CODE-SWITCHING IN EFL EDUCATION: A PERCEPTION-BASED STUDY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SINDH, JAMSHORO – PAKISTAN

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Abstract:
This research investigates the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the use of Code-switching in English as Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms at the University of Sindh, Jamshoro. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study draws on questionnaire data from 550 undergraduate EFL learners, semi-structured interviews with 15 English teachers, and classroom observations across multiple departments. Results revealed that both teachers and students held positive attitudes toward code-switching, viewing it as a pedagogical tool that enhances comprehension, reduces anxiety, and facilitates complex concept instruction. Key motivations for Code-Switching included explaining grammar (mean = 3.62), clarifying vocabulary (mean = 3.61), and administrative communication (mean = 3.51). Classroom observations showed Code-Switching occurring 25–40% of instructional time, primarily during grammar instruction (32%) and vocabulary explanation (28%). Despite consensus on benefits, concerns about overreliance hindering fluency were noted. The study recommended strategic, context-sensitive Code-Switching use in EFL pedagogy and institutional policies supporting teacher training in bilingual methodologies.

Keywords: Code-switching, EFL, perceptions, bilingualism, classroom interaction, Sindh, English language teaching

1. Introduction

Pakistan's linguistic diversity presents unique challenges in the context of English language teaching (Li & Akram, 2023, 2024). English, though an official language, often coexists with regional languages such as Sindhi, Urdu, Punjabi, and others. In this multilingual environment, the phenomenon of Code-switching — the alternating use of two or more languages in communication — has emerged as a natural and often necessary pedagogical strategy in EFL classrooms. Despite long-standing debates regarding the use of students' first language (L1) in foreign language instruction, recent scholarship has emphasized the pragmatic and pedagogical benefits of Code-Switching. This study explores how both teachers and students at the University of Sindh perceive and engage with Code-Switching in EFL classrooms. It examines when, why, and how Code-switching occurs, and evaluates its perceived benefits and drawbacks. The research aims to bridge the gap between theory and classroom practice, offering insights for teacher training, curriculum development, and language policy.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Defining Code-switching: Code-switching is defined as the alternation between two or more languages within a single conversation or utterance (Gumperz, 1982). Poplack (1980) categorizes it into three main types: intra-sentential (within a sentence), inter-sentential (between sentences), and tag-switching (use of discourse markers or interjections). Mugheri, N. A., & Panhwar, F. Y. (2024) established that participants within the usual class exhibited comparatively lower English proficiency levels than their counterparts in the English language class, as evidenced by the stark divergence in the number of code-switching functions under the student category.

2.2 Historical and Pedagogical Context: Historically, language teaching methods such as the Grammar-Translation Method and Audio-Lingual Method discouraged the use of L1 in foreign language classrooms (Akram & Abdelrady, 2023, 2025; Abdelrady & Akram, 2022; Akram et al.,

2019, 2020). However, recent pedagogical paradigms like Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) advocate for pragmatic flexibility, recognizing that L1 use can aid learning if applied judiciously (Atkinson, 1989; Willis, 1996).

2.3 Theoretical Frameworks Supporting Code-Switching Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985):

It emphasized comprehensible input, suggesting that strategic use of L1 enhances learners' understanding. Schumann's Acculturation Model (1978) highlights the importance of cultural familiarity in language learning, a context in which L1 serves as a social and cognitive bridge. Constructivist theories (Reyes & Vallone, 2008) regard Code-Switching as a tool for collaborative knowledge-building and learner scaffolding.

2.4 Functional Roles of Code-switching several scholars categorize Code-Switching functions:

Researchers have identified several distinct functions of code-switching in language classrooms. These roles contribute to both teaching effectiveness and classroom dynamics:

- **Pedagogical Function:**
Code-switching is used to clarify difficult grammar rules, unfamiliar vocabulary, or complex instructions, especially when students struggle with comprehension in the target language (Atkinson, 1989; Nation, 2003).

- **Social Function:**
Teachers switch to the learners' first language to build rapport, show empathy, and ease classroom tension, creating a more comfortable and inclusive learning environment (Sert, 2005).

- **Cognitive Function:**
It aids in processing information, constructing meaning, and encouraging independent thinking by helping learners relate new content to prior knowledge (Auer, 1998).

- **Administrative Function:**
Teachers use the first language to convey routine information such as assignment guidelines, exam dates, or classroom rules efficiently and without confusion.

2.5 Empirical Studies in Multilingual Settings: In multilingual contexts, Code-Switching has been validated as an instructional strategy. Schweers (1999) and Tang (2002) found that both teachers and students in Spanish and Chinese EFL contexts preferred limited L1 use to support learning. Maniruzzaman (2003) reported similar findings in Bangladeshi classrooms, emphasizing its role in vocabulary acquisition and classroom participation.

2.6 Code-switching in Pakistani Classrooms Research in Pakistani EFL classrooms:
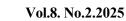
Panhwar (2018) and Zaib (2020) highlighted the prevalence of Code-Switching due to learners' limited English proficiency and cultural preference for indigenous languages. In Sindh, instructors often switch to Sindhi or Urdu for explanation and rapport-building.

2.7 ESL Challenges and Opportunities

Ramzan et al. (2023a) empowered ESL students by harnessing the potential of social media for the enhancement of academic motivation in higher education and concluded that potential of social media were overlooked (Ramzan et al., 2023b). Ramzan et al. (2023c) viewed ESL learners' English motivation from various perspectives and found contradictions especially in syntax instructions (Ramzan et al., 2025; Ramzan, & Alahmadi, 2024).

2.8 Challenges and Criticisms Despite its benefits, Code-Switching faces criticism:
Cook (2001) argued that excessive L1 use may inhibit immersion and reduce opportunities for authentic English communication. Butzkamm (2003) warned that overuse may foster dependency and slow fluency development. Therefore, balance and intentionality in Code-Switching use are crucial.

Table 1: Functional Roles of Code-Switching

Function	Description	Key Scholars
Pedagogical	Used to clarify difficult grammar rules, vocabulary, or classroom instructions to aid understanding.	Atkinson (1989), Nation (2003)
Social	Helps in building rapport, reducing learner anxiety, and creating a more inclusive learning environment.	Sert (2005), Cook (2001)
Cognitive	Facilitates mental processing, helps students make sense of new content, and supports learner autonomy.	Auer (1998), Macaro (2005)
Administrative	Employed to communicate routine matters such as exam guidelines, homework, or attendance rules.	Levine (2011), Lin (2013)

3. **Research Methodology**

3.1 Research Design: A triangulated mixed-methods design was adopted to ensure a holistic understanding. Quantitative data from student questionnaires were complemented by qualitative insights from interviews and classroom observations.

3.2 Participants: The study engaged 550 undergraduate EFL learners and 15 English instructors from 15 departments, institutes, and centers at the University of Sindh. Participants represented diverse linguistic, gender, and socio-economic backgrounds, ensuring data richness and generalizability within the context.
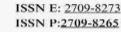
3.3 Data Collection Instruments:

- **Student Questionnaire**: A 30-item Likert-scale instrument focused on attitudes toward Code-Switching, frequency of use, perceived effectiveness, and contexts of application.
- **Teacher Interviews**: Semi-structured interviews explored beliefs, rationales, and classroom strategies related to Code-Switching.
- **Classroom Observations**: Conducted across 12 classes, with detailed field notes and audio recordings to analyze spontaneous Code-Switching events.

3.4 Data Analysis: Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software for descriptive and inferential statistic Code-switching (e.g., t-tests, ANOVA). Qualitative data were coded thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model. Triangulation ensured validity and reliability.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Participants
This table provides a summary of the basic demographic characteristics of the research participants, including teachers and students, to contextualize the findings. The information

includes gender, academic qualification, years of teaching experience (for teachers), and program/discipline (for students). Presenting these demographics enhances the credibility of the study and allows readers to understand the diversity and representativeness of the sample.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Participants

Participant Group	Total Number	Gender (M/F)	Qualification	Experience/Level of Study
EFL Teachers	15	9 / 6	M.A. (ELT), M.Phil., Ph.D.	5 with 1–5 yrs, 7 with 6–10 yrs, 3 with 10+ yrs
University Students	60	32 / 28	Enrolled in B.A., B.S., M.A. (Eng)	1st year: 20, 2nd year: 18, Final year: 22

4. **Results and Discussion**:

4.1 Student Perspectives Students overwhelmingly perceived Code-Switching as a facilitator of learning. 78% agreed that switching to Sindhi or Urdu helped clarify complex grammar and vocabulary. 65% noted that Code-Switching lowered anxiety and made the classroom environment more engaging. However, some expressed concern about long-term reliance on L1 reducing English fluency.

4.2 Teacher Insights: Teachers acknowledged that they used code-switching intentionally as a supportive strategy, especially when teaching challenging topics or working with students who had limited English proficiency. They reported switching to the first language (L1) for specific purposes, such as:
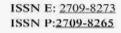
- **Explaining abstract concepts** that were difficult to grasp in English alone,
- **Giving exam instructions** to ensure clarity and prevent misunderstandings,
- **Encouraging shy or silent students** by making them feel more comfortable and confident,
- **Managing classroom behavior** more effectively through clear, authoritative communication.

Overall, teachers viewed code-switching as a practical and flexible tool to enhance learning and classroom management.

All teachers advocated a balanced approach and stressed the need for conscious code-switching, avoiding habitual switching.

4.3 Classroom Observations: Code-switching was observed most frequently during grammar and vocabulary instruction, group discussions, and administrative announcements. Intra-sentential switching was the dominant type, followed by inter-sentential and tag-switching. Teachers frequently used phrases like "You know?" and "Samjhay?" (Do you understand?) to link the two languages.

Table 3: Observed Benefits of Code-Switching

This table presents a synthesis of the positive outcomes associated with code-switching in EFL classrooms, as observed through classroom data and teacher/student responses. It categorizes the key benefits—such as enhanced comprehension, increased participation, better motivation, and improved classroom management—along with brief descriptions and supporting sources or field observations.

Table 3: Observed Benefits of Code-Switching

Benefit	Description	Source/Observation
Enhanced Comprehension	Helped students grasp complex concepts when English-only explanations failed.	Teacher interviews, classroom notes
Increased Student Participation	Encouraged quieter or less confident students to engage more actively.	Classroom observation, student survey
Improved Rapport and Motivation	Strengthened teacher–student relationships and reduced anxiety.	Teacher reflections, focus groups
Efficient Classroom Management	Enabled quick clarification of rules and instructions, reducing disruptions.	Field notes, teacher feedback

4.4 Linguistic and Demographic Correlations: Data showed rural students and those with lower self-rated English proficiency favored code-switching more than their urban and fluent peers. No significant gender differences were observed. Teachers adapted their code-switching frequency based on classroom composition.

4.5 Observed Benefits:

Based on classroom observations, student feedback, and teacher reflections, several notable benefits were associated with the strategic use of Code-switching in EFL classrooms at the University of Sindh. These are outlined below:

• **Enhanced Comprehension**

One of the most immediate and significant benefits observed was improved student understanding of lesson content. Code-switching into the students' first language (L1), particularly Sindhi or Urdu, enabled teachers to clarify complex vocabulary, abstract grammar concepts, and culturally unfamiliar references. This scaffolding approach allowed learners to connect new information to prior knowledge, reducing cognitive overload and enhancing the processing of English language input. As a result, students were better able to grasp lesson objectives and demonstrate learning outcomes more confidently.

• **Increased Student Participation**

The use of Code-switching encouraged greater classroom interaction and student involvement, especially among lower-proficiency learners who might otherwise remain silent due to language anxiety. When explanations, questions, or instructions were partially delivered in the L1, students felt more secure and were more willing to contribute. This increased engagement was particularly evident during pair-work and group discussions, where bilingual facilitation helped bridge linguistic gaps. Consequently, Code-switching served as a participatory enabler, democratizing classroom discourse.

• **Improved Rapport and Motivation**

Teachers' willingness to shift into the students' native language was perceived by learners as a sign of empathy and approachability. This helped in building stronger teacher-student relationships, fostering a supportive and inclusive classroom climate. Students reported feeling more valued and understood, which positively impacted their motivation to learn English. By creating a learning environment where linguistic identity was respected, Code-switching contributed to students' emotional and psychological readiness to engage with the second language (L2).

• Efficient Classroom Management

In practical terms, Code-switching proved to be an effective tool for managing classroom behavior and ensuring the smooth flow of lessons. Teachers used the L1 to give instructions, maintain discipline, handle administrative matters, and resolve misunderstandings swiftly. This reduced time lost in repetition or misinterpretation and allowed more time to be dedicated to actual language teaching. Moreover, the ability to switch codes helped teachers manage mixed-proficiency classrooms by addressing learners' needs more flexibly and responsively.

4.6 Reported Challenges

While Code-switching was widely acknowledged for its pedagogical advantages in EFL classrooms, several challenges emerged from the data collected through classroom observations, teacher interviews, and student surveys. These concerns suggest that the practice must be employed judiciously to avoid unintended consequences. The primary reported challenges are discussed below:

• Risk of Linguistic Laziness

One of the most commonly reported drawbacks of Code-switching was the tendency for both students and teachers to fall into what has been termed "linguistic laziness." This refers to the overuse of the first language (L1) in situations where English (L2) could and should have been used. Some teachers admitted that they found it easier and faster to explain concepts in the L1, especially under time pressure or in large classes. However, this habit discouraged students from attempting to express themselves in English and undermined their confidence in using the L2 for communication. Students, in turn, became overly reliant on L1 translations and explanations, which diminished their need to struggle productively with English vocabulary, syntax, or expressions. Over time, this risked stagnating their linguistic growth and fluency.

• Reduced Immersion in English

Another significant concern was the reduction in the immersive language environment that EFL classrooms are ideally supposed to provide. Language immersion is a key principle in second language acquisition theory, which posits that meaningful exposure to the target language enhances language development. However, frequent and sometimes unnecessary Code-switching diluted this immersive experience. Students reported that hearing too much of their native language in class reduced their motivation to "think in English" and minimized their opportunities to practice listening and speaking in authentic contexts. This was particularly detrimental in skill-based courses, such as speaking and listening, where maximum exposure to English is crucial.

• Teacher Over-Reliance on L1 in Complex Subjects

In content-based language instruction or linguistically dense topiCode-switching such as academic writing, English phonetic Code-switching, or literary analysis, teachers often resorted to extended explanations in the L1. While this strategy helped ensure understanding, it also created a situation where English was used only minimally or superficially. This over-reliance on L1 explanations risked transforming the classroom into a primarily L1-speaking environment, where English was relegated to a few isolated examples or phrases. Students expressed concern that some instructors lacked the training or confidence to simplify complex ideas in English, leading them to default to the L1 even when learners might have benefited from an English-medium explanation supplemented by occasional L1 scaffolding. This challenged the overall goal of building academic and professional English proficiency among university-level learners.

These findings resonate with Cook's (2001) call for balanced language use and Nation's (2003) emphasis on functional L1 integration.

Table 4: Reported Challenges of Code-Switching
Definition:
This table highlights the drawbacks and concerns related to the use of code-switching in EFL classrooms. Based on teacher interviews, student feedback, and field observations, the table categorizes the most frequently reported challenges—such as reduced English immersion, linguistic laziness, and teacher over-reliance on L1—and provides concise explanations for each.

Table 4: Reported Challenges of Code-Switching

Challenge	Description	Source/Observation
Linguistic Laziness	Students may rely on L1 and avoid the effort needed to think and speak in English.	Teacher interviews, classroom notes
Reduced Immersion in English	Frequent L1 use can limit exposure to authentic English input and practice.	Student focus groups, observations
Teacher Over-Reliance on L1	Some teachers switch codes even when unnecessary, affecting L2 learning goals.	Field notes, teacher reflections
Hindered Language Development	Excessive switching may slow down vocabulary acquisition and fluency in English.	Literature review, student feedback

5. **Implications**
5.1 Pedagogical Implications: Teachers should receive training on intentional and strategic code-switching use. Lesson planning can include designated moments for L1 use (e.g., vocabulary pre-teaching or grammar recap). Peer teaching strategies may also integrate code-switching as a collaborative tool.
5.2 Curriculum and Materials Development Curricula: It should recognize code-switching as a legitimate scaffolding strategy. Materials may include bilingual glossaries, dual-language reading passages, and translanguaging activities.
5.3 Policy Implications: Policy frameworks must shift from English-only ideologies toward pragmatic bilingualism. The Higher Education Commission and provincial ministries can include code-switching strategies in teacher training programs.
5.4 Technological Integration: Digital tools such as bilingual learning apps or subtitled videos can support code-switching strategies. Recorded bilingual lectures and online forums may also help students learn outside the classroom.

6. **Conclusion**
The findings revealed that employing code-switching in the language learning classroom and the perspectives of English instructors and EFL learners were satisfactory enough to include code-switching when developing policy (Mugheri & Panhwar, 2024). This study affirmed that Code-switching, when used intentionally and judiciously, enhanced EFL teaching and learning. It served

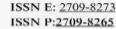as a pedagogical scaffold, social lubricant, and cognitive bridge. While risks of overuse exist, the benefits of code-switching in multilingual contexts like the University of Sindh outweighed its limitations. Moving forward, teacher training, curriculum reform, and language policy must embrace code-switching as a pragmatic and pedagogically sound practice. Future research should explore the longitudinal effects of code-switching on language acquisition and examine its role in digital learning environments.

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