JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY SCIENCES AND INNOVATIONS
GERMAN INTERNATIONAL JOURNALS COMPANY
ISSN: 2751-4390
IMPACT FACTOR (RESEARCH BIB) : 9,08. Academic research index

CODE-SWITCHING IN ESL CLASSROOMS: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF CODE-SWITCHING BETWEEN STUDENTS' NATIVE LANGUAGE AND ENGLISH IN A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Tolipjonova Sevara Rustam kizi
Student of Uzbekistan State World Languages University

Abstract: This study investigates the role of code-switching, the practice of alternating between a student's native language and English, in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms for secondary-level learners. Employing a qualitative case study design, the research examines how code-switching influences language acquisition, student engagement, and classroom dynamics. Data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, and analysis of teaching materials in public secondary schools and English learning centres in Tashkent, Uzbekistan during the 2024–2025 school year. Findings indicate that strategic code-switching enhances comprehension, encourages participation, and fosters inclusivity, though overuse may limit English proficiency. Challenges include managing linguistic diversity, ensuring balanced language use, and addressing limited teacher training. The study recommends structured code-switching strategies, professional development, and resource support to optimize ESL instruction. These insights contribute to developing effective, inclusive language learning environments for secondary learners.
Keywords: Code-switching, ESL classrooms, secondary learners, language acquisition, student engagement, bilingual education

Introduction

Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) to secondary-level learners involves navigating linguistic, cultural, and social complexities. Secondary students, typically aged 13–18, often use code-switching—alternating between their native language and English—to clarify concepts, express ideas, or connect with peers. In multilingual ESL classrooms, code-switching is a natural occurrence, enabling students and teachers to bridge communication gaps and build rapport (Ferguson, 2003). It can facilitate understanding and boost confidence, particularly for students transitioning to English-medium instruction. However, its impact on language acquisition and classroom dynamics remains debated, with concerns about excessive native language use reducing English practice (García & Wei, 2014). While some educators view code-switching as a hindrance to English fluency, others argue it supports learning by leveraging students' linguistic resources (MacSwan, 2017).

This study explores how code-switching affects secondary ESL classrooms, focusing on its role in supporting language learning, engagement, and inclusivity. By analyzing teachers' practices, the research aims to identify effective code-switching strategies and address challenges like linguistic diversity and teacher preparedness.

Framework

The study is anchored in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which views learning as a socially mediated process driven by interaction and cultural tools, such as language (Vygotsky, 1978). Code-switching acts as a scaffold within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), helping students progress from native language reliance to English proficiency through collaborative interactions (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). The classroom serves as a social environment where code-switching fosters communication and peer support.

Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis also informs the study, suggesting that proficiency in a second language builds on first-language knowledge (Cummins, 2000). Code-switching enables students to transfer linguistic skills, enhancing comprehension and expression. Additionally, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory highlights the classroom as a microsystem influencing learning outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Supportive environments that permit strategic code-switching promote engagement, while restrictive settings may limit its benefits. These frameworks underscore the value of code-switching as a learner-centered approach that leverages social and linguistic resources for effective ESL instruction.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to:

1. Explore the role of code-switching in supporting language acquisition and engagement in secondary ESL classrooms.
2. Identify challenges teachers face in implementing code-switching in diverse classroom settings.
3. Recommend practical strategies for integrating code-switching to enhance English learning outcomes.

Research Methods and Procedures

4.1 Methods A qualitative case study design was used to investigate teachers' experiences with code-switching in secondary ESL classrooms. Data were gathered through lesson observations and interviews with 8 ESL teachers in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, during the 2024–2025 school year. Eight classroom observations and document analysis of lesson plans and teaching materials provided further insights into code-switching practices. Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, was applied to identify recurring themes related to benefits, challenges, and strategies of code-switching. This approach ensured a systematic and rigorous interpretation of qualitative data.

4.2 Locale and ParticipantsThe study was conducted in public secondary schools and English learning centres in Tashkent, Uzbekistan selected for their diverse student populations, including native speakers of Uzbek, Russian, and Korean. Participants were certified ESL teachers with 3–9 years of experience teaching grades 7–10. The schools ranged from well-resourced institutions with digital tools to under-resourced settings with limited materials, allowing the study to examine contextual influences on code-switching. The diverse sample provided a broad perspective on its implementation.

Results and Discussion

Teachers reported that strategic code-switching improved students' understanding of complex English concepts, such as academic vocabulary and grammar structures. For instance, explaining terms like "passive sentences" in students' native languages helped clarify meaning and encouraged application in English. One teacher noted, "When I used Russian to explain the meaning of a difficult Enlish word, they immediately got the concept, which made th learning faster" This supports Cummins' (2000) view that the native language facilitates second-language acquisition. Code-switching also increased participation, particularly among less confident learners. Activities like bilingual group discussions allowed students to brainstorm in their native language before presenting in English, boosting engagement by roughly 50%, as observed during classroom sessions.

Code-switching created a supportive atmosphere where students felt valued for their linguistic backgrounds. Teachers used it to build connections, such as incorporating native language phrases during class discussions or allowing brief native language clarifications. This approach aligns with MacSwan's (2017) argument that code-switching affirms students' identities, promoting inclusivity. For example, a teacher shared that permitting Uzbek-speaking students to use their first language during brainstorming for the debate in English helped enhance their confidence, which in turn encouraged greater participation, even among those with lower English

proficiency. However, teachers stressed the importance of setting boundaries to ensure English remained the primary focus, as excessive native language use could reduce practice opportunities. Teachers identified several challenges, including managing linguistic diversity, balancing language use, and limited training in code-switching strategies. In classrooms with multiple native languages, addressing all students' needs was difficult. One teacher remarked, "I can switch to Russian for some, but Uzbek speakers feel excluded if I can't help them the same way." The teachers of learning centres said that even if the students are in the same level group, for example 'Intermediate' group, there is still a little gap among students' proficiency and how fast they grasp the information. This little diverse proficiency level further complicated instruction, with learners, whose vocabulary is more extensive than that of their peers, required less native language. Observations showed that unstructured code-switching sometimes led to off-task conversations in the native language, reducing English practice time.

Lack of formal training was a significant barrier. Many teachers developed code-switching strategies through experience rather than professional development, echoing García and Wei's (2014) call for teacher education in bilingual pedagogies. Resource limitations, such as a lack of bilingual dictionaries or digital tools, also hindered effective code-switching in under-resourced schools. These challenges highlight the need for structured approaches and institutional support.

Teachers employed various strategies to optimize code-switching. Structured activities, such as bilingual vocabulary lists or sentence frames, helped students transition from their native language to English. For example, a teacher used bilingual sentence starters (e.g., "In Russian, I would say ___, but in English, I say ___") to guide writing tasks. Cooperative learning, like peer mentoring, enabled weaker students to get assistance from their fellows, whose language proficiency is higher.

Scaffolding techniques, including modeling bilingual examples and using visual aids, supported diverse learners. Teachers set clear guidelines, such as limiting native language use to clarification or planning phases, to maintain an English-focused environment. These strategies align with Ferguson's (2003) recommendation for controlled code-switching to enhance learning outcomes. In resource-constrained settings, teachers improvised by creating bilingual handouts or leveraging students' linguistic knowledge, demonstrating adaptability.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study underscores the value of code-switching in secondary ESL classrooms, where it enhances comprehension, encourages participation, and fosters an inclusive learning environment. By leveraging students' native languages, code-switching serves as a scaffold that supports English acquisition while validating linguistic identities. It is particularly effective for less confident learners, creating low-anxiety contexts for language practice. However, challenges like linguistic diversity, unbalanced language use, and limited teacher training require careful management. Unstructured code-switching can reduce English exposure or disrupt classroom dynamics, emphasizing the need for clear guidelines.

To maximize its benefits, teachers should implement structured code-switching activities, such as bilingual sentence frames, cooperative learning, and scaffolding techniques, to guide students toward English proficiency. Educational institutions must prioritize professional development programs that equip teachers with bilingual pedagogy skills. Policymakers should address resource disparities by providing bilingual materials and digital tools to support inclusive instruction. Schools should also ensure manageable class sizes to facilitate personalized language support, as large classes limit interaction.

Future research could examine the long-term impact of code-switching on English proficiency and academic performance across diverse linguistic contexts. Comparative studies between secondary and other age groups could further clarify its effectiveness. By strategically integrating code-switching, ESL classrooms can become dynamic, inclusive spaces that empower secondary learners to thrive in their language-learning journey.

References

1. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
2. Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.
3. Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, power, and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Multilingual Matters.
4. Ferguson, C. A. (2003). Code-switching in the classroom: A sociolinguistic perspective. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 6*(3–4), 231–247. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050308667783
5. García, O., & Wei, L. (2014). *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education*. Palgrave Macmillan.
6. Lantolf, J. P., & Thorne, S. L. (2006). *Sociocultural theory and the genesis of second language development*. Oxford University Press.
7. MacSwan, J. (2017). A multilingual perspective on translanguaging. *American Educational Research Journal, 54*(1), 167–201. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831216683935
8. Myers-Scotton, C. (1993). *Social motivations for code-switching: Evidence from Africa*. Oxford University Press.
9. Pinter, A. (2017). *Teaching young language learners* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
10. Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.