

The Lived Experiences of Senior High School Students in Code-Switching Practices in the Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) Senior High School students in their classroom code-switching practices using a descriptive phenomenological approach. A blend of purposive and snowball sampling was employed to select seven (7) TVL students from a selected public secondary school under the Department of Education Division of Siquijor. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and were analyzed using Colaizzi's method. Two emergent themes were identified: (1) Code-Switching as the Learning Compass; and (2) Holding On to CS When CS (Confidence Shakes). The findings revealed that behind moments of silence, hesitation, and language shifting lies a deliberate and meaningful process in which students return to their first language to regain confidence and remain engaged. The study demonstrated that code-switching goes beyond a linguistic strategy, functioning as a holistic learning tool that supports comprehension, emotional security, and mental well-being, and emphasizes the need for classroom practices that compassionately and strategically integrate code-switching in English-medium instruction.

Keywords: Code-switching, Colaizzi's method, Descriptive Phenomenology, Lived Experiences, TVL Senior High School Students

INTRODUCTION

Across the globe, students who learn in a language different from their mother tongue often experience not only academic challenges but also emotional and mental strain, particularly in English-medium classrooms (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020). In multilingual educational contexts, code-switching (CS) naturally emerges as a communicative practice that supports learners as they navigate linguistic demands, reduce anxiety, and maintain confidence during classroom interaction (MacSwan & Faltis, 2020; Olivera, 2021). International studies indicate that CS helps learners process complex academic content while easing cognitive load, allowing students to remain mentally engaged without becoming overwhelmed (Al-Musthofa & D'Angelo, 2024; Nawaz et al., 2023). Moreover, the strategic use of familiar languages has been shown to foster emotional security and a sense of belonging, particularly among learners who struggle with sustained use of the target language (Khosa & Zitha, 2024).

In the Philippines, where both Filipino and English are used daily, code-switching in education is a

complex and emotionally significant phenomenon. Senior High School students often study in English but rely on their native languages to communicate and grasp challenging concepts, making CS a crucial tool for comprehension (Enriquez et al., 2022). While this strategy supports understanding, it can also create tension between language proficiency and confidence, as students may feel anxious or self-conscious when fully immersed in English. Aporbo (2022) noted that although CS can be an essential pedagogical tool in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms, it also presents challenges in balancing students' native and target languages. This issue impacts not only students' cognitive learning but also their emotional well-being. Educators, too, face the emotional responsibility of guiding students in a way that supports language development without undermining confidence or causing frustration.

What makes this study unique is its focus on the emotional and mental impact of CS on students. While existing research has primarily examined its cognitive benefits and role in comprehension (Blanco, 2024; Aporbo, 2022), only a limited number of studies have explored the emotional struggles learners experience as they constantly move between their mother tongue and English. This continuous linguistic shifting can influence students' confidence and level of classroom engagement. Although the study by Temesgen and Hailu (2022) discusses the reasons behind CS, there remains a gap in understanding how students mentally and emotionally cope with the pressure of performing in English. Addressing this gap, the present study emphasizes that CS functions as an emotional and mental support mechanism, helping learners process meaning and gradually build confidence in using the target language.

The researcher, a language teacher with firsthand classroom experience, has observed that many students struggle to communicate effectively in English. These difficulties often lead learners to engage in CS as a coping strategy to feel more comfortable, regain confidence, and lessen classroom anxiety. This lived experience informs the central aim of the study, which is to examine how CS influences students not only in terms of cognitive development but also in their emotional and mental well-being. As noted by Olivera (2021), CS can enhance learners' confidence and reduce anxiety, fostering a sense of security and support within the learning environment. However, when overused, it may also impede the development of English proficiency. Grounded in the realities of bilingual classrooms, this research seeks to move beyond language acquisition by offering insights into teaching practices that are both pedagogically effective and empathetic. These realities stress the need for educational approaches that attend to learners' emotional and mental well-being, aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), specifically Target 4.1, which promotes inclusive and equitable quality education, and Target 4.7, which emphasizes holistic, learner-centered education.

Research Questions

This study aimed to explore TVL students' lived experiences with code-switching in the classroom. Specifically, it sought to answer the grand tour question: "What are the lived experiences of senior high school students in code-switching practices in the classroom?"

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research used a qualitative methodology, specifically descriptive phenomenology by Edmund Husserl. Phenomenology focuses on understanding and exploring people's daily life experiences. The researcher also adopted Colaizzi's method of data analysis, which serves as a lens to explore the authentic experiences underlying the phenomenon. Colaizzi's seven-step process provided a thorough analysis, ensuring that each stage aligns closely with the collected data, resulting in a clear yet

comprehensive portrayal of the phenomenon, supported by the participants' contributions.

Research Environment

This study was conducted in a selected public secondary school in the Division of Siquijor, a diverse community, with students coming from varied social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. This setting provides a unique context for examining CS, reflecting a multilingual environment where students often blend languages in their academic interactions.

Interviews with the participants were conducted in quiet, private spaces, such as the school library, to ensure their comfort and privacy. This arrangement allowed the participants to freely describe their experiences and perspectives regarding CS in the classroom.

Research Participants and Selection Criteria

The participants were the TVL–Senior High School students, specifically those who apply CS to the greatest extent as part of their learning process in the classroom, as observed by the researcher during classroom interactions. They were selected using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used to choose participants who consistently and frequently engaged in CS during classroom interactions, while snowball sampling helped identify additional participants who met the study criteria. With snowball sampling, initial participants referred other students whom they had observed regularly practicing CS in the classroom. This approach enabled the collection of rich, in-depth data from students with extensive and sustained experience of the phenomenon.

Moreover, the number of participants was determined by data saturation, which was closely monitored by the researcher through detailed note-taking during interviews. Saturation is reached when participants' responses become repetitive, and no new themes or insights emerge. Even after reaching this point, additional interviews were conducted to ensure completeness, and having no new insights served as confirmation that data saturation had been achieved. This careful approach ensured that the data collected fully represented the participants' experiences with CS in the classroom.

Research Instrument

The study utilized a semi-structured interview as its primary data collection tool. The interview questions were open-ended, allowing the participants to freely express their thoughts, reflections, and personal experiences related to CS in the classroom. While interviews were primarily conducted in English, participants were free to respond in their native language if they felt more comfortable, ensuring that their perspectives were fully and accurately expressed.

The individual interviews were recorded using the Voice Memos application on a mobile device. The recordings remained strictly confidential and were accessed only by the researcher for transcription and analysis.

Lastly, the researcher made use of a journal for reflexivity practice. The journal serves as the researcher's diary that contains all relevant notes before, during, and after the conduct of the study. It is also where he wrote down his thoughts, feelings, and biases related to this inquiry.

Data Gathering Procedure

To make the data gathering possible, a letter of request was first sent to the Graduate School of Foundation University to seek permission to conduct the research study. Upon approval, a forwarding letter from the Graduate School was submitted to the Schools Division Superintendent of DepEd–Division of Siquijor, together with a separate letter from the researcher personally requesting permission to conduct the study in one of the secondary schools in the division. After securing approval from the

division office, a letter of permission was subsequently sent to the school principal of the target school to formally request the participation of the students.

Prior to the actual data collection, the researcher conducted mock interviews with students to refine the interview guide, improve questioning techniques, and ensure the clarity and appropriateness of the questions. The participants involved in the mock interviews were not included in the final participants of the study. Insights gained from the mock interviews led to revisions of the interview prompts, particularly in how questions were phrased and sequenced, to ensure that they effectively captured the students' deep and meaningful lived experiences. This process enhanced the reliability of the interview instrument and adequately prepared the researcher for the formal interview sessions.

Data collection was carried out systematically from October to December 2025. Before the interviews commenced, the researcher obtained informed consent from all participants and parental consent from their legal guardians. The researcher also clearly explained the purpose of the study, the participants' roles, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences.

During the data collection, participants were allowed to choose a convenient time and a quiet location for their interviews to ensure comfort and confidentiality. Each interview typically lasted between 20 minutes and one hour, even longer, depending on the depth of the participants' responses. Open-ended questions were used to allow participants to freely describe their experiences with using CS. The participants were encouraged to elaborate on specific aspects of their emotional and mental learning experiences. During the interviews, the researcher also took notes to capture non-verbal cues and other significant observations that enriched the data.

Data Analysis Procedure

This study employed Colaizzi's method to examine and analyze the data from the interview transcripts. First, the researcher recorded all interviews using a mobile app. Each interview was then transcribed verbatim. After transcription, the researcher carefully read through the transcripts to become thoroughly familiar with the data and gain a general sense of the participants' lived experiences.

Next, key statements relevant to the research questions were identified and extracted from the transcripts. These significant statements highlighted moments where students expressed their perspectives, emotions, or reflections about CS. The researcher ensured that these excerpts were directly related to the phenomenon under investigation.

Following the extraction of significant statements, the researcher interpreted the underlying meanings of these excerpts. Each significant statement was reworded from a third-person perspective to generate formulated meanings, which reflected the core ideas embedded in the participants' narratives.

These meanings were then organized and clustered into emerging themes. The researcher grouped similar meanings and identified patterns, ultimately producing a fundamental structure of the phenomenon. This thematic clustering was guided by the goal of accurately representing the essence of the participants' experiences with classroom CS.

After clustering the themes, the researcher developed an exhaustive description of the phenomenon. This narrative integrated all identified themes into a comprehensive account that encapsulates how Senior High School students experience CS practices in the classroom.

The sixth step involved returning this description to the participants for validation. Participants were asked to review the exhaustive description and verify whether it authentically captured their experiences. Their comments, corrections, or confirmations were noted and taken into account for refinement.

Finally, the researcher added any new or relevant information from the participants' validation to the exhaustive description, making it clearer and more accurate in reflecting their experiences. This helped ensure that the findings were trustworthy and true to what the participants meant.

In conclusion, by following Colaizzi's structured seven-step process—supported by ongoing reflection and participant validation—this study produced a rich, credible, and deeply contextualized understanding of the CS practices experienced by TVL Senior High School students in the classroom setting.

Scope of the Study

This research centered on examining the real-life experiences of TVL students on CS within the classroom setting. It sought to gain insights into how switching from one language to another affects the students' academic participation, understanding of lessons, and their emotional and mental security as learners.

Limitations of the Study

This study was confined to a specific group of students in a selected public secondary school in the Division of Siquijor. Hence, the findings could not be applied to students from other schools or regions. Moreover, since the sample size is small and was drawn from one school, it does not represent the broader population of Senior High School students in other areas or contexts.

Additionally, the study relied mainly on qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews. Given the subjective nature of the data, there might be biases in how the participants recalled or interpreted their experiences, which might not have fully captured the broader students' collective experience.

The research also did not account for external factors, such as socioeconomic status, family background, or individual language proficiency, which might also influence students' use of CS. These factors, while significant, are outside the scope of this study, whose focus is on the academic and emotional experiences of students related to CS in the classroom. Therefore, the findings do not offer a comprehensive understanding of all possible factors influencing language learning and may not reflect the full complexity of the students' educational experiences.

RESULTS

Following a thorough analysis of the transcripts, emergent themes and sub-themes were identified to capture the essence of the students' lived experience with classroom code-switching (CS).

Emergent Theme 1: Code-Switching as a Lifeline in Academic Challenges

The first emergent theme explores how senior high school students use CS as a strategy to navigate the challenges of understanding academic content. This theme reveals that CS, beyond its cognitive function, is deeply tied to students' emotional security in the learning process. When learners shift to their native language, they are not only seeking understanding but also emotional reassurance that they are not failing as learners. CS allows students to reduce mental strain, ease confusion, and regain a sense of control when English becomes overwhelming. This emotional relief enables them to stay engaged, participate without fear, and maintain confidence in their ability to learn despite linguistic challenges.

Within this theme, five sub-themes were identified: a) (Theme 1) The Native Tongue as Cognitive Scaffolding; b) (Theme 2) When Translation Gives Meaning; c) (Theme 3) Bridging the Abstract and the Concrete; d) (Theme 4) Unlocking Meaning Through Familiar Words; and e) (Theme 5) Unbroken Voices in Classroom Interaction.

Theme 1: The Native Tongue as Cognitive Scaffolding. This theme highlights how students' native language, particularly Bisaya, functions as a cognitive scaffold that supports comprehension when English alone is insufficient. Participants consistently indicated that CS enables them to follow classroom discussions more effectively, especially when explanations in English are unclear or difficult to understand. In addition to improving comprehension, the use of the native language lessens their fear of misunderstanding and encourages continued participation in classroom discussions.

Participant 1 emphasized the importance of code-switching when he said:

"Makatabang para mas masabot pagyud. Pananglitan naay magaklase dayon dili kayo ka kabalo mo explain ug English, mo switch dayon ka sa imong linguahe. Pareha nato, linguahe nato Cebuano, pwede pod makaswitch ug Cebuano para masabtan."

Trans: ("It helps to understand better. For example, if a classmate cannot explain in English, I switch to our language, Cebuano, so it can be understood.")

He also added:

"Syempre Cebuano atong gigamit na linguahe. Di man gyud pod English ato gyung language."

Trans: ("Of course, we use Cebuano. English is not our language.")

Participant 2 also shared why using the native language helps foster understanding when he stated:

"Common naman kaayo ang Bisaya. Nasabtan ra dayo nila. Makasabot pod ka sa imong estorya."

Trans: ("Bisaya is commonly used. They immediately understand it. You can also clearly understand what you are saying.")

Participant 3 further supported this idea when he said:

"Bisaya is mao naman na ang naandan, magkasinabot ra gyud kung gamiton kaysa sa English."

Trans: ("Bisaya is what we are already used to; we understand each other better when it is used compared to English.")

These statements demonstrate that the native language serves as a cognitive scaffold that strengthens students' understanding of academic content and helps them overcome the fear of not being understood. CS enables learners to access complex ideas through a familiar linguistic framework, making lessons more comprehensible when English vocabulary or structures become limiting.

Similar to the findings of Enriquez et al. (2022), the use of students' first language helps clarify difficult concepts and ensures that key ideas are fully understood rather than partially grasped. In addition to enhancing comprehension, the use of the native language also encourages greater classroom engagement. Allowing students to alternate between English and their mother tongue creates a more comfortable learning environment where they can express their thoughts without fear or hesitation. As noted by Blanco (2024), such linguistic flexibility promotes active participation, as students feel more confident contributing to discussions.

Reinforcing these findings, learners in the study of Torres (2025) perceived CS as highly effective, particularly for explaining topics more clearly and aiding comprehension, indicating that CS not only supports understanding but also fosters meaningful interaction and sustained engagement in classroom learning.

Theme 2: When Translation Gives Meaning. Students frequently translate English into Bisaya to confirm understanding among peers and themselves. CS is used as a deliberate strategy to ensure that both the speaker and the listener share the same meaning, especially when English alone is insufficient for clear communication. This practice helps prevent misunderstandings, facilitates accurate knowledge transfer, and supports active participation in classroom discussions. It also aids in easing anxiety and building confidence among students so that they are on the right track academically.

Participant 1 described his reliance on translation through CS to fully comprehend lesson content, stating:

“Ako di mangyud kayo ko’g English. Tapos, mangutana ko sa uban, sa akong mga classmates, sa teacher ug unsa gyud uy pasabot gyud.”

Trans: ("I am not very good in English. So, I ask classmates or the teacher to understand the true meaning.")

He further said:

“Ug dili kaayo nimo masabtan, makasabot naka. Imbes nga naay English nga lisod kaayo nimo sabton, imong ipatranslate ug Bisaya makasabot naka adto tas timan-an ang mga English nga word mao to makasabot ta sa English nga dili pa unta nimo masabtan sauna kay gapatranslate ko.”

Trans: ("If you cannot understand something, you can understand it. Instead of English which is very difficult to understand, you translate it into Bisaya and then remember the English words, which helps you understand English that you could not understand before because I had it translated.")

Participant 2 also highlighted the role of translation in expressing information clearly:

“Aron mahatag nako ang information ug maexpress nako ug unsa’y pasabot nako niya.”

Trans: ("So that I can give the information and clearly express what I mean.")

He also added:

“Reporting sa research kanang pag conduct sa title. Wa ko’y mathink na words, maong akoang giBisaya ra. English pod wala ko uy mahunahunaan, maong akoo rang Gibisaya. Akoo rang gitranslate.”

Trans: ("When reporting research, like conducting the title, I did not know what words to use, so I just used Bisaya. I could not think of English words, so I just translated it into Bisaya.")

Participant 7 emphasized the importance of making sure peers understand immediately:

“Ganahan ko nga masabtan dayon ang uban kaysa mangutana pa sila ug unsa’y meaning sa akong giingon.”

Trans: ("I want others to understand right away instead of them asking what my statement means.")

Participant 6 further illustrated this practice when giving examples in class:

“Pagmaghatag ug mga example unya dili nako dretso masulti sa English na way, akoo dayon siyang itranslate sa Bisaya para masabtan.”

Trans: ("When giving examples, I cannot say it straight in English, so I translate into Bisaya for understanding.")

These student accounts are strongly supported by recent research. Padernal (2023) noted that translation, CS, and code-mixing in bilingual and multilingual classrooms help students grasp

meaning more fully and engage confidently in classroom discourse. Translation allows learners to bridge conceptual gaps when L2 alone is insufficient, facilitating participation and interaction in meaningful ways.

Smagul (2024) also found that L1 and translation use in EFL classrooms is highly valued by teachers for supporting comprehension, especially among lower-level learners, as it helps clarify difficult content and ensures accurate understanding.

Theme 3: Bridging the Abstract and the Concrete. Participants consistently reported that code-switching helps them understand and articulate abstract or technical content more effectively. It enables them to feel competent rather than overwhelmed.

For example, Participant 2 described how switching to Bisaya enhances understanding when explaining tasks in Home Economics:

“Kanang ga describe ug usa ka butang. Kanang unsa uy gamit pareha sa H.E. Unsaon paghandle sa mga guests. Mas masabtan sya nimo if mo-shift ug Bisaya.”

Trans: (“When describing something like in HE, explaining in Bisaya helps better understanding.”)

Participant 4 shared how he uses both English and Bisaya in Personal Development reporting:

“Sa Per Dev magareport me English man gyud na sya tas amoang i Bisaya ug explain kay naa man nay ihatag nga imong iresearch in English. Para masabtan sa imong mga classmates imong i-Bisaya kay kung amo rang i-English permi naa man guy ubang dili kasabot tas mura ra gihapon me ug ga report para sa wala.”

Trans: (“In our Personal Development class, we are required to report in English, but we explain the content in Bisaya because the materials we research are in English. Translating the explanation into Bisaya helps our classmates understand. If we use only English all the time, some students would not understand, and it would feel as though we are reporting without an audience.”)

Participant 6 also emphasized translation during examples:

“Pagmaghatag ug mga example unya dili nako dretso masulti sa English na way, akoa dayon siyang itranslate sa Bisaya para masabtan.”

Trans: (“When giving examples, I cannot say it straight in English, so I translate into Bisaya for understanding.”)

Participants described CS as an essential strategy for connecting unfamiliar concepts to prior knowledge in their first language, reducing cognitive strain and enabling clearer comprehension. Rather than feeling overwhelmed, students reported feeling more confident and competent when complex ideas were explained through both languages.

These experiences are supported by Al-Musthofa and D’Angelo (2024), who found that CS enhances comprehension in bilingual classrooms by helping learners process complex academic content when proficiency in the target language is still developing. Using the first language enables students to retain information more effectively and construct meaning by linking new concepts to familiar linguistic frameworks. Similarly, Khosa and Zitha (2024) demonstrated that students strategically use CS during oral English presentations to articulate complex ideas more clearly, resulting in improved engagement and communication.

The participants’ accounts mirror these findings, as they described translating explanations, examples,

and reports into Bisaya to ensure that classmates fully understand the lesson. Supporting this, Lavadia et al. (2025) affirmed that CS serves deliberate clarificatory and instructional functions, particularly in linguistically diverse classrooms. Their study found that learners and teachers use CS purposefully to clarify meanings, explain difficult concepts, and ensure comprehension, particularly in mixed-language contexts where students may struggle with target-language vocabulary and subject-specific terms. This supports the view that CS is not incidental, but a strategic communicative resource that enhances learners' ability to process and articulate complex academic content.

Theme 4: Unlocking Meaning Through Familiar Words. Participants shared that switching to their native language helps them convey complex ideas more clearly, particularly when English vocabulary is insufficient or when classmates struggle with comprehension. Using familiar words gives them emotional assurance that they can express themselves meaningfully despite limited English proficiency. This reduces self-doubt and helps learners maintain confidence when articulating ideas in front of peers and teachers.

Participant 1 shared:

"Mas prefer pajud nako ng mag code switch para mas masabtan jud nimo ng English. Tapos, maglisod ka ug English pareha nako mo code switch ka mao na ang pinaka the best nga buhaton sa pareha nako."

Trans: ("I really prefer to code-switch so English can be understood better. If you struggle with English like I do, code-switching is the best thing to do.")

Participant 2 shared:

"Kanang ga debate me. Communication, English. Aron masabtan nila ang akong ganahang ipasabot."

Trans: ("When we debate in English, I code-switch so they can understand what I want to express.")

Participant 4 explained:

"Mas dali masabtan sa akong mga classmates ang among report tungod sa code switching kay maga Bisaya."

Trans: ("Our report is easier for classmates to understand because of code-switching into Bisaya.")

Participant 6 shared:

"Magadepende man sya sa situation. For example, pareha anang paansweron ko nimo unya magahatag ko ug example. Naa uy time na ug mag-English ko, dili gyud kaya ipadayon. Dili gyud angayan ang daloy sa imong pag-English. Di kaayo correct imong grammar. So, kinahanglang mochange na pod ka sa Bisaya para mas masabtan sa teacher or sa imoang giatubang imong point."

Trans: ("It depends on the situation. For example, if I am answering and giving an example, there are times when continuing in English is impossible because the flow is awkward and grammar is incorrect. So, switching to Bisaya is necessary to ensure the teacher or the person I'm addressing understands my point.")

He also added:

"Kinahanglan nga mo Bisaya, musagol kag Bisaya para mas masabtan ka nila."

Trans: ("It is necessary to use Bisaya, mixing it in, so that they can understand you better.")

These experiences are strongly supported by Blanco (2024), who emphasized that CS fosters emotional safety by reducing learners' fear of ridicule, insecurity, and communicative threat in English-dominant classrooms. Blanco found that when students are allowed to integrate their first language, they become more confident, satisfied, and willing to participate, as the pressure to perform perfectly in English is eased. Correspondingly, Gamelo and Roy (2024) posited that teachers' strategic use of familiar languages creates a non-threatening and inclusive classroom environment, where learners feel emotionally secure and supported. This emotional comfort, in turn, encourages students to speak more confidently and engage actively in classroom discussions.

Ezeh et al. (2022) further argued that CS enables learners to communicate meaning without fear of making linguistic errors. Their study shows that when students are allowed to draw from their first language, they participate more freely, openly express difficulties, and gradually build confidence in using English. Rather than silencing learners, CS empowers them to convey ideas accurately while maintaining their self-esteem. The participants' accounts mirror these findings, as they described switching to Bisaya during debates, reports, and explanations to maintain clarity, protect confidence, and ensure that their intended message was understood.

Theme 5: Unbroken Voices in Classroom Interaction. Participants emphasized that CS promotes smoother and faster classroom interactions. CS prevents mental blocks caused by fear of errors, enabling them to speak with greater ease and reduced anxiety, which supports continuous participation.

Participant 2 shared this communicative benefit:

"Helpful kay if maglisod ko naa ko uy ikatubag without the difficulty."

Trans: ("It's helpful because if I struggle, I still have something to answer without the difficulty.")

Participant 4 noted how pronunciation and ease of expression support fluency:

"Wala me kabalo ug unsaon pag pronounce jud ang mga words in English maong amoang gi Bisaya kay mas dali man sya ipronounce ug naa me hanaw sa Bisaya."

Trans: ("We don't really know how to pronounce some English words, so we switch to Bisaya because it's easier to pronounce and we understand Bisaya.")

Participant 6 described her experience with hesitation in English:

"Mautal-utal ko, mao nga mokalit nalang ko 'g Bisaya para dili pod kaayo ulaw."

Trans: ("I stutter in English, so I switch to Bisaya.")

Participant 7 explained her preference for Bisaya during classroom responses:

"Mas kumportable ko mag Bisaya kaysa English kay madiretso diretso nako ang mga answer sa pangutana sa maestra. Sa English, maghunahuna pa ka kung insakto ba ang words, ug moabot sa time nga mabulol gyud ka."

Trans: ("I am more comfortable with Bisaya than English because I can answer questions directly. In English, you think about whether the words are correct, and there are times when you really get stuck.")

She also added:

"Mas paspas akong pag communicate sa Bisaya kay mao na ang naandan nga language. Sa English, mura'g ma stop ang hunahuna ug maghunahuna ko kung masabtan ba sa maestra ug kung okay ra ang grammar. Mas prefer gyud nako ang Bisaya."

Trans: ("I communicate faster in Bisaya because it is the language I am used to. In English, my thoughts seem to stop, and I worry if the teacher will understand and whether my

grammar is correct. I really prefer Bisaya.”)

These experiences show how CS reduces hesitation, supports continuity in speech, and enables learners to participate actively without being hindered by limited vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciation challenges.

Lavadia et al. (2025) found that CS in classroom interactions maintains lesson flow and facilitates communication, allowing teachers and students to navigate linguistic gaps without interrupting the learning process. Occasional use of L1 sustains conversational flow and prevents breakdowns in interaction, especially in multilingual classrooms where students struggle with continuous use of the target language.

Khosa and Zitha (2024) also asserted that students use CS strategically during oral English presentations. In their study, they found that incorporating the first language enabled learners to communicate complex ideas more effectively, improving clarity, engagement, and overall participation in oral tasks.

Emergent Theme 2: Holding On to CS When CS (Confidence Shakes)

This theme captures the emotional core of the students’ lived experiences. CS emerges as a protective emotional response to anxiety, fear of embarrassment, and self-doubt when speaking English. Participants’ lived realities show that language choice is closely tied to their emotional well-being, as switching to their native language helps regulate emotions, restore confidence, and prevent withdrawal from classroom interaction.

Within this theme, two sub-themes were identified: a) (Theme 6) Shielded by Familiar Words: Code Switching for Social Comfort; and b) (Theme 7) Navigating Fear Toward Linguistic Comfort.

Theme 6: Shielded by Familiar Words: Code-Switching for Social Comfort. This theme captures how participants strategically use CS to overcome social pressures and maintain face in classroom interactions. The students indicated that the fear of being judged by peers or teachers when speaking English incorrectly often triggers the use of their native language. This practice functions as a protective mechanism, allowing them to participate in classroom interactions without the anxiety of public scrutiny or ridicule. When they shift to a familiar language, they are able to express their ideas more freely while safeguarding themselves from negative judgment related to grammatical or pronunciation errors in English.

Participant 2 explained that using code-switching reduces his self-doubt during participation:

“Kay di ko maghunahuna ug sayop ba ni or dili sa grammar.”

Trans: (“Because I don’t have to think whether this is wrong or grammatically incorrect.”)

He also added:

“Ma-embarrass ka ug pasagad raka ug English. Kataw-an dayon ka.”

Trans: (“You get embarrassed if you speak English carelessly. People will laugh at you right away.”)

Similarly, Participant 3 expressed her concern about judgment from others:

“Basig wala sila kasabot dayon basin i-judge akong English.”

Trans: (“They might not understand and might judge my English.”)

Participant 7 echoed this fear of ridicule. She said:

“Kataw-an ka kay masayop ka’g grammar ug pag pronounce sa English.”

Trans: (“People will laugh at you if you make mistakes in grammar and pronunciation in

English.”)

Students’ use of CS is strongly motivated by social and emotional considerations. The fear of being laughed at, judged, or publicly embarrassed discourages learners from using English exclusively, as anxiety related to accuracy and form inhibits English production. These findings reinforce Liu et al.’s (2021) assertion that fear of negative evaluation is a central component of foreign language anxiety. Supporting this view, Aparece and Bacasmot (2023) found that although CS did not statistically mediate English language problems, it was significantly associated with higher levels of foreign language classroom anxiety, indicating that students tend to code-switch when anxiety is heightened. Rather than viewing this behavior as a deficiency, the authors suggest that CS reflects learners’ adaptive response to emotionally demanding English classroom situations, serving as a coping and communicative strategy when fear, embarrassment, or uncertainty interferes with English use.

Task-specific and classroom-based research further strengthens this interpretation. Zhao et al. (2025) claimed that allowing CS significantly reduced writing-related anxiety among language learners, while Quevedo and Bermillo (2025) observed that teachers’ empathetic use of CS lowered students’ anxiety, strengthened confidence, and affirmed cultural and linguistic identities. In other words, students resort to their first language as a coping and communicative strategy when fear, embarrassment, or uncertainty interferes with English production.

Theme 7: Navigating Fear Toward Linguistic Comfort. Participants revealed that CS helps them cope with anxiety and fear in situations where English is expected. When they feel pressured to speak English, shifting to their native language functions as an emotional buffer that allows them to continue participating despite nervousness and self-doubt.

Participant 1 shared his experience during a high-pressure situation:

“Ni code-switch ko during interview sa career guidance. Di ko ka explain ug in-English adto na time gyud kay dala sa kakulba. Mura nako ’g narattle adto.”

Trans: (“I code-switched during the interview because I could not explain in English due to nervousness. I felt like I was rattling.”)

This experience shows how anxiety can disrupt students’ ability to articulate ideas in English, prompting them to rely on CS to manage emotional stress.

Participant 2 expressed feelings of embarrassment and fear when unable to articulate thoughts in English:

“Maulaw. Embarrass kay naa unta kay ma express na English pero dili. Mahadlok ka ba.”

Trans: (“You feel shy and embarrassed because you want to express something in English but cannot. You become afraid.”)

Similarly, Participant 5 highlighted fear of public embarrassment:

“Mahadlok gyud kay dili lalim maulawan.”

Trans: (“You really feel afraid because being embarrassed is not easy.”)

These statements reflect how fear of negative evaluation intensifies anxiety in English-only situations, discouraging participation.

Participant 6 further explained how anxiety affects classroom engagement in English subjects:

“Kung English ang subject, maunhan ko ’g kakulba; imbes moraise na akong hand kung tawagon ko sa teacher, mura ’g mastuck kalit akong utok ug murag mawala tanan naa sa akong hunahuna, maong lisod kaayo.”

Trans: (“In English subjects, I get nervous; instead of raising my hand when the teacher calls,

my mind suddenly gets stuck and everything disappears, making it very difficult.”)

While fear and embarrassment initially dominate students’ experiences in English-only situations, some participants revealed that CS eventually becomes a source of emotional comfort and relief. As Participant 5 noted:

“Naay positive effect ang code switching kay nigaan akong pamati ug mawala akong kakulba.”

Trans: (“Code-switching has a positive effect because it calms me and relieves my nervousness.”)

Similarly, Participant 6 explained:

“Malipay ko dayon usahay gaan gaan sa dughan kay mawala-wala na ang kalisod bitaw. Usahay kay lisod bya kaayo basta mag English unya dili ka anad mag English jud or mag-Tagalog. So, mas okay sya, mas gaan sa dughan nga mag Bisaya nalang ka.”

Trans: (“I feel relieved, lighter, when switching to Bisaya because English is difficult.”)

These statements indicate that English-only situations frequently generate fear, anxiety, and mental blocking among students, limiting their ability to express ideas and participate in class. Participants’ stories reveal that nervousness, embarrassment, and fear of negative evaluation interfere with cognitive processing, often causing students to hesitate, remain silent, or forget what they intend to say. Their experiences underscore the affective barriers present in English learning, where emotional pressure rather than linguistic incompetence becomes the primary obstacle to communication.

Within this emotionally demanding context, CS emerged as a crucial coping strategy that helps students transition from fear toward linguistic comfort. Participants described how shifting to their first language reduced nervousness, eased emotional tension, and restored confidence, enabling them to continue engaging in classroom interactions. This suggests that CS functions as an emotional buffer that regulates anxiety and prevents complete withdrawal from participation.

These findings align with the statement of Sholikhah and Isnaini (2024) that CS plays a positive role in reducing speaking anxiety among EFL learners. Their study showed that learners intentionally use their first language to lower apprehension and fear of negative evaluation, perceiving L1 use as emotionally supportive and confidence-building during oral communication.

Similarly, Rengur et al. (2025) emphasized that strategic and controlled CS enhances comprehension while reducing both cognitive and emotional strain, particularly for lower-proficiency learners. Although they cautioned against excessive reliance on L1, the authors stressed that purposeful CS allows students to remain communicative in anxiety-inducing situations without experiencing mental overload.

In addition, Aparece and Bacasmot (2023) found a significant positive correlation between students’ anxiety levels and the frequency of CS, indicating that anxious learners are more likely to engage in CS as a means of managing emotional discomfort. Maed and Barcelona (2023) further observed that while students generally hold positive attitudes toward English, fear of making mistakes prompts frequent CS to reduce stress and maintain classroom participation.

DISCUSSION

Emergent Theme 1: Code-Switching as a Lifeline in Academic Challenges

This theme captures students’ experiences of CS as a guiding tool that helps students overcome the complexities of academic learning while reducing mental strain. When English becomes difficult or overwhelming, students shift to their native language as a strategic means of restoring understanding,

clarifying meanings, and sustaining classroom interaction. Participants described CS as both a practical and reassuring practice that scaffolds comprehension and keeps them engaged in learning tasks. Rather than impeding academic progress, CS enables learners to remain cognitively focused and emotionally supported, allowing lessons to stay accessible and participation to continue.

The Native Tongue as Cognitive Scaffolding. This sub-theme illustrates how the native language supports comprehension when English alone is insufficient. Students rely on their first language to process ideas more deeply, reinforce understanding, and reduce anxiety caused by confusion, allowing them to remain mentally engaged during lessons.

When Translation Gives Meaning. This theme highlights translation as a deliberate pause where learners confirm shared understanding. By translating English into Bisaya, students ensure accuracy, prevent misunderstanding, and gain reassurance that they are interpreting information correctly, which lessens academic pressure and builds confidence.

Bridging the Abstract and the Concrete. This theme represents how CS helps transform abstract academic concepts into understandable ideas. Learners bridge unfamiliar English terminology with familiar language, easing cognitive overload and making learning less intimidating.

Unlocking Meaning Through Familiar Words. This theme emphasizes how familiar vocabulary opens doors to clearer expression. Students rely on their native language to articulate ideas effectively when English words fall short, helping them maintain confidence and avoid self-doubt during classroom communication.

Unbroken Voices in Classroom Interaction. This theme reflects how CS keeps communication flowing. Students are able to participate without interruption when they switch languages, as it sustains fluency, minimizes hesitation, and prevents emotional withdrawal from discussions.

Emergent Theme 2: Holding On to CS When CS (Confidence Shakes)

This theme reflects the emotional dimension of CS. When confidence wavers and anxiety rises, students hold on to familiar words as a form of emotional grounding. CS emerges as a coping mechanism that allows learners to manage fear, embarrassment, and self-doubt as they engage in classroom discourse, helping them remain present and participative despite emotional vulnerability.

Shielded by Familiar Words: Code-Switching for Social Comfort. This theme portrays the native language as a protective space. Learners use CS to shield themselves from judgment, ridicule, or grammatical scrutiny, enabling freer and more confident participation.

Navigating Fear Toward Linguistic Comfort. This theme reveals that English-only situations often evoke fear, anxiety, and mental blocking among students, limiting their ability to express ideas and participate actively. To cope with these emotional pressures, students engage in CS, which serves as an emotional buffer that reduces nervousness, restores confidence, and enables continued classroom participation. The findings indicate that CS functions not merely as a linguistic strategy but as an affective coping mechanism that helps learners manage anxiety and maintain engagement in English learning contexts.

Conclusions

This study revealed that behind students' moments of silence, hesitation, and language shifting, code-switching (CS) emerges as a meaningful and deliberate practice through which students make sense of lessons, sustain classroom interaction, and steady themselves emotionally when English feels overwhelming. The findings indicate that CS is effective because it reduces cognitive strain and lowers

affective barriers, such as anxiety and fear of making mistakes which often hinder classroom participation and expression. By temporarily returning to their first language, students experience comfort, reassurance, and clarity of meaning, enabling them to continue thinking, speaking, and participating in academic tasks.

Overall, the study found that CS is not merely a linguistic strategy but a multidimensional academic and emotional support, functioning as cognitive scaffolding and an affective coping mechanism that helps learners manage comprehension difficulties, maintain confidence, and remain engaged in English learning contexts.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are offered:

For School Administrators:

1. Foster a classroom environment where students feel safe to use both English and their native language, encouraging participation and reducing fear of making mistakes by recognizing code-switching (CS) as a supportive learning strategy.
2. Promote teacher professional development focused on understanding how CS supports comprehension, emotional comfort, and sustained classroom interaction. This may be implemented through trainings, workshops, or Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions.
3. Provide instructional support and resources that allow teachers to use bilingual strategies, particularly for clarifying meaning and reducing confusion during lessons.
4. Encourage the use of bridging strategies, where teachers draw on students' native language to clarify abstract concepts and support understanding during English lessons.

For Teachers:

5. Allow students to clarify concepts and explain ideas in their native language when English becomes overwhelming, particularly during discussions, reporting, and explanation of complex topics.
6. Design collaborative learning activities where students can work in pairs or groups, using CS as a tool for peer explanation, problem-solving, and knowledge transfer.
7. Use CS strategically to sustain classroom interaction, especially when students hesitate, experience mental blocking, or struggle to express ideas in English.
8. Provide feedback in a supportive and non-threatening manner, allowing students to express ideas without fear of embarrassment or ridicule, and encouraging continued participation.

For Students:

9. Use code-switching as a supportive tool to clarify understanding, organize thoughts, and manage anxiety during classroom participation.
10. Remain actively engaged in classroom discussions, using familiar language when necessary to maintain confidence and continue participating in learning tasks.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

This study was conducted in full adherence to established ethical research principles. Approval to conduct the study was secured from the Graduate School of Foundation University and endorsed by the Schools Division Superintendent of DepEd–Siquijor, with permission granted by the participating school. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents, along with parental consent since the participants were minors. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to

withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. The anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents were strictly maintained, and all data were securely stored and accessed only by the researcher. The well-being of the respondents was safeguarded throughout the research process, ensuring that no physical, emotional, or psychological harm occurred. There was no conflict of interest in the conduct of the study, and plagiarism was strictly avoided. The researcher practiced bracketing and reflexivity to prevent bias in data collection and interpretation, ensuring that the findings genuinely reflected the participants' lived experiences. The results of the study were used solely for academic and research purposes, upholding integrity, credibility, and ethical responsibility.

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