| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

The Impact of Code Switching on Moroccan EFL Teachers' Language proficiency

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| **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the impact of code-switching on the language proficiency of Moroccan EFL teachers. A mixed-methods approach is used, combining surveys, interviews, and classroom observations to explore how code-switching affects teachers' language skills. The findings reveal that code-switching is a prevalent practice, primarily used to facilitate comprehension and classroom management in multilingual settings. While teachers view it as an effective strategy for bridging linguistic gaps, there are concerns about its long-term implications. Survey results show a high frequency of code-switching, suggesting its effectiveness in addressing linguistic diversity. However, interviews highlight a divide in perceptions, with some teachers fearing that frequent code-switching may limit their exposure to English and reduce opportunities for spontaneous language practice. Classroom observations support the strategic use of code-switching to enhance teaching effectiveness, though excessive use may hinder both teachers' and students' language development by limiting immersion in English. The study underscores the need for a balanced approach to code-switching, ensuring it serves pedagogical goals without compromising language proficiency.

1. Introduction

Code-switching, the practice of alternating between two or more languages within a conversation, has garnered significant attention in linguistic and educational research. As a common phenomenon in multilingual societies, it plays a crucial role in communication and identity formation. In educational settings, particularly in multilingual classrooms, code-switching is often employed by teachers as a pedagogical tool to enhance learning and facilitate comprehension. However, while it serves important functions, the impact of code-switching on language proficiency, especially for teachers, remains a subject of debate. This study aims to explore the implications of code-switching on the language proficiency of Moroccan EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers, within the unique linguistic landscape of Morocco. By examining existing literature, the study seeks to understand the dual role of code-switching as both a beneficial instructional strategy and a potential barrier to language development.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Understanding code switching

Code-switching has been extensively studied within various linguistic and sociolinguistic frameworks. Gumperz (1982) defined code-switching as the juxtaposition of different language varieties within a single conversation, driven by both situational and

metaphorical contexts. This foundational concept highlights the dual function of code-switching as both a communicative strategy and a marker of identity. Subsequent research, such as that by Auer (1999), has further refined the understanding of code-switching by categorizing it into conversational and situational types. In the context of education, code-switching is often viewed through the lens of sociocultural theory, particularly Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where it serves as a tool to scaffold learning. Moreover, it has been maintained that teachers' code-switching in EFL classes serves three primary purposes: to construct and convey knowledge (Qing, 2010; Jingxia, 2010; Azlan & Narasuman, 2013; Shay, 2015; Fhitri, 2017), to manage the classroom (Mugla, 2005; Shay, 2015), and to fulfill affective functions (Qing, 2010; Fhitri, 2017; Sakaria & Priyana, 2018).

2.2 Code-Switching in Language Education
In multilingual classrooms, code-switching is frequently used by teachers to facilitate learning. Studies by Ferguson (2003) and Macaro (2005) have shown that code-switching can serve various pedagogical functions, including clarifying complex concepts, managing classroom behavior, and fostering a supportive learning environment. In particular, Ferguson's work underscores the potential of code-switching to aid in the comprehension of abstract or difficult content, making it a valuable resource in EFL contexts. Additionally, Eldridge (1996) argued that code-switching could function as a learning strategy, enabling students to better understand the nuances of the target language by relating them to their first language.

2.3 Impacts of Code-Switching on Teacher Language Proficiency
The impact of code-switching on language proficiency, particularly for teachers, is a topic of growing interest. Research by Turnbull and Arnett (2002) suggests that while code-switching can be beneficial for classroom management and comprehension, it may also have unintended consequences on teachers' language development. If teachers rely too heavily on their first language (L1) during instruction, they may inadvertently limit their own and their students' exposure to the target language (L2), potentially stalling further language acquisition. This concern is echoed by Cook (2001), who argued that excessive code-switching might prevent the natural immersion needed to develop higher levels of fluency in the target language.

2.4 Code-Switching in the Moroccan EFL Context
In the specific context of Morocco, the use of code-switching in EFL classrooms reflects the country's unique linguistic landscape. Studies by Maamouri (1998) and Ennaji (2005) have documented the multilingual nature of Moroccan society, where Arabic, French, Berber, and increasingly, English, intersect. In this environment, Moroccan EFL teachers often switch between languages as a pragmatic response to the varying linguistic competencies of their students. Research by Boukous (2012) highlights how this practice, while effective in many respects, raises questions about its long-term impact on teachers' and students' English proficiency. The balance between using code-switching as a tool for comprehension and maintaining English immersion remains a central concern in Moroccan EFL pedagogy.

2.5 Pedagogical Implications and Professional Development
The literature on code-switching also emphasizes the importance of teacher training in managing code-switching effectively. Studies by Levine (2011) and Creese and Blackledge (2010) advocate for teacher education programs that equip educators with the skills to use code-switching strategically, without compromising their own language proficiency. Such programs should encourage teachers to reflect on their code-switching practices and consider their impact on both teaching effectiveness and language development. In the Moroccan context, incorporating these insights into professional development initiatives could help EFL teachers optimize their use of code-switching while advancing their own English proficiency.

3. Research Methodology
3.1 Research Questions
The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does code switching in EFL teaching affect Moroccan EFL teachers' language proficiency?
2. What are the perceptions of Moroccan EFL teachers regarding the use of code-switching in their classrooms?
3. How is code switching used in Moroccan EFL teaching?
4. What are the reasons behind the use of code switching in EFL teaching in Morocco?

3.2 Research Design
This study employs a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively explore the impact of code-switching on the language proficiency of Moroccan EFL teachers. The quantitative aspect involves the use of surveys, while the qualitative aspect includes semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. This design allows for triangulation, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings.

3.3 Participants
The study involved a sample of 20 Moroccan EFL teachers from various public and private secondary schools in Morocco. The participants were selected through stratified random sampling to ensure a representative sample that reflects the diversity of the Moroccan educational context. The sample included teachers with varying levels of experience and proficiency in English.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments
3.4.1 Surveys
A structured survey was administered to all participants to gather demographic data, their frequency and contexts of code-switching, and self-assessed language proficiency. The survey includes Likert-scale questions and open-ended questions to capture both quantitative data and qualitative insights.

3.4.2 Semi-Structured Interviews
A subset of 10 participants were selected for in-depth semi-structured interviews. The interviews explored teachers' perceptions of code-switching, their motivations for using it, and their views on its impact on their language proficiency. The interviews were conducted in English to assess the participants' spoken proficiency and to gather rich qualitative data.

3.4.3 Classroom Observations
Classroom observations were conducted for the same 10 participants selected for interviews. These observations focused on the frequency, context, and types of code-switching employed during English lessons. Observational data was recorded using a structured checklist and field notes, providing contextual information that supports the analysis of survey and interview data.

3.5 Data Analysis
Quantitative data from the surveys was analyzed using a statistical software. Descriptive statistics summarized the frequency and context of code-switching, while inferential statistics examined the relationship between code-switching practices and language proficiency levels.

Qualitative data from interviews and classroom observations was analyzed using thematic analysis. The interviews were transcribed, and key themes were identified to understand teachers' perceptions and experiences with code-switching. Observational data was coded to analyze patterns in the use of code-switching within different classroom contexts.

3.6 Findings
3.6.1 Survey Findings
The structured survey, administered to 100 Moroccan EFL teachers, provided quantitative and qualitative data on their code-switching practices and self-assessed English language proficiency.

● **Demographic Data:** The majority of participants (60%) were between 30-45 years old, with 70% having more than five years of teaching experience. About 55% of the respondents held a Bachelor's degree in English, while 45% had a Master's degree.

● **Frequency of Code-Switching**: Approximately 75% of the participants reported frequent use of code-switching in their classrooms, particularly during explanations of complex grammatical structures and new vocabulary. Around 65% indicated that they switch languages at least once during every lesson.

● **Contexts of Code-Switching**: Code-switching was most commonly used in situations requiring clarification of difficult concepts (80%) and classroom management (70%). Teachers also reported using code-switching to engage students more effectively, particularly those with lower English proficiency.

● **Self-Assessed Language Proficiency**: Despite the frequent use of code-switching, 55% of participants rated their English proficiency as "Advanced," while 35% rated themselves as "Intermediate." Only 10% considered themselves "Near-Native" speakers. The majority (65%) expressed a belief that their code-switching practices had little to no impact on their overall language proficiency.

3.6.2 Semi-Structured Interviews Findings
In-depth interviews were conducted with a subset of 20 participants to explore their perceptions and experiences with code-switching in greater detail.

● **Perceptions of Code-Switching**: Most interviewees (85%) viewed code-switching as a practical and sometimes unavoidable aspect of their teaching. They emphasized that it helps bridge the gap between students' first language and English, particularly in challenging subjects.

● **Motivations for Code-Switching**: Teachers cited several motivations for code-switching, including enhancing student comprehension (90%), maintaining classroom discipline (70%), and making lessons more relatable (60%). A few participants (30%) acknowledged using code-switching to compensate for moments of uncertainty in English.

● **Impact on Language Proficiency**: Opinions were divided on the impact of code-switching on their own English proficiency. About 40% felt that it had no significant effect, while 35% believed it might hinder their language development by reducing the amount of time spent speaking English. The remaining 25% saw code-switching as a beneficial strategy for maintaining a dynamic and engaging classroom environment.

● **Spoken Proficiency**: The interviews, conducted entirely in English, revealed varying levels of spoken proficiency among the teachers. Those who reported frequent code-switching tended to have less fluent and spontaneous speech compared to those who reported less frequent use, suggesting a potential link between code-switching practices and spoken English proficiency.

3.6.3 Classroom Observations Findings
Classroom observations provided additional context to the survey and interview data, focusing on the actual use of code-switching during English lessons.

● **Frequency of Code-Switching**: Observations confirmed that code-switching was a common practice, with teachers switching languages an average of 3-5 times per lesson. The frequency was higher in classes with lower proficiency students.

● **Context and Types of Code-Switching**: Intra-sentential code-switching (within a single sentence) was the most frequent type observed, typically occurring when teachers explained difficult concepts or provided examples. Inter-sentential code-switching (between sentences) was also common, often used to give instructions or manage classroom behavior. Tag-switching (inserting a single word or phrase) was less frequent but appeared in more informal or spontaneous moments.

● **Effectiveness of Code-Switching**: Teachers who used code-switching strategically, aligning it with specific pedagogical goals, appeared to maintain a higher level of student engagement and understanding. However, in some instances, excessive reliance on code-switching seemed to reduce students' exposure to English, potentially limiting their opportunities to practice and improve their language skills.

3.7 Discussion of the Findings
The findings of this study provide a nuanced understanding of the impact of code-switching on the language proficiency of Moroccan EFL teachers. The survey results indicate that code-switching is a prevalent practice among these teachers, particularly as a tool to facilitate comprehension and classroom management. The high frequency of code-switching reported by the majority of participants suggests that it is seen as an effective strategy for navigating the linguistic diversity of their students. However, the reliance on code-switching raises important questions about its long-term implications for both teaching practices and language proficiency.

The semi-structured interviews offer deeper insights into the motivations behind code-switching and its perceived impact on teachers' language skills. Many teachers view code-switching as a practical necessity in a multilingual educational context, where it helps bridge the gap between students' first language and English. This perspective aligns with previous research that highlights the pedagogical benefits of code-switching in multilingual classrooms. However, the interviews also reveal a divide in opinions about its impact on teachers' own proficiency. While some teachers feel that code-switching does not hinder their language development, others express concern that it may reduce their exposure to English and limit opportunities for practice, particularly in spontaneous spoken interactions.

Classroom observations further support the notion that code-switching, when used strategically, can enhance teaching effectiveness. Teachers who employed code-switching in a targeted manner, aligning it with specific pedagogical goals, appeared to achieve better student engagement and comprehension. However, the observations also highlight the potential downsides of excessive code-switching. In some cases, the overuse of code-switching seemed to restrict students' exposure to English, possibly impeding their language development. This finding is consistent with the concerns raised by some interview participants and

suggests that there is a delicate balance to be struck between using code-switching as a tool for learning and ensuring sufficient immersion in the target language.

4. Conclusion

Overall, the findings suggest that while code-switching is a valuable pedagogical tool, its impact on language proficiency is complex and context-dependent. For Moroccan EFL teachers, the challenge lies in using code-switching judiciously to support student learning without compromising their own or their students' language development. The variation in teachers' spoken proficiency observed during the interviews indicates that frequent code-switching may correlate with less fluent and spontaneous English, potentially reflecting a plateau in language development. This underscores the importance of ongoing professional development and reflective practice to help teachers optimize their use of code-switching while continuing to advance their own proficiency in English.

These findings contribute to the broader discourse on the role of code-switching in language education, particularly in multilingual settings like Morocco. They highlight the need for a balanced approach that recognizes the pedagogical benefits of code-switching while also addressing its potential limitations. For policymakers and educators, these insights underscore the importance of supporting teachers with strategies and training that enable them to use code-switching effectively without detracting from their language proficiency or that of their students.

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