



Evaluating Students' Code-Switching Use in Yobe State Tertiary Institutions

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Abstract

This study evaluates learners' use of code-switching, and highlights the motivations and triggering factors that necessitate it among students in the teaching and learning process. The data for the study were elicited from one hundred and eighty (180) students in three higher institutions in Yobe state of Nigeria. Sixty (60) students, who are from different disciplines and different ethnic groups in Nigeria, were selected from each school. The data were presented and analysed using charts and simple percentages. The findings show that code-switching is a common practice in multilingual classrooms and is triggered by different factors, which include the need to maintain fluency in communication and to reduce stress and anxiety associated with classroom learning. The study concludes that code-switching is purposeful and related to pedagogical goals, and improves learners' classroom performance and experience.

Keywords: Code-switching, Learning, Classroom, Higher Education, Language of Instruction

Introduction

Language, in classroom practice, is the central organiser of what is taught, how it is taught, and, by extension, what is learned and how (Bailey, Burkett & Freeman, 2008). Studies (Obanya, 1992;

Olanrewaju, 1996; Emenanjo, 1996; Osborn, 2007) have all argued that teaching learners in a language they are comfortable in and can express their thoughts and translate their internal ideas

into articulate sentences is very effective.

In multilingual societies, two or more languages often manifest in classroom teaching and learning. Auer (1984, 1998) has argued that it is natural to encounter mixed language use in the learning process in bilingual classes. That is, learners tend to code-switch by uttering combinations of two or more linguistic varieties in bilingual classrooms (Eldgridge, 1996).

Nigeria is a multilingual state, and the National Policy on Education stipulates that English be used as the medium of instruction in the teaching and learning of academic subjects in higher education. But due to what Tom-Lawyer, Thomas & Kalane (2021) referred to as "the insufficient acquisition of literacy skills in English *in lower education*" (emphasis mine), the problem of conceptualization occurs, especially, where English, a language the learners are yet to develop enough proficiency in is used as the medium of instruction. Gojo (2007) contends that this will lead to the opacity of the learning content. To remedy this situation, Gojo further suggests that in such instances, remediation activities-both in the sense of second mediation and in that of restoration, or a process of clarification may occur. In all these processes of conceptualization and remediation, the teacher and learners can resort, momentarily to all languages in their repertoires in constructing meaning.

This remediation process involves code-switching between languages within the repertoire of the teacher and the learners. García (2009) agrees that code-switching, an approach to teaching and learning in which students' whole language repertoires, is valuable for constructing meaning and for developing academic competence.

The present study evaluates code-switching use by students in three higher institutions in Yobe state. Yobe state is located in northeastern Nigeria. Though its people are made up of different ethnic groups with diverse languages, Hausa is used by many for wider communication. There are seven tertiary institutions in Yobe state which are attended by people from within the state and people from other states in Nigeria.

Code-switching

Many studies have shown "code-switching" to be an alternation between languages by a speaker. According to Clyne (2000), code-switching is the alternate use of two languages within or between sentences. Poplack (1980, p.583), on the other hand, defined code-switching as "the alternation of two languages within a single discourse, sentence, or constituent." Other authors, such as Torres (1989), who defined code-switching as the alternation of two languages within a single discourse, sentence, or constituent, argue that a switch made across sentence boundaries is an example of inter-sentential alternation.

However, as pointed out by Hassan, Abu-Krooz, Qasim & Al-Azzawi (2019), the term code-switching, as with any aspect of language contact phenomenon, is inundated with

the problem of terminological confusion. While some researchers (e.g., Clyne, 1991) argue that code-switching and code-mixing refer to the same phenomenon in which the speaker stops speaking in language A and begins speaking in language B. Muysken (2000), on the other hand, claims that there is a distinction between code-switching and code-mixing. According to him, code-switching is used when the two codes retain their monolingual characteristics, whereas code-mixing is used when there is some convergence between the two languages.

Other researchers (e.g., Myers-Scotton, 1997; Poplack, 1993) have proposed code-switching as a cover term for both the use of two languages in speech. Myers-Scotton (1997) uses code-switching as a cover term for the use of material from more than one language both inter- and intra-sententially.

Studies have shown that the use of code-switching is pervasive in multilingual classrooms and is used to achieve different pedagogical expectations. In a study, Eldridge (1996), which described and analysed the code-switching of young learners in Deniz High School, a Turkish secondary school, focusing on learners aged 11-13 at an elementary and lower intermediate level, showed that code-switching in the classroom is highly purposeful and related to teaching and learning goals. The study affirmed that students code-switch in the classroom for reasons such as equivalence, floor-holding, reiteration, group membership, alignment and misalignment, and so on. The study concluded that code-switching is a natural and deliberate phenomenon which facilitates both communication and learning.

Another study, by Rose & Dulm (2006), focusing on the functions of code-switching between English and Afrikaans in the classroom interactions of a secondary school in the Western Cape, clearly indicates that code-switching between English and Afrikaans fulfils pedagogical functions in the classrooms, such as clarification, confirmation, and expansion. They concluded that these were seen to help teachers and students achieve academic goals.

Uys & Dulm (2011) found that code-switching serves both academic and social functions in a study conducted in four secondary schools in the Siyanda District of South Africa's Northern Cape province, with the goal of identifying the functions of code-switching, involving English, Afrikaans, Setswana, and isiXhosa, in classroom interactions. Code-switching is used specifically for explaining and clarifying subject content; assisting learners in understanding and interpreting material; as a teaching tool for confirming understanding and encouraging participation; in classroom management, such as maintaining learners' attention and reprimanding disruptive behaviour; and for social functions, such as humour and as a marker of bilingual identity. The study concluded that code-switching could be used as a useful classroom strategy.

Adesokan (2021) investigated the effect of code-switching and mathematics achievement on Pre-NCE students admitted to mathematics-related courses at the Federal College of Education Katsina in the 2019/2020 session. According to the findings, Pre-NCE students perform better when their course lecturer alternates between the official language of instruction and their first language. The study recommended that lecturers be encouraged to alternate between the learners' first language and the official language of instruction when teaching mathematics and that code-switching should not be regarded as abnormal behaviour in our schools' mathematics classrooms.

Methodology

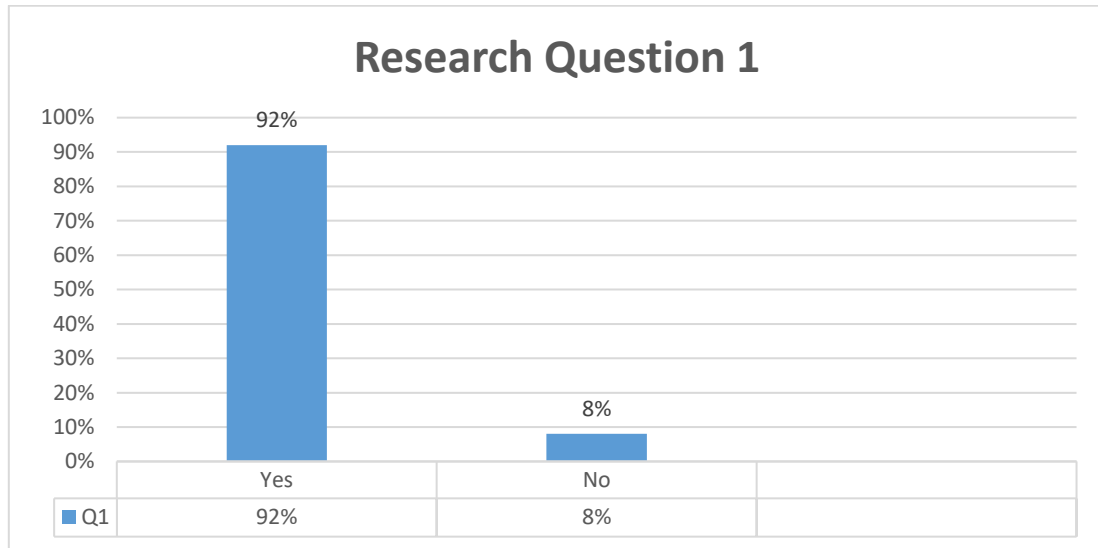
The study employed the use of a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to one hundred and eighty (180) students who were randomly selected from all the academic levels at Yobe State University, Damaturu, the Federal Polytechnic Damaturu, and the Federal College of Education (Technical) Potiskum. Sixty (60) students, from various ethnic groups in Nigeria, were chosen from each school. The study population further consists of thirty males and thirty females from each school. Fifty per cent (50%) of the population are from Arts oriented courses while the remaining fifty per cent (50%) are from Science and Engineering related courses. The questionnaires were collated, presented using charts and analyzed using simple percentages.

Research Questions.

The study will attempt to answer the following questions.

1. Have you at any time code-switched in the class during lectures?
2. What languages have you mixed during lectures in the classroom?
3. Does code-switching, when necessary, help you to participate more in classroom activities?
4. Does code-switching, in your classroom, have any cognitive, psychological and social benefits?
5. Does your teacher code-switch, sometimes, in class?
6. Does your teacher frown at your code-switching in class?
7. Is comprehension enhanced when the teacher code-switches to a language you are familiar with?
8. Does the use of code-switching reduce anxiety and stress associated with learning?
9. Why do you code-switch?
10. Do you think the use of code-switching as a teaching and learning strategy will help you achieve a successful academic experience?

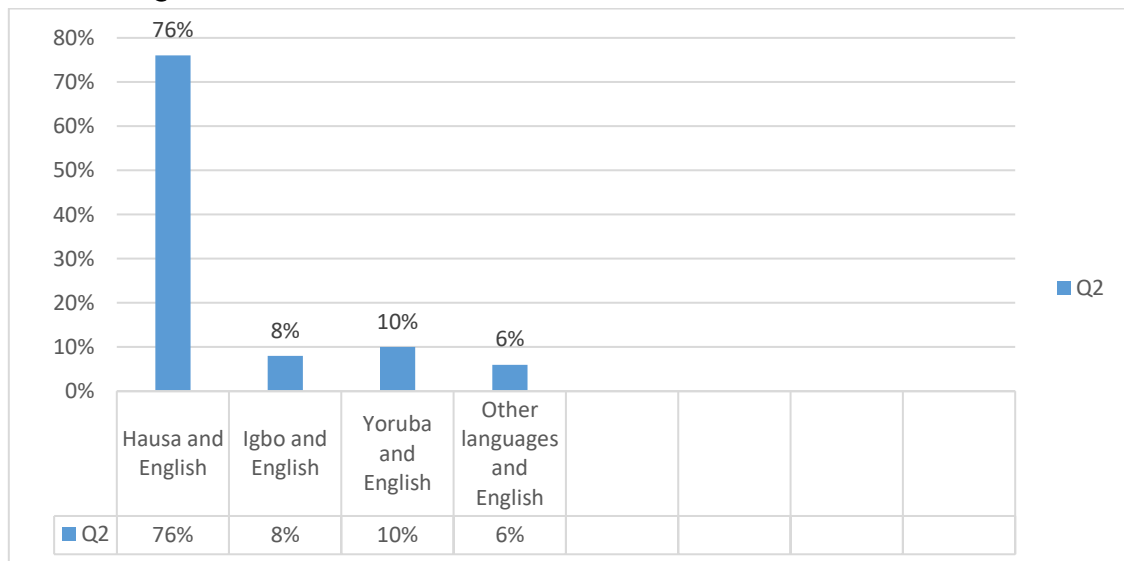
Findings and Discussions



Have you at any time code-switched in class during lectures?

The above chart shows that 92% of the students have at some time code-switched in the class while 8% claim they have never code-switched during class lectures. This shows that code-switching is a dominant factor in classroom teaching and learning at the schools investigated, and many students at one time have implored this linguistic phenomenon to achieve pedagogical and social goals. This highlights the claims of Olugbara (2008) and Iqbal (2011) that code-switching between the official language of instruction and other languages is common in the multilingual classrooms.

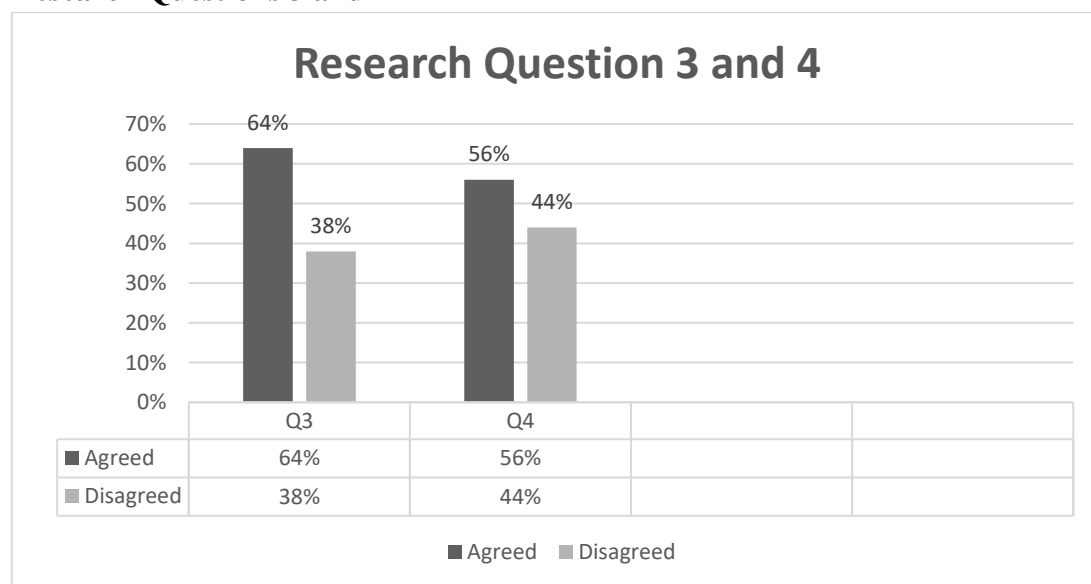
Research Question 2



What languages have you mixed during lectures in the classroom?

The chart above shows that 76% of the study population claim they have mixed Hausa and English, 8% said they have mixed Igbo and English, and 10% claimed they have mixed Yoruba and English during lectures. On the other hand, 6% of the students agreed to have mixed English and other Nigerian languages. The variations in the percentages of the various mixes are significant. Most of the students in the three schools being investigated have Hausa as their first language or are students who at least speak and understand Hausa reasonably. Again, most of the teachers, who teach these students, are native Hausa speakers or have Hausa as their second language. On the other hand, the reason why other students do not code-switch much could be that their teachers and other students do not share the same languages with them. This has implications for teaching and learning in these classrooms and raises concerns as to how teachers and students navigate possible challenges occasioned by all the students not speaking the same languages, as well as how the educational and social needs of students who feel alienated in the teaching and learning process can be resolved. The chart further shows that a greater number of students, about 85% of the study population, code-switched from English to an indigenous language. This may be because of their low proficiency in English, the official language of instruction, and thus resort to switching to other languages to be able to sufficiently partake in classroom discussions. This is in tandem with Diaz's (1983) claim that bilingual learners easily switch to their mother tongues while performing complex tasks in a second language in order to clarify doubts and misunderstandings encountered in the second language. They also use their mother tongue to demonstrate to teachers that they understand the materials presented, though they can hardly explain them in English.

Research Questions 3 and 4

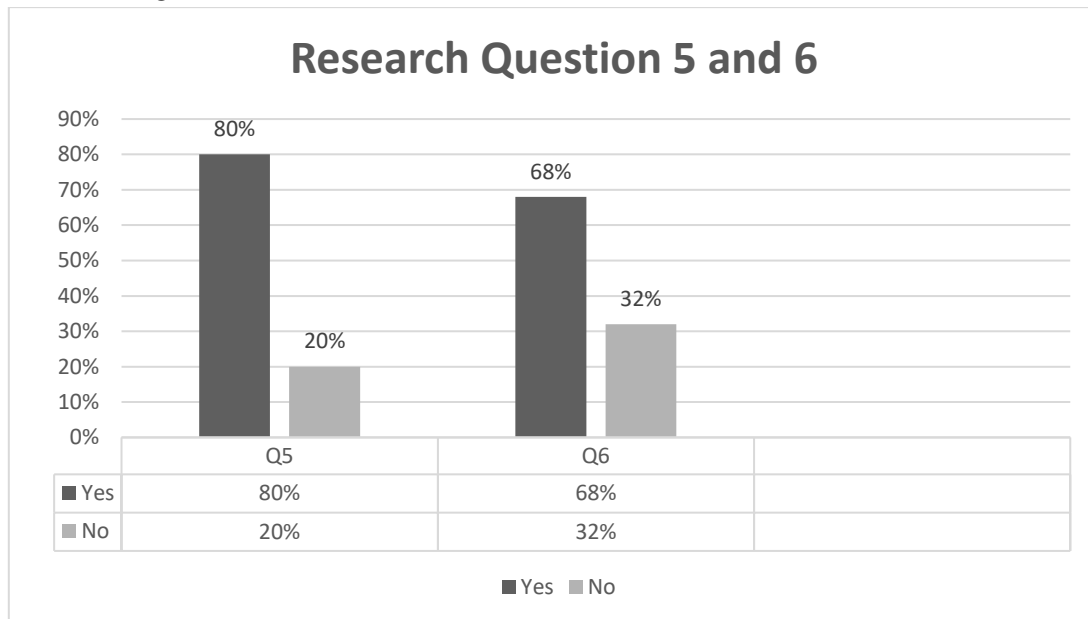


Does code-switching, when necessary, help you to participate more in classroom activities?

4. Does code-switching, in the classroom, have any cognitive, Psychological and social benefits?

The above chart shows that 62% of the students agree that code-switching helps them to participate more actively in the classroom, while 38% said it does not enhance their classroom activities. In the same vein, 56% affirmed that code-switching in classroom learning has cognitive, psychological and social benefits. This supports the claim of Obiamalu and Mbagwu (2008) who opined that code-switching is triggered by socio-psychological motivations. They argue that the attitude of the bilinguals towards the languages they use for various purposes motivates them to use either of the codes with which they are familiar. However, 44% think code-switching in classroom learning does not have any cognitive, psychological or social benefits. These findings show that when a student is allowed or knows he can express himself in another language, that he is comfortable in, he feels a sense of relief and is motivated to participate in class. Furthermore, the findings show that students tend to learn faster when what they don't understand in one language is explained to them in a language they are familiar with.

Research Questions 5 and 6



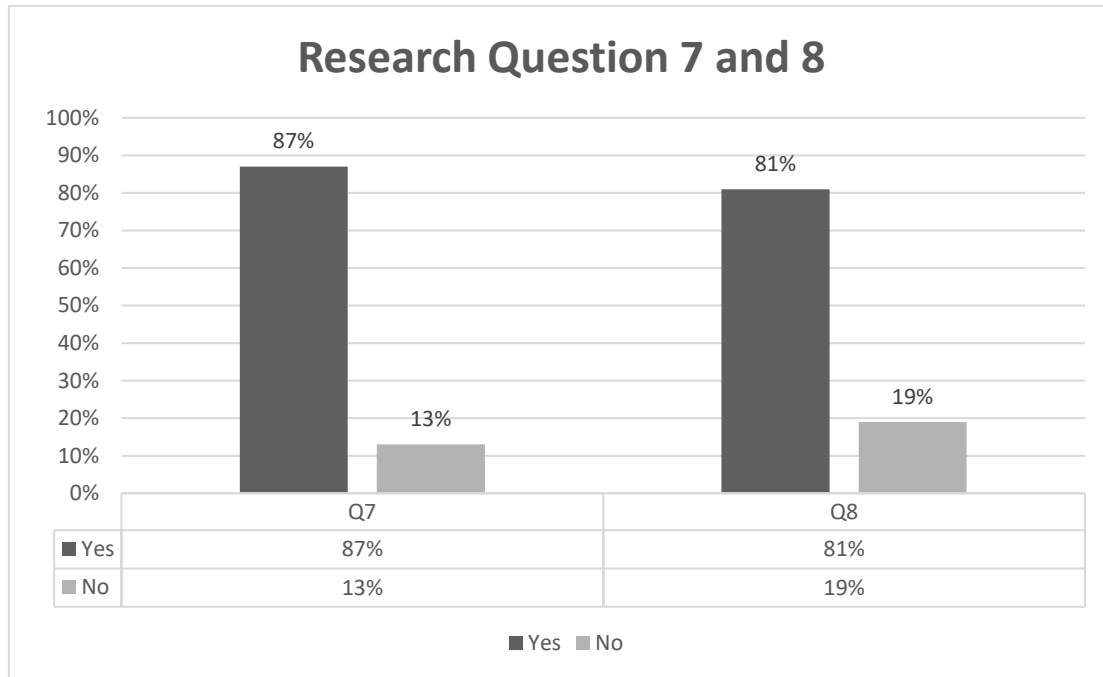
Does your teacher code-switch, sometimes, in class?

Does your teacher frown at your code-switching in class?

The above chart shows that 80% of students and teachers code-switch in class during lectures, while 20% do otherwise. For research question 5, 68% of the students say that their teachers frown at their code-switching class while 32% say their teachers do not frown at their code-switching in class. These findings show that teachers, in the

bid to help the students understand certain concepts, may code-switch to explain such concepts to the student(s). However, these teachers frown at their students' attempts at code-switching in class. The reason for this could be not to encourage laxity on the part of the students in making efforts to learn and understand the language of learning in the country. This corroborates Setati and Adler's (2000) assertion that teachers are pressured to let students code-switch to increase class participation.

Research Questions 7 and 8



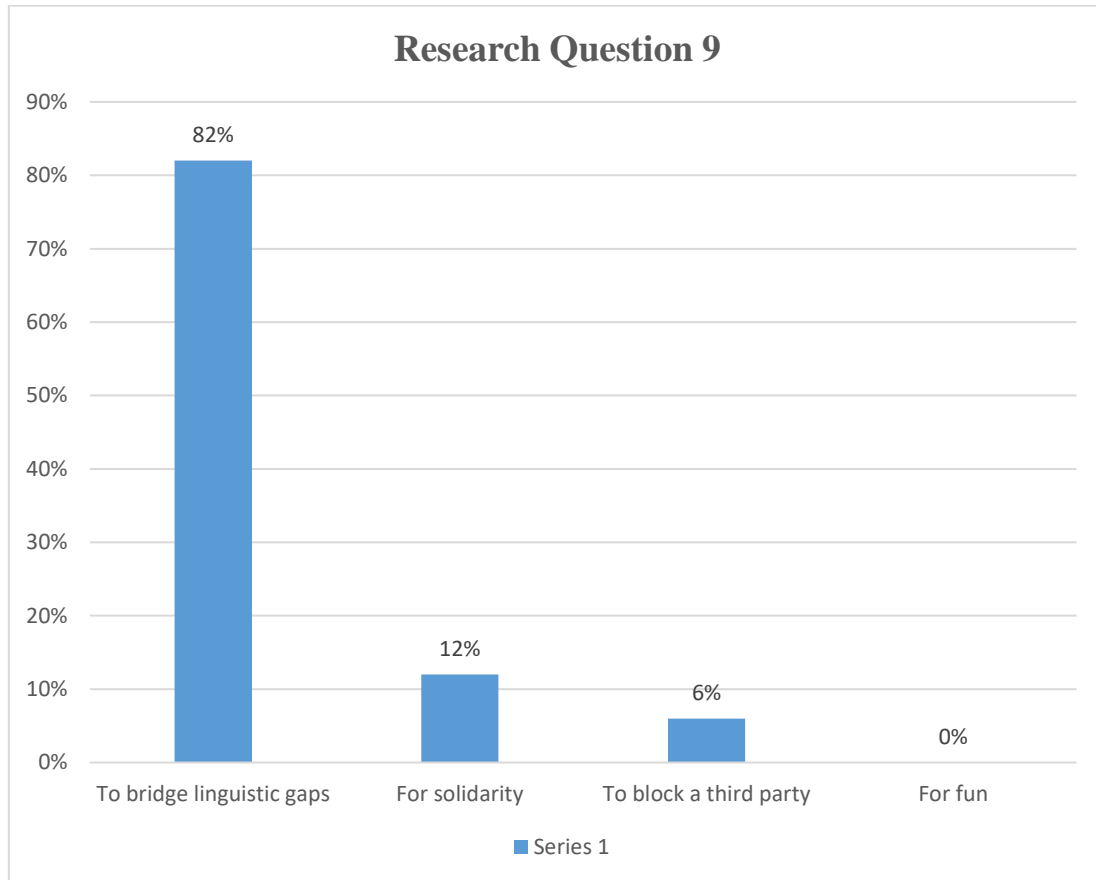
Is comprehension enhanced when the teacher code-switches to a the language you are familiar with?

Does the use of code-switching in the classroom reduce anxiety and Stress associated with learning?

The above findings show that 87% of the study population agree that Comprehension is enhanced when a teacher switches to a language the students are familiar with. More so, about 81% of the respondents are of the opinion that code-switching during learning reduces anxiety and stress associated with learning in the classroom. Students often feel anxious in class when they cannot express themselves or understand, in whole, what the teacher is saying. Such anxiety and stress can be eliminated or at least be reduced if the teacher, sometimes switches to a language the students are familiar with or when the student is allowed to switch to a language he can readily express himself. The elimination of such anxiety and stress leads to better comprehension and enhanced classroom participation. This agrees with Okorie's (2023) claim that code-

switching helps to reduce classroom tension and allows students to relax and feel more connected to the lecturer and the lecture.

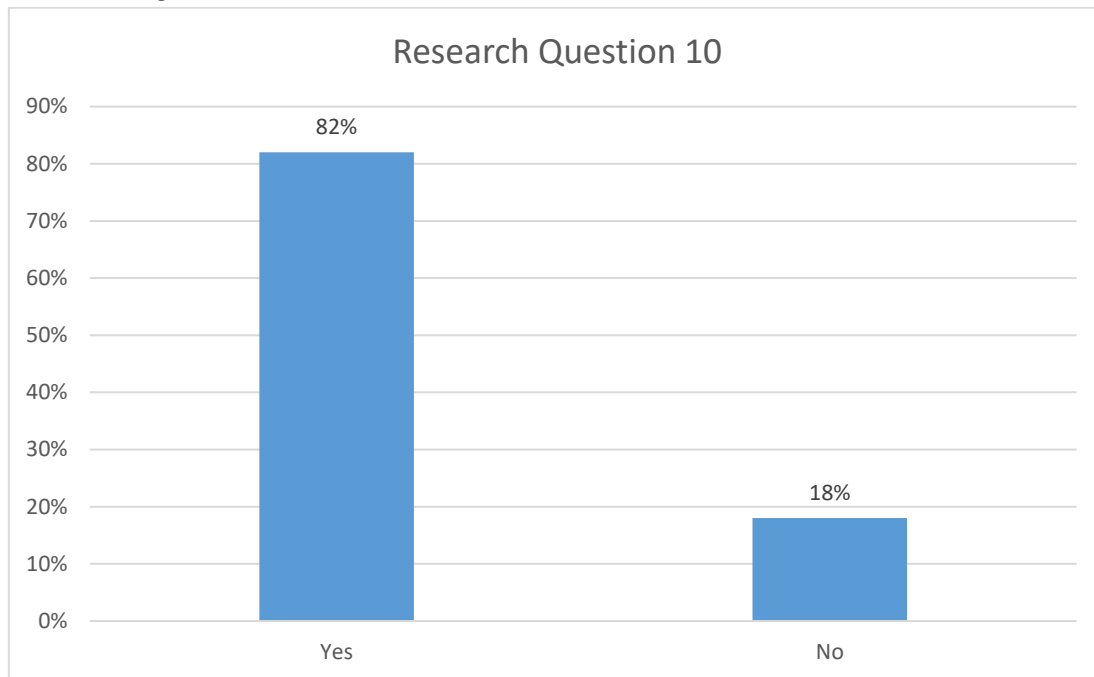
Research question 9



9. Why do you code-switch?

The findings above indicate that 82% of the study population code-switch to bridge the communication gap during classroom teaching and learning. 12% code-switch to show social solidarity to their mates while 6% code-switch to block meaning from others who are not supposed to be privy to the information being discussed then. These findings show that the main reason why students code-switch in class is because sometimes they lack words in the official language of instruction (English) to explain what they have in mind and, thus, resort to another language with which they are more conversant to make their point. This is consistent with Eze, Umeh and Anyanwu's (2022) contention that code-switching, as a practical approach to teaching, allows teachers and students to communicate freely and without any linguistic constraints, preventing potential misunderstandings and misrepresentations during the learning process.

Research Question 10



Do you think the use of code-switching as a teaching and learning strategy will help you achieve a successful academic experience?

The result above shows that 82% of the respondents agree that code-switching will help them to achieve a successful academic experience while 18% do otherwise. According to Okorie (2023), through code-switching, students show their alignment and misalignment with the teacher's instructional strategy. This backs up Mashiyi's (2014) findings that code-switching to learners' L1 compensated for their poor educational background. Consequently, the teacher's use of code-switching as an instructional approach helps the students to follow what is being discussed, and the teacher's switch to the student's L1 enables the teacher to mediate knowledge and new information. This is in line with the observations of Hibbert and Van der Walt (2014), who observed that code-switching was utilised to mediate knowledge and new information in terms of what is known, in a language that is familiar and meaningful in students' life-world experience. This process enhances learners' academic performance and may help in achieving a successful academic experience.

Conclusion

Code-switching has become popular among students in the teaching and learning process in Nigerian classrooms. Though the medium of instruction for higher education in Nigeria is the English language, there are occasions when the students are not able to express themselves or describe a particular concept in English, and as such

would resort to switching to another language to compensate for the deficiency. This could be beneficial to such students as it may help to enhance learning and reduce anxiety and stress associated with learning.

The analysis of the data offers direct evidence in support of code-switching as a teaching and learning strategy that impacts classroom practice and enhances learners' performance. The findings of the study show that the learners' positive attitude towards code-switching is supported throughout the data. The majority of the learners agree that code-switching supports learning and that knowledge of ideas can be reinforced in class if code-switching is utilized.

However, other students who do not share the same language switched to in the class could be disadvantaged as they would not understand anything from the conversations carried out in such a situation. Furthermore, students may become complacent in mastering the language of instruction as they feel comfortable switching languages in every class conversation. The study, therefore, advocates that the use of code-switching should be guided, and used only when and where necessary.

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