

## Code-Switching in Bilingual Classrooms

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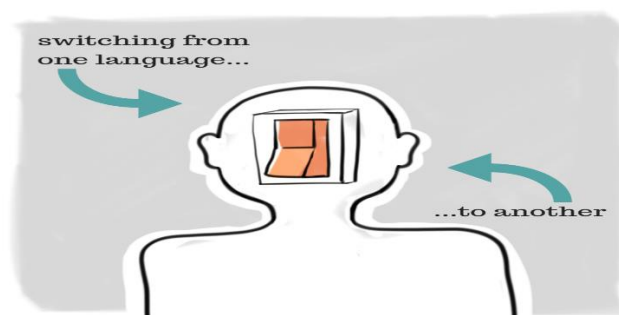
**Abstract:** This paper explores the use of code-switching in bilingual classrooms, its pedagogical functions, sociolinguistic functions, and its impact on language acquisition. Code-switching, or the alternation of two or more languages within a conversation or a sentence, is a common phenomenon among bilingual speakers, particularly in classrooms where both learners and educators have more than one language in common. On the basis of data collected through observations of classes, teacher interviews, and student questionnaires, the study reveals the myriad functions of code-switching, such as clarification, emphasis, classroom management, and identity. The research illustrates how purposeful use of code-switching can aid student understanding, promote inclusivity, and connect home and school languages. However, the possible excessive use of the native language at the expense of immersion in the target language is also a point of concern. The findings suggest that code-switching, when employed purposively and not excessively, is an effective tool in bilingual education. The study contributes to what is known about language practice in multilingual classrooms and provides teaching staff with practical recommendations on how to reconcile code-switching with target language exposure.

**Key points:** Code-switching, bilingual education, language acquisition, classroom discourse, multilingualism, pedagogy.

### Introduction

Within multilingual societies, bilingual classrooms have become commonplace, especially in regions where pupils use a home language other than the most widely spoken official instruction language. Within those settings, code-switching—the alternation between two or more languages in a single conversation—has become an ingrained and often obligatory means of communication.

Rather than perceiving code-switching as a deficiency of linguistic competence, code-switching is an exercise of the sociolinguistic ability of bilinguals and serves useful functional and pedagogical roles in the classroom. It can be used by teachers to clarify complex ideas, explain new vocabulary, or manage classroom behavior, while students generally rely on it to show understanding, ask questions, or apply learning to situation. In spite of this, code-switching use in language acquisition is debatable. Whereas some scholars claim that it enhances comprehension and engagement, others are concerned that it reduces exposure to the target language and slows language development in the long term.



Picture.1

The following study seeks to examine these conflicting arguments through a focus on the code-switching frequency and uses in bilingual classroom settings. It is interested in teachers' and students' interaction, frequency and site of language alternation, and teachers' perceived benefits and drawbacks of the practice. Based on real classroom data and the voices of learners and teachers, this article will strive to find out if code-switching is a bridge or barrier in successful bilingual education. The research question central to this research is: How does code-switching affect communication, comprehension, and language development in classroom settings where students are bilingual? In posing this question, the research seeks to lend credence to the bilingual instruction debate and offer guidance on how professionals in language education can make suitable judgments in matters of language usage in multicultural learning environments.

## **Methods**

This study applied a qualitative study design to examine the role and impact of code-switching in bilingual classroom settings. Three bilingual schools in Uzbekistan's urban area were selected as sites where Uzbek and English were switched readily in lessons. Six language teachers and sixty 13- to 17-year-old students, all of whom had intermediate or higher proficiency in both Uzbek and English, were the participants. Data collection procedures involved classroom observations, semi-structured teacher interviews, and open-ended student questionnaires. Twelve sessions were tape-recorded over a period of four weeks, and field notes were written extensively to record instances of code-switching, including who switched, when, and why. Interviews with the teachers were planned with the intention of tapping into their notions about code-switching, how frequently it happened, and why they employed those languages in the classroom. Questionnaires for students focused on their perceptions regarding code-switching, i.e., if it helped or made it difficult for them in comprehension and language learning. Thematic analysis was applied to the qualitative data, which identified recurring themes and categories such as clarification, discipline, motivation, expression of identity, and academic help. The ethical codes were strictly followed: informed consent was obtained from all the volunteers and anonymity was ensured during the entire process. In addition, triangulation of data sources—observations, questionnaires, and interviews—was utilized to enhance comprehensiveness and accuracy of findings in the research. The use of this method facilitated an overall picture of the way code-switching operates in bilingual classrooms and how teachers as well as students perceive it. By an engagement with the mundane discursive activities of the classroom and the employment of multiple perspectives, the research aimed to produce rich accounts of the pedagogical impacts of bilingual language use and to inform best practice in teaching multilingual classrooms.

## **Results**

The observed data illustrate that code-switching is frequently and purposefully used in the bilingual classroom. Teachers preferred this strategy mainly to clarify difficult instructions, to illustrate abstract concepts, to translate hard vocabulary, to control student misbehaviors, and to provide classroom rapport. About 70% of the language alternations that occurred were during instructional delivery, especially when there was introduction of new material. The participating teachers all mentioned that the shift towards the first language, Uzbek, was a deliberate move towards facilitating their comprehension and keeping learners' attention. In interviews, the teachers further pointed out that code-switching filled linguistic gaps and made students much more at ease, especially the weaker groups in English. From the students' point of view, 82% of respondents to the questionnaires reported that code-switching to Uzbek at times was delightful because it made the lessons easier to understand and less stressful to learn. Many students admitted that they "did not feel lost" and were able to ask questions more boldly due to code-switching instances. However, both the teachers and the students acknowledged drawbacks: Some teachers reported that constant use of the native language could result in insufficient exposure to English for students, and hence, contribute to a slower process of acquiring new language structures. 18% of all participants said they would have welcomed sessions entirely in English so they could communicate more fluently and could even work more on listening. Notably, code-switching was also observed in the

interaction between students, for instance, in group discussions and activities, as a strategy to make thoughts easier to put into words in English. These observations suggest that code switching is a useful tool in assisting learning rather than indicating linguistic weakness. Balancing things, however. Proper code-switching is quite beneficial to bilingual education if used in a structured manner, but overuse may undo the effects of a full immersion program.



Picture.2

## Discussion

The findings of this current study provide rich evidence of the dynamic and complex role of code-switching in bilingual classrooms. Rather than hindering learning, code-switching in fact facilitates it by offering learners linguistic scaffolding and emotional support. The findings concur with previous studies suggesting that strategic code-switching facilitates understanding, validates new ideas, and enhances feelings of belonging in students who share a common first language. Pedagogically, code-switching appears to be especially helpful for beginners or intermediate level learners who may struggle to immerse themselves in the target language. The possible disadvantage—less exposure to English—cannot be ruled out. Overdependence on the first language may create insufficient time for students to immerse themselves completely in English and develop fluency, particularly in speaking and listening. Therefore, the question is not whether to code-switch or not, but when and how. Teachers need to learn when code-switching will serve learning and when it would be detrimental. Teachers should be trained in efficient bilingual teaching methods in professional development courses, including controlled and intentional use of more than one language. Moreover, the students can be increasingly dissuaded to speak the target language more heavily as they become more proficient. The interesting outcome of the study was that students themselves used code-switching as an interactive learning strategy, and that is testimony to the fact that it can even help peer scaffolding and classroom camaraderie. Last but not least, code-switching is not only a linguistic choice but a highly successful pedagogical tool when used judiciously. In multilingual schools where students are switching languages and cultures on a daily basis, code-switching reflects real communication and can help students transfer knowledge between languages. Additional research might explore long-term effects of code-switching on educational achievement or investigate its application in computer-mediated learning systems where language switching also occurs on a regular basis.

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