

**RESEARCH PAPER**

Effectiveness of Code-Switching in Pakistani University ESL Classroom: Action Research

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ABSTRACT

Code-switching (CS) in English Second Language (ESL) classrooms is among the most debated topics in educational circles. This study reports action research results addressing the effectiveness of code-switching as an ESL teaching technique for low-achiever undergraduate students of a private university in Lahore. The study includes 50 English language learners at the beginner level. The researchers conducted action research with that class using a CS teaching methodology for reading comprehension. For data collection, focused group interviews, questionnaires, and observations were incorporated. The findings suggest that CS is effective in three ways: It enhances understanding of the English content; Students feel more confident and responsive to comprehension-based questions; CS aids in creating a good rapport between the teacher and students. The research helped the researcher to improve the overall class environment resulting a productive teaching-learning process.

KEYWORDS

Action Research, Code-Switching, ESL

Introduction

Action research is a methodical technique of investigation that enables individuals to find effective solutions to daily difficulties. In contrast to conventional experimental/scientific research, which seeks generalizable answers applicable in all contexts, action research focuses on specific problems and particular solutions. Action research gives the means for people in schools, businesses, and community organizations, as well as instructors and those in health and human services, to enhance the effectiveness of their work (Stringer, 2008). Action research studies in education usually concentrate on student needs and give teachers the tools to change teaching strategies successfully. It helps people navigate the occasionally confusing complexity of the circumstances they encounter, elevating the significance and satisfaction of their work in the process (Ali, 2020).

Kemmis and McTaggart (1998) discuss four phases of action research: First, the researcher targets the problem and plans to fix a troubling part of the research context. As a result, when choosing an investigational method, the researcher should consider the instructional setting and the anticipated results. Second, Planned actions are implemented over time, along with testing different approaches or solutions to produce the desired outcomes. Third, the researcher administers the implementation of the action and collects the data with different tools. Fourth, the researcher analyzes their findings and reflects

either to carry on with the research to improve the troubling situation or to think of other ways to solve the problem.

Code-switching (CS) is employing two or more languages in a sentence or in other sentences. It is one of the traits that distinguish multilingual behaviors. However, in many educational settings, it is seen to have a detrimental impact on academic performance and language development (Dewaele, Housen, & Wei, 2003, Martin, 2005; Moodley, 2007; Probyn, 2009 as cited in Kim, 2015). The studies have noted that CS in an educational context hinders learning of English and is a deficiency in interactional skills. However, other researchers contend that CS aids L2 acquisition (Gumperz, 1982; Romaine, 1995; Sridhar, 1996).

Additionally, Kachru (1978) notes that CS significantly contributes to the efficient instruction of ESL to non-native English speakers. Although opinions on CS have varied, it is assumed that at least some purposes and justifications for switching between the native language and the foreign language exist. In light of prior CS research, this study will address how CS functions in the L2 learning process in the Pakistani educational system. According to a Pakistani study by Younus et al. (2020), university lecturers use CS efficiently to increase students' comprehension and participation. According to more recent studies, L1 facilitates higher cognitive methods when learning a second language (Bashir et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2022; Al Norzaidi et al., 2022).

Urdu is the national language of Pakistan, and it is spoken in many other countries as well, especially in India. In Pakistan, Urdu is the national and English is the official language in Pakistan (Rahman, 1996; Ethnologue, 2017). It is widely spoken and understood as a lingua franca across the country. English is considered a second language (ESL) in Pakistan, meaning they do not use English excessively in their routine. It is taught at school from class 1 -4 onwards. Elite-class schools have an English-only approach.

In contrast, the middle class sends their children to public and government schools using English-Urdu mixed methods to teach (Rahman, 1996, 2002). In this situation, the teacher uses Urdu and English to describe the content so that the pupils can comprehend it properly. Codes are switched in classrooms during the teaching and learning process by teachers and students.

This study aims to analyze the role of CS in English as a second language classroom. In Pakistani universities, students come from varying academic backgrounds and have varying English language proficiency levels (Malik, 2014). Undergraduate students study three English courses as compulsory courses. The students with Urdu-only medium background or from rural backgrounds- find it very difficult to perform well in English courses. At the university level, teachers use an English-only approach as their teaching methodology in ESL classrooms, which becomes problematic for the students, leading to reluctance and poor performance.

This action research was conducted in an ESL classroom of first-semester students. Most (78%) of the students belonged to small towns and villages in Pakistan. They were taught in Urdu-medium schools at the school and college levels. Initially, English-only teaching method was used in the class. They were found very reluctant in participating class discussions and activities. They used to ask to repeat the concept or instructions in Urdu for better understanding. Their performance could have been better in diagnostic tests based on reading comprehension and writing. Additionally, it was a matter of concern that the class needed to be more interactive. Their confidence level was very low, and they considered the English language learning hard.

Literature Review

Using the first language in second language learning has been a common topic of study over the years. Schweers (1999) opines that using first languages in the classroom creates a relaxed atmosphere that helps to learn. According to Gulzar (2010), code-switching takes place in language classrooms to cater to the needs of L2 learners. He further discusses CS in bilingual classrooms' effective communication.

Alvarez (2014) also highlighted the value of using the native tongue in second language instruction. According to the study, teachers who speak Spanish in the classroom may foster a more culturally sensitive atmosphere that fosters children's learning and communication.

Zaka et al. (2020) conducted a study to analyze the effectiveness of CS in second language learning. The result shows that CS plays a significant role in learning a second language. CS also assists teachers in managing the classroom.

The study by Kumar et al. (2021) shows that CS is the most common practice in primary education and is used to perform various functions such as: elaborating difficult concepts, seeking confirmation, and assessing understanding. It is also employed to form solidarity between students and teachers.

According to Hyn-Ju Kim's (2015) findings, teachers and students believe that using code-switching is a good way to learn English skills, though teachers think it works better for reading and students for listening. The role of code-switching in the classroom was also investigated in this study. The results imply that CS is used to consider the participants' preferred or skillful languages.

The study by Nugarah (2019) revealed that students demonstrated their favorable perceptions of code-switching in English classrooms, which was supported by 75%–95% of all students. Students benefited from CS in English classrooms in multiple ways, including understanding the subject matter easily, expanding their vocabulary, learning English more quickly, understanding English easily, and helping them.

According to Song's research (2019), vocabulary acquisition was more successful with a momentary switch to the kids' native language (L1) than with English-only instruction. This benefit persisted two weeks after instruction. Regarding the learners' attitudes towards language choices, it was discovered that preschoolers strongly preferred to use their native language while learning English and had negative feelings towards learning only in English. These findings offer the first empirical proof of the problem of teacher code-switching for very young students.

In his study, Adriosh (2019) concluded that students occasionally used Arabic as their first language (L1) for various pedagogical and social purposes: Clarification, repetition, recapitulation, and socialization. The use of the teacher's CS to address pedagogical and social issues is well-received by both teachers and students.

Sahan (2021) collected and analyzed the data using a qualitative methodology. Three lecturers provided data on nearly 14 hours of classroom observations, which were then analyzed by trends in student interaction and language use. The results imply that teachers and students prioritize communicative effectiveness over adherence to monolingual norms in classroom interactions.

Chan's (2019) study revealed Hongkongers' views on three language uses, including pure code, bilingual code-switching, and trilingual code-switching, by analyzing the quantitative and qualitative data from sixty university students collected through an online survey. The outcome demonstrated that trilingual code-switching is present in Hong Kong but has yet to be widely used. The study also demonstrated the relationship between bilingual code-switching and Hong Kong identity.

Narayan's (2019) research calls for educating ESL teachers about the beneficial applications of code-switching, given that Fiji has a large English-speaking population. Therefore, the novelty of this research would require that code-switching be appropriately and occasionally incorporated into ESL instruction methods and curricula wherever possible.

According to Dema (2022), there is a noticeable difference in the learning outcomes for students when code-switching is used versus when it is not, with more favorable outcomes in favor of code-switching.

According to Ezeh (2022), code-switching and mixing have progressive and advantageous effects on language learning for both the teacher and students in an ESL setting.

Action research was carried out by Jeanjaroonsri (2022) in Thailand. He used questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and observations for the study. He concluded that CS was favorable for English language classrooms. It also supported English language learning by improving the understanding of ESL learners.

Material and Methods

Qualitative and quantitative methods were used in the present study to collect and analyze the data. Focus group interviews were conducted for qualitative data collection, and observations were recorded. Furthermore, quantitative data were collected through questionnaires which were analyzed for the percentages.

Plan of Action

A plan was devised to evaluate the issues the students were having, modify my teaching methods for them, and improve the class's interaction, comprehension, and writing abilities. Two lessons were designated comprising a historical information passage to improve my students' reading comprehension and writing abilities. One lesson used a lecture and instruction style that was entirely in English. The other lesson's design included occasional Urdu-English code-switching to clarify the activity's content. The students were informed clearly about the objectives of the study. It was conveyed to them that the purpose of the ESL course is to learn the English language. Therefore, there will be more English input, but the Urdu language might be used to make things understandable for them.

Participants and setting

This research was carried out at a Lahore private university. The participants were first-semester International Relations undergraduate students taking an English comprehension and composition course. Their ages ranged from 17 to 22, with 20 females and 30 males. Many students living in Lahore hostels were from Pakistan's villages and small towns. The diagnostic test revealed that particular class included a greater ratio of students with low English proficiency.

Table1
Gender, Location and Medium of instruction

Gender		Location		Medium of Instruction in school	
Male	Female	Urban	Rural	Urdu/English	English
30	20	15	35	39	11

The evaluations were made by observation and other data collection instruments after 20 hours of teaching and learning sessions for this study.

Table 1 shows how the participants are distributed by gender, location, and school setting

Instrument

Three techniques were used to collect data: focus group interviews, questionnaires, and observations. Six students participated in semi-structured focus group interviews where they were questioned about their perspectives on using Urdu- English CS in English classes. Kumar's (2021) questionnaire was modified to include closed-ended questions analyzing respondents' opinions of Urdu code-switching and its value for learning English. The observation sheet was created to track the students' responsiveness during ESL class.

Transformed Teaching Technique

The speech style was altered by speaking clearly and slowly. The way to offer instructions in class was also changed; they were still given in English, but they were gradually made simpler to correspond to the student's English competence levels. In addition, as (Cook, 2001) suggested, code-switching was used occasionally between English and Urdu to highlight crucial ideas, regain students' attention, and introduce challenging vocabulary. By making these adjustments, amount of input provided in English during lessons was progressively increased. Under clearly defined guidelines, students were allowed to use Urdu during class as a means of self-expression and language transmission and to relate the concepts and topics with their experiences. Students were allowed to utilize Urdu in class to organize their thoughts better and, as a result, express themselves in English. By allowing students to speak in Urdu, they would gain confidence and realize that they could truly react, which would promote their involvement in class. The idea underlying this action was that students would become less reliant on Urdu as their knowledge of English increased.

In order to motivate students and promote further discussion, it was also decided to include more relevant, context-related, and authentic topics (such as stress in students and stereotypes). By making these adjustments, students were expected to understand that English can be used for day-to-day communication.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze data collected from different methods, as Burns (1999) proposed, data were assembled, coded, and compared. It was done in three ways.

First, the questionnaire responses were arranged on an excel sheet with proper coding.

The percentage for each response received on 5 points Likert scale was calculated. Finally, the percentages were arranged as a table to show a clear comparison of each item.

Second, the observation sheet was analyzed according to predefined codes. Observations were evaluated for patterns of students' responsiveness and understanding due to CS methodology.

Third, the responses given in focus group interviews were arranged on an excel sheet with the coding of questions, analyzing the patterns in responses, and responses were divided into categories such as interaction, confidence, and better understanding.

Results and Discussion

The survey's findings on students' perceptions of CS in ESL show that students have a highly positive attitude toward CS as a teaching methodology. The table1 illustrates high percentages of responses regarding the positive use of CS in Urdu and its role in English language learning (90%) and a better understanding of content and vocabulary (80% and 71%, respectively). Moreover, 69% of students agree that CS aids in improving their fluency in English, and 73% agree that CS helps polish their writing skills. Similarly, 82% of students agree that the Use of CS enables them to understand better at the sentence level, and 87% agree on the faster comprehension by CS. It boosts their confidence to speak in class discussions, motivating them.

In contrast, only 27% of students agreed that using Urdu confuses them in English learning.

Table 2
Percentage of the responses to the items of questionnaire

		S Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S Disagree
1	The use of English-Urdu CS by the teacher in ESL class helps in learning English.	70%	20%		10%	-
2	The use of English-Urdu CS by the teacher in English classroom makes the understanding of the content easier.	35%	45%	3%	17%	-
3	The use of English-Urdu CS by the teacher in ESL classroom makes to comprehend new vocabulary easy.	41%	30%	4%	22%	3%
4	The use of English-Urdu CS by the teacher in ESL classroom is helpful in gaining fluency of English.	46%	23%	20%	8%	3%
5	The use of English-Urdu CS by the teacher in ESL classroom improves your writing skills.	61%	12%	5%	8%	4%
6	The use of English-Urdu CS by the teacher in English classroom is helpful to understand English on sentence level.	71%	11%	3%	7%	8%
7	The use of English-Urdu CS by the teacher in English classroom helps to understand the concepts quicker.	66%	21%	2%	5%	6%
8	The use of English-Urdu CS by the teacher in ESL classroom confuses you.	9%	18%	15%	35%	22%

Likewise, the observation notes show that students tend to respond more efficiently when asked questions using Urdu and English CS. CS boosts their confidence to speak in class discussions, motivating them. Moreover, better bonding between students and teachers resulted in a favorable environment for English language learning.

The focus group interviews revealed the same pattern of responses by the students. They considered CS as an effective method to make learning more meaningful. Additionally, they felt to share a common ground with the teacher who assisted in enhancing confidence and motivation. The positive impact of L1 facilitated English language learning without hesitation or fear.

Conclusion

Based on the data, it can be concluded that the careful use of English-Urdu CS successfully enhanced students' English learning for that particular class. It notes the role of CS in improving students' class performance. CS also gives confidence to the students and enhances their comprehension, speaking, and writing skills. Moreover, CS improves the classroom environment and students' motivation to learn English. The results of this action research corroborate those of several recent studies (Sahan, 2021; Jeanjaroonsri, 2022; Ezeh, 2022; and Dema, 2022), all of which revealed that CS was very advantageous in ESL classes for several reasons. Students' enthusiasm and interest in the material rose when L1 was incorporated into class activities, evidently shown in their improved performance, involvement, and motivation toward learning English.

By using L1 sparingly, this study ultimately served to justify the link between students' English learning processes and its use and positioned L1 as a stepping stone for further improvements in English learning. As a result, it is crucial to inform instructors about the different functions of CS in ESL classrooms and motivate them to discover what function is beneficial in their respective courses. This inquiry will give instructors a strong foundation for effectively using L1 in their classes. However, the use of CS by the instructor and the learners must not be unlimited rather it needs to be incorporated as a communicative bridge. If CS is used frequently in an ESL class, it might affect the accuracy and fluency of the learners in English.

Recommendations

This study was limited to a particular class in a limited time. In order to resolve the problems faced by the learners, only few factors were taken into account. In future, researchers can examine the role of CS taking into account the learners' cultural and educational backgrounds, and attitudes towards CS. Further, a longitudinal study could also be carried out to trace the role of CS in the development of language learning of the target language.

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