Code-Switching in English Curriculum Delivery in Rural South African Universities: Pedagogical Roles, Benefits, and Challenges for Pre-Service Teachers

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Abstract

This systematic literature review examines how code-switching (CS) functions in English instruction at rural South African universities for preservice teachers, highlighting its advantages and challenges. Although English is the primary language of instruction in higher education, most students in these settings speak African home languages, which pose major challenges to understanding and academic success. The review combines research from peer-reviewed journals, book chapters, and policy documents published between 2010 and 2025, drawing on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis. The researchers started with 1281 documents collected from Google Scholar, Web of Science, and Scopus and identified 186 studies that met their research requirements, which they analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The study identified five themes: CS as strategic pedagogical scaffolding; the promotion of inclusivity and affective security; the policy–practice disconnect; meta-pedagogical modelling for pre-service teacher socialisation; and systemic resource, stigma, and training deficits. The findings show that CS is an effective teaching method when grounded in theory, connecting students' native language skills with academic English. The system faces major limitations due to its English-only teaching rules, the absence of formal CS guidelines, and insufficient instructor training. The review indicates that South Africa requires specialised teacher-training programmes that will prepare pre-service teachers to work in multilingual educational settings in rural areas.

Keywords: Code-switching, English curriculum delivery, pre-service teachers, rural universities, multilingual higher education, sociocultural theory, South Africa

1. Introduction

The linguistic landscape of rural South African universities reveals a persistent conflict: students in teacher education programmes use African languages as their primary language. In contrast, universities use English as their primary language for teaching and learning. The institutional language requirements create a structural contradiction that prevents students from using their native languages to achieve academic success and understand their studies (Wang, 2021; Wawrzynski & Garton, 2024; Willers, 2022).

Code-switching (CS) serves as a vital teaching tool in this context, offering instructors more than a simple linguistic solution (Taiebine, 2023; Thomas, 2021; Tuimebayeva et al., 2024). Students in multilingual classrooms use strategic CS to understand new concepts, which helps them express their thoughts and display their true identity through their native language skills (Banda, 2018; Makalela, 2018). Pre-service teachers use CS as a learning tool, which helps them develop their academic identities and teaching skills while preparing them for future multilingual classroom environments (Ajani, 2024b).

The theoretical basis for assessing CS as an authentic teaching method exists as a complete framework. Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory defines learning as a social activity that people engage in through cultural and linguistic resources, with language as their primary tool for mental growth. The Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis, developed by Cummins (1979, 1981), posits that students who acquire academic skills in their first language (L1) will use those skills to learn academic content in their second language (L2). The two frameworks establish a theoretical foundation for why teachers should use strategic CS: it helps students learn English through their primary language skills.

South African higher education institutions exhibit high rates of code-switching, but rural teacher-training programmes lack established theories to guide their implementation, and academic discussion remains limited. According to Makhanya and Zibane (2020), lecturers use CS as an unplanned response to comprehension problems rather than as a scientifically based instructional method. The research field currently lacks a cohesive structure because existing studies have examined CS in primary and secondary education or investigated multilingual language policies at higher education institutions. However, no comprehensive synthesis exists of how CS operates as a teaching method in English teacher education programmes at rural South African universities.

The absence of a coherent evidence base has several important consequences. The professional development for CS needs consolidated empirical evidence to progress beyond existing anecdotal reports (Szelei et al., 2020; Sterling, 2024; Stroud & Kerfoot, 2021). The absence of formal institutional recognition leaves both lecturers and students in doubt about CS status and its proper academic use, creating a risk that they will either misuse it or dismiss it as an academic 'crutch' that schools should not use in teaching. Institutions need to establish support structures that first require an understanding of the various challenges, including English-only requirements, insufficient lecturer training, and ongoing social stigma (Sithole & Mbukanma, 2024; Cele, 2021).

The present study addresses this research gap through a systematic literature review. The study aims to synthesise and critically analyse peer-reviewed studies published between 2010 and 2025 to develop an evidence-based understanding of CS as a teaching method in the English curriculum taught to pre-service teachers at rural South African universities. The review uses an integrative theoretical framework that combines Sociocultural Theory with the Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis to analyse how CS functions, provides benefits, and imposes restrictions in this educational setting. Hence, the review is structured around three research questions:

a. What are the identified pedagogical roles and functions of lecturer-led code-switching in the delivery of English curriculum modules within rural South African university teacher education programmes?
b. What benefits for pre-service teacher learning and professional development, as documented in the literature, are associated with the use of pedagogically informed code-switching in these contexts?
c. What institutional, policy-related, and practical challenges constrain the effective and sustainable implementation of code-switching as a recognised pedagogical strategy in these rural university settings?

Literature Review

Code-Switching in Multilingual Educational Contexts

The academic community has changed its fundamental approach to studying code-switching in educational environments. Through sociolinguistic and educational psychology research, bilingual and multilingual speakers demonstrate their natural cognitive abilities through their multilingual communication skills, which were previously considered linguistic deficiencies in monolingual language-teaching practices (Siziba & Nhongo, 2024; Smit, 2024; Smith Washington, 2024; Sofi-Karim et al., 2023). This conceptual framework has been used in South African research to support ongoing discussions about fair language policies for educational settings. CS has evolved into an educational tool that teachers use to help students understand material while building their confidence and classroom involvement.

Code-Switching in Higher Education: Roles and Functions

The research study, which examines CS in higher-education English programmes, demonstrates three teaching functions that interconnect with one another, according to Sharma and Bhardwaj, Sigcau and Siziba, and Maseko. First, it operates as a cognitive and linguistic resource: lecturers draw on students' home languages to explain assessment criteria, unpack discipline-specific vocabulary, and mediate access to complex theoretical content (Banda, 2018; Ramadiro, 2017). A Vygotskian framework defines this process as linguistic scaffolding, which enables students to understand their current knowledge in their first language as they strive to achieve academic objectives (van Compernolle, 2021). The second purpose of CS is to create a classroom environment that fosters emotional connections among students while reducing their mental obstacles to studying in English-speaking academic settings (Ajani & Ntombela, 2024; Makalela, 2018; Seleke et al., 2025). The third function of CS assists students who transition from speaking their home language to using academic English by helping them better understand English content.

Rural South African Universities: Contextual Challenges

Rural universities in South Africa face distinct challenges that create an urgent need for their language-teaching methods to adapt to local conditions (Romijn et al., 2021; Roux, 2020; Sahlane & Pritchard, 2023; Sayed et al., 2019). The students at these institutions enter higher education with African-language educational backgrounds, having received instruction in African languages throughout their schooling. However, they must study academic material, complete assessments, and develop professional skills in English. The transition creates a semiotic gap, as Mgqwashu (2024) describes it, between students' everyday language use and the requirements of academic discourse. Rural universities experience resource limitations that affect their ability to provide academic materials in African languages and deliver necessary professional development for their lecturers who teach multilingual students (Benson, 2019; Mpofu, 2023).

Theoretical Support: The Interdependence Hypothesis

CS, as a teaching method, receives strong theoretical support from Cummins' (1979, 1981) Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis. The hypothesis holds that academic proficiency developed in the L1 does not impede but rather underpins the development of L2 academic competence, specifically, the context-reduced, cognitively demanding language that Cummins identifies as Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). South African research has shown that students who study difficult academic materials in their native languages can develop a better conceptual understanding, which they can later demonstrate in English (Mulaudzi, 2024). The evidence shows that people mistakenly believe monolingual English instruction is the best way to achieve academic proficiency in English.

Code-Switching in Pre-service Teacher Education

The CS literature identifies pre-service teacher education as a unique field of study that examines how student teachers balance two primary

roles: academic learning and professional development (Ball, 2000; Ajani, 2024a). Educators need to learn the curriculum material as they build their teaching skills, including the instructional techniques they will use to teach their future students. The teacher educators who demonstrate strategic CS through their explicit and reflective implementation during curriculum delivery provide students with understanding support while showing them a standardised method that educators should use to teach multilingual students (Ajani, 2024b; Nomlomo & Ajani, 2025). The pre-service teachers who learn CS through effective learning experiences develop the ability to understand CS as a professional technique, which they will implement in multilingual Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase classrooms.

The Policy–Practice Disconnect, together with the Systemic

constraints, create multiple obstacles to implementing CS in university classrooms and teacher training programmes, despite its pedagogical benefits. The most widespread problem manifests as a mismatch between official language policies and actual classroom language use. South African universities choose English as their primary language of instruction despite the Constitution granting rights to all eleven official languages, resulting in CS being an unofficially accepted practice that institutions do not recognise (Cele, 2021; Hlengwa-Selepe, 2024). The policy–practice gap forces lecturers to choose between their teaching duties and their institutional commitments due to a lack of official guidance or assistance (Ajani & Govender, 2024; Bang, 2024; Bell & Swart, 2018).

The educational system faces its most serious challenge due to the complete lack of organised professional development programmes that teach CS and translanguaging teaching methods. Most lecturers who use CS in their teaching do so without understanding the research-based methods that would produce the best teaching results (Bergene et al., 2023; Knaus et al., 2022). The absence of multilingual teaching materials is an additional problem, as lecturers must create all multilingual content themselves, with no standard resources to support this need (Mabela & Ditsele, 2024). The literature presents a) professional development needs that extend beyond multilingual awareness and require practical skills in translanguaging and CS implementation to be suitable for academic development. (Erling et al., 2021).

The Existing Literature Contains Unaddressed Research Deficiencies.

The field of computer science education in South African schools has received extensive study (Adedokun et al., 2024; Akintayo et al., 2024; Ajani, 2023), but no study has combined these two research areas to examine English teacher education at rural universities in South Africa. The studies concentrate on three aspects: student attitudes, lecturer perspectives, and institutional policy assessment (Joubert & Sibanda, 2022; Makhanya & Zibane, 2020). The present systematic review is designed to address this gap by synthesising evidence from 2010 to the present across these interconnected domains (Braun & Clarke, 2006), thereby establishing the operational patterns and operational difficulties of CS in rural pre-service teacher education, alongside its educational benefits.

Theoretical Framework

The review uses an integrative theoretical framework that combines Vygotsky's 1978 Sociocultural Theory from developmental psychology and Cummins' 1979 and 1981 Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis from applied linguistics and language acquisition. The two frameworks together establish a unified conceptual framework which enables researchers to study code-switching CS as a teaching practice that serves cognitive learning needs, social contexts, and educational purposes.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky's 1978 Sociocultural Theory states that all advanced cognitive abilities, including language learning and academic knowledge development, begin in social interaction and then progress through it. Language is the fundamental cultural instrument that enables people to build shared understanding. The theory uses the Zone of Proximal Development ZPD concept to describe the learner's ability to accomplish tasks without help compared to their abilities when supported by someone who possesses greater knowledge MKO. The university classroom functions as a learning environment where lecturers act as MKOs who deliver scaffolding, which consists of temporary instructional support that helps students move from ZPD to independent learning McLeod, 2018.

Pedagogical CS serves as linguistic and conceptual scaffolding that helps students develop their academic abilities at their current learning level. The lecturer uses the student's native language to explain difficult material, which the student then learns in English, because this method helps the student understand new academic concepts while working within their ZPD. The classroom dialogues follow this perspective because the Sociocultural framework holds that people create meaning through social interactions within particular social environments (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). The English-medium classroom transforms into an inclusive environment that fosters a real community of practice through strategic CS, enabling all students to use their language skills to build a common understanding (Makalela, 2018). The two connected concepts establish a foundation that improves understanding. Strategic CS refers to instruction that uses multiple languages in a planned way, whereas translanguaging describes how multilingual speakers use their entire language system without adhering to specific language boundaries (Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021). The present review uses CS as its main term because most studies in the corpus use this term, but most of the described practices align better with the translanguaging framework.

Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis serves as the second theoretical framework foundation of the research. Cummins distinguishes between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP): BICS refers to conversational language skills learned through direct experience in social situations. At the same time, CALP describes the academic language needed to succeed in structured educational settings. He shows that multilingual speakers develop language skills that exhibit surface-level differences, yet share common cognitive and academic skills across their entire range of languages. Academic literacy

acquired through L1 literacy development will help English learners acquire CALP skills in their second language. The requirement that students stop using their first language during English-only instruction hinders their academic development by preventing them from applying their current cognitive abilities and academic knowledge. When lecturers use CS to explain theoretical frameworks and discipline-specific concepts in students' home languages, they enable students to develop the CUP in their strongest language, thereby simultaneously building the conceptual foundations for English academic proficiency.

Integration of Frameworks and Implications for this Review

The two frameworks together create a strong explanatory capacity. Vygotsky's (1978) theory explains the social and interactive mechanisms through which CS facilitates learning, whilst Cummins' (1979, 1981) framework explains the cognitive and linguistic reasons why drawing on the L1 is not merely permissible but academically advantageous. The two sources establish CS as a research-supported teaching method that operates as an official educational strategy rather than an unstructured approach.

The framework is particularly well-suited to the rural South African university context. Students from rural educational backgrounds need extended time to reach the ZPD levels required for academic English communication, since their available CUP resources contain valuable cultural knowledge but do not meet academic CALP requirements. Lecturer-led CS creates a suitable learning environment that allows students to practice two different language styles.

The framework serves a dual purpose in pre-service teacher education: as a content-delivery mechanism and as a demonstration of effective multilingual instructional strategies (Ajani, 2024b; Nomlomo & Ajani, 2025). Pre-service teachers who experience strategic CS in their own learning develop both conceptual understanding of curriculum content and a practically embodied understanding of how to teach effectively in multilingual classrooms. The review uses two frameworks as its foundation to investigate literature on scaffolding, community-building, conceptual transfer, affective benefits, meta-pedagogical modelling, and systemic challenges.

2. Method

The study uses a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology, which establishes a transparent process for identifying, selecting, and synthesising all relevant academic sources addressing a specific research question (Page et al., 2021). The SLR uses a pre-established protocol that eliminates operational biases while ensuring full research output and method duplication through its synthesis process. The review protocol was developed in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines, which provide an internationally recognised framework for ensuring methodological integrity in systematic review research (Sharma & Bhattarai, 2022).

The review applied clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria to guide study selection. Studies were included if they: (1) were published in English between 2010 and 2025 to capture contemporary research developments in the post-policy period; (2) presented empirical research which used qualitative or quantitative or mixed-methods designs or which contained substantial theoretical scholarly research; (3) explicitly addressed code-switching or closely related pedagogies such as translanguaging in higher education settings; (4) focused primarily on South Africa with particular relevance to rural universities or multilingual teacher education contexts and (5) examined curriculum delivery, language policy, or teacher education with respect to English instruction. The study excluded papers that (1) examined primary or secondary education but did not relate their findings to higher education, (2) studied multilingualism through general policy discussion but did not assess classroom teaching methods, (3) consisted of non-peer-reviewed commentaries and editorials and unpublished dissertations which were not available through the chosen databases, or (4) took place in regions which displayed distinct linguistic and political characteristics.

The research team conducted a comprehensive database investigation across three primary interdisciplinary research platforms. The research team selected Scopus and Web of Science because these databases provide comprehensive indexing of peer-reviewed scholarly articles. At the same time, Google Scholar provides access to South African research materials, including journal articles, book chapters, and institutional repository content that other databases do not consistently track (Haneef & Agrawal, 2024). The search strategy used both controlled vocabulary terms and Boolean operators. The search string used in the core search operation contained the following elements: ("code-switching" OR "translanguaging") AND ("higher education" OR "university") AND ("South Africa" OR "rural") AND ("English language" OR "curriculum delivery") AND ("teacher education" OR "pre-service teachers"). The research team adjusted their search terms according to each database's specific linguistic rules and term dictionaries to achieve the best possible results.

The search and selection process followed a multi-stage approach, modelled on the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram (Page et al., 2021). The initial searches across all three databases yielded 1,281 records. The team screened 1,138 titles and abstracts after eliminating 143 duplicate entries. The first-stage screening process eliminated 827 records that did not meet the required criteria for contextual or educational content. The researchers retrieved 311 full-text articles from the database to evaluate their suitability for the research study. The research team excluded 125 studies because they focused on international contexts or required investigation of multilingual education through classroom-based methods. The research team conducted qualitative analysis on 186 studies, which formed the final research body.

The researchers processed data extraction using a standardised template applied to all 186 studies, while storing their findings in a structured spreadsheet. The researchers extracted essential information, including author details, publication information, research goals, methodological design, institutional and geographical context, and results on CS practices and associated theoretical frameworks. The structured procedure enabled researchers to compare and synthesise results from various studies (Olsen, 2022).

Thematic synthesis was conducted using the reflexive thematic analysis approach described by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2024). This method is well-suited to analysing patterns in qualitative data across a large and varied body of literature. The analytical process consisted of six stages, each requiring researchers to complete a step before moving on to the next. Researchers began their work by familiarising themselves with the extracted data, which they used in their analysis. The next step after initial processing required the researchers to create preliminary codes. The next step involved researchers creating candidate themes by aggregating codes. The researchers assessed and improved themes by comparing them with the entire dataset. The researchers established final themes, which they used to create the written synthesis. The thematic development process used an inductive approach, relying on data rather than on the research frameworks derived from Vygotsky (1978) and Cummins (1979, 1981) to guide the research.

The review demonstrated trustworthiness through the researchers' adherence to standard requirements for systematic reviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researchers established credibility through their systematic search across multiple databases and their comprehensive documentation of all analytical choices. The research maintained dependability by openly presenting their search methods and criteria used for study selection. The extensive explanation of the research context and methods enables readers to evaluate how the study results apply across different research settings. The researchers used extracted data to support all interpretations of the study results. (Bang, 2024).

3. Results

The reflexive thematic analysis of 186 eligible studies yielded five principal themes that together illuminate how CS functions as a pedagogical practice within the delivery of the English curriculum in South African rural teacher education programmes. The themes demonstrate the possible uses of CS in this situation but also show its existing operational limitations. Table 1 provides a structured overview of the themes, their relationship to the three research questions, key supporting studies, and a summary of the evidence base.

Table 1. Summary of Themes from the Systematic Review of Code-Switching in Rural South African Universities

Research Question	Theme	Supporting Studies	Summary of Evidence
RQ1: What are the pedagogical roles and functions of lecturer-led code-switching?	**Theme 1: Code-Switching as Strategic Pedagogical Scaffolding** A deliberate tool to explain complex concepts, vocabulary, and assessment criteria. Functions as Vygotskian linguistic and conceptual scaffolding within the ZPD. Leverages L1 to build L2 academic proficiency via Common Underlying Proficiency.	Ajani (2024b); Ramadiro (2017); van Compernolle (2021); Mulaudzi (2024); Maluleke (2019); Banda (2018)	CS is a planned, cognitively essential strategy that uses students' linguistic repertoire as a bridge to access English academic discourse, directly applying the frameworks of Vygotsky (1978) and Cummins (1979, 1981).
	Theme 4: Pre-service Teacher Socialisation and Meta-Pedagogical Modelling Demonstrates CS as a legitimate and effective teaching strategy. Models 'pedagogical language knowledge' for future multilingual classrooms. Provides experiential learning in which the teaching method is as important as the content.	Ajani (2024b); Nomlomo & Ajani (2025); Mgqwashu (2024); Erling et al. (2021); Paris & Alim (2017); Ndhlovu & Makalela (2021)	Teacher educators use CS not only to teach but to demonstrate how to teach. This dual function socialises pre-service teachers into viewing multilingualism as a pedagogical resource rather than a barrier.
RQ2: What benefits for pre-service teachers are associated with code-switching?	**Theme 2: Fostering Inclusivity, Rapport, and Affective Security** Validates student identity and linguistic repertoire. Reduces anxiety, builds rapport between lecturers and students, and increases participation. Develops pre-service teachers' values towards inclusive, socially	Makalela (2018); Joubert & Sibanda (2022); Nomlomo & Ajani (2025); Vygotsky (1978); Li (2019); Cummins (1979, 1981)	The affective and social benefits are foundational. CS creates an identity-affirming space that enables cognitive engagement and models how to build inclusive learning communities for future teachers.

Research Question	Theme	Supporting Studies	Summary of Evidence
	just classrooms.		
	Theme 4 (Benefits Aspect): Pre-service Teacher Socialisation and Meta-Pedagogical Modelling Builds practical skills and professional self-efficacy for future multilingual teaching. Transforms perception of CS from a 'crutch' to a professional strategy. Provides a template for responsive teaching in diverse classrooms.	Ajani (2024b); Erling et al. (2021); Mgqwashu (2024); Knaus et al. (2022); Lantolf & Thorne (2006); McLeod (2018)	Experiencing effective CS as a learner directly equips pre-service teachers with a replicable method, building their confidence and competence to manage linguistic diversity as a professional asset.
RQ3: What challenges constrain the effective implementation of code-switching?	**Theme 3: Navigating the Policy–Practice Disconnect** Official 'English-only' LoLT policies conflict with multilingual classroom realities. CS operates in a state of accepted illegality without institutional support. This creates professional and ethical dilemmas for lecturers.	Cele (2021); Hlengwa-Selepe (2024); Sithole & Mbukanma (2024); Knaus et al. (2022); Makhanya & Zibane (2020); Ndhlovu & Makalela (2021)	The most-cited structural barrier is the schism between multilingual classroom practice and monolingual institutional policy, forcing lecturers into unsanctioned and unsustainable practices.
	Theme 5: Systemic Challenges: Resource Scarcity, Stigma, and Training Deficits Critical lack of multilingual teaching and assessment materials. CS is stigmatised as a sign of deficiency in English or academic rigour, with a major absence of structured professional development on how to implement CS and translanguaging pedagogically.	Mabela & Ditsele (2024); Mpofu (2023); Makhanya & Zibane (2020); Cele (2021); Knaus et al. (2022); Mgqwashu (2024)	A triad of obstacles impedes effective implementation: an absence of appropriate materials, negative institutional attitudes, and a lack of training. Lecturers are left to rely on intuition without institutional support, making systemic adoption unattainable.

Theme 1: Code-Switching as Strategic Pedagogical Scaffolding

The established finding shows that CS functions as an intentional cognitive tool that students use to develop their skills through the learning material. Studies demonstrate that lecturers at rural South African universities employ CS to mediate student access to English-medium academic content, using home languages to explain theoretical concepts, unpack assessment criteria, and introduce discipline-specific vocabulary (Ramadiro, 2017; Ajani, 2024b). The use of L1 in this context serves as a psychological tool that enables students to access L2 materials, in line with Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory. Research in science and mathematics education contexts has demonstrated that foundational conceptual understanding developed first through the home language subsequently supports the acquisition of corresponding English academic terminology. This process directly illustrates Cummins' (1979, 1981) Common Underlying Proficiency principle.

Theme 2: Fostering Inclusivity, Rapport, and Affective Security

The research demonstrates that CS yields advantages that extend beyond cognitive development to encompass social and emotional learning outcomes. The use of home languages in English-medium classrooms validates students' linguistic identities and signals recognition of their broader cultural and epistemic resources, fostering a sense of belonging in an environment that might otherwise feel exclusionary (Calaguas, 2023; Joubert & Sibanda, 2022). CS establishes connections between lecturers and students, enables students to participate in group discussions, and serves as an educational tool to help them overcome emotional and psychological obstacles hindering their academic

progress (Makalela, 2018). The affective aspect in pre-service teacher education is of great importance because a classroom environment that demonstrates inclusive practices and validates all languages helps student teachers develop the values and skills needed for socially just and culturally responsive teaching methods (Chiblow & Meighan, 2022; Nomlomo & Ajani, 2025).

Theme 3: Navigating the Policy–Practice Disconnect

Research shows that institutional language regulations struggle to match actual classroom language use. South African universities need to follow their constitutions, which recognise 11 official languages, yet maintain policies that allow only English as the language of instruction. The systematic review shows that this situation creates a state of 'accepted illegality' that, according to several scholars, arises when lecturers use CS as a necessary teaching method while practising it without institutional permission, thereby creating professional doubt and prompting the adoption of alternative teaching methods (Knaus et al., 2022). The most severe problem occurs at rural universities, where students need to master academic English while their home languages differ from English, and universities provide the least assistance (Sithole & Mbukanma, 2024).

Theme 4: Pre-service Teacher Socialisation and Meta-Pedagogical Modelling

The literature on teacher education identifies a distinctive and educationally powerful dimension of lecturer-led CS: it operates as a metapedagogical model. Pre-service teachers are professionally socialised through both direct teaching and the pedagogical methods they encounter in their own learning experiences (Ajani & Govender, 2024). Teacher educators who use reflective and strategic CS in their curriculum delivery teach both educational content and an authentic teaching method (Ajani, 2024b). Research shows that this exposure helps pre-service teachers change their understanding of CS from an informal coping method to an officially approved professional technique (Erling et al., 2021). The process of modelling develops what scholars define as 'pedagogical language knowledge' by enabling educators to choose language for specific teaching purposes (Mgqwashu, 2024), a competency that remains unaddressed in standard teacher preparation programmes (du Plessis & du Plessis, 2023).

Theme 5: Systemic Challenges: Resource Scarcity, Stigma, and Training Deficits

The fifth theme unites three distinct systemic barriers that hinder the successful execution of CS. The educational system lacks adequate multilingual teaching materials and assessment tools, forcing teachers to create their own resources to meet job requirements (Elliot, 2023; Mabela Ditshele, 2024). The ongoing social and institutional discrimination processes link CS with low English proficiency and reduced academic standards, which decrease lecturers' confidence and students' willingness to use their home languages in academic spaces (Fynn Ndlovu, 2024; Makhanya Zibane, 2020). The entire body of teachers reports that structured professional development opportunities for strategic CS development, translanguaging, and language-sensitive curriculum design are nonexistent in their institutions. Practitioners who lack training rely on gut feelings, which prevents CS from becoming an institutional teaching mechanism grounded in research-based knowledge (Mpofu, 2023). The three existing deficiencies constitute the main obstacle preventing rural South African teacher education programmes from successfully implementing CS (Goforth et al., 2024).

4. Discussion

The systematic review identified five themes that demonstrate that code-switching serves as an approved educational method. The system's institutional constraints, stemming from policies and resource limitations, reduce this potential. The documented CS practices examined in this review are strongly connected to the theoretical frameworks underpinning this research. The use of home languages to scaffold access to academic English content directly demonstrates the Vygotskian (1978) ZPD in operation, with the lecturer functioning as the MKO who mediates learning through culturally and linguistically familiar tools. The corpus provides consistent evidence that learners transfer conceptual understanding from L1 to L2, supporting Cummins' (1979, 1981) Common Underlying Proficiency principle (van Compernolle, 2021; Mulaudzi, 2024). The convergent findings present strong evidence that challenges the monolingual ideologies that dominate most South African higher education institutions.

The synthesis study found that policy and practice are structurally misaligned, which is one of its most critical findings. The teaching staff must break institutional language rules to share their knowledge with students, creating an educational approach that schools cannot sustain and that endangers their professional standing, according to Hoinle et al. and Hrastinski. The existing disconnect demonstrates more significant structural disparities. The permanent use of English as the exclusive academic language, according to Ndhlovu, Makalela, and Knaus et al., reflects a colonial knowledge system that devalues African languages as academic and professional communication tools.

The literature under study contains an essential conceptual conflict that the researchers need to investigate in their writing. The majority of the studies the researchers examined use the term 'code-switching'; however, the classroom activities they studied align better with the translanguaging framework, which combines ideological and pedagogical elements (Makalela, 2018). The theory of translanguaging holds that multilingual people use their full linguistic repertoire as their active communication system, drawing on it as needed for speaking and thinking. The way South African rural university lecturers use both English and their native languages for teaching shows a better understanding through translanguaging than through code-switching between defined linguistic systems. The new definition changes how educational institutions legitimise code-switching by using it to support their language policies, as the translanguaging approach shows that multilingual education practices should be used for both cognitive development and equal access in educational programme development (Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021).

The discovery shows that CS is an effective educational method that helps pre-service teachers develop their teaching skills. Teacher

educators use CS through strategic methods because it helps students understand and adopt effective teaching methods, leading to professional growth through practical experience. Pre-service teachers who experience effective CS as learners do not merely observe a technique: they develop an embodied understanding of how to manage linguistic diversity as a pedagogical resource rather than a classroom management challenge (Ajani, 2024b; Nomlomo & Ajani, 2025).

The experiential learning process enables them to build up professional self-efficacy, which helps them handle multilingual requirements in their upcoming classroom settings. The systemic challenges identified in Theme 5 require a response that involves structural changes. The absence of multilingual teaching and assessment materials represents a significant equity issue: it places the entire burden of language-responsive curriculum design on individual lecturers, consuming the professional resources that should be directed towards teaching quality improvement (Mabela & Ditsele, 2024). The ongoing CS-related stigma underscores the need for decolonisation, as African linguistic resources must gain new value within academic culture. At the same time, existing language hierarchies require comprehensive policy changes and dedicated efforts to dismantle these barriers.

The most critical gap in teaching CS and translanguaging methods is that schools lack organised teacher training programmes. The evidence shows that lecturers who use CS methods do so on instinct rather than through deliberate planning, and that they lack an understanding of both theoretical concepts and practical methods that would help them achieve their highest professional performance (Mpofu, 2023). Required training programmes should equip lecturers with skills in language-use planning, assessment of multilingual competence, and the design of translanguaging-responsive lesson materials (Erling et al., 2021). The absence of professional infrastructure funding will result in CS development remaining an individual-based response system rather than becoming a supported educational method.

The language-in-education frameworks at rural South African universities need a complete redefinition in light of the review findings, which require fundamental policy change. All academic programmes and their teaching methods must use multilingualism as their primary foundational element, rather than treating it as a minor aspect to be accommodated. Educational institutions need to create policies that support and establish translanguaging practices as official school procedures, while recognising African languages for academic use and developing resources for multilingual instruction and evaluation through institutional processes. Pre-service teacher education programmes need their curriculum frameworks to establish multilingual teaching as an essential professional skill, rather than relying on superficial references to 'language across the curriculum' (Mgqwashu, 2024; Markey et al., 2021).

5. Conclusion

The systematic review combines findings from 186 academic studies to establish that code-switching is an essential teaching method grounded in valid theoretical foundations in South African rural university teacher-training programmes. The review uses Vygotsky's 1978 Sociocultural Theory and Cummins' 1979 and 1981 Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis as a foundation to demonstrate that pre-service teachers who use strategic code-switching gain a better understanding of English-medium curriculum content while acquiring practical skills needed for their multilingual professional work. The programme creates a secure emotional space for students, affirms their cultural backgrounds, and provides future educators with practical training that showcases language-sensitive teaching methods. Three major systemic barriers stop CS from achieving its educational goals: institutional guidelines prevent teachers from using CS together with their teaching methods, which they need to implement CS; there is no proper training system that teaches teachers how to use strategic CS and translanguaging in their classrooms; and schools lack suitable multilingual educational resources. The institutional response needs to be undertaken in a unified manner because existing language-in-education policies need to recognise translanguaging as an acceptable academic practice. Educational institutions need to invest in developing comprehensive professional training programmes for their teacher trainers. The institutions need to develop educational resources which cater to distinct local language needs. The transformation of CS from an individual practice into a fundamental element of fair and efficient teacher training at South African rural universities depends on effective alignment between educational policy development and advancement programmes and the distribution of educational resources.

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