teachers were also randomly drawn to serve as sample members in the study. Sample frame is shown in table 1.

**Table 1: The Sample Frame** 

Respondent category		Public School		Private School		Total	
	population	sample	Population	sample	population	sample	
Principals	31	9	5	2	36	11	
Students	1860	558	300	90	2160	648	
Teachers	62	19	10	3	72	22	
Total	1953	586	515	95	2268	N=681	

Sample size = N = 681

## **Results**

The study involved a total of 681 respondents categorized as shown in table 1.

**Table 2: Respondents Categories** 

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Students	648	95.2
Teachers	22	3.2
Head teachers	11	1.6
Total	681	100.0

Source: Field Data (2019)

From table 1 it is evident that the majority 648(95.2%) of the respondents involved in the study were students. This was attributed to the fact that the study directly dealt with student respondents because they are the most affected with code switching in learning English. Thus, teachers may code switch to enhance understanding of certain concepts and skills in English language. However, it is worth noting that crucial information in this study came from principal and teachers. This was attributed to the assumption that they initiate code switching as they interact with learners; whether formally (in class) or informally (in other settings).

The study focused on the role of code switching in development of English speaking skills in secondary schools in Kwanza sub-county. In an attempt to achieve this object the study subjected teacher respondents to 15 items inform of statements.

The first item was the claim that "code switching enhances learning/teaching of English language". Respondents' responses on this aspect are presented in table 3.



Table 3: Code Switching Enhances Learning/Teaching of English language

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	5	15.2
Agree	11	33.3
Undecided	5	15.2
Disagree	7	21.2
Strongly Disagree	5	15.2
Total	33	100.0

Table 3 indicates that the majority 11(33.3%) of the teacher respondents agreed with the assertion that code switching enhances learning/teaching of English language. Similarly, 5(15.2%) of the respondents strongly agreed with the assertion. Cumulatively, therefore, 48.5% of the teacher respondents acknowledged the observation that code switching enhances learning teaching of English language. It is worth noting that this is contrary to what Mutahi 92006) notes about the language policy in Kenya. The language policy identifies language use as follows: official language-English, national language-Kiswahili and mother tongue-community language or language of the catchment area.

The issue of code switching as found out in this study is aimed at aiding learners to understand the concepts being taught. However, in using code switching to teach English speaking skills is likely to jeopardize the learner's effort and interest in learning the English language. The teachers' use of code switching in teaching of speaking skills could be attributed to what Barasa (2005) terms as lack of harmony in training and practice of teachers of English in Kenya. This lies in the vagueness of the language policy as noted by Okumbe (1996) that it gives room for loose interpretations during the implementation phase.

Table 4.5 further notes that 5(15.2%) of the teacher respondents involved in the study were undecided about the statement that code switching enhances teaching/learning of English language. This was attributed to teachers' lack of awareness of the language policy.

However, table 3 notes that 36.4% of the teacher respondents refuted the claim that code switching enhances learning/teaching of English; by 7(21.2%) disagreeing and 5(15.2%) strongly disagreeing. These were teachers who adhered to language policy. These teachers were of the view that code switching may lead to corrupting the use of English language; which could eventually lead to code mixing resulting into unstable forms like Sheng'. This is also observed by Mazrui (1995) that one great challenge to the language planners in Kenya is the Sheng' phenomenon.

The study also subjected respondents to the statement that "students like interacting through code switching". Teacher respondents' responses on this assertion are presented in table 4.



Table 4: Students like Interacting through Code Switching

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	14	42.4
Agree	10	30.3
Undecided	4	12.1
Disagree	3	9.1
Strongly Disagree	2	6.1
Total	33	100.0

Table 4 reveals that the majority 14(42.4%) of the teacher respondents strongly agreed with the assertion that students like interacting through code switching. Data in table 4 further shows that 10(30.3%) of the respondents agreed with the assertion in question. This implies that 24(72.7%) cumulatively acknowledged the claim that students like interacting through code switching. This high percentage of acknowledgement of the assertion is attributed to the practical use of language both in class and outside class settings. This finding further implies that there are no working school language policies. In many schools language policies are just nominal but not practical. The school language policies are almost similar in most schools; where students are called upon to speak English in all settings except during Kiswahili lesson. In most cases such policies are not functional as learners and even teachers resort to the use of code switching.

The above finding deviates from KNEC(1994) which noted that there was a lot of rote learning in the teaching of English in secondary schools and the possibility of learners failing to express themselves especially when their linguistic abilities are put to test is almost nil.

Table 4 further reveals that 12.1% of the respondents were undecided about the statement that students like interacting through code switching. These were teacher respondents who did not have tangible information about the language in which students interact.

Lastly table 4.6 further notes that 9.1% and 6.1% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively with the assertion that students like interacting through code switching. This implies that 15.2% of the teacher respondents refuted the claim that students like interacting through code switching. These were teachers who were in schools where the school language policy was upheld.

In addressing the aspect of English use of code switching among secondary schools students; the study investigated teacher respondents on the statement that secondary schools students answer speaking questions in class through code switching. Their responses are captured in the chart labeled figure 1.



Figure 1: Secondary schools Students Answer Speaking Questions in Class through Code Switching.

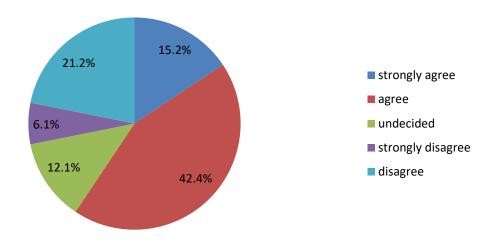


Figure 1 reveals that the majority (42.4%) teacher respondents involved in the study agreed with the assertion that secondary schools students answer speaking questions in class through code switching. This was attributed the fact that teachers of English in the studied schools initiate the use of code switching in teaching English lessons and thus students do the same in answering speaking questions. It is worth noting that code switching is only used in speaking skills but not in written English.

Figure 1 also indicates that 15.2% of the teacher respondents strongly agreed with the assertion in question. Therefore, cumulatively, 57.6% of the respondents acknowledged the assertion that secondary schools students answer speaking questions in class through code switching. This enhances understanding and self-expression of learners during speaking communication.

However, figure 1 shows that 12.1% of the teacher respondents were undecided the claim that secondary schools students answer speaking questions in class through code switching. These were respondents who remained non-committal about the statement in discussion.

Nevertheless, 21.2% and 6.1% of teacher respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed with the claim that secondary schools students answer speaking skills questions in class through code switching. This implies that 27.3% of teachers involved in the study refuted the claim that secondary schools students answer speaking questions in class through code switching. This was attributed to implementation of school policy on language in the schools where this category of respondents was drawn. Some schools insist that learners should use appropriate language in answering questions; whether speaking or written. In the case of English as a subject; then English language is used but not code switching.

However, it is worth noting that secondary school students' English language competence is still developing and their performance aspect involves code switching. In this connection the study subjected respondents to the assertion that "the teachers of English enhance the use of code switching among secondary school students as role models in their speech".

Respondents' responses on the above assertion are captured in table 5.



Table 5: The Teachers of English enhance the use of code switching among secondary school students as role models in their speech

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	11	33.3
Agree	4	12.1
Undecided	5	15.2
Disagree	9	27.3
Strongly Disagree	4	12.1
Total	33	100.0

Table 5 reveals that the majority 11(33.3%) of the teacher respondents engaged in the study strongly agreed with the assertion that teachers of English enhance the use of code switching among secondary school students as role models in their speech. This implied that teachers use code switching in talking to students as were as discussing among themselves. In using code switching in speaking to students, teachers encourage them to code switch in their conversations. This enhances communication but could undermine the mastery of English language especially in written communication. It may hamper development of the learner in expressing himself or herself in written communication.

Furthermore, table 5 indicates that 4(12.1%) of the respondents agreed with the assertion in question. They agreed that teachers of English enhance the use of code switching among secondary school students as role models in their speech. This reinforces the preceding observation that by use of code switching in their speech, teachers directly or indirectly influence students to use the same in their speech. Cumulatively, therefore, 45.4% of the respondents captured in table 5 acknowledged the statement that teachers of English enhance the use of code switching among secondary school students as role models in their speech.

In addition, table 5 shows that 5(15.2%) of the respondents were undecided about the statement in question. These were teachers who were non-committal to the assertion that teachers of English enhance the use of code switching among secondary school students as role models in their speech. Such teachers had little experience with the use of code switching in their interaction with learners or other teachers.

Nevertheless, 9(27.3%) of the respondents in table 5 disagreed with the statement that teachers of English enhance the use of code switching among secondary school students as role models in their speech. Similarly, 4(12.1%) of the respondents strongly agreed with the same assertion. Therefore, 39.4% of the respondents refuted the claim that teachers of English enhance the use of code switching among secondary school students as role models in their speech. This was attributed to adherence to school language policies in the schools where 39.4% of the respondents were drawn from. This enhances the mastery of all English language skills.

The study also sought to establish teachers' stand on the use of code switching in their teaching. They were thus subjected to statement "I like teaching through code switching". Their responses are presented in the chart labeled figure 2.



Figure 2: I like teaching through code switching.

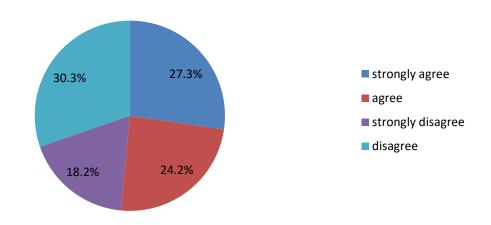


Figure 2 reveals that the majority (30.3%) of the respondents disagreed with the claim that they liked teaching through code switching. Similarly, 18.2% of the respondents in figure 2 strongly disagreed with the assertion. Cumulatively, 48.5% of the respondents refuted that assertion that they like teaching through code switching. This is attributed to the professional requirement that teachers of English should all the skills of the language in this language. As a result most of the teachers of English prefer teaching in English.

However, 27.3% of the respondents strongly agreed with the claim that they liked teaching through code switching. In addition 24.2% of the respondents in chart 3 agreed with the assertion in question. Cumulatively, therefore, 51.5% of the respondents acknowledged the claim that they liked teaching through code switching. This category of teachers formed the cumulative majority and this was attributed to the level of secondary school students and their background in English language learning. Majority, 51.5% liked code switching in their teaching of English speaking skills to enhance self expression of secondary school students. It is through code switching that secondary school students are able to learn their speaking skills in English. However, it is worth noting that code switching enhances self expression in speech but not in written English. This calls for teachers to be cautions in the use of code switching for it may not work well for learning other language skills other than speaking and listening.

All (648;10%) students involved in the study acknowledged that their teachers code switch enhancing lessons. They also observed that they communicate to each other in either English or Kiswahili or both when interacting with others outside class time.

# Conclusion

The study found that code switching may lead to corrupting the use of English language; which could eventually lead to code mixing resulting into unstable forms like Sheng'. However, it is worth noting that secondary school students' English language competence is still developing and their performance aspect involves code switching. Nevertheless, in using code switching in speaking to students, teachers encourage them to code switch in their



conversations. This enhances communication but could undermine the mastery of English language especially in written communication. It may hamper development of the learner in expressing himself or herself in written communication.

Thus code switching provides an avenue for those who cannot express themselves in one language. Ultimately, the speaker develops speaking skills in the languages involved code switching. Code switching enhances learning of speaking skills especially at secondary school level. Therefore, secondary school students will improve their speaking by use of code switching.

## Recommendations

The study makes the following recommendations based on its findings;

- 1. School language policies should be upheld by teachers being role models for students.
- 2. Code Switching should be minimized in class setting and only used cautiously where inevitable.
- 3. Interactive methods of teaching speaking skills should be used to enhance teaching of speaking skills purely in English.

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