

Code-mixing and Switching Usage by Non-Arab Saudi Instructors in EFL classrooms: A Sociolinguistic Study of Dynamic Communication Strategies

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the complex phenomenon of code-mixing and code-switching by non-Arab instructors (henceforth NAI) in English as a Foreign Language (henceforth EFL) classrooms in Saudi Arabia. Interaction between multiple linguistic and cultural backgrounds is inevitable as education becomes increasingly globalized. This study examines the patterns, causes, and effects of NAI code-mixing (henceforth CM) and code-switching (henceforth CS) approaches in EFL classrooms in Saudi Arabia, shedding light on the sociolinguistic dynamics of these encounters. The study used a mixed methods methodology. The study used semi-structured interviews with NAIs for qualitative analysis and a 12-item questionnaire for quantitative analysis. The results of the study showed that NAIs had a positive attitude towards the application of CM and CS techniques in EFL classrooms. There are several reasons why they use these tactics, which this paper covers. The study also discussed some of the advantages and disadvantages of CM and CS techniques.

Keywords: *teacher education, communication, sociolinguistics, dynamic communication strategies, code mixing and switching, Saudi EFL classroom, Non-Arab Instructors.*

Introduction

In recent years, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has seen significant modernization and globalization, resulting in an increased demand for English language instruction. NAIs in EFL classrooms play an important role in moulding Saudi students' linguistic and communicative skills. Effective communication skills are critical in Saudi Arabia's multicultural classroom context, where varied cultural backgrounds collide. This study investigates the dynamic communication strategies used by non-Arab EFL teachers in Saudi classrooms, focusing on CM and CS techniques. Here the NAIs' L1 code is Hindi or Urdu, L2 code is English that functions as Lingua Franca among teachers and students while L3 code is Arabic. As the demand for English language education in Saudi Arabia grows, the role of NAI in developing the Kingdom's future generation of confident and successful communicators remains critical.

The fundamental aim of sociolinguistic study is to detect the language use by the society at particular point in time. This leads to the speakers' ability to use language in different contexts appropriately. According to Al-Ahdal (2020), because language and society have

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a symbiotic relationship, they have always had the most profound impact on each other. Language interaction causes modifications in one or more languages in use. Language is an ever-changing and dynamic phenomenon that represents the rich fabric of human culture and interaction. Interactions between persons from different language backgrounds are becoming more widespread in our globalized environment. One result of this international interchange is CM and CS. CM and CS is an intriguing lens through which we can investigate the complexities of human communication and the changing nature of languages.

Defining CM and CS

According to Al-Ahdal (2020), a code is a common communication technique used by two or more parties in any situation. When two or more individuals speak, the communication method that they employ is referred to as a code. Wardhaugh (2006) describes the speech communication between two or more people as a code that is a language. He clarifies further, that, two bilingual speakers, that is, those who have access to two codes and who, for whatever reason, move back and forth between the two languages while they interact by CS. In his words, “Code-switching (also called code-mixing) can occur in conversation between speakers’ turns or within a single speaker’s turn. In the latter case it can occur between sentences (intersententially) or within a single sentence (intra-sententially), (p. 101)”. CM and CS are two separate but related linguistic occurrences. CM involves blending components from two or more languages inside a single sentence or discourse results in a unique linguistic hybrid. CS, on the other hand, refers to the alternation of two or more languages within a discourse, sentence, or even a single clause. CS, as opposed to CM, entails separate movements from one language to another. According to Spolsky (1998), bilinguals frequently switch between their two languages throughout a conversation. These code shifts can occur between or even inside sentences, and might involve phrases or words.

Now, we can clearly say that CM is a linguistic phenomenon in which speakers mix elements from two or more languages or language varieties within a single sentence, clause, or discourse. In this aspect, the speaker may seamlessly insert words, phrases, or even entire sentences from one language into another. CS, on the other hand, involves shifting between two or more languages or language varieties within a conversation or even within a sentence. Developing communication proficiency in two or more languages allows individuals to convey their feelings and thoughts while also shaping their identity. It also assists speakers in meeting their individual and social demands in the various contexts of the languages utilized (Shariq, 2013). Understanding how and why this happens requires understanding the environment, motivations, and the role of CS in meaning-making. It is safe to assume that some CS will occur in the most, if not all, contact situations. It is prevalent in immigrant populations, regional minorities, and native multilingual groups (Gardner-Chloros, 2020). CM and CS are both natural linguistic phenomena that occur frequently in multilingual and multicultural settings. These methods are used by speakers to navigate their language repertoire based on the circumstances of the discourse and the people involved. These occurrences demonstrate the adaptability and complexities of human language use in a variety of social and cultural contexts. These reasons are the rationale behind the study's search for dynamic communication techniques by NAIs in Saudi EFL classrooms utilizing CM and CS. It also seeks to provide answers to the following questions.

Research questions

1. How do the NAIs observe their use of CM and CS in a Saudi EFL classroom?
2. What CM and CS strategies do the NAIs follow while communicating with Saudi students?

Literature Review

CM and CS are two linguistic phenomena that have been extensively researched in a variety of contexts. Previous scholarly research show that teachers employ CS for a variety of purposes in diverse circumstances, such as English as a second language or English as a foreign language classrooms Temesgen and Hailu (2022). The majority of these research found that teachers' CS in L2 classes can serve three key purposes: academic, managerial, and social (Adendorff, 1993; Puspawati, 2018; Sali, 2014; Tsagari & Georgiou, 2016). Shariq (2023) suggests that, while the Arabic (pidgin variety) used by non-Arab workers in Saudi Arabia is still insufficient for communication between the two groups, yet it does provide some relief in the absence of a shared language for interaction. According to Adamou and Shen (2019), language switching costs in comprehension are affected by the frequency of CS in the bilingual society as well as exposure to certain lexical elements. Furthermore, a number of criteria, such as age and kind of acquisition, proficiency, socioeconomic background, and the sort of activities and stimuli, have received attention. It has been demonstrated, for example, that L2 learners process switching differently from highly proficient and early bilinguals, with the latter demonstrating an unanticipated processing advantage of L2 (L3) over L1' (Costa & Santesteban, 2004). According to Shariq (2013), CM and CS are relatively frequent activities for Indians and have become a regular communication strategy for them. As speakers switch between two separate systems, these activities, particularly CS, are highly creative. CS was initially studied mostly in spoken circumstances, as it was thought to be more characteristic of speech than writing (Gardner-Chloros, 2020). However, Candra and Qodriani (2018) analysed a novel and discussed four different types of CS and the seven types of reasons because of which it can occur. Moreover, written CS has recently been studied in styles of writing that resemble conversational practice, such as personal letters and the email and SMS messages of young people of mixed background (Hinrichs 2006; Androutsopoulos 2007).

These phenomena have also been researched in the EFL context. This literature review aims to provide an overview of the current research on CM and CS in the EFL context. BENSEN and ÇAVUŞOĞLU (2013) suggested that CS by teachers is used for many reasons such as clarifying meaning, saving time in their teaching and motivating students. Their investigation also cleared that all of the teachers code-switched for different reasons and all agreed that it was a beneficial technique for enhancing learning when used carefully. Hussein, Saed and Haider (2020) demonstrated that teachers' CS is for a variety of reasons, such as linguistic ineptitude, emotive function, and providing instructions and directives. However, students' CS is for non-linguistic reasons, such as preserving rapport and interpersonal relationships and keeping the lines of communication open to prevent misunderstandings or conflicts. Moreover, their study's conclusion advises educators to help students' English language proficiency in non-linguistic areas including affective and interpersonal communication. The findings of Temesgen and Hailu (2022) showed that teachers' codes for social, managerial, and academic roles were reversed. Additionally, this study showed that the main elements impacting students' CS activities were their inadequate English ability, teachers' opinions, and the sorts and natures of language skills. Hence, rather than blindly following the English-only norm and feeling ashamed of their actions, teachers must be aware of CS in order to use it as a useful teaching tool. Furthermore, teacher preparation programs ought to include CS as a useful teaching approach since it is an essential component of classroom discourse and shouldn't be avoided.

According to the literature, CM and CS are common in the Saudi EFL environment, particularly in lower-level classes. These occurrences are employed by both teachers and students for a variety of purposes. Hence, the present research is significant as many studies have focused on the occurrences of CM and CS but very few have focused on the NAI's use of CM and CS in Saudi EFL classroom.

Methods

Research design

Using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study highlights the CM and CS strategies employed by the NAIs of EFL classroom at Qassim University, Saudi Arabia.

Participants

An empirical study was conducted at Qassim University in Saudi Arabia with a convenience sample of nine NAIs. There were seven male and two female instructors among the contestants. These NAIs were basically from India and their mother tongue was Urdu except one female instructor whose mother tongue was Malayalam. These EFL instructors teach Basic English (listening, speaking, vocabulary, reading, writing, grammar), translation, linguistic and literature courses in English. Except in a few cases where CM and CS are used for better communication results, these instructors deliver their lessons entirely in English. Because the target learners are Arabs, they are unable to use their mother tongue. Therefore, they use Arabic for these communication strategies.

The questionnaire

The 12-item attitude questionnaire, in this study, was adopted from Al-Ahdal (2020) and then modified for the purpose of the study. The questionnaire was sent to two specialists, one from Applied Linguistics and the other from Theoretical Linguistics. Both professors provided useful feedback, and the modest improvements they advised were dutifully implemented. The questionnaire was uploaded to Google Forms, and the link was sent to the NAIs' cell phones. Responses were solicited on a five-point Likert Scale, with 1 indicating Strongly Disagree, 2 indicating Disagree, 3 indicating Neutral, 4 indicating Agree, and 5 indicating Strongly Agree with the scope of the scale that is calculated as Very low 1 - 1.80, Low 1.81 - 2.60, Moderate 2.61 - 3.40, High 3.41 - 4.20, and Very High 4.21 - 5.00. Because the results were consistent, the questionnaire was deemed reliable. The reliability level was measured using Cronbach's Alpha which showed a very good level, P= .808 as indicated in the table below.

Table 1. Reliability scale (Cronbach's Alpha)

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.808	12

Findings related to the first question

IBM SPSS Statistics Software Version 22 was used to calculate the NAIs responses' mean and standard deviation (SD). Table 2 and Figure 1 below present the descriptive statistics of the NAIs perceptions towards the use of CM and CS.

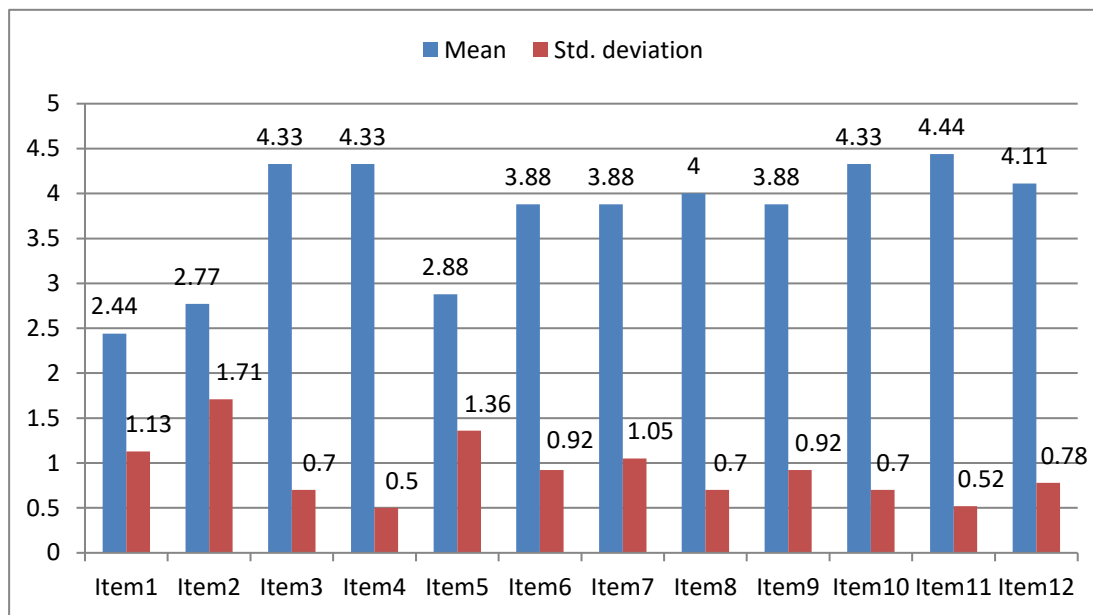
Table 2. NAIs perceptions towards the use of CM and CS

No	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I am as comfortable at speaking in Arabic as I am in English.	2 (22.2%)	3 (33.3%)	2 (22.2%)	2 (22.2%)	0 (0%)	2.44	1.13
2	I am not aware when I switch between English and Arabic.	2 (22.2%)	4 (44.4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (33.3%)	2.77	1.71
3	My attitude towards switching	0	0	1	4	4	4.33	0.70

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	between English and Arabic is positive.	(0%)	(0%)	(11.1%)	(44.4%)	(44.4%)		
4	Mixing and switching between languages shows my superior proficiency in the languages.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6 (66.7%)	3 (33.3%)	4.33	0.50
5	When I mix two languages, the time I take to frame my words is lesser as compared to staying with any one language.	1 (11.1%)	3 (33.3%)	3 (33.3%)	0 (0%)	2 (22.2%)	2.88	1.36
6	I move between languages as there is a dearth of words in one that is covered by my knowledge of the other language.	0 (0%)	1 (11.1%)	1 (11.1%)	5 (55.6%)	2 (22.2%)	3.88	0.92
7	I decide on mixing the languages owing to situational factors, like when I am unable to explain the subject in one language.	0 (0%)	1 (11.1%)	2 (22.2%)	3 (33.3%)	3 (33.3%)	3.88	1.05
8	I mix two languages only when I need a few words at a time.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (22.2%)	5 (55.6%)	2 (22.2%)	4.00	0.70
9	Mixing and freely moving from one language to another gives me a sense of social belongingness.	0 (0%)	1 (11.1%)	1 (11.1%)	5 (55.6%)	2 (22.2%)	3.88	0.92
10	I am particular about my grammar and punctuation when I mix English and Arabic.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (11.1%)	4 (44.4%)	4 (44.4%)	4.33	0.70
11	Mixing the two languages helps me explain myself better to my learners.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (55.6%)	4 (44.4%)	4.44	0.52
12	My ability to explain the topics has improved with freely mixing Arabic during the classes.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (22.2%)	4 (44.4%)	3 (33.3%)	4.11	0.78

Figure 1. Descriptive statistics of the NAIs perceptions towards the use of CM and CS



As indicated by the table 2 and figure 1 above, the first item has got the lowest mean value 2.44 (SD=1.13) which shows that the NAIs perception is low on the scale and they are not satisfied by their proficiency in Arabic. As opposed to this, NAIs have the very high perception on the scale with the highest mean value 4.44 (SD=0.52) for the item 11 which signifies that the NAIs are positive towards the use of CM in classroom. Further, item 3 and 4 show the similar results with mean 4.33 (SD=0.7 and 0.5) which is also a very high value on the scale. This indicates that the NAIs are positive towards the CS strategy and it makes them feel that their proficiency is superior as they shift between languages. The exact mean value 4.33 (SD=0.52) was shown by the item 10 indicating that the NAIs are particular towards the grammatical structures since they are the models for their learners in the classroom. This is followed by the item 12 that has the high perception with mean 4.11 (SD=0.78) towards the improvement in explaining the topics using the CM and CS strategies. Item 8 has the high perception on the scale with mean value 4 (SD=0.7) towards the need of the words while mixing the languages. This is followed by the item 6, item 7, item 9 with high perception on the scale and have the same mean 3.88 (SD= 0.92, 1.05 and 0.92) consecutively. Finally, item 5 and item 2 have got the moderate perception with mean value of 2.88 (SD=1.36) and 2.77 (SD=1.71).

Findings related to the second question

Interview

For the qualitative data, the researcher interviewed eight NAIs and conversed with them about the use of CM and CS in delivering their lectures and the strategies they use to communicate their message to their learners. In this interview, they shared how the use of CM and CS helps them in delivering their lectures successfully and make their students understand the lectures appropriately.

NAI's comments

When I mix Arabic words in my lecture, it becomes easy for me to explain the difficult ideas. (NAI 1)

I feel comfortable mixing the words from Arabic. It gives you freedom to choose words and explain ideas well. (NAI 2)

Students understand better when I mix words or switch to Arabic. I also use Arabic in order to get the students' attention. (NAI 3)

I frequently use code mixing and switching and when I do this, I get better responses from my students. (NAI 4)

When students ask for further explanation of complex topics, I prefer to explain them in Arabic. It makes me feel that the students understand better in their native language. (NAI 5)

I mostly use Arabic sentences with the students at beginner level. (NAI 6)

It feels awkward when I explain complex grammatical structures in English and I do not get any response from students specially those who are at their first level of study. Then I switch to Arabic or use Arabic words for explanation. (NAI 7)

As we are non-native speakers of Arabic, our proficiency in Arabic is very low. We communicate with Arabs in very limited words that are used for daily conversations. I cannot explain difficult ideas in Arabic. And I cannot switch over languages but have some ability to mix Arabic words in order to explain what I mean. (NAI 8)

Examples:

No.	CM strategies
1.	Now open the book and go to safha xamsa sitti:n. 'Now open the book and go to page sixty five.'
2.	Iqra haza paragraph. 'Read this paragraph.'
3.	Have you submitted your waajib? 'Have you submitted your homework?'
4.	Tomorrow we will start kitab thani. 'Tomorrow we will start the second book.'
5.	Now see carefully. This is third person singular pronoun 'yani damir'. What are damaier in Arabic? 'What are pronouns in Arabic?' Give me some examples.
CS strategies	
1.	You must do this homework. If you don't do, ana mafi atikum darajaat lilmusharka. 'You must do this homework. If you don't do, I will not give you the participation marks.'
2.	Don't worry about your mistakes. Kul shi iji shwaiye shwaiye. 'Everything will come slowly slowly.' Don't go fast.
3.	Who will come here and write three sentences using is, am, are? Yallah Ahmed anta ta'al hina. Uktub thlatha jumla. 'Ahmed, come here and write three sentences.'
4.	I can give you some examples of feminine nouns that do not have ta marbuta (a feminine marker). We say, hazihi yad, hazihi rijal but not haza yad or haza rijal. 'We say, this (feminine) is hand, this (feminine) is leg but not this (masculine) is hand or this (masculine) is leg.'

Discussion

The findings obtained here indicate that NAIs are satisfied with how they use CM and CS strategies in EFL classrooms. It is an evident from (Al-Ahdal, 2020 and Moghadam, Samad and Shahraki, 2012) that both the instructors and students used CS in the classroom more frequently while utilizing certain unique language functions, like socializing, translation, and clarification/persuasion. As stated earlier in the study, the instructors' CM and CS strategies are more common with the students of lower level. The

instructors' frequency of code changes appears to be impacted by the students' level of competency. It was established that the lecturer used code switching less frequently in the class of advanced semester students than in the class of first semester students (Astrid, 2015 and Horasan, 2014). Moreover, the use of CM and CS strategies are employed for the explanation of difficult tasks lack of vocabulary, grammatical structures and to convey study materials (Horasan, 2014 and Nurhamidah, Fauziatia and Supriyadi, 2018). According to the findings of Moetia, Kasim and Fitriani (2018), the teacher used these kinds of codes to hide the fact that some students were not proficient in the target language and to ensure that the lesson plan was implemented efficiently. However, as these NAIs are from different cultures and linguistic backgrounds, their use of Arabic is limited and their perception towards their proficiency in Arabic is low (Shariq, 2023; Bedairi and Al-Doubi, 2020 and Alfallaj, 2016). Furthermore, Alqahtani (2014) indicated that the faculty members of different cultural backgrounds employ the method for a variety of purposes. Diverse cultural backgrounds have slightly varied perspectives on the subject. Nevertheless, in spite of all of their disagreements, they all maintain that CM and CS are social and communicative requirements that carry out certain jobs without which communication ability would deteriorate. This study also demonstrate that the variety of Arabic that NAIs use is Gulf Pidgin Arabic that is created to facilitate communication between Arabs and non-Arabs in order to prevent misunderstandings. This result is consistent with the findings from a number of previous studies (Smart, 1990; Al-Azraqi, 2016; Avram, 2014, Ferguson, 1968; Gomma, 2007). Al-Ahdal (2020) found that CM with Arabic and English was viewed favorably, that people were more accepting of the activity itself, and suggested that CM might be used as a teaching tool in an EFL context—albeit with some modifications.

Based on the teachers' experience, comments, and the literature available in the researches on CM and CS, this study also presents some of the advantages and disadvantages of CM and CS in an EFL classroom.

Advantages of CM and CS

Clarity and Comprehension: CM and CS can improve students' comprehension by giving them explanations and clarifications in their own language. This is very useful for explaining difficult ideas.

Cultural Connection: The use of CM and CS can help make the classroom more welcoming and relatable for students. Throwing in words or phrases from their native language makes lessons feel more culturally connected. This gives students a sense of familiarity and helps them to relate to the material. Teachers can also use a bit of code-switching to explain complicated ideas or new vocabulary in simpler terms. Toggling between languages this way prevents confusion that could happen with English-only lessons. It helps get concepts across more clearly. Occasional code-switching can strengthen the teacher-student bond too. Students feel more comfortable and supported when the teacher speaks some of their first language. It shows the teacher cares about connecting with them. As students get better at English, teachers can use less and less code-switching. This gradual decrease gives students confidence in using more English independently. The goal is to depend on their native tongue less and less. Moderate use of code-switching can also encourage shy or hesitant students to participate more actively in class. Knowing they can fall back on their first language makes them more willing to discuss and engage. Overall, thoughtful code-switching provides learning assistance, boosts comprehension, and builds relationships. The end goal is to improve English skills through a supportive bilingual approach. Teachers just need to be careful not to overuse it, so students get enough practice immersing in English.

Promoting Bilingualism: By using CM and CS, teachers can accept and acknowledge the bilingualism of their students and value their linguistic heritage. this can facilitate the development of bilingual skills, which is beneficial in today's globalized world. Cognitive

development: the use and exposure to multiple languages has a positive effect on cognitive abilities. CM and CS improve students' general cognitive growth, language awareness, and cognitive flexibility. Disadvantages of CM and CS

Language reliance: an over-reliance on code-mixing and code-switching can cause students to become less proficient in English as they rely more on their mother tongue. It is possible for students to lose interest in communicating only in English.

Restricted exposure to English: excessive using code-switching and code-mixing can limit how much real conversational English learners are exposed to. This can stunt their ability to learn to speak and listen in English. Constantly switching between languages can also lead to confusion and make it hard to use either language consistently. Mixing languages together could make it tougher for students to properly learn both languages, since the distinctions get blurred. Plus, frequent code-mixing and switching disrupts the English-only environment that is often best for learning the language. If teachers rely too much on mixing the native language in, students get less English practice and exposure. This lack of immersion in English could undermine their language learning. Students miss out on chances to fully communicate and practice their English skills. The goal should be to increase opportunities to converse in and be engaged in English.

Interference with language structure: Blending in native language parts can undermine the structure and grammar of English. Students might absorb grammatical mistakes and incorrect language translations by mimicking patterns from their first language. If teachers use a lot of code-mixing and code-switching, it can imply they lack proficiency in English. Learners may get the sense that the teacher isn't competent in English if they lean too hard on code-switching instead of sticking to teaching in English. Inserting native language words and phrases can distort the proper grammar and structure of English. By copying code-mixing habits from their native tongue, students could pick up flawed grammar and translations. Ideally, instruction should maximize the use of correct English grammar and structure, rather than diluting it with excessive mixing of the native language. This helps students fully acquire English proficiency by reinforcing the proper patterns.

The grammar and structure of English can become corrupted when native language words and phrases are inserted. Students run the risk of adopting flawed grammar and translations when they mirror code-mixing patterns from their native tongue. Ideally, instruction should maximize the use of proper English structure and grammar, rather than diluting it through excessive mixing with the native language. This helps reinforce the right patterns for students to fully acquire English proficiency.

Students' confidence may be reduced in the teacher's ability to help them learn the language. Potential for Misunderstandings: Improper use of code mixing and switching can lead to misunderstandings. Students may misinterpret the intended message or context, especially if the teacher switches between languages abruptly or inconsistently. Disrupting English-only policies: Excessive code mixing and switching can disrupt English-only policies in settings, this way leads to difficulty to a consistent language acquisition strategy. Complete English Engagement Opposing: If the students have the trust in their teacher's frequently uses of their native language, they may not want to be fully involved in practicing English. In the EFL classroom, this opposition can delay the progress of language skill development. The potential for cultural misconfiguration: the unintentional introduction of cultural elements from the students' native language that may not match the English cultural setting when CM and CS occur. Misunderstandings or wrong impressions about cultural nuances can sometimes arise from this. Even though there are many pros and cons linked with CM and CS, it's important for teachers to strike a balanced approach. They need to wisely use these strategies to help language learning, without hampering the students' ability to learn English.

Conclusion

This study explored code-mixing and code-switching among non-Arab teachers in Saudi EFL classrooms. Despite limited Arabic proficiency, interviews and surveys revealed teachers leverage code-mixing and code-switching to aid comprehension, engage students, explain grammar, give instructions, motivate participation, and build rapport. While risks like overreliance on Arabic exist, judicious mixing and switching largely benefited multilingual classrooms. More research could further optimize usage. However, findings suggest training and policies should recognize mixing and switching as useful tools, not blanket prohibitions, for navigating multilingual dynamics. This pragmatic acceptance, paired with guidelines for appropriate implementation, could empower teachers to utilize students' diverse linguistic repertoires during English acquisition.

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