# The Effectiveness of Code Switching in Bilingual Classrooms: A Case Study of English/Arabic Environment

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#### **Abstract:**

Some studies e.g. (Burden, 2001; Tien and Liu, 2006; and Greggio & Gil, 2007) confirm that code switching in the classroom is an important and effective tool that assists students understand and master a language. However, other studies e.g. (Skiba, 1997) suggest that code switching may hinder learning process, slow it down, and make students always depend on it in their learning of a second language.

This study aimed to find out the importance of code switching in the classroom for university students and whether its use was a helpful factor in improving reading and writing skills. Also it tried to show what type of code switching was the most common used by the participants and the reasons behind it.

The participants were 45 pre-intermediate learners who were divided into 3 groups. Group 1 received instruction without code-switching. Group 2 received student- driven code switch instruction. Group 3 was taught through instructor code-switch but had students to summarize everything in English afterwards. After five weeks, all groups took a reading and writing test. Regarding reading skill, the study found that allowing code-switching with summarizing at the end of lectures improved reading comprehension the most F (2, 42) = 7.89, p = 0.001. The findings of writing test showed that allowing students to code-switch during instruction improved their writing compared to English-only classes. Specifically, both methods of code-switching (student-driven or instructor-initiated with summarizing) helped with grammar, while instructor-initiated code-switching with summarizing led to a wider vocabulary range. Sentence structure and complexity developed similarly in the three groups regardless of the teaching technique employed. Concerning the most common code switch type used, the students mainly switched languages within sentences (intra-sentential switching) to clarify specific words or ideas. This might be because it's faster and more natural than switching languages entirely between sentences.

**Keywords:** Code switching, Cultural and social identities, Bilingual.

#### الملخص

تؤكد بعض الدراسات منها ( Burden, 2001; Tien and Liu, 2006; and Greggio & Gil, 2007 أن التبديل بين اللغات في الفصل الدراسي يعد أداة مهمة وفعالة تساعد الطلاب على فهم اللغة وإتقانها. ومع ذلك، ترى دراسات أخرى (مثل (مثل 1997 ، Skiba) أن التبديل بين اللغات قد يعيق عملية التعلم، ويبطئها، ويجعل الطلاب يعتمدون عليها دائمًا في اكتسابهم لغة ثانية.

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى معرفة أهمية التبديل بين اللغات في الفصول الدراسية لطلبة الجامعة وما إذا كان استخدامه عاملاً مساعداً في تحسين مهارات القراءة والكتابة. كما حاولت أيضًا إظهار نوع التبديل اللغوي الأكثر شيوعًا بين الطلاب والأسباب الكامنة وراء ذلك.

تكونت عينة الدراسة من 45 طالب وطالبة من كلية اللغات بجامعة بنغازي, تم تقسيمهم إلى 3 مجموعات. تلقت المجموعة 1 تدريس دون تبديل اللغات. تم تدريس المجموعة 2 باستخدام إستراتيجية التبديل بين اللغات بين الطلاب عن طريق الطلاب . تم تدريس المجموعة 3 من خلال التبديل بين اللغات عن طريق المعلم ولكن طلب من الطلاب تلخيص كل شيء باللغة الإنجليزية بعد نهاية كل محاضرة . بعد خمسة أسابيع، أجرت جميع المجموعات اختبار لقياس مهارتي القراءة والكتابة. فيما يتعلق بمهارة القراءة، وجدت الدراسة أن السماح بالتبديل بين اللغات والتلخيص في نهاية المحاضرات أدى إلى تحسين فهم القراءة بأكبر قدر من 7.89 = (42, 42) ، . 0.001 و أظهرت نتائج اختبار الكتابة أن السماح للطلاب بالتبديل بين اللغات أثناء التدريس أدى إلى تحسين كتابتهم مقارنة بالمجموعة التي تلقت تدريس باللغة الإنجليزية فقط. على وجه التحديد، ساعدت كلتا طريقتي تبديل اللغات (التي يقودها الطالب أو التي يبدأها المعلم ) في القواعد، في حين أدى تبديل اللغات الذي يبدأه المعلم مع سياسة التلخيص باللغة الانجليزية إلى نطاق أوسع من اكتساب المفردات. أن تركيب الجملة تطور بشكل مماثل في المجموعات الثلاثة بغض النظر عن طريقة التدريس. فيما يتعلق بنوع تبديل اللغات الأكثر شيوعًا، قام الطلاب بشكل أساسي بتبديل اللغات داخل الجمل (التبديل بين الجمل) لتوضيح كلمات أو أفكار معينة. قد يكون هذا لأنه أسرع وأكثر طبيعية من تبديل اللغات بالكامل بين الجمل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التبديل بين اللغات, الهوية الثقافية والاجتماعية, ثنائي اللغة.

#### Introduction

Code-switching has received extensive focus in bilingualism and multilingualism fields. Numerous studies revealed the effectiveness of code-switching in facilitating and improving comprehension and language learning (Tien & Liu, 2006; Greggio & Gil, 2007), while others criticized it for creating dependency and slowing progress (Skiba, 1997). This study aimed to address these different views by investigating the role of code-switching in enhancing literacy skills in an English/Arabic bilingual classroom setting.

The effectiveness of code-switching as a pedagogical tool in bilingual classrooms is still controversial. This study therefore sought to clarify whether code-switching helps or hinders language learning, particularly in terms of reading comprehension and writing proficiency. In addition, it examined the types of code-switching students used and assessed its impact on learning outcomes.

To achieve these goals, the research compared various instructional approaches incorporating code-switching, namely, *student-driven code-switching*, *instructor-initiated code-switching with summarization*, and an *English-only instruction approach*. The study further investigated students' perceptions of code-switching and their preferences for different teaching methods.

#### **Literature Review**

Code switching has become an area of attention in various fields such as sociolinguistics, language teaching, and psycholinguistics. It is a term introduced first by the linguist Haugen in 1950s, who defined it as the ability of individuals to move between different languages and dialects. Aranda (2014) considers code switching as natural phenomenon among bilingual and multilingual speakers.

Code switching is a technique used by teachers during classroom interaction to make teach easier, assist students to understand what is being taught and also to make the classroom interaction more active. Likewise, Bullock & Toribio (2009), Gardner & Chloros, (2009) state that code switching is the ability to exchange between two or more languages easily.

Poplack (2001) and Gardner & Chloros (2009) followed by saying that code switching exists in the grammar of the bilingual speaker's two languages and it may lead to a better understanding of grammar.

Wardhaugh (2010, p. 84) defines code switching as "the particular dialect or language that a person chooses to use on any occasion, a system used for communication between two or more parties". He further states that code refers to any sort of system employed by two or more

individuals for communication. In other words, code switching can be applied according to linguistics, register or language. Linguistically, code switching alludes to dialect, accent or vernacular, in terms of register, code switch can be considered in formal and informal language use. Code switch in language refers to alternating between two languages, usually learner's first language (L1) and another second language (L2). Kamwangamalu (2010, p. 116), defines code switch as "the intersentential alternating use of two or more languages or varieties of a language in the same speech situation".

Teaching in English only can result in frustration as students may not be able to understand the content presented by instructors. (Widdowson, 2003).

## **Reasons for Code-Switching**

Wei (2006), states that when bilinguals switch between two languages, several speaker-related factors are important considerations in the process. Bilinguals and multilinguals switch languages for a variety of reasons. When they have difficulty finding a particular word or idea in their primary language, they may switch to another language to fill "lexical gaps" and ensure effective communication (Wei, 2006).

Hoffman (1991) states that there are several reasons why bilinguals switch between languages: Among these reasons is that when discussing a certain topic, a bilingual may resort to switching between the two languages to clarify an idea, quote someone else, express sympathy for a cause, express surprise, or want to clarify the content of the conversation to the interlocutor.

Code switching is more than just a means of communication; it is a multiliteral tool that has a crucial role in shaping our identity and social interactions. It can be utilized to express individuals more accurately, build stronger social relationships, and reflects cultural and social belonging, allowing them to be flexible in adapting to different situations. Furthermore, code switching contributes to the development of cognitive skills by allowing leveraging the strengths of different languages. (Green, & Abutalebi, 2013).

## **Functions of Code Switching**

In some situations, code switching has its own functions. A variety of studies (e.g. Macaro, 2001; Simon, 2001; Storch & Wigglesworth 2003) state that code switching is a facilitator tool teachers and students can use in classrooms. Learners can gain additional cognitive support through the use of the first language. This cognitive support enables them to analyze language more deeply. Moreover, code switching may help students create a learning environment full of collaboration between students and teachers, which encourages learner-centered teaching.

Code switching is a complex linguistic and social phenomenon that plays a crucial role in communicative interactions. It is a tool for expressing identity, building social relationships, and adapting to diverse contexts. In addition, code switching has multiple functions, including: enhancing group affiliation, highlighting social status, facilitating understanding, expressing emotions, and meeting diverse communication needs. Individuals from certain linguistic minorities may resort to code switching to express their cultural and linguistic identity

In literature (e.g. Holmes, 2013; Gardner-Chloros, 2009; Auer, 1998), Code switching serves a variety of functions in communication including establishing social identity, expressing solidarity, indicating social status, demonstrating language skills, accommodating others, expressing emotions, and filling lexical gaps. Other functions of code switching include the following:

### Accommodation

Code-switching can be used as a social or cultural adaptation strategy, allowing speakers to adapt their language to suit the context or linguistic preferences of their interlocutor. Learners may code switch in classroom for the purpose of facilitating understanding or creating a sense of solidarity.

#### **Identity or Solidarity within a Group**

Identity and solidarity can serve as code-switching function, allowing people to express cultural and social identities, adjust their language and communication style to connect with different social groups or contexts, thereby demonstrating solidarity with a particular group while maintaining their own identity.

Identity within a group can be expressed through code switching to show solidarity or connection to that group's culture or norms.

#### Clarification

Code switching may have an explanatory function by expressing certain concepts or ideas better in one language over another. Learners can switch languages to provide additional information and express an idea more effectively when using a particular language. Code switching can fill some gaps in linguistics.

#### **Discourse Markers**

Discourse markers play an effective role in organizing discourse and facilitating the communication process among individuals, especially in multilingual contexts. They act as linguistic signals that mark the transition points between different languages or dialects, which contributes to maintaining the cohesion of discourse.

Various studies e.g. (Myers-Scotton, 1993; Benrabah, 2009) have shown that the use of discourse markers is closely linked to the cultural and social identity of speakers, as it can reflect their belongings to a particular linguistic group or their desire to adapt to a particular communicative context. For instance, an Arabic speaker in international contexts may use phrases such as "by God" to express emphasis, reflecting the influence of colloquial dialect on classical Arabic.

#### **Quotation or Emphasis** (Phatic Function)

The phenomenon of code-switching through quoting specific expressions from other languages or dialects contributes to successful communication. In this context, there is a strategy known as the phatic function that allows speakers to give a special character to their speech and direct the attention of listeners to certain points. Citing specific phrases is a way to assert cultural or linguistic identity or to give a formal order to a discourse among languages. For example, an Arabic speaker might use an English expression such as "Frankly" to express a clear and simple idea, reflecting the influence of English on Arabic in certain contexts.

## **Social and Power Dynamics**

Social and power dynamics are interactions between individuals and groups. They shape social structures and relationships among individuals, and they influence social identity and behavior (Hunt et al, 2018). Some studies of code switch (e.g. Bernstein) have shown that language plays a crucial role in enhancing or undermining social status and power. Furthermore, Foucault's theory (1982) asserts that power operates covertly and indirectly through social and cultural mechanisms, shaping the behavior of individuals without the need for direct force.

#### **Emotional Expressions**

Emotional expression through code switching is a reflection of the cultural values and beliefs in which individuals were raised. Every culture has a set of rules and norms that govern how emotions are expressed. For example, norms for expressing anger can differ significantly between Eastern and Western cultures. In addition, social context plays a crucial role in determining how emotional symbols are interpreted. The same symbol may carry completely different meanings depending on the relationship between the speakers and the situation in which the expression is made.

#### **Poetic Function (Culture References and Humor)**

Cultural references and humor can function as code-switching, allowing individuals to connect with others through shared experiences, values, or language styles specific to a particular group or context.

Cultural references and humor are an integral part of language, adding patterns of meaning and significance to words and phrases. Speakers, through these references, can convey complex messages in a brief and direct manner, without the need for a detailed explanation of each word or phrase, as the receiver understands the implicit meaning through the shared cultural background. Thus, cultural references and humor facilitate communication and reduce the chances of misunderstanding (Norrick, 1993).

The process of transforming meanings and ideas into understandable symbols, known as symbol switching, is a complex process that involves several basic functions. According to Abel and Muysken (2006), these functions include: referential (referring to objects or ideas in the real world), directive (guiding the behavior of others), rhetorical (transmitting information and knowledge), metalinguistic (talking about the language itself), expressive (expressing feelings and emotions), and poetic (using language in a creative and engaging way).

## **Typologies of Code Switching**

Based on linguistic and social contexts, code switching has various types in communication (Wardhaugh, 2006). Such forms assist individuals to manage their conversational environment and thoughts effectively.

For some researchers (e.g. Hoffman, 1991; Wardhaugh, 2006; Appel & Muysken, 2006) code switching could be divided to numerous types depending on the scope of language change. For Wardhaugh (2006), code switching has two types: (a) Situational Code Switching and (b) Metaphorical Code Switching. The former might occur subconsciously. It refers to the speaker's use of one language in one situation and use other languages for other situations without making any changes in topics. The latter, however, involves changes in topics which in turn lead to code switching

According to Appel & Muysken (2006), code switching includes three types: (a) inter-sentence (switching between sentences), (b) intra-sentence (switching within a sentence). It is also known as code mixing, and (c) tag switching (inserting a word or phrase from another language).

#### **Code switching versus Borrowing**

According to some researchers (e.g. Thomason, 2001, 2003; Myers-Scotton, 2006), both code switching and borrowing are related as they are on a diachronic continuum. They both involve incorporating elements of one language into another. Both processes can occur naturally during language learning and communication. That is, borrowing is a diachronic procedure by which languages divers areas of structures, whereas code-switching refers to the use of spontaneous

language mixing in the speech of bilinguals. Originally, borrowing expressions are code switches. However, others (e.g. Poplack & Dion 2012; MacSwan & Colina 2014) both code switching and borrowing are separate processes. Code-switching means to insert foreign words into a sentence or a phrase; borrowing refers to entering foreign elements into a lexicon.

## Methodology

A quantitative research design was utilized in order to reach the findings of this study. The aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of code switching on improving the academic achievement in reading and writing skills of fifth-semester students in the English Department at the College of Languages, University of Benghazi for the academic year 2023. It also aimed to show what type of code switching was the most common used by the participants and the reasons behind it.

The participants were 45 male and female students. Their English level was pre intermediate. Before conducting the treatment, a placement test was distributed to 60 male and female students, and participants who achieved the pre-intermediate level (45 participants) were selected.

They were randomly divided into 3 classes. Each class contained 15 students. The three classes were taught using a different teaching technique. Code switching was allowed in just two groups (2,3). Group 1 (OEG) was taught only in English. The use of learners' first language was prohibited and hence no code switching was utilized. With group 2 (CSG), the instructor allowed the use of student-driven code switching among learners, and group 3 (CSE), instructor initiated code switching was allowed to be used while following the policy of having students summarize everything was taught at the end of each lecture only in English. The period of teaching lasted for five weeks. There were four classes a week, two hours per lecture.

To gather data after the completion of instruction, two tests (reading test and writing test) were distributed to the three groups. With regard to the reading test, a reading passage that matched the content and difficulty of the instruction provided to each group was selected. The passage was appropriate for the students' pre intermediate level and the vocabulary aligns with the material covered during the teaching period.

The writing test aimed to assess writing skills in terms of grammar, vocabulary and sentence structure of three groups. That is, it was conducted to show whether students exhibit a wider range of vocabulary, grammar and sentence structure in their writing among the three groups. Students were given a specific amount of time to complete the writing task (two hours). The topic chosen for the test aligned broadly with the content taught to all three groups.

## **Participants**

The population of the study involved 45 male and female Libyan fifth-semester students (aged 22-25) enrolled in the Faculty of Languages at the university of Benghazi (academic year 2023). They had all received English instruction throughout their primary, preparatory, and secondary education. However, a placement test determined their current English proficiency to be preintermediate. To investigate how code-switching impacts reading and writing development, participants were randomly assigned to three treatment groups. This randomization helped ensure that any observed differences in writing skill development can be attributed to the specific teaching technique employed in each group, rather than pre-existing variations in English proficiency among the participants.

#### Instrumentation

All groups used identical materials for consistency across the experiment. The three groups were taught by the researcher. Reading and writing skills were taught to the three groups. Each lecture contained a new lesson. The primary difference between the groups centered on their exposure to code-switching:

**Group 1** (OEG) experienced lessons in English, promoting reliance exclusively on English comprehension and skill development. **Group 2** (CSG) explored student-driven code-switching, allowing participants to employ their native language for explanation throughout the lectures. **Group 3** (CSE) received instructor-initiated code-switching for explanation, followed by English summaries to ensure understanding and support participation and learning in English.

All groups completed the same reading comprehension exercises and writing tasks throughout the treatment. However, Group 3, in addition to standard assessments, was required to summarize the main points of each lecture in English at the end of lessons. This allowed for an examination of their ability to learn and express themselves effectively in English after using code-switching throughout instruction.

#### **Findings**

#### **Results of the Reading Test**

#### **Descriptive Statistics**

The findings indicate the effectiveness of code-switching with English summarization at the end of each lecture. That is, group 3 achieved the highest mean score (82) compared to Group 2 (student-driven code-switching, mean: 75) and Group 1 (English-only instruction, mean: 68). One —way ANOVA was employed to reveal whether the observed differences in mean scores between the three groups were statistically significant, one-way ANOVA was employed. It

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revealed a statistically significant effect of teaching technique on reading comprehension scores (F(2, 42) = 7.89, p = 0.001).

After conducting a one-way ANOVA and finding a significant effect of teaching techniques on reading comprehension scores, Post-hoc analysis using Tukey's HSD test was conducted in order to determine which specific group differed significantly.

This kind of test compares the means of all possible pairs of groups (G1 vs. G2 / G2 vs. G3/G1 vs. G3).

Post-hoc analysis using Tukey's HSD test showed that students in **Group 3** (instructor-initiated code-switching with summaries group) scored significantly higher on average compared to both Group1 (the English-only group, (p = 0.001) and **Group 2** (student driven code-switching group, p = 0.02).

## **Results of Writing Test**

As previously mentioned, in the writing test evaluated writing focusing on grammar, vocabulary and sentence structure. The findings were as follows:

#### 1. Grammar

One-way ANOVA on grammar scores revealed a statistically significant difference among the three groups (p < 0.05). A post hoc test (Tukey's HSD) was used to further locate those differences and to conduct pairwise comparisons between all groups.

#### 1. Group 1 (English Only) vs. Group 2 (Student-Driven Code-Switching):

The results revealed a statistically significant difference (p < 0.05) in grammar scores between Group 1 (English Only) and Group 2 (Student-Driven Code-Switching). Students in Group 2 who used student-driven code-switching techniques made **fewer grammatical errors on average** compared to students in the English-only group.

# 2. Group 1 (English Only) vs. Group 3 (instructor initiated Code-Switching with Summarization):

The post hoc test revealed a statistically significant difference (p < 0.05) in grammar scores between Group 1 and Group 3. This indicated that students in Group 3 achieved significantly lower grammar error rates compared to the English-only group (Group 1)

# 3. Group 2 (Student-Driven Code-Switching) vs. Group 3 (Code-Switching with Summarization):

The findings showed no significant difference in grammar scores between Group 2 and Group 3. This means that students in both groups had benefited from the act of code-switching itself,

regardless of who initiated it. In other words, using code switching techniques that were utilized with groups 1 and 3 were equally effective in improving grammar skills compared to G1 English-only instruction.

## 2. Vocabulary

One-way ANOVA showed a statistically significant effect of teaching technique on vocabulary scores (p = 0.01). Post-hoc analysis using Tukey's HSD test revealed that Group 3 (CSE) used a significantly wider range of vocabulary on average compared to both group 1 (OEG) (p = 0.008) and group 2 (CSG) (p = 0.03).

#### 3. Sentence Structure

Based on ANOVA, there were no significant differences detected between the groups in sentence structure scores. This means that all three teaching techniques (English-only, student driven codeswitching, and instructor code-switching with summaries) had a similar impact on sentence structure complexity. That is, the findings showed that all three techniques contributed to developing sentence structure complexity, even though they approach it differently.

Generally, the results revealed that code-switching instruction was beneficial for improving grammar compared to English-only instruction. However, utilizing summarization technique to code-switching (CSE) seemed to significantly impact vocabulary usage, with students in Group 3 demonstrating a wider and more precise vocabulary range. Sentence structure complexity did not appear to be significantly impacted by the different teaching techniques in this study.

Regarding the last objective of the paper which is to show the most common type of code-switching used by students, the results showed that intra-sentential switching was the most common type observed. The students switched languages within single sentences. This happened when a specific word or expression was better conveyed in the other language. Individuals might have switched languages within sentences (intra-sentential code-switching) to express themselves more clearly or naturally, especially when they are not able to locate the right word in one language. They might have also used code-switching to highlight key points or create a specific language style

The results showed that the students integrated linguistic elements from their mother tongue (Arabic) into the target sentence structure in English. This approach facilitated the process of expressing complex ideas, as it enabled them to employ specific expressions for which they could not find a correct corresponding in the target language.

#### **Conclusion**

This study highlighted the importance of code switching in bilingual classroom settings, particularly English and Arabic. Three groups were taught using different teaching techniques. Generally, the results showed that incorporating code switching along with the policy of summarizing the main points in each lecture in English had a positive impact on students' abilities to improve their reading and writing skills. Regarding the type of exchange used most among students, the results showed that frequent switching between sentences, in which students combine terms or phrases from their mother tongue into one sentence, is the type most used among students. In general, the results of the study showed that code switching served as a valuable mechanism for bilingual individuals to efficiently convey nuances and bridge vocabulary differences.

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