

## CODE SWITCHING IN EFL CLASSROOMS: FUNCTIONS, FREQUENCY, AND TEACHER ATTITUDES IN THE UZBEKISTAN CONTEXT

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### ABSTRACT

Code-switching — the alternating use of two or more languages within a single communicative context — is a widely observed phenomenon in multilingual EFL classrooms. This study investigates the functions, frequency, and pedagogical implications of code-switching (CS) between Uzbek, Russian, and English in university-level EFL classrooms in Uzbekistan. Employing a convergent mixed-methods design, data were collected through video-recorded classroom observations (20 sessions), structured teacher interviews (n=15), and a learner attitude questionnaire (n=120). Findings indicate that code-switching served five primary functions: translation, clarification, classroom management, metalinguistic discussion, and affective support. Teacher-initiated CS was significantly more frequent (68%) than learner-initiated CS (32%). While most teachers acknowledged CS as sometimes pedagogically necessary, over half reported feeling conflicted about its use, fearing it might reduce students' English exposure. Learners, however, generally held positive attitudes toward moderate CS, citing it as a source of comprehension and emotional comfort. The study argues for a principled, deliberate approach to code-switching as a legitimate pedagogical tool in the Uzbek multilingual EFL context.

**Keywords:** code switching, EFL, multilingualism, Uzbekistan, bilingual classroom, teacher attitudes, language alternation

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The EFL classroom in Uzbekistan is an inherently multilingual space. Students and teachers alike navigate at least three language systems — Uzbek, Russian, and English — often within a single lesson or even a single utterance. This linguistic landscape reflects the broader sociolinguistic reality of Uzbekistan, where Uzbek is the state language, Russian retains significant prestige and communicative currency, and English is increasingly positioned as a gateway to academic and professional opportunity (Smagulova, 2008). Within this multilingual environment, the phenomenon of code-switching (CS) — defined as the alternation between two or more languages within a conversational exchange — is both inevitable and ubiquitous.

Despite its prevalence, code-switching in EFL classrooms has historically been viewed with ambivalence or outright negativity by language educators and policymakers. The dominant monolingual instruction ideology, rooted in communicative language teaching (CLT) principles, prescribes maximal use of the target language and treats L1 use as a departure from best practice (Cook, 2001). However, a growing body of sociolinguistic and applied linguistics research challenges this view, presenting evidence that principled, purposeful use of the first language (L1) can scaffold learner comprehension, reduce affective barriers, and support the internalization of complex grammatical or lexical concepts (Cummins, 2007; Macaro, 2009).

Critically, the specific context of Uzbekistan — characterized by its trilingual dynamics, transitional educational system, and diverse student population — remains underexamined in the code-switching literature. Most existing studies are situated in Western or East Asian EFL contexts, leaving a significant gap in our understanding of how CS operates in Central Asian educational environments. This study seeks to address that gap by systematically examining the functions and frequency of CS in Uzbek EFL university classrooms and by investigating the attitudes of both teachers and learners toward this phenomenon.

The research is guided by three questions: (1) What are the primary functions of code-switching in EFL classrooms in Uzbekistan? (2) How frequently does code-switching

occur, and who initiates it — teachers or learners? (3) What attitudes do EFL teachers and learners hold toward the use of code-switching as a pedagogical practice? The answers to these questions have direct implications for teacher training, curriculum design, and language policy in Uzbekistan.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Code-switching is a well-documented sociolinguistic phenomenon studied across various disciplines. Myers-Scotton (1993) distinguished between inter-sentential CS (switching at clause boundaries), intra-sentential CS (switching within a clause), and tag switching (insertion of tags from one language into another). In educational contexts, researchers have adopted Macaro's (2009) functional taxonomy as a useful analytical framework, categorizing CS according to its pedagogical purpose — whether it serves to clarify meaning, manage the classroom, provide emotional support, or facilitate metalinguistic instruction.

A key theoretical contribution to the field is Cummins' (1981) Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) model, which posits that competencies developed in the L1 transfer positively to the L2. From this perspective, using the L1 in EFL instruction is not merely permissible but potentially advantageous, as it allows learners to activate existing conceptual knowledge while building L2 representations. More recently, translanguaging theory (Garcia & Wei, 2014) has offered a more radical position, suggesting that multilinguals do not operate with separate, bounded language systems but rather draw on an integrated linguistic repertoire — a view that further legitimizes the strategic use of CS in language classrooms.

### Code-Switching in EFL Classroom Research

Empirical studies on classroom CS have yielded nuanced findings. Turnbull and Dailey-O'Cain (2009) found that effective EFL teachers use L1 strategically and sparingly, primarily for concept explanation and classroom management. Al-Nofaie (2010), in a Saudi EFL context, reported that both students and teachers favored judicious L1 use,

particularly for explaining abstract vocabulary and reducing learner anxiety. Lin (2013) extended this discussion to argue that CS can function as a 'space of possibility' in which teachers negotiate between official language policy and the communicative realities of their classrooms.

Studies in contexts linguistically comparable to Uzbekistan, such as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, have similarly found that CS serves important scaffolding functions. Smagulova (2008) documented extensive Russian-Kazakh switching in Kazakhstani classrooms, arguing that official English-only policies create unrealistic expectations that are systematically ignored in practice. These findings suggest that a gap between policy prescription and classroom reality is a structural feature of multilingual EFL contexts — one that is likely to be reproduced in the Uzbek setting.

Teacher attitudes toward CS are shaped by a complex interplay of professional training, institutional expectations, and personal linguistic identity. Studies consistently find that teachers are more likely to engage in CS when they feel secure in their professional identity and perceive the classroom as a space for pragmatic decision-making rather than rigid policy compliance (Macaro, 2009). In contrast, teachers with more prescriptive orientations — often those trained in CLT or immersion frameworks — tend to express guilt or ambivalence about CS, even when they engage in it (Canagarajah, 2011). Understanding these attitudinal dynamics is essential for designing professional development programs that equip teachers to use CS deliberately and reflectively.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

A convergent mixed-methods design was employed, in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently and integrated at the interpretive stage. This approach was selected because it allows for a comprehensive understanding of a complex, context-dependent phenomenon such as classroom CS, where numerical patterns alone cannot capture the richness of teacher and learner experience (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The study was conducted at three state universities in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, across departments of Philology, Economics, and Engineering. These departments were selected to represent different disciplinary contexts in which English is taught. Participants included 15 EFL teachers (9 female, 6 male; mean teaching experience 11.3 years) and 120 first- and second-year undergraduate students (74 female, 46 male). All teachers held at least a bachelor's degree in English philology or linguistics; three held doctoral degrees. Students were at B1–B2 CEFR proficiency levels.

### Data Collection

Three instruments were used. First, 20 classroom sessions (each 80 minutes) were video-recorded and transcribed. CS instances were identified and coded according to the language involved (Uzbek-English, Russian-English, or trilingual) and their function (translation, clarification, classroom management, metalinguistic, or affective). Inter-rater reliability for the coding scheme was established at Cohen's kappa = 0.81. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all 15 teachers to explore their attitudes, beliefs, and decision-making processes regarding CS. Interviews were conducted in Uzbek or Russian, according to teacher preference, and translated into English for analysis. Third, a 20-item Likert-scale questionnaire was administered to the 120 student participants to assess learner attitudes toward CS on dimensions of comprehension, motivation, and language learning efficacy.

Quantitative data from the questionnaire and frequency counts were analyzed using SPSS 27.0, with descriptive statistics and chi-square tests applied as appropriate. Qualitative data from observations and interviews were analyzed thematically following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), incorporating both deductive codes derived from the literature and inductive codes emerging from the data.

## 4. RESULTS

Across the 20 observed sessions, a total of 487 CS instances were identified, yielding an average of 24.4 instances per 80-minute lesson. Teacher-initiated CS accounted for 331

instances (68%), while learner-initiated CS accounted for 156 instances (32%). The most frequently used language pair in CS was Uzbek-English (61%), followed by Russian-English (29%), with trilingual (Uzbek-Russian-English) switching comprising the remaining 10%. This distribution reflects the broader sociolinguistic profile of the student population, the majority of whom reported Uzbek as their dominant home language but Russian as the language of prior academic instruction.

Five functional categories accounted for all 487 CS instances. Translation and equivalence provision was the most frequent function (34%), occurring when teachers rendered English instructions, vocabulary, or explanations in Uzbek or Russian to ensure comprehension. Clarification and elaboration followed (27%), used to explain abstract concepts or nuanced grammatical distinctions. Classroom management accounted for 18% of instances, typically occurring when teachers gave instructions about homework, groupings, or behavior. Metalinguistic discussion — instances where CS was used to explicitly discuss language structure or usage — comprised 13%. Finally, affective support (8%) involved CS used to encourage, praise, or comfort students, particularly when addressing errors. A chi-square analysis confirmed significant differences in the functional distribution of teacher-initiated versus learner-initiated CS ( $\chi^2(4) = 41.7, p < 0.001$ ), with learner CS concentrated in the translation and affective categories.

Interview analysis revealed a dominant theme of pedagogical pragmatism among teachers: most acknowledged that CS was often unavoidable and sometimes beneficial, yet over half (8 of 15) expressed feelings of professional discomfort when they switched languages, associating it with a failure to implement CLT principles fully. A smaller group of teachers (5 of 15) articulated a more affirmative view of CS, describing it as a resource that allowed them to meet students where they were linguistically.

Learner questionnaire data were broadly positive toward CS. Approximately 78% of students agreed or strongly agreed that CS helped them understand English lessons better. 71% felt less anxious when teachers occasionally switched to Uzbek or Russian. However, 62% also agreed that excessive CS would reduce their opportunities to practice English —

reflecting a nuanced awareness that CS, while beneficial in moderation, should not supplant target language use.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study make several important contributions to our understanding of CS in EFL classrooms. The dominance of translation and clarification as CS functions aligns with previous research in comparable multilingual EFL contexts (Al-Nofaie, 2010; Lin, 2013) and supports the argument that CS in teacher practice is primarily driven by communicative necessity rather than linguistic laziness or policy negligence. The high prevalence of teacher-initiated over learner-initiated CS is also consistent with the literature and reflects the teacher's role as the primary language authority and scaffolding agent in the classroom.

The attitudinal data present a more complex picture. The conflict expressed by many teachers — using CS in practice while feeling professionally uncomfortable about it — reflects what Canagarajah (2011) describes as the 'ideological gap' between dominant monolingual teaching paradigms and multilingual classroom realities. This tension is particularly acute in Uzbekistan, where educational policy increasingly promotes English-medium instruction but provides limited guidance on how to manage the multilingual realities of classrooms in practice.

Learner attitudes offer perhaps the most significant finding for pedagogical practice: students are not passive recipients of CS but active evaluators who recognize both its benefits and its risks. Their endorsement of moderate, purposeful CS — combined with their concern about over-reliance — suggests that learners themselves understand and value a balanced approach to language use. This finding argues against simplistic 'English-only' or 'L1-permitted' positions and in favor of a principled, context-sensitive pedagogy of translanguaging.

From a policy perspective, the study underscores the need to revise the often ambiguous or restrictive language policies that govern EFL classrooms in Uzbekistan. Policies should acknowledge the multilingual reality of these classrooms and provide

teachers with a principled framework for making CS decisions — one grounded in learner needs, pedagogical goals, and linguistic theory rather than monolingual ideology.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This study provides a systematic empirical account of code-switching in EFL university classrooms in Uzbekistan, documenting its frequency, functional distribution, and the attitudes of teachers and learners toward it. The results demonstrate that CS is a pervasive and functionally diverse practice serving legitimate pedagogical purposes, including scaffolding comprehension, managing affective barriers, and facilitating metalinguistic awareness. Both teachers and learners hold nuanced attitudes toward CS, recognizing its utility while also expressing concerns about its potential to limit target language exposure.

These findings have important implications for teacher education, classroom practice, and language policy. Teacher training programs should equip future EFL educators with theoretical frameworks and practical strategies for principled CS use, moving beyond the binary of 'English-only' versus unrestricted L1 use. Language policies in Uzbekistan should be revised to reflect the multilingual realities of classrooms rather than prescribing idealized monolingual norms that are systematically inconsistent with practice. Future research should examine CS in secondary school EFL contexts and investigate the long-term relationship between CS patterns and L2 proficiency development

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