

Original Article | **Open Access** | Peer Reviewed



Instructor's Use of Code-Switching in ESP classrooms at the College of Business Studies in Kuwait

Nour Haidar Haidar, MA¹

¹The College of Business Studies at The Public Authority for Applied Education and Training in Kuwait; nh.haidar@paaet.edu.kw.

Copyright and Permission:

© 2024. The Author(s). This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), which permits sharing, adapting, and building upon this work, provided appropriate credit is given to the original author(s). For full license details, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Address for Correspondence:

Nour Haidar Haidar, The College of Business Studies at The Public Authority for Applied Education and Training in Kuwait. (nh.haidar@paaet.edu.kw)

Article History:

Received: 30 March 2024; Accepted: 12 April 2024; Published: 18 April 2024

Abstract

Code-switching used to be closely linked to the idea that bilingual individuals could never fully master two languages. This made them switch between languages if the other person was not fluent enough in the speaking language. Some people may believe that it is unwise to highlight linguistic abilities in language classes. Despite this, new research is concentrating on code-switching using different language codes in the same conversation as an effective way to teach languages. This investigation examined how English at Kuwait's College of Business Studies implements code-switching in ESP courses. Three distinct instructors, two of whom speak Arabic as their first language and one who speaks English natively, had their classroom interactions recorded and then analyzed. Additionally, follow-up meetings were scheduled to obtain instructor feedback regarding implementing code-switching in the classroom. The findings from the research indicated that all instructors implemented code-switching for a variety of reasons.

Keywords

Code Switching, EFL classroom, ESP classroom, Native language, Bilingual, English instructors

Volume 11, 2024

Publisher: The Brooklyn Research and Publishing Institute, 442 Lorimer St, Brooklyn, NY 11206, United States.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30845/ijll.v11p9>

Reviewers: Opted for Confidentiality

Citation: Haidar, N. H. (2024). Instructor's Use of Code-Switching in ESP classrooms at the College of Business Studies in Kuwait. *International Journal of Language & Linguistics*, 11, 91-98. <https://doi.org/10.30845/ijll.v11p9>

1. Introduction

One of the most common and unavoidable phenomena in language classes worldwide where instructors teach a foreign or second language is code-switching (CS) or utilizing one's first language (L1). This phenomenon has drawn the attention of an increasing number of scholars. These researchers looked at the many forms of code-switching, its purpose, how it affects students, the causes of code-switching, and how instructors and students see it in various classroom settings. Teaching English may be difficult in Kuwait and many other Middle Eastern countries because the language is not used for daily conversation. According to Dehrab (2002), instructors in countries where English is a common language may not face these difficulties. Instructors in non-English-speaking countries often teach English in their native tongue. For example, a large number of English instructors in Kuwait teach English in their native tongue. While explaining the contents. Typically, this specific phenomenon is referred to as code-switching. Nonetheless, there is still debate about using CS in the context of English classes. The primary topic of discussion is whether or not the use of L1 in English as a foreign language (EFL) class should be wholly prohibited. To put it another way, CS, or the use of L1 in EFL classes, has become a two-edged sword with advantages and disadvantages (Raman & Yigitoglu, 2015).

1.1 ESP and ELT in Kuwait

English is the principal language of teaching at several institutions run by the Public Authority of Applied Education and Training (PAAET), including The College of Technological Studies, The College of Health Studies, and The College of Nursing (Dehrab 2002). Arabic is often used as the main teaching language at public colleges and institutions that do not specialize in science and technology. However, they only provide a small selection of EFL classes. Only English for specific purposes (ESP) courses essential to the learner's subject of study must be taken.

1.2 ESP In Kuwait

Students learned English in General English (GE) courses before the creation of ESP, which only briefly discussed science, technology, medicine, business, and other subjects. Naturally, this did not match the learners' demands. Thus, providing business English, nursing English, engineering English, and other courses and modules became necessary. Since its first appearance in the 1960s, ESP has developed into a significant element of English language teaching (ELT). Kuwaiti colleges and institutions adopted ESP in the early 1980s by providing ESP courses to college students in response to the increasing need for specialized English in specific sectors. Learning English would make it easier for students to comprehend additional English-language modules related to their course of study. According to Dehrab (2002), the goal was to prepare students for their academic careers and future jobs.

2. Literature Review

Skiba (1997) claimed that code-switching is a widely accepted teaching strategy in English language education, and it is often seen as a sign of progress in learning. It enables efficient transmission of information and can be beneficial for learners who are not proficient in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) course. However, the perception of language development as modest and gradual persists. This study argues that code-switching should not be seen as improper conduct but as a deliberate strategy both learners and instructors employ when teaching or studying a second or foreign language. Harbord (1992), an advocate of English-only classrooms, argued that using L1 in English instruction is unnecessary and negatively affects students' language abilities. He/she argued that learners' native tongues should be avoided in foreign or second-language contexts to ensure equal understanding and classroom procedures. Proponents of intralingual or monolingual teaching strategies argue that instructors should strive to create a pure foreign language environment by avoiding L1, as they are the sole linguistic models for learners. Code-switching is believed to have a detrimental effect on foreign language acquisition (Ellis (1984), Chaudron (1988), and Wong-Fillmore (1985)).

Ellis (1984), Chaudron (1988), and Wong-Fillmore (1985), proponents of intralingual or monolingual teaching strategies, believed that teachers should strive to create a pure foreign language environment by avoiding L1 at all costs because they are the learners' only linguistic models. That code-switching will result in negative transfer in foreign language learning.

On the other side is the grammar-translation technique, which uses L1 to guide language instruction and learning. Richards and Rodgers (2001) suggested that L1 should be used to teach students about lexical items and

grammatical structures through translation. The first language is the language of instruction, used to translate phrases and clarify grammar rules. Advocates of this approach argued that learners should be taught using their native language, regardless of approval. Cook (2010) supported this, stating that a new language should be taught using the learner's first language.

Instructors have used code-switching in both English as a second language and English as a foreign language classroom. According to this research, teachers' code-switching in L2 classrooms can satisfy three main purposes: academic, managerial, and social ones (Adendorff, (1993). Puspawati (2018) also divided three primary categories: curriculum access, classroom management, and interpersonal relations into which functions of classroom code-switching fall. However, opinions on the exact number of particular functions are not shared. This categorization is comparable to research done by Dehrab (2002), who divided instructors' code-switching into three main categories: code-switching applied to complete instructional objectives, achieve conversational tasks, and transmit social information.

Instructors may not fully understand the code-switching process and its implications (Sert, 2005). Qing (2010) argued that this behavior is unavoidable during in-class speeches—code-switching, whether intentional or unintentional, fulfilled essential tasks in language acquisition (Qing, 2010). Mattsson and Burenhult-Mattsson (1999) identified three types of language classroom functions: subject switching, emotive functions, and repetitive functions. This classification will serve as a conceptual foundation for the investigation. The following sections provide an overview of various functions.

Topic Switch

According to Cole (1998), instructors might use learners' L1 learning experience to enhance their knowledge of the new language. Topic switching occurs when an instructor's language changes based on the discussed topic. When teaching grammar, instructors use their learners' native language to address particular themes. Learners employed code-switching to focus on new information and spoke in their native language. To ensure clarity, it might be beneficial to create a connection between native language and new foreign language information.

Affective functions

Lecturers might also use code-switching while performing emotional activities. They sometimes use code-switching to describe their feelings in these circumstances. Code-switching fosters unity and connection among learners and helps instructors establish a helpful language-learning atmosphere in their classrooms. However, it might not be considered an intentional practice among instructors. According to Sert (2005), code-switching may occur naturally, and instructors may not always be aware of it.

Repetitive Function

In repetitive functions, instructors employed code-switching to transmit vital information to learners and ensure intelligibility. To explain instructions, teachers might alternate between target and native languages. She/he emphasized the significance of foreign language knowledge for effective understanding. Unwanted behaviors may result from the repetition of classroom instruction in the native language of the learner. If learners become accustomed to receiving instructions in their native language, they may lose interest in listening to the initial instruction, as per Sert (2005). This may result in poor academic outcomes and minimal exposure to foreign language speech.

Benefits and Drawbacks of Code-Switching in Language Teaching

Language instructors who advocate for unique teaching methods frequently refrain from speaking their native language in the classroom. Dehrab (2002) stated that using the native language via code-switching may be beneficial in numerous respects. To evaluate the effectiveness of code-switching in foreign language classrooms, it's important to examine the perspectives of both camps.

Cook (2002) found that using code-switching in multilingual classrooms might be problematic due to learners' different native languages. When instructors employ code-switching during lessons, learners should communicate in the same native language. Students who speak a different native language may struggle to grasp the course, feel excluded, and miss out on the beneficial effects of code-switching. When adopting code-switching, it is important to consider the instructor's proficiency in the learners' first language. According to Eldridge (1996), learners cannot foresee whether those they address would share knowledge of their native tongue beyond the classroom.

Skiba's (1997) study on code-switching in language classrooms found that when used due to a lack of expressiveness, it may help maintain speech continuity rather than cause linguistic interference. Code-switching facilitates communication and social engagement by transferring meaning. Additionally, the instructor's code-switching capabilities supported the observed behavior. According to Sert (2005), successful code-switching is crucial in language instruction since it bridges the gap between known and new concepts.

At the College of Business Studies, instructors are encouraged to use the target language, English, throughout the classroom to increase learners' exposure to it. Although English is primarily taught in an Arabic-speaking country, instructors often practice code-switching in the classroom.

3. Methodology

The present study examines why instructors practice code-switching in ESP classrooms. I claimed that instructors might use code-switching to teach a second or foreign language without hindering students' mastery. The research examined how EFL instructors employed code-switching and their perspectives on linguistic behaviors.

3.1 Approach of the Study

In this research, English language instructors at the College of Business Studies in Kuwait focused on and highlighted the utilization of code-switching ESP classrooms, where learners of Arabic origins were studying English.

3.2 Participants

Three English instructors, two of whom spoke Arabic as their first language, one PhD holder with 35 years of experience in teaching English, and one master's degree holder with 17 years of experience. The last instructor who participated in this study was a native speaker of English with 28 years of experience.

3.3 Instruments

After explaining the study procedures and obtaining written consent, participants were observed in their language classrooms for an hour and a half. A digital voice recorder was employed to capture learners' natural speech and conversations during the one-hour-and-a-half period. They all taught ESP courses.

Following the explanation of the study's methods to each participant and the acquisition of their written agreement, each participant had been observed in their classrooms for the duration of one and a half hours. A digital voice recorder was employed throughout the hour-and-a-half period to capture their interactions with students and spontaneous language usage. In order to document the code-switching of instructors and afterward carry out a discussion with them regarding their linguistic practices, this specific approach was implemented. 4.5 hours of spoken data were collected from the classroom interactions, with portions of the recordings being transcribed by the researcher for further study.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

This design (voice recording) was used to observe instructors' code-switching and then discuss their language behaviors. The researcher captured four and a half hours of interactions in the classroom and transcribed a portion of them for investigation. Instructors were questioned individually about their usage of code-switching in the classroom to determine its purpose and if it was intentional.

The interviews, which are also known as playback sessions (Harris, 2006), were conducted to ascertain the participants' viewpoints regarding code-switching as a language teaching methodology. The primary concepts were categorized, and the interviews were transcribed to address the study's topics.

4. Results and Discussion

Code-Switching Actions of Lecturers in an ESP Classroom

In-class observation analysis indicated that all participants code-switched when instructing. Table 1 illustrates the occurrence and purpose of each code-switching function among them: topic switch, affective function, and repetitive function (Mattsson & Burenhult-Mattsson, 1999).

Table 1. Occurrence and purpose of code-switching

Participants	Frequency of code switching	Purpose		
		Topic switch	Affective function	Repetitive function
Teacher 1	40	✓	✓	✓
Teacher 2	25	✓		✓
Teacher 3	15		✓	✓

Table 1 indicated that teacher 1 used code-switching 40 times during her 1.5-hour instruction, implementing all three functions identified by Mattsson and Burenhult-Mattsson (1999). Cook (1989, 1991) believes that this intentional implementation is a teaching strategy to overcome communication barriers rather than an accidental reaction. The following instances demonstrate her code-switching techniques:

Table 2: Teacher1

Original use of words	Translation
ماذا تفعلون- everyday in the morning	What do you do every day in the morning?

Teacher 1 was asking learners in this situation what they do every day as an introduction to new grammar: "*What do you do every day in the morning?*". For her learners to grasp, she asked her question again in Arabic. In such a scenario, the topic switch was applied. The instructor brainstormed in the two extracts before starting a new grammatical point. To help the learners understand the concept, the instructor repeated her specific statements in Arabic. But she did not alter the English grammatical structure of the statement while doing it. She just included her repeated speech in Arabic within her original sentence:

Table 3: Teacher 1

Original use of words	Translation
Today, we are focusing on the past tense زمن الماضي	Today we are focusing on the past tense the past tense
I played football أنا لعبت	I played football I played

Teacher 1 last code-switching example (Take your time, لا تستعجلون المهم تفهمون) was used to demonstrate the teacher prioritizing comprehension over speed. The students were assigned a task to apply the grammar rule after it was taught. The teacher used the affective function to encourage patience and tell the students to take their time.

Table 4: Teacher 1

Original use of words	Translation
- Take your time, لا تستعجلون المهم تفهمون	Don't rush take your time as long as you understand.

Additionally, teacher 2 is bilingual and code-switched 25 times. She employed the same routines while employing code-switching in her class. Unlike teacher 1, the instructor appeared to unintentionally code-switch. Sert (2005) proposed that in some cases, code-switching may be regarded as an automatic and unconscious behavior. Here are some examples of teacher 2 code-switching in class:

Table 5: Teacher 2

Original use of the word	Translation
A verb in the past tense ينقسم الى قسمين regular and irregular	A verb in the past tense is divided into two parts regular and irregular

When forming a question لا يمكنك تغيير الفعل because the word 'did' تؤكد على الماضي	When forming a question, you cannot change the verb it stays the same because the word 'did' emphasize the past
ما نوع الفعل that is used in the sentences, regular or irregular?	What type of verb is used in the sentence, regular or irregular?

Teacher 2, in the first case, was teaching past simple. The instructor code-switched and addressed the classification in Arabic. Therefore, eliciting regular and irregular verbs. The instructor code-switched and outlined the grammatical rules in Arabic. Therefore, the topic switch function is employed to acquire a prior understanding. In the second case, teacher 2 was responding to a learner's inquiry about "How to form a question using the past tense" that was displayed on the board. Combining the two phrases she generated in two distinctive linguistic codes; she emphasized the aim of adopting the tense by emphasizing its recurring use. In the final scenario, learners were completing an activity in the book. Teacher 2 used code-switching while asking a learner why she answered a specific question in a certain way. The last example shows how this teacher utilizes a repetitive function. Teacher 2 asked learners to identify the verb (regular or irregular) throughout the sentences.

The scenarios discussed above demonstrate how the teacher utilizes topic-switching and repetitive functions in her ESP class to simplify grammar rules for her learners. According to the findings presented here, these functions act as bridges between learners' understanding of their day-to-day language and the new content offered by their lecturers.

Teacher 3, the only native English speaker in the group, appeared to code-switch the least (15 times). This might be due to a very low level of Arabic competence. However, knowing that she utilized code-switching in her classes indicates that this strategy may be required in ESP classrooms. Throughout the one-and-a-half hours of monitoring, she appeared to use repetitive and affective functions instead of the topic switch function. The instructor employed these functions to simplify the subject matter and instruction and establish a positive classroom environment for learners. The examples below show her code-switching:

Table 6: Teacher 3

Original use of the word	Translation
No, it is past simple لماذا وضفتي قاعدة اخرى	No, it is past simple why did you use another grammar rule.
ما هو الزمن؟ Which tense?	Which tense?... Which tense?
based on the sentence's context. تأكد من تصريف الفعل	Make sure that the verb is in the correct tense based on the sentence's context.
الطب has advanced in recent decades	Medicine has advanced in recent decades.

Teacher 3 code-switched while asking a learner why she answered a specific exercise question. The second example demonstrates how this native-speaker instructor uses a repetitive function. Teacher 3 asked students to identify the tense of the example on the board. In the third case, she used code-switching to explain instructions and ensure proper exercise completion. The fourth example highlights the affective function of code-switching since the teacher utilized it when the Arabic term was shorter than the English term, such as saying "الطب" instead of "medicine." These examples show how code-switching may be used in various circumstances, including English instruction and classroom settings.

Instructors' Views on Code-Switching in ESP Classes

Furthermore, during class recordings of lectures, Harris (2006) asked instructors to reflect on their individual code-switching in classrooms by replaying back sections of the recordings. During these interviews, participants were given the chance to comment on code-switching as an instructional approach based on their own experiences with it.

All participants acknowledged that code-switching is an efficient approach for teaching English in their setting since it is the simplest and fastest way to convey a topic (Gumperz 1982), particularly in a grammatical context.

Teacher 2: Rather than using five words to explain ourselves when teaching, we may simplify matters by switching to the learner's native tongue... Because of the curriculum requirements, teaching exclusively English to intermediate-level learners is hard as it is time-consuming. The curriculum might require that students learn in English, but at the intermediate level, using only English can slow down teaching because the learners may not fully understand or need longer to grasp the material.

Teacher 1: Using purely English does not assist learners in understanding grammatical rules. Learners will obtain a poor grade if they struggle to comprehend what is being taught; thus, code-switching is essential for enhancing their performance. While only English is preferred when equipping learners for real-life situations, code-switching enhances learning based on our objectives and curriculum requirements.

Qing (2010) highlighted using code-switching in classrooms to help teachers focus on relevant vocabulary and grammatical concepts. Teachers can explain grammatical points more effectively and save time by not repeating the same explanation multiple times. Code-switching also allows instructors to express specific meanings, improving learning. Bilinguals play a crucial role in overcoming language gaps and building meaning. Teachers like Kow (2003) found that code-switching makes comprehension easier for learners. Tien and Liu (2006) found that code-switching effectively boosts understanding when providing comparable comprehension and instruction methods. It serves as a bridge to express exact concepts and comprehension, leading to greater understanding. However, if taught for everyday use, code-switching may negatively affect learners' fluency, vocabulary, and competency. When students do not want to learn and use the language for communication, code-switching can be an effective strategy for boosting learning and passing exams with good grades.

Code-switching in the classroom can help address various challenges, including motivation, cultural connection, and bridging the status gap between teacher and student. Instructors believe that code-switching bridges the gap between them, increasing confidence and encouragement in the classroom. However, it should not be used with advanced-level students, as they may not understand the fundamentals of English as their target language.

Advanced-level learners are more competent in the target language, so they don't need to switch back to Arabic to explain or comprehend instructions. Teachers can use students' first language learning background to help them grasp the new language, so code-switching should only be used to highlight grammatical points. The classroom is the sole area where students can practice and study their target language, and switching between languages won't help students in the long run when speaking and listening to native speakers.

Language learning teachers also expect code-switching to be used constantly, as students may expect their instructors to perform in their mother tongues during speaking exercises. Sert (2005) contends that translating information into a student's native language can contribute to poor academic performance.

Students may receive limited exposure to foreign language speech, as they expect their instructor to code-switch in all situations and for everything they learn. This can lead to students relying on their teacher's code-switching for clarification, hindering their ability to become independent learners. While code-switching has advantages, it should not be used with advanced-level students due to its potential limitations.

5. Conclusion

The study investigates the use of code-switching in English as a Second Language (ESP) classes at Kuwait's College of Business Studies. Despite the institute's recommendation to use English, all participants code-switched in their classes. Instructors use code-switching for various reasons, including clarifying meaning, reducing teaching time, and boosting student motivation. Emphasizing code-switching during linguistic discussions improves students' knowledge, engagement, and motivation. However, the study also suggests that code-switching may be ineffective for highly motivated students, as it may hinder their development of communication skills. The study highlights the need for more effective teaching methods in language learning classrooms.

Conflict of Interest: Not declared.

Ethical Approval: Not applicable.

Funding: None.

References

- Adendorff, R. (1993) Code-Switching amongst Zulu Speaking Teachers and Their Pupils: Its Functions and Implications for Teachers' Education. *Language in Education*.
- Chaudron, D. (1988). *Second Language Classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139524469>
- Cole, S. (1998). The use of L1 in communicative English classrooms. *The Language Teacher*, 22,11-13.
- Cook, G. (2010) *Translation in Language Teaching: An Argument for Reassessment*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Cook, V. (1989). Reciprocal language teaching: Another alternative. *Modern English Teacher*, 16(3/4), 48-53.
- Cook, V. (1991). *Second language learning and language teaching*. Melbourne: Edward Arnold/ Hodder Headline Group. Teachers. Retrieved May 10, 2011, from <http://www.jalt-publications.org/tlt/articles/1999/09/critchley>.
- Cook, V. (2002). *Portraits of the L2 user*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Dehrab, B. (2002). *A Study of Code-Switching in Four English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Classrooms at the College of Business Studies in Kuwait*. Ohio State University, USA.
- Eldridge, J. (1996). Code-switching in a Turkish secondary school. *ELT Journal*, 50(4), 303-311.
- Ellis, R. (1984). *Classroom Second Language Development*. Oxford: Pergamon. chaudron 1988
- Ferguson, G. (2003) *Classroom Code-Switching in Post-Colonial Contexts: Functions, Attitudes and Policies*. *AILA Review*, 16, 38-51.
- Fillmore, Lily Wong (1985) "Taking Stock: What Do We Know About Second Language Acquisition?" *Deseret Language and Linguistic Society Symposium*: Vol. 11: Iss. 1, Article 2.
- Gumperz, J. (1982). *Discourse strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Harbord. *JELT Journal*, Volume 46, Issue 4, October 1992, Pages 350–355, <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/46.4.350>
- Harris, R. (2006). *New ethnicities and language use*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Kow, Y. C. (2003). Code-Switching for a Purpose: Focus on Malaysian Pre-School Children. *Multilingual*, 22, 59-77.
- Mattsson, A & Burenhult-Mattsson, N. (1999). Code-switching in second language teaching of French. *Working Papers*, 47(1), 59-72.
- Puspawati, I. (2018). Teachers' Use of Code-switching in EFL Classroom and its Functions. *Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Learning*, 3(1), 73–74. <https://doi.org/10.18196/ftl.3128>
- Qing, X. (2010). To Switch or Not to Switch: Examine the Code-switching Practices of Teachers of Non-English Majors. *Canadian Social Science*, 6(4), 109-113.
- Raman, Y. & Yigitoglu, N. (2018). Justifying code-switching through the lens of teacher identities: novice EFL teachers' perceptions. *Qual Quant*, 52:2079–2092 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-017-0617-1>.
- Richards, J., & Rodgers, T. (2001). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* (p. 204). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Sert, O. (2005). The functions of code-switching in ELT classrooms. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 11(8), Retrieved May 10, 2011, from <http://iteslj.org/> <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Sert-CodeSwitching.html>.
- Skiba, R. (1997). Code Switching as a countenance of language interference. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 3(10). Retrieved May 22, 2011, from <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Skiba-CodeSwitching.html>
- Tien, C & Liu, K. (2006). Code-switching in two EFL classes in Taiwan. In A. Hashim & N. Hassan (Eds). *English in Southeast Asia: Prospects, perspectives, and possibilities*. Kuala Lumpur: University Malaya Press.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The views, opinions, and data presented in all publications are exclusively those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and do not necessarily reflect the position of BRPI or its editorial team. BRPI and the editorial team disclaim any liability for any harm to individuals or property arising from the use of any ideas, methods, instructions, or products mentioned in the content.