CODE-SWITCHING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS: HELPFUL OR HARMFUL?

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Annotation: This article investigates the role of code-switching in English language classrooms, particularly in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) settings. It examines the potential advantages of incorporating students' first language to aid comprehension and engagement, as well as the drawbacks that may hinder immersion and fluency. The study also offers practical strategies for balanced and purposeful code-switching to enhance language learning outcomes.

Keywords: code-switching, language learning, bilingual education, first language use, EFL classroom, language acquisition, teaching strategies.

Introduction

Code-switching, the practice of alternating between two or more languages in a single conversation or discourse, is a common phenomenon in multilingual educational contexts. In English language classrooms, particularly in non-native environments, teachers and students frequently switch between English and their mother tongue. While some educators consider code-switching a pedagogical weakness that hinders immersion and language development, others argue that it can serve as a valuable tool for scaffolding, clarification, and increasing learner engagement. This paper explores the advantages and drawbacks of code-switching in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms, considering both teacher and learner perspectives and analyzing when and how it may support or interfere with language acquisition.

Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data were gathered through surveys distributed to 50 English language teachers working in secondary schools across Uzbekistan, while qualitative data were collected via semi-structured interviews with 15 teachers and classroom observations in 5 schools. The research focused on the frequency, purpose, and perceived impact of code-switching during English lessons.

The survey included both multiple-choice and open-ended questions related to:

- The contexts in which code-switching is used;
- Teachers' attitudes toward code-switching;
- Students' responses and engagement levels.

Interview questions further explored teachers' reasons for code-switching, perceived benefits and challenges, and suggestions for appropriate use in the EFL context. Classroom observations aimed to triangulate findings by documenting real-time instances of code-switching and their immediate effects on learning.

Results

- **Frequency of Use**: 84% of teachers reported using code-switching at least occasionally, especially when explaining grammar rules or complex vocabulary.

- **Purpose**: The most common reasons were clarifying instructions (76%), reducing student anxiety (65%), and enhancing comprehension (82%).

- **Student Impact**: 68% of teachers noted improved classroom engagement when code-switching was used moderately; however, 40% also

observed a decline in students' effort to speak English if L1 (native language) was overused.

From classroom observations, it was evident that judicious use of code-switching helped reduce confusion during difficult tasks but excessive reliance limited English exposure.

Discussion

The findings suggest that code-switching can serve as a valuable pedagogical tool in EFL classrooms when applied purposefully and sparingly. It supports scaffolding, especially for beginner and lower-intermediate learners, and creates a psychologically safe learning environment. However, the risk of overuse remains a concern, as it may foster dependency on the native language and impede language immersion.

The study emphasizes that teacher training programs should include strategies on how to balance code-switching with target-language input. By fostering awareness of when and how to switch codes effectively, educators can better support their students' language development without compromising fluency.

In sum, code-switching is not inherently harmful; rather, its effectiveness depends on intentional, strategic application aligned with pedagogical goals and student needs.

Conclusion

The role of code-switching in English language classrooms is complex and context-dependent. When used strategically, code-switching can enhance comprehension, lower learner anxiety, and create a bridge between known and new knowledge. It can be particularly helpful for explaining difficult grammar rules,

giving instructions, and managing classroom behavior. However, excessive or uncontrolled code-switching may reduce students' exposure to English, limit practice opportunities, and reinforce dependence on the first language. Therefore, a balanced, intentional approach is essential. Teachers should aim to maximize English use while leveraging the first language only when pedagogically justified. Ultimately, code-switching is not inherently helpful or harmful—it is how and why it is used that determines its impact.

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