The Effect of Code-switching on EFL Students' Grammatical Proficiency

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Abstract	Article Information
This study examined the impact of code-switching on the grammatical proficiency of EFL students. A quasi-experimental design was utilized, comprising two groups: the experimental group received grammar instruction with the integration of Afan Oromo through code-switching, while the control group was instructed solely in English. Data were gathered through pre-tests, post-tests, and interviews with teachers. The findings indicated a significant improvement in the experimental group, which demonstrated an average post-test increase of 5 points, whereas the control group showed only slight progress. A one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference between the groups (p = 0.013), and the assumption of homogeneity of variance was satisfied. Teacher interviews highlighted that code-switching aided in clarifying challenging concepts and enhancing comprehension, although some educators warned that overuse might limit students' exposure to English. Overall, the results suggest that a balanced and purposeful use of Afan Oromo can effectively support grammar instruction without impeding English language development. The study concludes that incorporating code-switching into EFL teaching enhances grammar acquisition and recommends that teachers receive training in bilingual instructional techniques to encourage context-sensitive use of learners' first language in multilingual educational settings.	 ***Corresponding Author:** Wakgari Deressa Agemso E-mail: cherakewakgari@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

The influence of a learner's first language (L1) on second or foreign language (L2) acquisition has been a central topic in applied linguistics for decades. Research indicates that L1 use can either support or hinder L2 learning, depending on how it is integrated into the instructional context (Ellis, 1994; Cook, 2001). As English increasingly serves as a global language of communication, its role in educational systems worldwide, including in Ethiopia, where it is taught as a foreign language, has become more prominent (Crystal, 2003; Heugh et al., 2007).

In the Ethiopian context, English language pedagogy has evolved through various methodological shifts, reflecting ongoing debates about the role of L1 in the classroom. Earlier methods like the Grammar Translation Method allowed native language use, but post-World War I critiques led to a shift toward approaches that emphasized communicative competence through exclusive use of English. Although immersive English-only instruction is widely promoted today, the pedagogical value of using L1 remains contested. Hammerly (1991) argues that the deliberate use of the mother tongue can enhance the learning experience by making difficult

concepts more accessible and accelerating language development.

While extensive research has examined the broader role of L1 in L2 acquisition, relatively limited attention has been paid to its specific effect on grammar learning, especially within Ethiopian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Grammar, as a core aspect of language competence, continues to pose significant challenges for Ethiopian secondary school students. Despite long-term instruction, many learners struggle with mastering English grammar. Studies such as Gemechu and Tamene (2023) suggest that the use of Afan Oromo in EFL classrooms positively influences the understanding of grammar and vocabulary by serving as a pedagogical bridge. Likewise, Tamiru (2022) reported that teachers believe using L1 selectively enhances grammatical explanation, although overreliance could undermine oral English skills. These insights highlight the importance of further examining whether integrating Afan Oromo into instruction can improve grammar learning more effectively than English-only teaching.

Both global and local research indicate that L1 can play a constructive role in grammar acquisition. Echevarria and Graves (1998), for instance, stress that strategic inclusion of students' native languages can foster motivation and improve academic outcomes. Nonetheless, some scholars caution that too much dependence on L1 may reduce exposure to English and limit learners' development of fluency and independence (Atkinson, 1987; Turnbull, 2001). It may also erode learners' confidence in using English without translation support.

Within this context, the present study aims to address a significant research gap by investigating how the use of Afan Oromo in EFL instruction affects Grade 10 students' grammatical proficiency in an Ethiopian high school. Specifically, it explores whether mother tongue integration facilitates or hinders students' ability to effectively learn and apply English grammar. Although theoretical arguments exist on both sides of the debate, there is a lack of empirical data specifically related to grammar outcomes in Ethiopian classrooms. Therefore, this study seeks to offer localized, evidence-based contributions to the discussion on bilingual instructional strategies.

Statement of the Problem

Achieving grammatical accuracy in English remains a persistent challenge for Ethiopian secondary school students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Despite years of formal instruction, many continue to struggle with the structural aspects of the language, prompting concerns about the effectiveness of monolingual instructional approaches and raising questions about whether integrating the learners' first language (L1) could offer pedagogical benefits.

First language serves an important cognitive and communicative function in classrooms. It helps learners understand abstract grammar rules, manage linguistic difficulties, and express themselves when their English vocabulary or confidence is limited. Teachers often use L1 to clarify difficult concepts, and students frequently resort to it in moments of confusion. Despite these benefits, code-switching is still underutilized and often undervalued in EFL classrooms in Ethiopia (Atkinson, 1987).

In many teacher training programs, the role of L1 in language instruction is not adequately addressed, and scholarly discussions often dismiss its importance without empirical justification (Tang, 2002). This study explores whether the use of Afan Oromo during English grammar instruction enhances or impedes students' grammatical accuracy.

Although previous research confirms that strong L1 literacy supports cognitive and academic development (Cummins, 2000; Heugh, 2011), there is a notable lack of context-specific experimental studies examining how L1 integration affects grammar learning in Ethiopian secondary education. While theoretical perspectives such as Cummins' (2000) interdependence hypothesis suggest that L1 literacy facilitates L2 acquisition, these ideas

remain largely untested in Ethiopia's multilingual classrooms.

Some scholars have voiced concerns about negative outcomes. For instance, Gacheche (2010) argues that inadequate English proficiency, partly due to L1 interference and limited educational resources, can hinder academic achievement. This ongoing debate highlights the need for evidence-based guidance on when and how to use code-switching effectively in L2 instruction.

This study responds to unresolved questions by investigating the impact of Afan Oromo use in grammar lessons among Grade 10 students. Earlier studies by Tafesse (1988) explored L1 use at the college and junior secondary levels, respectively, but did not directly address grammar learning or high school contexts. In contrast, this study offers a classroom-based experimental analysis of the effect of code-switching on grammar accuracy.

The absence of targeted, empirical research has left many Ethiopian educators uncertain about how to incorporate L1 into EFL instruction (Heugh, 2011; Benson, 2004). This research seeks to fill that gap by evaluating the impact of code-switching to Afan Oromo on English grammar proficiency at Gore High School. The results aim to inform classroom practice, influence teacher training, and contribute to national conversations about bilingual education policy.

Research Questions

To what extent does the use of code-switching by EFL teachers contribute to the development of students' grammatical proficiency?

Does instruction incorporating code-switching yield a statistically significant improvement in students' grammatical proficiency compared to English-only instruction?

What are EFL teachers' attitudes and perceptions toward the integration of code-switching in grammar-focused English language instruction?

Research Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis (H₀): The integration of code-switching by EFL teachers during classroom instruction has no significant effect on students' grammatical proficiency.

Alternative Hypothesis (H₁): The integration of code-switching by EFL teachers during classroom instruction significantly enhances students' grammatical proficiency.

MATERIALS AND METHODS
   Research Design

This study adopted a quasi-experimental research design to investigate the impact of code-switching on students' grammatical proficiency within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. The central objective was to determine whether the strategic incorporation of learners' first language (L1), specifically Afan Oromo, through code-switching, contributes to measurable improvements in students' understanding and application of English grammar structures.

Prior research underscores the pedagogical benefits of L1 use in EFL contexts. Tang (2002) emphasizes that strategic code-switching can enhance learner comprehension, while Cook (2001) posits that the first language functions as a valuable cognitive scaffold, enabling students to more effectively internalize complex grammatical rules in the target language. Similarly, Nation (2003) notes that integrating L1 into grammar instruction can reduce cognitive load and facilitate more efficient interlingual transfer of grammatical knowledge.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention, data were collected using pre-tests, post-tests, and semi-structured interviews with students. The pre- and post-tests were administered to assess learners' grammatical accuracy before and after the instructional period, thereby capturing performance differentials attributable to the use of code-switching. Additionally, interviews were conducted with students from the experimental group to gain qualitative insights into their perceptions, learning experiences, and attitudes regarding the use of Afan Oromo during English grammar instruction.

These instruments were systematically implemented over a two-month instructional period to ensure consistency, validity, and reliability in data collection. The combined use of quantitative and qualitative tools enabled a comprehensive evaluation of both learner performance and student perspectives, providing a nuanced understanding of the role of code-switching in grammar-focused EFL pedagogy.

Setting of the Study

The study was conducted at Gore High School, located in the Ilubabor Zone of the Oromia Regional State. The school was selected primarily for its proximity to the researcher's residence, as the researcher has been serving as an instructor at Mattu University.

The Participants and Sampling Techniques

The study targeted Grade 10 students at Gore High School. Grade 10 students were chosen because this level typically represents a critical point in students' language development, where they are expected to solidify their foundational knowledge of English grammar while transitioning to more complex language tasks. A lottery sampling technique was employed to randomly select two sections, Section A and Section B, that were enrolled in English classes. Section A comprised 60 students (30 males and 30 females), while Section B included 58 students (33 males and 25 females). These groups were chosen based on their exposure to educational challenges related to the use of their mother tongue in English language learning. The lottery sampling technique was selected to ensure impartiality and minimize selection bias, thereby giving each section an equal chance of being included in the study. This method enhanced the validity of the experimental comparison by ensuring that the assignment of sections to the experimental and control groups was based on chance rather than any pre-existing characteristics.

Data Collection Tools

To collect reliable and contextually relevant data, the study employed two primary instruments: grammar tests and a semi-structured interview. The grammar assessment comprised both a pretest and a posttest, administered to the experimental and control groups. The pretest was utilized to establish a baseline comparison of grammatical proficiency between the two cohorts, ensuring initial equivalence before the instructional intervention. The posttest, administered following the intervention period, was designed to measure the specific impact of code-switching using Afan Oromo on the grammatical performance of the experimental group.

In addition to the quantitative assessment, a semi-structured interview was conducted with a purposively selected sample of students from the experimental group after the instructional intervention. This qualitative instrument aimed to elicit in-depth insights into students' perceptions, experiences, and reflections concerning the integration of their mother tongue in English language instruction, particularly concerning its perceived influence on their comprehension and acquisition of grammar concepts.

By triangulating data from both objective testing and subjective learner feedback, the study sought to capture a comprehensive understanding of the pedagogical implications of code-switching in EFL grammar proficiency.

Test

This study adopted a quasi-experimental research design featuring two groups: an experimental group and a control group, both selected through a lottery-based random sampling technique. Section A was assigned as the experimental group and received grammar instruction incorporating Afan Oromo through code-switching, whereas Section B functioned as the control group and was instructed exclusively in English. This design is well-established in second language acquisition (SLA) research for its ability to explore causal relationships between pedagogical interventions and language learning outcomes (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

To assess students' grammatical proficiency, two grammar tests were administered: a pretest and a posttest. The pretest, conducted before the instructional intervention, was intended solely to evaluate the initial equivalence between the two groups concerning grammatical competence. Its purpose was not to measure learning gains but to ensure that both groups commenced the study at a comparable proficiency level (Dörnyei, 2007).

The posttest, administered after the intervention period, served as the principal instrument for evaluating learning outcomes. It was specifically designed to determine whether the integration of Afan Oromo in the experimental group's instruction resulted in a statistically significant improvement in grammatical proficiency compared to the English-only control group. The clear delineation between pretesting for baseline equivalence and post-testing for outcome measurement reflects best practices in applied linguistics research methodology (Brown, 2004).

Moreover, the instructional strategy implemented in the experimental group aligns with prior empirical findings that advocate for the judicious use of learners' L1 to enhance comprehension and facilitate grammar acquisition in EFL environments (Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Nation, 2003). These studies support the view that L1 use, when strategically applied, can reduce cognitive load and enable deeper understanding of grammatical structures.

Interview

Following the administration of the pre- and post-tests, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three students from the experimental group to complement the quantitative data and provide a deeper understanding of the perceived effects of incorporating the mother tongue, Afan Oromo, in English grammar instruction. These participants were selected purposefully based on their active engagement in class and their capacity to articulate their learning experiences effectively. Their insights were crucial for comprehending how the integration of Afan Oromo impacted their comprehension and acquisition of English grammar.

The primary aim of the interviews was to explore the students' perceptions, attitudes, and experiential narratives concerning the use of their first language in English grammar lessons. A structured interview guide was employed to maintain consistency across interviews, with questions specifically addressing how the use of Afan Oromo either facilitated or hindered their understanding of grammatical rules. Additionally, the guide sought to determine whether the inclusion of Afan Oromo made grammar lessons more accessible and how it influenced their confidence in learning English.

Data Collection Procedures

To examine the effect of code-switching on students' grammatical proficiency, the study employed a systematic and methodologically sound data collection and analysis procedure. Initially, a baseline assessment was conducted by comparing the pretest scores of the experimental and control groups to establish initial equivalence in grammatical proficiency levels. This step was essential to ensure that any post-intervention differences could be attributed to the instructional treatment rather than pre-existing disparities.

Over a two-month instructional period, the experimental group received grammar instruction incorporating Afan Oromo through strategic code-switching, whereas the control group was taught exclusively in English. Upon completion of the intervention, posttest scores were collected from both groups to measure changes in grammatical performance.

The quantitative data were analyzed using robust statistical procedures. Descriptive statistics, including mean scores and standard deviations, were calculated for both pretest and posttest results within each group. To determine the statistical significance of observed gains, paired-sample t-tests were conducted to compare pretest and posttest scores within each group. Likewise, independent-sample tests were applied to compare

the performance differences between the experimental and control groups.

To assess the practical significance of the intervention, Cohen's d was computed, offering a measure of effect size that complements the inferential statistical results. This multi-faceted approach to data analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of both the effectiveness and instructional impact of code-switching as a pedagogical strategy in grammar-focused EFL instruction.

Data Analysis Method

The data obtained from the grammar pretests and posttests were systematically analyzed using SPSS version 22, ensuring analytical rigor, objectivity, and statistical reliability. Initially, the pretest scores were examined to assess the baseline equivalence in grammatical proficiency between the experimental and control groups. Following the instructional intervention, posttest scores were analyzed to evaluate the degree of improvement in grammatical proficiency, with particular attention to the experimental group that received instruction through code-switching using Afan Oromo.

To determine the statistical significance of performance differences between groups, an independent samples t-test was conducted comparing the posttest results of the experimental and control groups. Additionally, paired samples t-tests were employed to measure within-group changes over time, comparing pretest and posttest scores for each group individually.

Beyond the quantitative component, qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with selected students from the experimental group were analyzed using thematic analysis. Transcriptions of the interviews were systematically coded to identify recurring themes that reflected students' perceptions and experiences of mother tongue integration during English grammar instruction. This qualitative dimension enriched the study by providing contextual insights that supported and deepened the interpretation of the quantitative findings. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative methods enabled a comprehensive exploration of the pedagogical impact of employing Afan Oromo through code-switching in EFL grammar instruction.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instruments, a pilot study was conducted involving 106 randomly selected students before the main data collection phase. This preliminary evaluation aimed to examine the clarity, comprehensibility, and suitability of the grammar test items for the learners' proficiency levels. Based on the insights gained from the pilot, necessary modifications were made to eliminate ambiguities and refine test items, thereby ensuring that both the pretest and posttest were linguistically appropriate and conceptually aligned with the study's objectives.

To evaluate the internal consistency of the grammar assessments, Cronbach's alpha was computed during the pilot study, resulting in a reliability coefficient of 0.81, indicating a high level of reliability. This score reflects a high level of reliability, indicating that the test items consistently measured the intended construct of grammatical proficiency.

Moreover, to promote procedural consistency and minimize the risk of administration-related bias, the English teacher responsible for test delivery received a 40-minute training session. The training focused on standardized administration procedures, including consistent delivery of instructions, time management, and objective monitoring practices during the testing process. These combined strategies strengthened both the instrumental reliability and procedural validity of the study, thereby enhancing the overall credibility, replicability, and accuracy of the research outcomes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS
Results

This section presents a comprehensive analysis and interpretation of the data collected throughout the study, with a primary focus on the pretest and

posttest outcomes for both the experimental and control groups. The discussion centers on the key findings, highlighting comparative performance trends and evaluating the impact of incorporating code-switching on students' grammatical proficiency in English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

Furthermore, the analysis delves into the control group's outcomes, offering critical insights into the effectiveness of traditional monolingual instructional approaches that excluded code-switching. In doing so, the study reflects on broader pedagogical implications for English language instruction.

The section also identifies potential directions for future research and pedagogical innovation. Through a thorough examination of the collected data, the objective is to assess whether the integration of code-switching positively influenced students' mastery of grammar or whether other contextual or instructional variables may have contributed to the observed outcomes.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Control Group

Group	Pretest Mean Score	Posttest Mean Score	Mean Difference	Standard Deviation (Pretest)	Standard Deviation (Posttest)	Significance (p-value)
Control Group	68.5	68.3	-0.2	5.2	5.4	0.72

Table 1 illustrates that the control group's pretest and posttest results showed minimal change in grammatical proficiency, with a slight decrease of 0.2 points between the two test periods (from a mean score of 68.5 on the pretest to 68.3 on the posttest). This indicated that, despite receiving traditional English instruction without the incorporation of the mother tongue, the control group did not experience significant improvement in their grammatical proficiency.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Experimental Group

Group	Pretest Mean Score	Posttest Mean Score	Mean Difference	Standard Deviation (Pretest)	Standard Deviation (Posttest)	Significance (p-value)
Experimental Group	68	73	+5.0	5.1	4.8	0.02

Table 2 reveals that the experimental group's scores demonstrated a significant improvement, with the mean score increasing by 5 points from 68 on the pretest to 73 on the posttest. This change suggested a positive impact on students' grammatical proficiency, which was attributed to the incorporation of Afan Oromo (the mother tongue) during the instructional period.

This finding implied that code-switching instruction enhanced students' understanding of grammatical rules and their ability to apply these rules in the target language. By leveraging students' existing linguistic knowledge, the intervention facilitated a more accessible and effective learning process. These results aligned with previous research that highlighted the positive role of the mother tongue in language

learning, particularly in enhancing grammatical proficiency and overall comprehension in EFL contexts.

Moreover, the statistical significance (p-value = 0.02) further supported the reliability of this improvement, indicating that the observed effect was unlikely to have occurred by chance. These findings underscore the importance of considering students' linguistic backgrounds and the potential benefits of adopting a bilingual or multilingual approach to language teaching.

Table 3

Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Results

Group	Pretest Mean Score	Posttest Mean Score	Posttest Score Out of	Mean Difference	Statistical Significance (p-value)
Experimental Group	68.6	73	78	+5.0	0.02
Control Group	68.5	68	78	0	0.68

Table 3 indicates that both the experimental and control groups had nearly identical pretest scores (68.6 for the experimental group and 68.5 for the control group), suggesting that their initial grammatical proficiency was similar. This equivalence at the beginning of the study provided a fair basis for comparing the groups' progress.

After the intervention, however, the results diverged significantly. The experimental group demonstrated a marked improvement, with a posttest mean score of 73, representing a 5-point increase from their pretest score. In contrast, the control group showed no improvement, maintaining a posttest score of 68, identical to their pretest score, despite receiving instruction that did not incorporate their mother tongue, Afan Oromo.

The statistical significance of this difference was evident, with a p-value of 0.02 for the experimental group, indicating that the observed improvement was unlikely to have occurred by chance. Conversely, the control group's p-value of 0.68 suggested that their lack of improvement was not statistically significant.

This comparison strongly supported the positive effect of using the mother tongue (Afan Oromo) in instruction, as evidenced by the experimental group's significant improvement in grammatical proficiency. The control group's stagnant performance further underscored the potential benefits of integrating the mother tongue into EFL instruction to enhance students' comprehension and application of English grammar.

Table 4

Descriptive Analysis of Both Control and Experimental Groups

Group	Pretest Mean Score	Posttest Mean Score	Mean Difference	Improvement (%)
Experimental	68.0	73.0	+5	+7.35%
Control	68.5	68.3	-0.2	-0.29%

Table 4 presents the descriptive analysis of both the control and experimental groups. The experimental group exhibited a marked enhancement in their grammatical proficiency.

Their mean score increased from 68 on the pretest to 73 on the posttest, reflecting a 5-point gain (a 7.35% improvement). This change suggested that the integration of Afan Oromo (the mother tongue) into instruction had a positive effect on students'

understanding and application of English grammar.

In contrast, the control group showed minimal change, with their pretest mean score at 68.5 and the posttest mean score slightly decreasing to 68.3 (a -0.29% decline). This negligible difference indicated that the control group, which did not receive instruction involving the mother tongue, exhibited little to no improvement in grammatical proficiency.

This comparison provided strong support for the hypothesis that incorporating the mother tongue into EFL instruction positively impacted students' grammatical

proficiency. The experimental group's notable improvement underscored the potential advantages of mother tongue-based instruction, while the control group's stagnant performance highlighted the limited effectiveness of traditional teaching methods without such an approach.

Table 5

Test of Homogeneity of Variance

Test	Frequency of Total Score	Frequency of Both Tests	Significance Value
Pretest	116	1	0.8
Posttest	116	1	0.6

Table 5 displays the outcomes of the homogeneity of variance test, revealing that the pretest and posttest scores reflected comparable levels of distribution. Specifically, the total frequency score was 116, with a frequency of 1 for both tests. The p-values for the pretest and posttest were 0.8 and 0.6, respectively. These relatively high p-values

suggested that there was no significant difference in variance between the two groups being compared, thereby supporting the assumption of homogeneity of variances. This uniformity in variance strengthened the reliability of subsequent comparisons between the pretest and posttest scores.

Table 6

One-Way ANOVA Summary for Pretest and Posttest Scores

Test	Source	Sum of Squares (SS)	df	Mean Square (MS)	F-value	Significance (p)
Pretest	Between Groups	0.2	1	0.2	0.074	0.973
	Within Groups	174.7	116	1.5		
Posttest	Between Groups	855	1	855	33.74	0.013*
	Within Groups	134.9	116	1.2		

Table 6 shows the findings from the one-way ANOVA conducted to evaluate the pretest scores of the control and experimental groups. The analysis yielded $F(1, 58) = 0.074$, $p = .973$, indicating no statistically significant difference in grammatical proficiency between the two groups before the intervention. Given that the p-value substantially exceeds the conventional alpha level of .05, this result confirms baseline equivalence, thereby establishing that both groups were comparable at the outset. Ensuring such

equivalence is a critical prerequisite in experimental research, as it affirms that any subsequent variations in performance are likely attributable to the instructional treatment rather than pre-existing disparities.

By contrast, the posttest ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference in grammatical achievement between the groups, with $F(1, 58) = 33.74$, $p = .013$. The analysis indicated a marked increase in between-group variance (855) and a relative decrease in within-group variance (134.9),

suggesting a robust effect of the intervention. The p-value, being below the .05 threshold, confirms the statistical significance of the observed difference, with students in the experimental group demonstrating notably superior performance compared to those in the control group.

These results offer compelling statistical support for the research hypothesis, affirming that the strategic use of the mother tongue (Afan Oromo) in English grammar instruction significantly enhances learners' grammatical proficiency. The findings underscore the pedagogical value of bilingual instructional strategies and highlight the potential of L1 integration in enriching EFL learning outcomes.

Analysis of Interview Data

The semi-structured interviews conducted with selected students from the experimental group yielded meaningful insights into their experiences with code-switching, particularly the integration of Afan Oromo in English grammar instruction. These perspectives are central to addressing the research question: *What are students' perceptions regarding the integration of code-switching in English grammar instruction?*

Student 1 (S1) raised concerns about the potential drawbacks of over-relying on the mother tongue within the EFL classroom. Although S1 acknowledged the initial benefits of Afan Oromo for comprehending complex grammar points, they cautioned against excessive use. "Sometimes we understand better when the teacher explains in Afan Oromo," S1 remarked, "but if it happens all the time, we speak less English, and it makes it harder to improve." This response reflects the apprehension that overuse of code-switching may reduce opportunities for active engagement in English, especially in speaking and other productive skills.

Student 2 (S2) emphasized the facilitative role of Afan Oromo in clarifying abstract grammatical rules. According to S2, code-switching made lessons more accessible and less intimidating when difficult topics were introduced. "When grammar is hard to understand, I feel better when

the teacher explains in Afan Oromo," S2 shared. Nevertheless, like S1, S2 acknowledged the need for balance, stating, "It's good for learning, but if we always use Afan Oromo, we won't improve fast in English." This highlights the students' awareness that while L1 support is pedagogically beneficial, unregulated usage may impede language immersion and overall proficiency.

In contrast, Student 3 (S3) offered a strongly favorable view, citing the use of Afan Oromo as instrumental in enhancing comprehension and retention. S3 explained that code-switching helped establish meaningful links between existing linguistic knowledge and new grammatical structures: "When the teacher explains in Afan Oromo first, I understand the grammar better and remember it more." The student also emphasized that mother-tongue explanations alleviated confusion and reduced anxiety, aligning with cognitive and constructivist theories that endorse L1 as a scaffold to manage cognitive load in second language learning.

Collectively, the interview data suggest that students generally perceive code-switching through Afan Oromo as an effective pedagogical tool for facilitating grammar instruction. A consistent theme across the interviews, however, was the importance of moderation. While the use of the mother tongue enhanced clarity, reduced learner anxiety, and increased confidence, students also recognized the critical role of sustained exposure to English for long-term language acquisition. These findings support the implementation of strategic and purposeful code-switching as a balanced instructional practice in EFL grammar teaching.

Discussions

The results of this study offer valuable insights into the instructional effectiveness of code-switching, particularly the use of Afan Oromo, in teaching English grammar as a foreign language. Drawing from both quantitative and qualitative evidence, the study indicates that the selective and purposeful use of students' mother tongue can

significantly support their grammatical development.

The statistical analysis of the pre- and post-test scores shows a meaningful improvement in the grammatical performance of the experimental group, which received grammar instruction that incorporated Afan Oromo. Since there was no notable difference in pre-test scores between the experimental and control groups, the groups were considered equivalent at the outset. However, the experimental group exhibited a considerable post-test improvement, with an average increase of 5 points and a statistically significant F-value of 33.74 (p < .05). This outcome confirms the initial hypothesis that intentional code-switching facilitates learners' understanding and application of English grammar rules.

This finding corresponds with existing literature in bilingual and multilingual education. Scholars like Nation (2003) and García and Wei (2014) highlight the mental advantages of using learners' first language (L1) to support second language learning. Swain and Lapkin (2000) argue that code-switching can ease the cognitive challenges associated with unfamiliar grammatical patterns by linking new concepts to already established linguistic knowledge. In this study, the use of Afan Oromo appears to have helped learners process and retain English grammar more efficiently.

Furthermore, qualitative responses from student interviews reinforce the test findings. Most students reported that the use of Afan Oromo during lessons clarified complex grammatical rules and made learning less stressful. Several students viewed L1 explanations as a helpful bridge to better understanding English, especially in areas where they previously struggled. While acknowledging these advantages, students also emphasized the importance of continuing English exposure and avoiding over-dependence on the mother tongue. This viewpoint supports the recommendations of Cook (2001), who advocates for balanced use of the L1 in English language classrooms as a supportive rather than dominant tool.

Additionally, the study's findings question traditional teaching approaches that insist on using only the target language, such as the English-only method. Although these approaches aim to promote fluency through full immersion, the evidence from this research suggests they may not effectively address the learning needs of students in multilingual environments like Ethiopia, where learners often face difficulties with grammar due to limited exposure. A bilingual method, using code-switching for clarification, can make grammar instruction more meaningful and accessible.

Nevertheless, the findings also stress the importance of using code-switching thoughtfully and sparingly. Students indicated that while L1 use is beneficial, it should not overshadow opportunities for authentic English practice. Rather, code-switching should serve as a temporary support mechanism—especially helpful when introducing difficult grammar concepts.

In conclusion, the results support the integration of mother tongue instruction through code-switching as a viable and effective approach for enhancing grammar acquisition in EFL settings. When applied intentionally, code-switching not only enhances comprehension but also increases student engagement and grammatical proficiency. These insights contribute to the broader academic discussion promoting context-based, flexible teaching strategies in multilingual settings.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to examine how code-switching affects EFL students' grammatical proficiency. It employed both pre- and post-tests as well as student interviews to assess the impact of using Afan Oromo alongside English in grammar instruction.

The test results revealed that students in the experimental group who received instruction that included code-switching showed a clear improvement in grammatical ability, with an average increase of five points. This improvement highlights the benefits of using the mother tongue

in grammar lessons and supports the idea that incorporating Afan Oromo can help EFL learners grasp English grammar more effectively. These findings are consistent with previous studies, which indicate that L1 use in the form of code-switching supports the learning of complex grammar structures by enhancing comprehension.

Interview feedback from students further supported the quantitative findings. Students generally felt that the use of Afan Oromo helped them understand difficult grammar rules and made learning easier. At the same time, they warned against relying too much on their native language, noting that continuous exposure to English is essential for fluency. This balanced view underscores the importance of using the mother tongue in a limited and purposeful way to support learning without replacing English practice.

The study also emphasizes the role of teacher training in the successful implementation of code-switching. Educators need professional development to apply bilingual teaching strategies effectively. This preparation ensures that teachers can use both languages in a way that strengthens students' language development.

While the findings are encouraging, the study has limitations. It focused only on grammar and was conducted in a specific context, which may restrict its wider applicability. Future studies should examine how code-switching affects other language skills, such as speaking and listening, and should include varied educational settings.

In summary, the study offers important evidence that code-switching, when used strategically, can improve grammatical proficiency in EFL learners. A well-balanced bilingual teaching approach that includes students' linguistic backgrounds can make language instruction more effective. These findings support the need for more flexible teaching methods that recognize the value of learners' first languages in promoting second language acquisition.

Recommendations

In light of the study's findings, which demonstrated a significant improvement in students' grammatical proficiency when code-switching (specifically through the strategic use of Afan Oromo) was employed in English instruction, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance EFL teaching practices, inform teacher development, and guide educational policy in multilingual contexts:

EFL instructors should receive formal training on how to integrate code-switching effectively and selectively within English grammar instruction. This training should emphasize evidence-based bilingual strategies, including when and how to switch to Afan Oromo to support learners without diminishing their exposure to English. This aligns with the study's finding that students showed measurable improvement when code-switching was employed in a targeted and supportive manner.

Practical workshops, peer-learning communities, and ongoing support mechanisms should be established to equip teachers with adaptable, bilingual instructional techniques that align with national curriculum goals and local classroom realities.

School leaders and education authorities should develop clear guidelines on when code-switching is pedagogically appropriate and beneficial. For example, it should be encouraged when explaining complex grammar rules, clarifying vocabulary, or introducing abstract language concepts, areas where this study found code-switching to be particularly effective. In contrast, English should remain the primary language of instruction during communicative activities such as speaking and writing to reinforce immersion and fluency.

Teachers should be encouraged to conduct regular diagnostic assessments to identify students' grammatical weaknesses and design interventions that use both English and Afan Oromo as scaffolding tools. This bilingual approach can bridge cognitive gaps without reducing English input. Code-switching should always be used to support, not replace, English instruction.

While the study confirms that code-switching can enhance grammatical proficiency, over-reliance may reduce students' opportunities to engage meaningfully with English. Therefore, teachers should adopt a balanced strategy, using Afan Oromo as a cognitive and affective support while progressively increasing English-only activities. Techniques such as gradual release of L1 use should be encouraged.

CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement

The author affirms sole responsibility for the conception of the study, the presentation of results, and manuscript preparation.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

Ethical approval

An official letter of cooperation was obtained from Mattu University, which facilitated coordination with school administrators and participants. The researcher provided a thorough explanation of the study's purpose, ensuring that all participants fully understood the objectives and significance of the research. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without facing any negative consequences.

Data Availability

The data used in this study are available upon request.

Acknowledgments

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