Examining Influence of Code-Switching on Classroom Interaction and Language Learning at the University Level in Multan

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of code-switching among teachers and learners in university-level English classrooms. Adopting a quantitative research paradigm, the study systematically measured classroom practices using structured questionnaires to examine patterns, frequency, and perceived impact of code-switching. The participants comprised 50 female respondents from The Women University Multan, including 20 English teachers aged 25–46 years and 30 B.S. learners aged 16–24 years. Data were collected through purposive sampling to ensure relevant insights into classroom interactions. The questionnaire, adapted from Prof. M. Yousuf Malik's (2014) work on code-switching in English teaching, enabled the researcher to quantify teachers' and learners' perceptions of its usefulness. Findings reveal that the majority of teachers employ code-switching to enhance communication, explain difficult concepts, relate lessons to the present context, and manage classroom attention effectively. Learners reported that code-switching supports understanding of new vocabulary, facilitates completion of difficult tasks, increases confidence in speaking English, and makes lessons more engaging. Comparative analysis indicates strong alignment between teachers' and learners' perspectives, confirming that code-switching is an effective pedagogical tool in higher education contexts. The study concludes that judicious use of code-switching enhances teaching efficacy and learner comprehension, making it a valuable strategy in English language classrooms.

Keywords: *Code-switching, classroom interaction, language learning, university education and bilingual pedagogy*

INTRODUCTION

Language serves not only as a medium of communication but also as a powerful tool for constructing knowledge, negotiating identities, and shaping social interactions within academic spaces. In multilingual contexts such as Pakistan, where English often functions as the language of instruction at the tertiary level, the practice of code-switching—the alternation between two or more languages within a conversation or discourse—has become increasingly prominent. University classrooms, in particular,

reflect a dynamic linguistic environment where teachers and learners navigate between English and local languages such as Urdu and regional languages to achieve clarity, maintain interaction, and facilitate learning.

Over the past few decades, the use of code-switching in educational settings has gained considerable attention in sociolinguistics and applied linguistics. Traditionally, code-switching was viewed as a deficiency in language competence or as an obstacle to effective learning. However, contemporary research suggests that it can function as a strategic pedagogical device that enhances comprehension, reduces language anxiety, and bridges the gap between learners' prior knowledge and new academic concepts. In the Pakistani context, where English occupies a high-status position yet remains a second or foreign language for many students, code-switching emerges as a natural linguistic choice that supports communication and instructional efficiency.

Teachers frequently switch codes to clarify difficult terminology, emphasize key points, check comprehension, and maintain classroom engagement. Learners, on the other hand, often shift between languages to negotiate meaning, seek peer support, and express complex ideas with greater confidence. These practices highlight the socio-cultural and cognitive functions of code-switching in higher education, while also raising questions about its long-term impact on English language proficiency, academic performance, and classroom dynamics.

Despite the prevalence of code-switching in university-level classrooms, its influence on teaching and learning remains a contested issue. Some scholars argue that excessive reliance on local languages may hinder students' mastery of English and limit their academic mobility, whereas others view code-switching as a necessary scaffolding tool, especially in multilingual societies. Given this debate, it becomes essential to investigate how both teachers and learners perceive and utilize code-switching, and how these linguistic practices shape the overall learning environment.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to explore the influence of code-switching among teachers and learners at the university level, focusing on its pedagogical motivations, communicative functions, and potential implications for language development. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for informing language policies, improving instructional strategies, and supporting meaningful learning experiences in multilingual higher education settings.

Statement of the Problem

In multilingual university classrooms, code-switching has become a common communicative practice among both teachers and learners. Although English is the primary medium of instruction in most Pakistani universities, students and teachers frequently shift between English and local languages such as Urdu and regional dialects to facilitate understanding, manage classroom interaction, or express cultural identity. Despite the widespread use of code-switching, its actual influence on teaching effectiveness, learning outcomes, and overall classroom dynamics remains insufficiently explored at the higher-education level.

Many students claim that code-switching helps them grasp difficult academic concepts, while others argue that it reduces their exposure to English and weakens their language proficiency. Likewise, teachers often rely on code-switching to maintain interaction, explain complex terms, and manage classroom discipline, yet they may be unaware of how these linguistic shifts affect student engagement and comprehension. The lack of empirical research addressing how code-switching influences academic performance, classroom participation, and linguistic development at the university level creates a significant gap in the literature.

Given these competing perspectives, there is a need to investigate how code-switching shapes learners' understanding, motivation, and communication, as well as how it affects teachers' instructional strategies. Understanding this influence is crucial for developing language policies that balance students' linguistic needs with the goals of English-medium instruction. Therefore, this study seeks to analyze the impact of code-switching among teachers and learners in university classrooms, addressing the pedagogical, communicative, and linguistic implications of this practice.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the influence of teachers' code-switching practices on learners' comprehension, participation, and overall classroom engagement at the university level.
2. To explore how learners' own code-switching behavior affects their communication, confidence, and academic performance within university classroom interactions.

Research Questions

1. How do teachers' code-switching practices influence learners' comprehension, participation, and overall classroom engagement at the university level?
2. How does learners' own code-switching behavior affect their communication, confidence, and academic performance within university classroom interactions?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it highlights how code-switching shapes teaching and learning processes in university-level classrooms. By examining when, why, and how teachers and learners shift between languages, the research offers insights into its impact on comprehension, participation, and academic performance. The findings can help educators understand whether code-switching supports learning by simplifying complex concepts, reducing anxiety, and improving classroom interaction, or whether it limits students' exposure to the target language. The study also provides practical guidance for policymakers and curriculum designers to develop language policies that balance linguistic flexibility with effective language acquisition. Ultimately, this research contributes to improving pedagogical practices and fostering more inclusive, multilingual learning environments at the university level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Su (2024) conducted a mixed-methods study with 15 university English teachers in Guangdong Province, China, using a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The objective was to examine teachers' perceptions of code-switching (CS) in university classrooms and how they use it pedagogically. Drawing on a sociolinguistic framework, Su found that teachers employed code-switching for functions such as topic switching, translation, economizing effort, maintaining classroom discipline, emotional support, and checking comprehension — translation being the most common. While teachers appreciated CS for facilitating understanding, they also cautioned against overuse, warning that too much reliance on the mother tongue could hamper students' English acquisition.

Murad, Zafar, & Mushtaq (2024) carried out an action-research project in a private Pakistani university with 50 low-achieving ESL undergraduates. Employing class observations, focused-group interviews, and questionnaires, their study aimed to assess the effectiveness of a code-switching-based teaching methodology. The framework was rooted in classroom action research and second language pedagogy. Their findings showed that CS significantly enhanced students' comprehension of reading texts, boosted confidence in responding to comprehension questions, and improved teacher-student rapport. The study concluded that CS can make ESL classrooms more inclusive and interactive, especially for learners with lower proficiency.

Shehzadi, Ali, & Mahmood (2022) compared beliefs about code-switching among university EFL teachers from Lahore and Multan (Pakistan) using a questionnaire on teachers' beliefs. The theoretical lens of the study was teachers' belief systems in L1/L2 pedagogy. They found that while many teachers believed that using L1 (or CS) helps in classroom management and teaching difficult content, there were significant differences between the two cities: for example, teachers in Lahore more strongly endorsed CS for interpersonal relations, whereas Multan teachers were more cautious. The study highlights how teacher beliefs about CS are context-specific and shaped by local institutional and cultural factors.

Hazaymeh (2022) investigated the perceptions of 46 EFL teachers (via survey) and 7 teachers (via group interview) in Jordan regarding the functions and effects of code-switching in their classrooms. Using a descriptive survey and sociolinguistic-pedagogical framework, she identified six pedagogical functions (e.g., clarifying meaning, building rapport) and four perceived positive effects (e.g., enhancing comprehension, reducing anxiety). Most teachers considered code-switching to have a clear, positive role in English teaching and learning, facilitating both linguistic and social classroom dynamics.

Nawaz, Yali, & Hameed (2023) used a quantitative survey design (n = 300 undergraduate students) in Pakistani universities to explore students' experiences of code-switching in English language learning environments. Grounded in second-language acquisition theory, their objective was to uncover how students perceive CS's impact on their learning. Surprisingly, many students believed that code-switching hindered their concentration and English proficiency development pointing to a negative impact on academic achievement. The authors argue that code-switching needs to be purposeful and contextualized rather than casually employed to avoid undermining immersion in English.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative research paradigm, which was selected because it allows data to be measured using scales, facilitating systematic and straightforward analysis. The quantitative approach has been widely used in similar studies on code-switching, providing a solid precedent for its application in this research. The population for this study comprises B.S. learners and English teachers at The Women University Multan. The teachers' ages range from approximately 25 to 46 years, while the learners' ages range from 16 to 24 years. A sample of 50 female respondents was purposively selected, including 20 teachers and 30 learners, to provide relevant insights into classroom code-switching practices. Data was collected exclusively from female participants to maintain consistency in the sample. The primary research tool employed was a structured questionnaire, designed separately for teachers and learners. This questionnaire was previously developed and utilized by Prof. M. Yousuf Malik (2014) in his study on code-switching as an effective technique for teaching English at the intermediate level. The responses obtained through this instrument were quantitatively analyzed to examine the patterns, frequency, and impact of code-switching among teachers and learners at the university level.

DATA ANALYSIS

Participants and Background

This study involved 20 teachers and 30 learners from WUM to explore the use, effectiveness, and perceptions of code-switching in English language classrooms. Teachers were asked about their practices and the pedagogical benefits of code-switching, while learners were asked about their experiences and attitudes toward code-switching as a learning aid.

Teachers' Perspectives on Code-Switching

The findings indicate that code-switching is a prevalent and valued strategy among teachers at WUM. Out of the 20 teachers surveyed, 95% (n = 19) reported actively using code-switching during their instruction.

This widespread adoption reflects teachers' recognition of its role in facilitating comprehension, engagement, and efficient classroom management.

Teachers emphasized several advantages of code-switching:

1. **Enhancing Student Engagement:** 85% of teachers reported that code-switching helps maintain students' attention, suggesting that strategically switching languages helps sustain learners' focus and participation.
2. **Contextualizing Lessons:** 80% of teachers indicated that code-switching allows them to relate lessons to students' real-life experiences, thereby making learning more meaningful and relevant.
3. **Facilitating Communication:** 90% of teachers agreed that code-switching improves communication with learners, helping to convey complex ideas more clearly and effectively.
4. **Increasing Teaching Efficiency:** 70% of teachers reported that code-switching reduces instructional effort and saves time, allowing them to explain difficult content more succinctly.
5. **Supporting Grammar and Conceptual Learning**: A significant proportion of teachers (85–90%) noted that code-switching aids in teaching grammatical rules and explaining challenging concepts, highlighting its dual role in linguistic and cognitive scaffolding.
6. **Enhancing Teaching Ability**: 80% of teachers perceived code-switching as a tool that strengthens their overall instructional capability, enabling them to deliver lessons more confidently and effectively.

These findings underscore that teachers view code-switching as a flexible pedagogical tool that enhances both instructional clarity and classroom interaction.

Learners' Perspectives on Code-Switching

Learners' responses revealed nuanced perspectives regarding the use of code-switching in class. While a slight majority (57%) expressed that code-switching should not be overused, the data shows that learners largely benefit from its judicious application:

Facilitating Vocabulary Acquisition: 90% of learners reported that code-switching helps them understand new words, suggesting that it serves as an effective linguistic bridge between English and their native language.

1. **Supporting Task Completion**: 93% of learners indicated that code-switching helps them carry out difficult tasks successfully, demonstrating its role as a scaffolding strategy that aids problem-solving and comprehension.
2. **Enhancing English Language Learning:** 63% of learners agreed that code-switching supports their overall learning of English, suggesting that it complements direct language instruction.
3. **Boosting Confidence**: 63% of learners reported that code-switching increases their confidence in speaking English fluently, reducing anxiety and encouraging active participation.
4. **Assisting in Lesson Preparation:** 80% of learners found code-switching helpful in preparing for lessons, reflecting its utility as a cognitive aid both inside and outside the classroom.
5. **Improving Teacher Explanations:** Nearly all learners (97%) agreed that teachers explain lectures more effectively when code-switching is employed, emphasizing its value in clarifying complex material.
6. **Teacher Competence Perception:** More than half of learners (53%) did not perceive code-switching as indicating vocabulary deficiency, highlighting that students recognize it as a strategic teaching tool rather than a limitation.
7. **Maintaining Lesson Clarity and Engagement:** Most learners stated that code-switching does not complicate lessons (63%) or cause boredom (80%) and 73% considered it an interesting phenomenon, demonstrating its positive impact on engagement and motivation.

Overall, learners perceive code-switching as a supportive strategy that enhances comprehension, confidence, and engagement, even though a small proportion prefer full immersion in English instruction. While, the comparative examination of teachers' and learners' responses reveals a convergence of perspectives: both groups acknowledge the multiple pedagogical benefits of code-switching. Teachers primarily emphasize its role in enhancing communication, clarifying complex content, and improving teaching efficiency, while learners highlight its contribution to comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, confidence, and engagement.

However, learners' opinions about overuse indicate the need for moderation, the findings collectively suggest that code-switching is a valuable instructional strategy. It functions as a bridge between learners' existing linguistic knowledge and new English input, facilitating smoother comprehension, active participation, and meaningful learning.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to explore the influence of code-switching among teachers and learners at the university level. Data were collected from 20 teachers and 30 learners of WUM, and their responses provide valuable insights into the role and effectiveness of code-switching in English language classrooms. The findings are presented and interpreted below, followed by a discussion comparing teachers' and learners' perceptions.

Teachers' Perspectives on Code-Switching

The majority of teachers (95%) reported that they use code-switching in their classrooms (Table 6.1). This indicates that code-switching has become a common pedagogical strategy among university teachers, highlighting its practical relevance in facilitating effective classroom communication.

Regarding the role of code-switching in maintaining students' attention, 85% of teachers agreed that it helps capture learners' focus (Table 6.2). This suggests that teachers strategically use code-switching to engage students, especially when explaining complex or abstract concepts. Similarly, 80% of teachers stated that code-switching allows them to relate lessons to the present context (Table 6.3), indicating that it helps contextualize learning material, making it more relatable and meaningful for students.

Furthermore, 90% of teachers believed that code-switching enhances communication with learners (Table 6.4). By bridging language gaps, teachers can convey ideas more effectively, ensuring learners grasp the intended message. Additionally, 70% of teachers reported that code-switching saves time and reduces effort in teaching English (Table 6.5), demonstrating its efficiency as a teaching strategy.

Teachers also perceived code-switching as a useful tool for explaining grammatical rules (85%, Table 6.6) and difficult concepts (90%, Table 6.7), suggesting that it supports both content comprehension and language learning. Moreover, 80% of teachers reported that code-switching enhances their overall teaching ability (Table 6.8), reflecting its positive impact on pedagogical effectiveness and classroom management.

Learners' Perspectives on Code-Switching

Learners' responses revealed a nuanced perspective on code-switching. While 57% of learners indicated that code-switching should not always be used in class (Table 6.1), they overwhelmingly acknowledged its benefits in facilitating learning. For example, 90% of learners agreed that code-switching helps them understand new words (Table 6.2), and 93% reported that it enables them to carry out difficult tasks successfully (Table 6.3). This demonstrates that while learners may prefer minimal reliance on code-switching, they recognize its value in supporting comprehension and task performance.

Additionally, 63% of learners agreed that code-switching helps them learn English in class (Table 6.4) and gives them confidence to speak fluently (Table 6.5). The majority (80%) also reported that code-switching aids them in lesson preparation (Table 6.6), indicating that it enhances both in-class learning and independent study. Notably, 97% of learners perceived that teachers explain lectures better when using code-switching (Table 6.7), emphasizing its role in effective classroom instruction.

Learners largely disagreed that code-switching reflects teachers' vocabulary deficiencies (53%, Table 6.8), complicates lessons (63%, Table 6.9), causes boredom (80%, Table 6.10), or is a waste of time (93%, Table 6.11). These findings highlight that learners generally view code-switching as a positive and supportive instructional practice. Moreover, 73% of learners described code-switching as an interesting phenomenon (Table 6.12), reflecting its engagement value.

comparatively, teachers' and learners' responses shows a strong alignment in the perceived utility of code-switching. Both groups agreed that it facilitates communication, enhances understanding of difficult concepts, aids in vocabulary acquisition, and supports effective teaching and learning processes. While teachers emphasized its efficiency in reducing effort and improving pedagogical delivery, learners highlighted its motivational and comprehension benefits. Collectively, these findings confirm the study's hypothesis that code-switching is a beneficial strategy in university-level English language classrooms.

CONCLUSION

The present study explored the influence of code-switching among teachers and learners in university-level classrooms. The findings demonstrate that code-switching serves as an effective pedagogical strategy that facilitates communication, enhances understanding, and supports the overall teaching and learning process. Teachers reported that it helps them capture students' attention, explain difficult concepts, relate lessons to the present context, and reduce teaching effort, thereby improving their instructional effectiveness.

From the learners' perspective, code-switching was found to aid comprehension of new words, increase confidence in speaking, support the completion of difficult tasks, and make lessons more engaging and easier to understand. Learners also acknowledged that teachers' use of code-switching enhances the clarity and effectiveness of lectures without reflecting negatively on teachers' language proficiency.

The comparative analysis indicates that both teachers and learners perceive code-switching as a valuable tool in English language classrooms. It not only strengthens classroom interaction and engagement but also bridges linguistic gaps, making the learning experience more effective and meaningful. While some learners expressed a preference for limited use of code-switching, its strategic application clearly contributes to improved language acquisition and classroom dynamics.

In conclusion, code-switching is a significant instructional strategy in higher education, promoting better communication, comprehension, and engagement. Its judicious use can optimize the teaching-learning process, making English language education more accessible, efficient, and student-centered at the university level.

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