

## Deploying a Sense of Plausibility in Language Choice: The Role of English-Shona Code Switching in Zimbabwean Classrooms

Thadeus Marungudzi, Lecturer  
Great Zimbabwe University

***Abstract:** Despite calls for the upgrading of Shona and Ndebele into languages of learning and teaching in secondary schools in Zimbabwe, and for the teaching of the so-called official minority languages, things have virtually remained unchanged in terms of the language of learning and teaching being used in the schools. English continues to dominate the role of medium of instruction. It is becoming more and more apparent in Zimbabwe that government calls for the use of indigenous languages as languages of learning and teaching in secondary schools have not been complemented by practical action. However, appealing to their sense of plausibility, teachers have reined in the indigenous languages into their classroom practice, through code switching, realising positive results in the process. The teaching of previously marginalised so-called minority languages is also steadily growing, particularly at tertiary level. Through observation of classroom practice and interviews in 10 secondary schools in the Masvingo District of Zimbabwe, it emerged that English-Shona code switching helped teachers achieve content transmission and classroom management goals. It emerged that the teachers have innovatively carved a momentous niche in a language policy environment that continues to effectively marginalise indigenous languages from the classroom.*

***Key words:** Zimbabwe, code switching, language of instruction, sense of plausibility, Shona,*

### 1. Introduction

Determining the language to be used as a language of instruction (LOI) is one of the key decisions that have a huge impact on the success of the learning process (Babaci-Wilhite 2013, Rea-Dickins and Yu 2013, Madiba 2012, Alemu and Tekleselassie 2011, Rezvani and Rasekh 2011, Roy-Campbell 2003, Barkhuizen 1995, Bamgbose 1991, among others). In most countries in Africa, such decisions are made by politicians who may not be interested or conversant with the nitty-gritty of language choice on the learning process, being more concerned with the political expediency dimension of the policy (Alemu and Tekleselassie 2011, Crystal 2003, Francis and Kamanda 2001). Such an approach by politicians has invariably ruined chances for the development of indigenous languages. In Zimbabwe, changing from the colonial language of learning and teaching policy that favoured English, to one that recognises the important role of the indigenous language, particularly in the schools, has eluded government policy planners for

over three decades now. Even at the height of the Zimbabwean crisis in 2007/2008 when the government churned out a barrage of anti-British vitriol, the position of English remained untouched (Ndhlovu 2011). It is important to explore how classroom practitioners have reacted to this stasis in the language of instruction policy.

## 2. Review of literature

The issue of language of instruction in the classroom belongs to the field of language planning in general and to that of language in education in particular. Subsections 2.1 to 2.4 give the background to the study by discussing language planning in the context of education, outlining the current language of instruction policy in Zimbabwe, defining the concept 'sense of plausibility' and reviewing some studies of code switching in the classroom context.

### 2.1 Language planning and education

According to Bamgbose (1991:162) "the question of what language to use in education is a problematic one in any multilingual country, particularly one that has also been subjected to the inevitable imposition of a foreign official language arising from colonialism". To a great extent, this description fits Zimbabwe as well as many other African countries.

Bamgbose (1991:69) observes that many African nations bear the brand of what he terms the "inheritance situation", a situation whereby African nations pretend to make policy in education; when in fact all they actually do is carry on the logic of the policies of the past. Such a phenomenon is evident "in the very languages selected, the roles assigned to them, the levels at which languages are introduced and the difficulty of changing any of these."

McNab (1992:2) also views the education system as an important field for the implementation of government policies. He goes on to elaborate that such policies include the reinforcement of national integration, popular legitimation of government, economic development and national cultural authentication. Tollefson (2002:179) notes that "in multilingual states, language policies in education play a central role in state efforts to manage language conflict". For example, in a situation where competing language groups seek to further their social, economic and political agendas within the educational system, language policy in education may be a crucial component in state efforts to favour one language group over another, or to reduce the potential of social conflict.

There are a number of definitions of language planning put forward by such scholars as Cooper (1989), Crystal (1997), Kaplan and Baldauf (1997), Francis and Kamanda (2001), Crystal (2003), Batibo (2005), Fishman (2006), Liddicoat (2007), among others. Focusing particularly on the African context, Batibo (2005:117) however proposes that language planning should be confined to "the formulation of a set of principles that allow an optimal utilisation of the language(s) in a country for the benefit of all its citizens and to manipulation of the relevant language(s) so that

they have the capabilities required to fulfil all the communicative and other needs of the speakers". Batibo goes on to propose two types of planning; ideological planning and technical planning. There are also other types of planning such as corpus planning, status planning and acquisition planning (Cooper 1989). However, in order to understand the proper context of code switching in Zimbabwean classrooms, it is important to describe the prevailing medium of instruction policy.

## 2.2 The current medium of instruction policy in Zimbabwe

Many scholars (Makanda 2013, Nhongo 2013, Ndhlovu 2009), for example, have observed that Zimbabwe has not developed formal language policies. Nevertheless, there exists an act of parliament that regulates how languages should be used and taught in the education sector in Zimbabwe. Inherited from the pre-colonial system and reconstituted without any alterations in 1996, the act that currently regulates language use and teaching in education was amended in 2006. The amended act is quoted verbatim below:

### *Languages to be taught in schools*

- (1) *Subject to this section, all the three main languages of Zimbabwe, namely Shona, Ndebele and English, shall be taught on an equal-time basis in all schools up to Form Two level.*
- (2) *In areas where indigenous languages other than those mentioned in subsection (1) are spoken, the Minister may authorise the teaching of such languages in schools in addition to those specified in subsection (1).*
- (3) *The Minister may authorise the teaching of foreign languages in schools.*
- (4) *Prior to Form 1, any one of the languages referred to in subsection (1) and (2) may be used as the medium of instruction depending upon which language is more commonly spoken and better understood by the pupils.*
- (5) *Sign language shall be the priority medium of instruction for the deaf and hard of hearing.*

Critics have identified a number of weaknesses in this amended policy, among them the fact that the policy is silent on the language of instruction to be used in secondary schools, thereby silently perpetuating the 1996 policy where English is the language of instruction. It is the constraints posed by the use of English as LOI that perhaps force teachers in the secondary schools to recourse to English-Shona code switching.

## 2.3 Defining sense of plausibility

Prabhu (1990:172) defines sense of plausibility as a teacher's subjective understanding or personal conceptualisation of the teaching activities she carries out in the classroom and their envisaged effect, more or less a pedagogic intuition. Prabhu argues that a teacher's sense of plausibility arises from any or all of the following: a teacher's experience from the past as a

learner, a teacher's earlier experience of teaching, exposure to one or more methods of teaching during training, what the teacher knows or thinks about other teachers' actions or opinions and a teacher's experience as a parent or caretaker.

An important dimension of a teacher's sense of plausibility is that it varies from teacher to teacher and may be viewed as a teaching theory in a dormant state. Prabhu (1990:173) goes on to say the following about the consequence of engaging the sense of plausibility:

“It is when a teacher's sense of plausibility is engaged in the teaching operation that the teacher can be said to be involved, and the teaching not to be mechanical. Further, when the sense of plausibility is engaged, the activity of teaching is productive: There is then a basis for the teacher to be satisfied or dissatisfied about the activity, and each instance of such satisfaction or dissatisfaction is itself a further influence on the sense of plausibility, confirming or disconfirming or revising it in some small measure, and generally contributing to its growth and change”. Prabhu says in conclusion that an engagement of the sense of plausibility is a major condition for teacher-learner rapport; a highly regarded condition in the classroom.

In an introduction to a book on writing, Tribble (1997: x) states : “We believe that advances in language teaching stem from the independent efforts of teachers in their own classrooms. This independence is not brought about by imposing fixed ideas and promoting fashionable formulas. It can only occur when teachers, individually or collectively, explore principles and experiment with techniques”. He goes on to argue that “if language teaching is to be a genuinely professional enterprise, it requires continual experimentation and evaluation on the part of practitioners whereby in seeking to be more effective in their pedagogy they provide at the same time – and as a corollary – for their own continuing education” (Tribble 1997:xii).

It is this continual experimentation and independence that constitutes ‘sense of plausibility. It should also be pointed out that teachers do not engage their sense of plausibility only in terms of methodological choices. This paper argues that language choice is a significant realm in which teachers and students, consciously or subconsciously, deploy the sense of plausibility in order to deal with the hurdles emanating from the existing LOI policy.

## **2.4 Code switching in learning and teaching activities**

Code switching may be understood as an attempt to recognise the potency of mother tongues as languages of instruction. Defined as “the use of more than one language in the course of a single communicative episode” (Eastman 1992:1) code switching is interesting in that some scholars argue that it must be encouraged while others feel that it must be discouraged in the classroom. Eastman adds that code switching encompasses borrowing, mixing and switching all of which have the same rhetorical effects though they are structurally different. According to Myers-

Scotton (1993) code switching can be classified as marked (where the language used would not be normally expected in a given context) or unmarked (where the language used is one that would be expected in that context). Researchers on code switching (e.g. Nwoye 1992; Adendorf 1993; Canagarajah 1995; Slabbert and Finlayson et al. 2002; Myers-Scotton 2005; Holmarsdottir 2007; Ahmad 2009) largely concur that it carries out important functions both in and outside the classroom. According to Adendorf (1993:141) “code switching is a communicative resource, which enables teachers and pupils to accomplish a considerable number and range of social and educational objectives”. In Myers-Scotton’s (2005:3) view, code switching “better expresses the semantics and pragmatics of the speaker’s intentions” than either of the separate codes singly.

In the classroom situation, code switching is also invaluable both in content transmission and classroom management (Canagarajah 1995). Adendorf (1993) concurs with this notion when he asserts that code switching plays both an educational and a social function. Code switching is important to the second language learner, not only because it augurs well with the communicative classroom (Faleni 1993, Canagarajah 1995) but indeed because students learn the values behind respective codes; how to negotiate meaning through code choice; how to negotiate identities through alternations in appropriate situations, the metalinguistic and metacognitive skills (Canagarajah 1995). Through exposure to code switching, students also learn to be communicatively competent and to practically benefit from their bilingualism.

Keane (1999) as well as Shumba and Manyati (1998) also report on how code switching resulted in improved levels of motivation and participation in the classroom. Furthermore, code switching gives the L2 learner an opportunity to use his or her mother tongue, thereby enabling him to enjoy this fundamental human right (Skutnubb-Kangas 1990, Babaci-Wilhite 2013) and leading to a reduction of the cultural and language shock of the minority language learner who is faced with a foreign language of instruction.

There are also micro-functions of code switching. Canagarajah (1995) gives examples such as negotiating directions, opening the class, managing discipline, expressing encouragement, complements, commands, admonitions and mitigation within the classroom context. There are of course scholars who argue that code switching takes away from the L2 learner an opportunity to experience vicariously how certain messages are communicated in the target language. Kgomoeswana (1993) says that paraphrasing learning content using the learner’s L1 should be discouraged because no two words or phrases from two different languages mean the same, such that translating, as it were, is bound to mislead the learner.

From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that despite some shortcomings that the use of code switching may have, it is by and large an important resource which teachers must not feel ashamed to use.

### 3. Methodology

The data for this study was collected through observation. Observation is a research technique that involves the collection of data without the researcher attempting to manipulate it. The researcher simply observed on-going activities, without making any attempt to control or determine them (Wray et al. 1998:186). However, Wilson (1987: 161) observes that though observation may give researchers naturalistic data, “in observing or recording everyday interaction, one is contaminating that very interaction by the procedures of observation”. This is what is known as “the observer’s paradox”. Either a participant or non-participant observer can execute observations. A non-participant observer “records in detail as an outsider, all the behaviours which take place” while a participant observer is “an integral part of the observed situation as one of the subjects without the other participants being aware of the fact” (Seliger and Shohamy 1989:161). For this study, the observation was carried out by a non-participant observer. Non-participation freed more time for the observer to concentrate on the task of observing and taking notes.

Observation focused on the actual LOI practice of secondary school teachers. Table 3.1 shows the subjects in which observations were carried out. Four teachers from each of the ten schools, one from each subject discipline, were observed.

**Table 3.1: The subjects in which observations were carried out**

Discipline	Subjects
Commercials	Commerce, Accounting
Humanities	Literature in English, History, Religious Studies, Geography
Practicals	Agriculture, Fashion and Fabrics, Computer Science
Sciences	Integrated Science, Physics, Chemistry, Biology

Observations vary in explicitness, with structured observations being of high explicitness and open or unstructured observations being of low explicitness. Data from structured observations are in the form of checks, tallies, frequencies, and ratings while those from open observations are in the form of impressions, field notes, tapes or transcripts.

In this study, an observation schedule (extrapolated from the one used by Meyer (1997, 1998) was used to elicit information on the LOI that was used in the classroom:

- when the teacher spoke to the students
- when the students spoke to each other.
- when the students spoke to the teacher.
- when the teacher wrote on the chalkboard.
- when the teacher wrote in the scheme book.

- when the teacher wrote in students' exercise or note books.
- when the students wrote in exercise or note books.
- when the students wrote on the chalkboard.
- in subject core textbooks.
- on charts and other audiovisual learning aids.

#### **4. Patterns and effects of code switching in the classroom**

As indicated in Section 2 above, classroom observations were meant to explore the reasons for the teachers' thinking and practice regarding the official medium of instruction policy. It was also indicated that the official language of instruction in Zimbabwean secondary schools is English. Against this background, the effects of English-Shona code-switching could be explored mainly through paying attention to those instances that teachers and learners departed from that official policy.

It emerged from the classroom observations that the disharmony between the language of instruction policy and practice was only minimal. Most departures from the official policy also seemed off the record but were in fact integral components of classroom instruction. However, it was interesting to note that the classroom sessions that were observed contrasted with lessons shown on the 'Extra Lesson' programme on ZBC Television in which teachers painstakingly used only the English language throughout their lessons. It must also be noted that the lessons beamed on television appeared more formal and rather artificial than the live lessons that were observed for this study.

Confirming Meyer's (1998) findings, it was observed that both teachers and pupils departed from the LOI policy only in the oral modes of communication. However the critical question was not whether or not disharmony between the LOI policy and practice existed and to what extent, but focused on the factors that give rise to a departure from the official LOI policy.

It was observed that departures from the prescribed LOI policy were mainly in the form of code switching. The observations revealed that switching was an act of engaging the teacher's sense of plausibility in terms of LOI choice. Broadly speaking, the functions that were observed could be grouped according to Canagarajah's (1995) taxonomy, which consists of classroom management, social and pedagogical functions. I discuss each of these broad functions below illustrating them with evidence from the observation data. Where actual quotations from the research participants are used, a code name for the participant is always given in brackets at the end of the quotation.

##### **4.1 Classroom management functions**

Many of the observations showed that teachers adopted the modality splitting strategy i.e. the reservation of specific codes or channels of communication for distinct functions (Canagarajah 1995:179) between Shona and English. It was evident that departures to Shona were mainly used

for maintenance of classroom management while English was mainly used for content transmission. The following example from a Form 2 (Grade 9) Accounting lesson on three-column cashbooks illustrates that:

*Example 1:*

Now the first thing that we want to do is divide our page into relevant columns. You should remember from yesterday how we go about drawing the columns. We shall do this in groups. Division of labour-*ka. Vamwe vachiita izvi, vamwe vachiitawo izvi.* [You should appreciate the importance of division of labour. Some will do this and others will do that] (MT 1).

This example shows that the teacher (MT 1) departs from the official LOI policy and switches to Shona when he is giving instructions on how the class is going to conduct itself in carrying out classroom activities. This is a typical classroom management strategy informed by modality splitting as the large proportion of the lesson is conducted in English.

It can also be argued that in this example, the teacher is also trying to clarify to the students the concept of 'division of labour' that he feels learners may not have understood. Thus he goes on to render the Shona equivalent of 'division of labour' ie '*vamwe vachiita izvi, vamwe vachiitawo izvo*'. This confirms Canagarajah's (1995) observation that code switching can be used as a vehicle for clarifying, explaining, exemplifying, reformulating and qualifying during the transmission of learning matter. It is evident here that the teacher has a hunch that these functions cannot be best accomplished in English which is a second language for the learners even if it is the official LOI. Thus he circumvents the obstacles posed by the official LOI and engages his sense of plausibility through switching to the learners' mother tongue. In the process, the teacher achieves the nobler goal of ensuring understanding in the learners. Though we will notice later that students' switches to the mother tongue might be a result of linguistic limitations in the official LOI, here it is evident that teachers' switches are not a result of linguistic incompetence.

Another episode in the same lesson that shows that the teacher was reserving Shona for classroom management purposes and English for transmitting the learning content was when he said, some five minutes into the group activity, to a straggling student:

*Example 2:*

*Hausati watanga?* [You haven't even started?] (MT 1).

*Kana tichirula torula takaita sei?*[How do we go about ruling the page?] (Learner A1).

*Uyo akwanisa wani kurula. Zvokurovha ndozvandisingadi.* [But your colleague there has successfully ruled the page. You are in the habit of bunking classes. I don't condone that] (MT 1).



In this episode, the teacher switches to Shona when he chides a student for being slow. The teacher proceeds to condemn, in Shona, the tendency of the student to absent herself from classes.

There are of course scholars (e.g. Kgomoewana 1993) who argue that code switching prevents the learners from experiencing how certain messages are communicated in the target language (usually the LOI). This is a sound argument in the sense that, in Example 2 above, if the teacher had used the English version to chide the learner, the class in general and the errant learner in particular, could have learnt how to chide in English. However, by switching to the learner's mother tongue, the teacher foregoes the opportunity of speaking in English in favour of the more pressing need to discipline the learner.

We also note in this example that the student asks the teacher a question in Shona. It can be argued that the student resorts to Shona because that is the language in which the teacher has initiated the exchange with her. Furthermore, it is equally plausible to argue that the student believes that if she asks her question in the mother tongue, the teacher, who in turn may also offer an explanation in the same language, will understand the question unambiguously. In such a scenario it becomes evident that some learners resort to the use of the mother tongue because they are conscious of their limitations in the official LOI. Such limitations were actually witnessed, even in Form 6 (Grade 13) students. (See examples 3 – 6 below)

#### *Example 3*

Sunshine will be short [for the concept that crops will be competing for sunshine] (Learner G1).

#### *Example 4*

The government must also chip in with subsidiaries [for subsidies] so that farmers do not buy inputs at market rates (Learner G2).

#### *Example 5*

The Agribank is useful to farmers like... like to...giving loans to farmers (Learner G3).

#### *Example 6*

Fertilisers add more manure [for fertility] to the soil (Learner G4).

There were some sniggers from some sections of the classroom whenever such grammatically incorrect sentences were uttered. Inspection of the learners' exercise books and examination scripts showed similar linguistic inaccuracies. However, something that seems to perpetuate such linguistic inaccuracies is the fact that in the interviews with the teachers who were professional examiners, they said that students' examination answers that were fraught with language errors would pass for correct answers as long as the answers communicated the desired content.

Another example in which code switching was used to control disruptive behaviour in the class was witnessed in a Form 6 (Grade 13) Geography class in which the teacher said:

*Example 7*

Those who are chatting to themselves *vasingingateereri zviri ku-present-wa ndichakukiyai chaizvo* if you get less than 14 *pa-test ye-Friday*. [Those who are busy chatting to themselves and not listening to what is being presented, I'll deal with you effectively if you score less than 14 on the test coming on Friday] (RM 4).

*Example 8*

*Chitoitai zveshamhu chaiyo, Sir*. [Better use a whip, Sir] (Learner G 1).

These examples also show, just as Example 1, that some learners depart from the official LOI once they notice that the teacher has switched from it. Slabbert and Finlayson (2002) make a similar point. It would be tenable to argue here that learners read a switch from the official LOI as a toning down of the formality degree of the lesson and they also thus adjust accordingly.

The reservation of the mother tongue for classroom management purposes, this time not necessarily to check disruptive behaviour or maintain classroom discipline, was also evident in a Form 3 (Grade 10) Mathematics lesson in which the teacher (MD 11) asks the class to clap hands for a learner who has successfully worked out a solution to an algebraic problem on the chalkboard. The teacher says:

*Example 9*

*Maoko panonakidzirawo kani* [Come on, we should always clap hands after a good showing from our colleagues] (MD 11).

After another laudable performance from a different student, the teacher also said:

*Example 10*

*Aha, maoko iwayo*. [Yes! Come on, let's clap hands for her as usual] (MD 11).

The same teacher also switched to Shona to create emphasis and humour. After a student had asked a question, the teacher replied:

*Example 11*

*Zvatinoita apa* is very simple. Minus sign *yako inyore ruviri*. *Munoziva*, Maths *yose iri paminus sign*. *Ukainyora ruviri, inopfavisa zvinhu zvako*. *Zvinopfava kuita semambava ekiti*. [What we do here is very simple. You have to write your minus sign twice. You know, all Mathematics rests

on the minus sign. If you write the minus sign twice, it renders your task very soft (meaning simple). As soft as the fur of a cat] (MD 11).

Here injecting humour into lesson delivery augurs well with the communicative approach to teaching, which discourages teachers from conducting themselves in a cold and authoritarian manner. Thus humour based on the children's mother tongue may be understood as a pedagogical strategy meant to address the learning needs of the class by promoting a friendly environment. Apart from that, such humour is also a sign of solidarity with the learners on the part of the teacher. Thus code switching may indeed be taken as a potent communicative resource (Canagarajah 1995, Mesthrie et al 2000, Holmarsdottir 2007) that a sensitive and innovative teacher has at his or her disposal.

#### 4.2 Pedagogical and social functions

It was also determined from classroom observations that one of the roles that code switching played in the classroom is that it may be used during content transmission as a contextualisation cue that alerts pupils to what is coming – a kind of advance organiser (Adendorf 1993). The following example from a Form 4 (Grade 11) Agriculture lesson illustrates this function:

##### *Example 12*

*Saka*, [So] you will realise that if the terrain is rugged, operation of agricultural machinery is hampered (N 7).

Here, the teacher has switched to Shona to signal to his audience that he was now about to give a kind of summary or conclusion to an earlier explanation. A similar contextualising strategy was observed in a Form 5 (Grade 12) Physics lesson in which the teacher said:

##### *Example 13*

*Pane ane mubvunzo here pa-speed... OK...ngatitarisei* velocity. [Anyone with a question on the concept 'speed'. Ok, let's go ahead and look at velocity] (VC 10).

Apart from indicating that the teacher is using code switching as a transitional device from one segment of the lesson to another, this example also shows that the teacher departs from the official LOI to invite questions from the class. Such a switch, apart from being a marker of solidarity between the teacher and the learners, could also be a strategy to make the learners feel free to ask questions. The teacher seems to understand that sometimes learners shy away from asking questions and by switching to a less formal home language, he could encourage the learners to loosen up and pose questions. This is a pedagogical strategy drawn from the teacher's sense of plausibility.

Some episodes of the lesson also yielded findings to the effect that departures from the official LOI were meant to facilitate clarification, reformulation, reinforcing or qualifying of concepts. For example:

*Example 14*

*Handiti* rugged terrain *munoiziva? Nzvimbo yakaita sepaSosera paya, tichienda kwaNyika*. You can hardly use a tractor in such a terrain. [Should I believe you know what a rugged terrain is? An area like the vicinity of Sosera on our way to Nyika (N 7).

Here, the teacher has switched to Shona in order to clarify through an example the meaning of the phrase 'rugged terrain'. There is certainly nothing wrong with such a practice because the teacher's professional obligation is to make sure that the learners understand what he is teaching and we know that conceptualisation of any phenomenon is usually more successful and authentic in one's mother tongue. It would be reasonable to argue from this example that the teacher is a rational communicator who is sensitive to his audience, the learners. It would not make sense, for example, for a teacher to rumble on in English to a sea of bemused faces simply because the teacher is very proficient in English or because a piece of legislation insists on the use of English as the LOI.

As far as code switching between learners is concerned, it was found that learners are less bound to adhere to the official LOI policy than teachers. It was noted that there is a slight difference in the code switching patterns of the teachers and the learners with the teachers using more of code switching than code mixing.

The observations also showed that few lessons featured opportunities for student-to-student interaction. However, the few that had such interaction showed that mixing Shona and English morphemes and lexemes were the unmarked choice. The following are some of the utterances from the learners, which were noted during the classroom observations:

*Example 15*

*Endaka unopresent-a* (Learner M1).

*Example 16*

*Handikwanisi sha-a* (Learner M2).

*Example 17*

First *uno-deal-a nezviri muma*-brackets, then *wozoita* addition and subtraction (Learner M1).

*Example 18*

*Uka-add-a idzi dziri two, then inobva yaita 3m. This one haugoni kui-expand-a because hapana ma-common terms (Learner M2).*

Even though most of the learners expressed themselves in a mixture of English and Shona, various teachers were not really concerned about it. Neither did they show that anything was amiss with the language being used. This shows that the teachers did not view the language of instruction policy as cast in stone, but as a tool which could be bent at their discretion to meet their classroom needs.

## 5. Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that secondary school teachers are creative professionals who appreciate their unique teaching contexts and independently make LOI decisions that they understand will benefit their clients. The teachers are evidently alive to the pedagogical difficulties posed by the use of a foreign language as a language of instruction. An analysis of the observed classroom LOI practice demonstrated that departing from the official LOI in the form of code switching enables teachers to engage their sense of plausibility and realise social and pedagogical goals. Teachers are able to break free from the dictates of the policy and customise their classroom practice to its contextual realities. Thus, dismissing code switching from the classroom on the grounds that it reduces the learner's exposure to the LOI, or that incompetent teachers may seize upon it as an avoidance strategy is like throwing away the baby with the bath water. Instead, aspirant teachers should be sensitised on the potential and effects of code switching so that they become sociolinguistically sensitive and judicious. This will equip them with strategies to handle LOI issues in the classroom, including ways in which an important pedagogical resource such as code switching may be used systematically and purposefully in classroom instruction.

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