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Impact of Code-Switching on Syrian EFL Learners 'Performance in Classroom

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Abstract

The present study, applied to a sample of preparatory Syrian students, aimed at studying the use of code-switching for students' performance in the classroom and the reasons for using code-switching. Although code-switching has been widely examined in different educational contexts, there is still limited research addressing its impact on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Syria, especially at the preparatory stage. This lack of empirical evidence has created uncertainty among teachers and policymakers regarding whether code-switching hinders or enhances learning. Thus, the problem this study seeks

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to address is the absence of clear, context-specific findings on how code-switching influences Syrian students' academic performance and classroom experiences. This experimental study adopts a mixed-methods design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches, using three data collection instruments: tests (pre- and post-), a questionnaire, and interviews. Sixty students participated; they were at eighth grade at preparatory schools in the second semester of the academic year 2024–2025. They were divided into two equal groups: the experimental and the control. The analysis of the data showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in vocabulary learning, reading comprehension, grammar use, and writing development. It also showed that overcrowded classrooms and time constraints were the main difficulties the participants encountered. However, code-switching was fruitful, as it helped the participants to have better results in their tests. In addition, the results showed that limited code-switching was very important. Moreover, teachers pointed out that they use code-switching to ensure clarity, particularly when introducing new vocabularies and grammar rules. They also use it to manage classrooms and support students' emotional comfort. Code-switching helped students better understand English lessons, reduce confusion, and participate more confidently.

Keywords: code-switching, clarity, grammar use, reading comprehension, students' performance

"أثر التبديل اللغوي على أداء متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية لغةً أجنبيةً السوريين في الفصل الدراسي"

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المستخلص

هدفت الدراسة الحالية، المطبقة على عينة من الطلاب السوريين في المدارس الإعدادية، إلى دراسة استخدام التبديل اللغوي لأداء الطلاب في الفصل الدراسي وأسباب استخدام التبديل اللغوي. على الرغم من أن التبديل اللغوي قد تم فحصه على نطاق واسع في سياقات تعليمية مختلفة، إلا أنه لا تزال هناك أبحاث محدودة تتناول تأثيره على متعلمي

اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL) في سوريا، وخاصة في المرحلة التحضيرية. وقد أدى هذا النقص في الأدلة التجريبية إلى خلق حالة من عدم اليقين بين المعلمين وصانعي السياسات بشأن ما إذا كان تبديل التبدل اللغوي يعيق التعلم أو يعززه. وبالتالي، فإن المشكلة التي تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى معالجتها هي غياب نتائج واضحة ومحددة السياق حول كيفية تأثير التبدل اللغوي على الأداء الأكاديمي للطلاب السوريين وتجاربهم في الفصول الدراسية. تعتمد هذه الدراسة التجريبية تصميمًا مختلط الأساليب، يدمج كلا من الأساليب الكمية والنوعية، باستخدام ثلاث أدوات لجمع البيانات: الاختبارات (قبل وبعد)، والاستبيان، والمقابلات. شارك ستون طالبًا؛ وكانوا في الصف الثامن بالمدارس الإعدادية في الفصل الدراسي الثاني من العام الدراسي 2024-2025. وقد تم تقسيمهم إلى مجموعتين متساويتين: المجموعة التجريبية والمجموعة الضابطة. وأظهر تحليل البيانات أن المجموعة التجريبية تفوقت على المجموعة الضابطة في اكتساب المفردات، وفهم القراءة، واستخدام القواعد، وتطوير الكتابة. وأظهرت الدراسة أيضًا أن الفصول الدراسية المزدهمة والقيود الزمنية كانت الصعوبات الرئيسية التي واجهها المشاركون. ومع ذلك، كان التبدل اللغوي مثمرًا، لأنه ساعد المشاركين على الحصول على نتائج أفضل في اختباراتهم. وبالإضافة إلى ذلك، أظهرت النتائج أن التبدل المحدود للرموز كان مهمًا جدًا. علاوة على ذلك، أشار المعلمون إلى أنهم يستخدمون التبدل اللغوي لضمان الوضوح، خاصة عند إدخال مفردات وقواعد نحوية جديدة. ويستخدمونها أيضًا لإدارة الفصول الدراسية ودعم الراحة العاطفية للطلاب. ساعد التبدل اللغوي الطلاب على فهم دروس اللغة الإنجليزية بشكل أفضل وتقليل الارتباك والمشاركة بثقة أكبر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تبديل لغوي، الوضوح، استخدام القواعد، فهم القراءة، أداء الطلاب.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

In multilingual and conflict-affected regions such as Syria, the challenges of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) are amplified by systemic disruptions, resource shortages, and linguistic barriers. Students in Syrian preparatory schools often experience inconsistent access to education, a lack of qualified English teachers, and minimal exposure to English beyond the classroom (Rajab, 2013; Meygle, 1997). These challenges contribute to a learning environment in which comprehension of English content is frequently hindered, particularly when instruction relies solely on the target language.

One widespread pedagogical strategy that has emerged in response is code-switching—the deliberate alternation between two languages, typically the learners' first language (L1), Arabic, and the second language (L2), English, within a single discourse (Gumperz, 1982; Poplack, 1980). In the classroom, teachers often shift to Arabic to clarify difficult vocabulary, explain grammatical rules, manage classroom behavior, or engage with students more effectively. While such switching may be spontaneous, it is often driven by practical instructional needs.

In the broader academic context, the use of code-switching in EFL classrooms is a topic of considerable debate. Some researchers (Krashen, 1985; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002) argue that code-switching can impede immersion and reduce learners' exposure to authentic language input, thereby limiting second-language acquisition. However, an increasing number of studies (Cook, 2001; Nation, 2014; Sert, 2005) suggest that, when applied strategically, code-switching can enhance learner understanding, foster confidence, and reduce cognitive load.

For learners in Syria—many of whom are grappling with the compounded effects of conflict, trauma, and interrupted schooling—code-switching may serve not only as a linguistic tool but also as a bridge to access and retain knowledge. Teachers report using Arabic to scaffold meaning, maintain engagement, and compensate for gaps in English exposure (Macaro, 2005; Afzal, 2019). In these contexts, the goal is not to replace English with Arabic, but to use Arabic as a support mechanism to facilitate a deeper understanding of English.

Despite its widespread use in Syrian classrooms, code-switching remains under-researched in local EFL pedagogy. While its cognitive, affective, and social benefits are increasingly acknowledged globally (Auer, 1998; Cummins, 1981), there is a critical need for context-specific evidence in post-conflict and under-resourced environments like Syria. This study seeks to address that gap by systematically examining how code-switching affects student performance and exploring why teachers continue to rely on it in their day-to-day instructional practices

1.2 Statement of the Problem

English language learners in preparatory schools across Syria face significant academic challenges due to a range of contextual factors, including the prolonged conflict, limited access to trained teachers, scarce educational resources, and a curriculum heavily grounded in traditional grammar-translation methods (Rajab, 2013; Meygle, 1997). These factors have contributed to weak student performance in English, particularly in areas such as vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, writing and grammar use.

To cope with these challenges, many Syrian EFL teachers resort to code-switching—the practice of alternating between Arabic and English during instruction—as a way to simplify complex content, clarify grammar rules, and ensure student comprehension (Macaro, 2005; Nation, 2014). In classrooms where students have minimal exposure to English outside of school, code-switching often becomes an essential tool for bridging linguistic gaps and sustaining classroom engagement (Sert, 2005).

Despite its practical value in daily instruction, code-switching remains a contested practice within language education. Critics argue that it may limit students' exposure to the target language and delay their development of full communicative competence in English (Krashen, 1985; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002). Others, however, suggest that in multilingual or under-resourced contexts, it offers a viable support mechanism to facilitate second language acquisition, especially among beginners (Cook, 2001; Cummins, 1981).

While the global debate continues, there remains a notable lack of empirical data concerning the use and effectiveness of code-switching in Syrian preparatory schools. Teachers tend to rely on personal judgment rather than data-informed strategies when switching between Arabic and English. Consequently, the pedagogical impact of code-switching on student performance has not yet to be clearly established in this region.

Research Questions

This study addresses this gap by examining two central questions:

1. Do learners who are exposed to code-switching in English language instruction outperform those who are not exposed to in preparatory schools?
2. What are the reasons for using code-switching in English language instruction at preparatory schools in Syria?

Research Objectives

The two objectives of this study are:

1. To test the hypothesis that learners in the experimental group who are exposed to code-switching in English classes outperform those in the control group who are not exposed to code-switching at preparatory schools in Syria.
2. To investigate the reasons for using code-switching at preparatory schools in Syria.

In doing so, the research aims to provide evidence-based insights that can inform both classroom practice and policy-making in linguistically complex and conflict-affected environments.

2. Literature Review

Code-switching is “the alternation of two languages within a single discourse, sentence or constituent” (Poplack, 1980, p.583). Code-switching is “the use of two (or more) languages in the same conversation, usually within the same utterance” (Myers-Scotton, 1993,p.47).

Code-switching is grounded in several key theoretical frameworks across sociolinguistics and applied linguistics. The Communicative Language Teaching approach emphasizes the importance of using language in meaningful and practical contexts, prioritizing fluency and the ability to communicate effectively over strict grammatical accuracy. Within this framework, code-switching is understood as a natural part of bilingual communication and a functional strategy that learners may use to maintain interaction, express ideas more clearly, or seek clarification (Littlewood, 2004; Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory further justifies the use of code-switching as a mediational tool within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), suggesting that strategic use of the L1 can scaffold learning and promote deeper understanding when students encounter difficult L2 material. The ZPD refers to the gap between what a learner can accomplish independently and what they can achieve with guidance or support. In

classroom contexts, this support often comes in the form of instructional scaffolding, where teachers provide temporary assistance to help students access new knowledge.

Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis focuses on the emotional and psychological factors that influence language learning. According to this theory, learners are more successful when they feel confident, relaxed, and motivated. In contrast, anxiety, fear of failure, or lack of motivation can create a mental "filter" that blocks language input and hinders learning. Code-switching can help reduce this affective barrier by making the classroom environment more inclusive and supportive. When teachers use the native language strategically—for example, to reassure students, clarify difficult content, or encourage participation—they help learners feel more at ease, which in turn enhances their willingness to engage and their ability to absorb new information (Krashen, 1985; Macaro, 2005).

This study is grounded in three key theoretical perspectives: the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, and Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. CLT emphasizes the functional use of language in authentic contexts, supporting the strategic use of code-switching to enhance communicative competence and learner participation in EFL classrooms (Littlewood, 2004). Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory highlights the centrality of social interaction and scaffolding in language development, framing code-switching as a mediational tool that facilitates learners' cognitive growth through interaction in both the first and second languages (Vygotsky, 1978; Swain et al., 2015). Additionally, Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis suggests that emotional variables such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence influence language acquisition; by lowering anxiety and increasing comprehension, code-switching can help reduce the affective filter and create a more conducive environment for language learning (Krashen, 1982). Together, these frameworks offer a comprehensive lens through which to examine the pedagogical, cognitive, and emotional dimensions of code-switching in the EFL context of Syria

2.2 Types and Forms of Code-Switching

Poplack (1980) classifies code-switching into three major types:

1. Intra-sentential code-switching: switching languages within a single sentence.

Example: You should underline the main **فكرة** in each paragraph".

Intra-sentential code-switching is often used spontaneously and naturally by both teachers and students, especially when one term from the first language expresses an idea more quickly or precisely. While it can enhance comprehension, overuse may hinder students from attempting to find the English equivalent or may reduce their exposure to key vocabulary in the target language.

2. Inter-Sentential Code-Switching

This type involves switching from one language to another between complete sentences or clauses.

Example: “We will revise the grammar rule”. لأنو مهم كتير للامتحان.

This is the most observable and commonly used form in formal teaching contexts, especially when transitioning between explanations and instructions. It allows teachers to provide scaffolding, clarify instructions, or shift between languages to maintain classroom control or reinforce understanding without breaking the grammatical integrity of the languages used.

3.Tag-switching: inserting a tag phrase or discourse marker from another language

Example: “You understand the rule”؟صح

Tag-switching is a subtle yet frequent form of code-switching in bilingual classrooms. It often serves discursive or social functions—such as checking understanding, softening commands, or expressing politeness. In the Syrian EFL context, using such expressions can strengthen teacher-student rapport, foster a positive emotional tone, and make classroom discourse feel more inclusive and culturally relevant.

Each type serves a distinct function, from clarification and emphasis to ease of expression, particularly in educational settings where learners navigate two linguistic systems simultaneously.

2.3 Previous studies

A growing body of research has examined code-switching in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms across diverse contexts, exploring its pedagogical functions, learner perceptions, and effects on academic outcomes. These studies provide a valuable backdrop for the present investigation, as they highlight both the benefits and limitations of L1 use in language learning. Presented below is a chronological overview of key empirical works that have shaped current understanding of code-switching and its role in EFL instruction.

Macaro (2009) conducted a quantitative experimental study involving 159 Chinese EFL learners, dividing them into randomized groups to test the effects of L1 glosses versus English paraphrases during reading tasks. His findings suggested that the use of L1 equivalents did not hinder vocabulary retention—in fact, it eased cognitive load and enhanced long-term learning, thereby challenging the monolingual principle often adopted in language classrooms.

Sheridan and Markslase (2017), adopting a mixed-methods approach, examined EFL learners in group-based classroom settings. Their study found that L1 usage encouraged deeper peer collaboration and improved engagement during tasks. The research emphasized the social and interactive roles of code-switching within group dynamics, although it did not specifically assess the impact on measurable learning outcomes.

Afzal (2019) explored how code-switching impacts Pakistani EFL learners, using a quantitative or mixed-methods design based on classroom observations and surveys. The study concluded that strategic use of L1 not only supported comprehension but also significantly reduced learner anxiety and improved classroom participation, especially among low-proficiency students.

In a broader synthesis, Lee and Macaro (2013) reviewed nine empirical studies on code-switching instruction (CSI). Their analysis revealed that eight of the studies reported stronger immediate post-test outcomes for learners exposed to CSI compared with those taught exclusively through the target language. This suggests that incorporating the first language, when done purposefully, can offer short-term cognitive and performance advantages. However, the synthesis also indicated that such benefits often diminished over time, particularly in delayed retention assessments, raising important questions about the long-term efficacy of CSI.

More recent studies have been conducted in Middle Eastern and other international contexts. Juma'a (2023) applied a mixed-methods approach using surveys and interviews across two Iraqi universities. The results showed that instructors used code-switching purposefully to maintain student interest, lower anxiety, and enhance understanding, highlighting its value as a supportive instructional tool.

Similarly, Daqiq, Akramy, and Wajed (2023) carried out a mixed-methods investigation at Takhar University in Afghanistan, exploring the underlying causes of code-switching among twenty bilingual EFL learners through semi-structured interviews and surveys. The study revealed that limited English proficiency and the desire to ensure mutual understanding were primary drivers of L1 use. While this aligns with the pragmatic use of code-switching observed in Syrian classrooms, their study emphasized learner perceptions and causes rather than examining pedagogical effects on academic performance, which constitutes the central focus of the current research.

In the Mexican context, Galván de la Fuente (2023) conducted a qualitative case study in a university setting, focusing on nine intermediate-level EFL students observed across two classroom sessions. Using conversation analysis and ethnographic observation, the study categorized code-switching functions into reiteration, equivalence, floor-holding, and socialization. These findings emphasized the interactive and communicative functions of L1 use in monolingual learning environments. Although this study provided a detailed account of code-switching in learner discourse, its narrow focus on discourse patterns did not extend to evaluating cognitive or academic gains.

In Turkey, Erdem (2024) conducted a large-scale mixed-methods study involving 138 students and six instructors. Utilizing Likert-scale questionnaires and open-ended survey items, the study found largely positive attitudes toward code-switching among both learners and teachers. Notably, differences in perception were significantly influenced by proficiency level. While this study contributes valuable insight into how code-switching is

received and justified in classroom discourse, it did not explore how such practices influence measurable learning outcomes.

In Iraq, Al Abdali (2024) conducted a qualitative case study involving classroom observations and interviews with eight teachers and twenty students at the intermediate school level. The findings revealed that code-switching was frequently used to explain difficult vocabulary, clarify grammar rules, and manage class interaction—contributing to improved learner comprehension and engagement.

Finally, a case study titled *Functions of Code-Switching* utilized a mixed-methods design, combining questionnaires and teacher interviews to examine the pedagogical reasons behind switching to the L1 in EFL instruction. This study found that both students and teachers used code-switching for clarification, classroom management, and emotional support, confirming its functional versatility in multilingual classrooms.

Collectively, these studies underscore the growing interest in contextually grounded examinations of code-switching. However, they also highlight a common limitation: the absence of performance-based outcomes tied to the pedagogical use of L1. The current research addresses this gap by employing a mixed-methods design that investigates both the reasons for code-switching and its effects on learners' academic achievements within the specific context of preparatory schools in Northwest Syria.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-method research design to investigate the impact of code-switching on EFL learners' performance in preparatory schools in Northwest Syria. It involved both quantitative and qualitative data collection from students and teachers using tests, questionnaires, and interviews. Key aspects such as participant selection, data collection procedures, ethical considerations, limitations, and methods of analysis are detailed below.

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods, experimental research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This design allows the researcher to analyze not only the statistical impact of code-switching on students' performance but also the perceptions and experiences of those directly involved in the teaching and learning process (Creswell, 2014). The use of both methods enhances the reliability and richness of the data by triangulating findings from different sources (Dörnyei, 2007).

Quantitative data were gathered through pre- and post-tests to compare the academic outcomes of two student groups: one exposed to code-switching and the other taught in English only. Qualitative insights were derived from structured questionnaire with experiment group participants and semi-structured interviews with teachers and students, offering a deeper understanding of attitudes and teaching practices.

3.2 Participants

The study included 60 students from the eighth grade in two preparatory schools in Syria. Participants were selected randomly from class rosters to ensure unbiased representation and to strengthen the validity of the findings (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). The students were then divided into two equal groups:

Experimental Group (30 students): Received instruction in English with occasional, purposeful code-switching into Arabic.

Control Group (30 students): Received instruction exclusively in English with no code-switching permitted.

To supplement the student data, six English language teachers were selected purposefully based on their experience and relevance to the study's aims. Purposeful sampling is recommended when the goal is to select information-rich cases that best illuminate the research objectives. These teachers had a minimum of five years of teaching experience and represented diverse instructional backgrounds.

Additionally, six students were chosen purposefully for in-depth interviews. These students were selected based on their varying academic performances (high, medium, low) to ensure a balanced representation of learner perspectives .

3.3 Instruments

Multiple data collection instruments were used to gather comprehensive evidence:

Pre-Test and Post-Test: These tests measured vocabulary acquisition, writing development, grammar use and reading comprehension and were based on the national curriculum. They were carefully designed to be equivalent in difficulty and validity .

Structured Questionnaire: Administered to all students in the experiment group, the questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale to assess attitudes toward code-switching and included two open-ended questions to gather qualitative responses .

Interviews: Conducted with six teachers and six students, the interviews explored when and why teachers use code-switching, the role of code-switching, the students ' attitudes toward code-switching and emotional responses to language instruction. Interviews are ideal for uncovering nuanced insights in educational research .

3.4 Procedures

The study took place over eight weeks. During this time, both groups followed the same English curriculum and lesson plans, with one key instructional difference: the experimental group was taught using English and occasional Arabic, while the control group was taught exclusively in English.

Three training sections were done for English teachers about code-switching and how it should be used correctly.

Pre-tests were administered in the first week to establish baseline proficiency. Instruction then proceeded for six weeks. During the sixth week students completed the questionnaire. In the final week, post-tests were conducted, and interviews were held in quiet, private settings to promote honest, detailed responses.

3.5 Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the sample is limited to preparatory schools in Syria, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to other regions or educational contexts. Second, time constraints restricted the depth of classroom observations and interviews. Third, the study did not include a comparative analysis of male and female students, which could have provided deeper insights into potential gender-based differences in the impact of code-switching.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted with strict adherence to ethical standards, ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality of all participants. Given the cultural context of Syria, particular attention was paid to respecting local norms, gender sensitivities, and school protocols during data collection. Ethical approval was obtained prior to conducting the research, and all interactions were carried out with cultural appropriateness to avoid discomfort or misinterpretation. Compared to research conducted in more liberal educational settings, this study required a heightened sensitivity to sociocultural expectations

3.7 Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the pre- and post-tests and the structured questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS in the first research question. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare performance between the two groups, while paired samples t-tests measured within-group gains. Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions provided additional insight into students' perceptions.

Qualitative data from the open-ended questionnaire responses and interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis in the second research question. This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of participant perspectives and ensured that their voices were meaningfully integrated into the findings.

The pre-test participants' scores were collected, reported and examined critically using the T-test program. Both Grp1 and 2 did the pre-test. The mean scores were listed in tables to study. Table 1 below shows a comparison between Grp1 and Grp2 in the pre-test.

Table 1: The mean scores of Grp1 and 2 in the pre-test.

| Grp | Number | Mean | Mean Difference | Std. Deviation | t-value | Sig. |
|------|--------|--------|-----------------|----------------|---------|--------|
| Grp1 | 30 | 4.8333 | 0.5 | 1.85850 | 1.128 | 0.2638 |
| Grp2 | 30 | 5.3333 | | 1.56102 | | |

Table 1 above points out that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups. Calculating the t-value, the significance (0.2638) was above 0.05, indicating no significant difference between the two groups. This means that the levels of the two groups in English were similar, which was considered a good starting point for the two groups in the treatment.

Both Group 1 and Group 2 underwent the post-test, and their respective scores were consolidated into a single table for convenient comparison. The participants' scores were collected and studied critically using the T-test program. Table 2 below presents a comparative analysis of the entire Grp 1 and Grp 2 in the post-test.

Table 2: The Mean Scores of Grp1 and 2 in the Post-test.

| Grp | Number | Mean | Mean Difference | Std. Deviation | t-value | Sig. |
|------|--------|---------|-----------------|----------------|---------|-------|
| Grp1 | 30 | 18.0333 | 11.233 | 0.40651 | 27.634 | 0.000 |
| Grp2 | 30 | 6.8000 | | 0.40651 | | |

The table above illustrates a distinct and statistically significant difference between the two groups in the post-test; the mean difference was high (11.233). With a significance value of 0.00 (under 0.05), it indicates a remarkable difference between the two groups.

Additional comparisons between the scores of each group in the pre-test and the post-test can be conducted to ascertain the actual progress or development of the groups over time,

using code-switching. Initially, Table 3 presents the outcomes for Grp 1, offering insights into their tangible development throughout the study.

Table 3: The Mean Scores of Grp1 in the Pre-test and the Post-test.

| Test | Number | Mean | Mean Difference | Std. Deviation | t-value | Sig. |
|------|--------|---------|-----------------|----------------|---------|------|
| Pre | 30 | 4.8333 | 13.2 | 1.85850 | 37.675 | 0.03 |
| Post | 30 | 18.0333 | | 1.60781 | | |

A substantial difference between the pre-test and post-test results in Grp 1 was observed, with a significance value of 0.03, indicating a noteworthy distinction between the two assessments. This signifies the genuine development of participants in vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, writing, grammar use, with an improvement of approximately 13 points.

Conversely, Group 2 did not exhibit a significant development in comparing the pre-test and post-test results, as stated in Table 4 below.

Table 4: The Mean Scores of Grp 2 in the Pre-test and the Post-test.

| Test | Number | Mean | Mean Difference | Std. Deviation | t-value | Sig. |
|------|--------|--------|-----------------|----------------|---------|--------|
| Pre | 30 | 5.3333 | 1.46 | 1.56102 | 6.151 | 0.0001 |
| Post | 30 | 6.8000 | | 1.54026 | | |

As indicated in Table 4, a substantial difference between the pre-test and post-test scores was evident for Grp 2, signifying development in participants' performance. However, Grp 1 significantly outperformed Grp 2. While the two groups demonstrated similarity in the pre-test, Grp 1 showcased a more remarkable advancement of approximately 13 points in the post-test, compared to Grp 2's development of only about 2 points. This implies that Grp 1 is more than doubles ahead of Grp 2 in terms of improvement.

In summary, addressing the first research objective, using code-switching proved advantageous in fostering the development of performance among participants. Those who incorporated code-switching in their learning process attained higher scores compared to those who did not use code-switching.

The findings from both the questionnaire and interviews indicate a strong, consistent preference among students and teachers for the use of code-switching in EFL classrooms in Syria. The questionnaire, completed by students, revealed overwhelmingly positive perceptions across eleven closed-ended items. Students reported that code-switching significantly enhanced their enjoyment, understanding, confidence, motivation,

concentration, and classroom participation. Notably, 100% of students rejected the idea of removing code-switching from lessons, and the majority agreed that using Arabic alongside English helped alleviate cognitive strain and improved overall engagement.

Open-ended responses identified overcrowded classrooms and tight instructional time as key challenges that limit the effectiveness of code-switching, despite its benefits. Many students suggested that teachers plan its use more systematically—especially for difficult or abstract content.

Teacher interviews echoed these findings. All six EFL teachers reported using code-switching as a strategic instructional tool, particularly for clarifying grammar, vocabulary, and exam instructions. Teachers emphasized that CS improved comprehension, reduced anxiety, and encouraged participation, especially among low-proficiency learners. They also acknowledged its emotional benefits, describing CS as a tool for building rapport and managing classroom behavior.

While both students and teachers recognized potential drawbacks—such as reduced language immersion or over-reliance on Arabic—they agreed that when used judiciously, code-switching serves as a powerful scaffold that supports learning. Interviewed students similarly highlighted how code-switching improved clarity and reduced fear, with most expressing a desire for its continued use.

Overall, the data clearly support the pedagogical value of code-switching in Syrian preparatory schools, especially when tailored to students' needs and classroom realities.

3.8 Summary of Findings

This study demonstrated a significant improvement in English language performance among preparatory school students who were exposed to code-switching techniques during English language instruction. The analysis of the data collected from tests, questionnaire and interviews yielded meaningful insights aligned with the objectives of the study. Participants in the experiment group, who were taught with strategic code-switching between English and Arabic, outperformed those in the control group in vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, writing development and grammar understanding. The mean post-test scores for the experimental group showed a statistically notable improvement, supporting the positive role of code-switching in language learning.

A closer analysis of questionnaire responses revealed that most students held favorable views about the use of Arabic in English classes. They reported that code-switching helped them better understand lessons, reduce confusion, and participate more confidently. While some concerns were noted—such as the risk of over-reliance on the native language and large classroom sizes—these were outweighed by the perceived educational benefits. In short, the following findings can be concluded:

1. Code-switching is an effective instructional strategy for enhancing vocabulary, grammar use, writing and reading comprehension in EFL learners

2. Students benefit from the occasional use of their native language to clarify complex concepts and reduce language anxiety.
3. The use of Arabic as a support tool fosters student engagement, confidence, and participation.
4. Teachers use code-switching purposefully to manage classrooms, explain difficult instructions, and support students' emotional comfort.
5. Overcrowded classrooms and limited instructional time were identified as key challenges during the implementation of code-switching.
6. Despite these challenges, students demonstrated increased motivation and improved learning outcomes when taught through bilingual strategies.
7. Strategic code-switching helps bridge gaps in learner understanding without hindering overall English proficiency.
8. Encouraging reflective awareness of L1 use can help learners transition toward more independent use of English over time.

In summary, the findings suggest that code-switching had a positive impact on students' academic performance and classroom experiences. The feedback from both learners and teachers supports integrating this technique into EFL teaching practices, especially in multilingual and resource-constrained contexts like Syria.

4. Conclusions

This study sought to investigate the impact and role of code-switching in English language instruction at preparatory schools in Syria. Drawing on data from both student questionnaires and teacher–student interviews, the findings provide robust insights into learners' academic experiences and instructional practices involving code-switching.

1. Do learners who are exposed to code-switching perform better than those who are not?

Based on the data collected, it is evident that learners exposed to code-switching demonstrated a significantly more positive attitude toward English learning and, by implication, improved academic performance. The questionnaire responses revealed that the majority of students (over 90% in some items) believed that code-switching enhanced their understanding, enjoyment, focus, and participation during English lessons. Similarly, interviews with both teachers and students confirmed that the strategic use of Arabic alongside English facilitated clarity of instruction, lowered anxiety, and boosted confidence, particularly when dealing with complex vocabulary or abstract grammatical structures.

These findings align with previous studies emphasizing the cognitive and affective benefits of code-switching in multilingual classrooms (Ahmad & Jusoff, 2009; Alshammari, 2011).

In this study, the contrast between the experimental and control groups further highlighted that code-switching helped bridge gaps in comprehension, enabling learners to engage more fully with lesson content and classroom activities. Therefore, it can be concluded that learners who are exposed to code-switching are more likely to perform better than those who are not, especially at the beginner and intermediate levels.

2. What are the reasons for using code-switching in English language instruction at preparatory schools in Syria?

The study identified multiple pedagogical and contextual reasons for the frequent use of code-switching by teachers in Syria. First and foremost, clarity and comprehension emerged as the primary motivations. Teachers reported switching to Arabic when introducing new topics, explaining abstract ideas, or clarifying instructions—especially during grammar lessons or reading tasks. Code-switching was also used to facilitate classroom management, deliver feedback, and ensure students understood exam instructions accurately.

Another major reason was emotional and psychological support. Teachers and students alike described how code-switching reduced classroom anxiety, built rapport, and increased students' willingness to participate. In emotionally demanding contexts such as overcrowded classrooms or under-resourced schools, code-switching served as a cultural and linguistic bridge that made students feel more secure and included.

Additionally, time efficiency was frequently cited. Teachers noted that quick switches into Arabic saved time by avoiding prolonged or unclear explanations in English. This was particularly important in the Syrian context, where time constraints and curriculum pressure limit the flexibility of classroom instruction

4.1 Educational Implications

The identified implications drawn from the findings aim to support EFL learners in their progression toward improved English language proficiency. Educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers can apply these implications to enhance teaching effectiveness and student engagement in multilingual classroom settings.

1. The use of code-switching in EFL instruction should not be viewed as a hindrance to language acquisition, but as a supportive and effective pedagogical tool, especially in contexts where learners share a common native language
2. Strategic use of the learners' first language (Arabic) can help store and consolidate new vocabulary and grammar structures, making it easier for students to retrieve and apply them in real-life communication.
3. Code-switching reduces learner anxiety and increases classroom participation by creating a more inclusive and emotionally secure learning environment, particularly for students with low confidence in their English skills.

4 .Teachers can use code-switching to clarify complex instructions, build rapport with students, and manage classroom behavior—factors that contribute to more effective and responsive teaching.

5 .Code-switching serves as a scaffolding strategy that helps learners bridge the gap between known (L1) and new (L2) concepts, gradually encouraging autonomy in English usage as students become more proficient.

6 .These implications support the development of context-sensitive, bilingual approaches in curriculum and teacher training programs, particularly in conflict-affected or linguistically homogeneous regions like Syria.

4.2 Suggestions for Further Research

The current study explored the impact of code-switching on EFL learners' academic performance and the pedagogical motivations behind its use. While the findings provided valuable insights, the researcher suggests the following points for further investigation within similar educational and sociolinguistic contexts in Syria:

1 .This study was conducted over a relatively short period. Future researchers are encouraged to conduct longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of code-switching on language proficiency, fluency, and communicative competence.

2 .The current research included both male and female students without focusing on gender-based differences. Future studies could examine whether gender influences students' responses to code-switching, particularly regarding motivation, anxiety, and classroom participation.

3 .The study focused on vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension, writing development. Researchers may wish to explore the effect of code-switching on other language skills, such as speaking, and listening, to build a more comprehensive understanding of its benefits and limitations.

4 .With the increasing integration of technology into education, it would be useful to investigate how code-switching is practiced and perceived in online or blended learning environments, especially in resource-limited areas affected by displacement and conflict.

5 .This study worked with mainstream preparatory school students. Future research might focus on the impact of code-switching for learners with special educational needs, including those with language learning difficulties or trauma-related challenges due to regional instability.

6 .Since this research was limited to a specific region in Syria, comparative studies between urban and rural schools, or between different governorates, could provide insights into how contextual, cultural, and institutional factors influence code-switching practices and their effectiveness.

Appendixes

Appendix A: The pre-and post-test

Idlib University/ Applied Linguistics / A pre-and post-test

A research project entitled: “Impact of Code-Switching on EFL Learners’ Performance at Preparatory Schools in Syria”

I. Read the text then do the following:

Syria has always been a centre where East and West meet. It is no wonder that this country has flourished throughout history. Shahba, also known as Philippopolis, is one of the last ancient cities founded in the South of Syria during the Roman Empire. It was named after Philip the Arab who was the Emperor of Rome. Because Shahba was the emperor's birthplace, it was built as a smaller copy of ancient Rome. Visitors today will still find some of the old town's remains intact. And if you are interested in the arts, you must visit the Shahba Museum where you can see magnificent mosaics. The Shahba mosaics are so beautiful that some of them are also displayed in the National Museum in Damascus.

II. Write (True) or (False):(3ms)

1. Syria has always been a centre where East and West meet.
2. Philippopolis was named after Philip the Arab.
3. Rome was the birthplace of the emperor Philip.

III. Choose the correct answer:(3 ms)

4. Shahba is in the of Syria.
 - a. East
 - b. South
 - c. West
5. Shahba was built as a smaller copy of
 - a. modern Rome
 - b. ancient Rome
 - c. ancient Greece
6. Some of the Shahba mosaics are displayed in in Damascus.
 - a. International Museum
 - b. the theatre
 - c. National Museum

IV. Match the following words with their definitions. (one word extra)(3 ms)

7. Flourish **A.** Show to the public
8. Mosaics **B.** To grow well and in a productive manner

| No | Statement | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Teacher’s use of code-switching helps me to enjoy the lesson. | | | | | |
| 2 | Teacher’s use of code-switching helps me to understand the lesson better. | | | | | |
| 3 | Teacher’s use of code-switching makes me feel more confident in learning English | | | | | |
| 4 | Teacher’s use of code-switching makes me feel more motivated in learning English | | | | | |
| 5 | Teacher’s use of code-switching enables me to focus on the lesson without worrying about unfamiliar words and sentences. | | | | | |
| 6 | Teacher’s use of code-switching encourages me to actively participate in classroom activities | | | | | |
| 7 | I would prefer the teacher not to use code-switching during lessons and not to use my first language. | | | | | |
| 8 | I would prefer the teacher to minimize the use of code-switching during lessons. | | | | | |
| 9 | I would prefer the teacher to use code-switching during lessons. | | | | | |
| 10 | I don’t like when the teacher uses code-switching during English lessons. | | | | | |

11. What are the main difficulties you encountered using cards?

.....

12. Please add anything you would like concerning this technique.

.....

Appendix C: Interview questions with the teachers

1. Do you use code switching in your classrooms? Why and When?
2. In what specific moments do you use code switching while teaching?
3. How does CS affect teaching and learning process?
4. What are the factors which you consider when using CS during English lessons?
5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of utilizing CS in EFL classrooms?
6. Could you please explain in detail why your code switching contributes to or hinders learners’ EFL learning?

7. According to your experience which code would you maintain your Ss' interest and keep the lesson more enjoyable, and why?

Appendix D: Interview questions with students

1. Does your teacher's use of Arabic alongside English help you understand the lesson better? Can you give an example?
2. Do you feel more confident and motivated to learn English when the teacher uses both languages? Why or why not?
3. Does the use of Arabic in class help you participate more in classroom activities? In what way?
4. Do you find it difficult to concentrate or learn when the teacher uses only English without any Arabic? Please explain.
5. Would you prefer your teacher to continue using both Arabic and English in lessons? Why?

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