



**To Be or Not to Be: Undergraduate ESL Learners' Attitudes
Towards Code-Switching**

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Abstract

Code-switching and its pros and cons, is a highly debated phenomenon in second language learning in a classroom setting. This study also discusses how hindering code-switching affects the learning process in English language classrooms. The data for this quantitative study was gathered from the population of 50 BS second language learners at the University of Lahore through a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire. The results indicate that the majority of undergraduate learners have a favorable disposition towards the practice of code-switching. They face difficulties when they are not allowed to switch codes in the classroom. However, it has been found that there are a few learners who do not feel any difficulty in the absence of code-switching opportunities. According to the findings, stopping the learners from code-switching in educational settings is disadvantageous. The encouragement of code-switching practice in classrooms is a robust way of enhancing communicative skills, socio-emotional engagement, and accelerating learning outcomes. These findings have important implications for language educators and policymakers and will help in fulfilling the actual classroom requirements and bringing about a change in the attitudes towards code-switching.

Keywords: Code-switching, ESL learners' attitudes, problems, Learning development.

Introduction

Code-switching is defined as the constant alternation between two or more language codes within the same discourse. The codes can be dissimilar languages, dialects, or styles of using a language (Myers-Scotton 147). In different academic arrangements, there are different impressions of code-switching. It is regarded as a negative practice and barrier by some



members of the English language teaching community (Ellis 4; & Fareed et al. 7). Nevertheless, many language instructors admit that there are occasions when teaching in the first language is facile (Hajrah et al. 627; Levine 346; & Xiaoli 1278). In most of the contexts, the English language learner (ELL) does not find the opportunity to switch codes in the language classrooms, which causes many problems in learning the target language. The principal reason for this investigation is to examine the difficulties faced by learners of the English language when they are deprived of code-switching opportunities in classrooms. The objectives of the study are to point out the difficulties that English language learners face without code-switching, to examine the effects of stopping English language learners from code-switching in classrooms. The research questions are given below:

- I. What are the effects of discouraging code-switching among English language learners?
- II. Which difficulties do the learners have to confront due to the absence of code-switching opportunities?

The theoretical insights are structured on the theory of bilingualism by Hoffmann, presented in 1991. According to him, bilinguals usually use their languages either independently or together in various domains of life and with different individuals (13). Numerous variables like age, setting, sequence, level of proficiency, capacity, usage, and state of mind must be considered while portraying bilingualism. He discusses the interconnection of bilingualism, the definitions, functions, types, benefits, and reasons for using code-switching (Hoffman 155; Candra and Qodriani 11; Susanti et al. 33). The current research will help map out the difficulties faced by English language learners when they are not allowed to switch codes in the classroom settings. Thus, it will help in getting a deeper understanding of the significance of the practice among learners. This study will provide insights that may influence the decisions of teachers and language policymakers about code-switching.

Against the historical backdrop of research on code-switching, various meanings of the phenomenon have been proposed. Gumperz (1982) says code-switching is a juxtaposition within a similar discourse having a connection with two distinctive linguistic frameworks or subsystems (59). It can be defined as the shift or alteration of two or more codes or one style of language to another style of language by a speaker within the same discourse (Auer 125). A person who can listen, read, speak, and write in more than one language is considered bilingual (Baker 57). Since the 1970s, bilingualism has turned into a noteworthy focal point of research. Research can be done on bilingualism from alternate points of view, i.e., from a phonetic, psycholinguistic, or sociolinguistic perspective (Hajrah et al. 627). De La Campa et al. (2009)



assert that the monolingual policy can hinder the process of language learning by delaying the process of concept development (57). Narasuman et al. (2019) have also the same views about code-switching, and according to them, when the teachers switch codes, the students follow them and use code-switching to facilitate their learning process (143). Code-switching makes second language acquisition easy by making changes to the input (Lin 215).

No research has been capable of clearly showing a causal correlation between the process of excluding the mother tongue from the classrooms and more satisfactory and effective learning. Arnaus et al. (2021) recommend that educationists ought to regard the mother tongue of the learners as a natural alternative and time-saving route to learning that should be employed where suitable and should not be avoided completely (19). Palmer (2009) found that for both children and adults, code-switching is not about the deficiency of language competence but communicative proficiency (45). According to the psychological perspective, it is the arrangement of significant patterns that work spontaneously in their minds for the processes of articulation and comprehension (Sultana and Fang 66). According to the sociological perspective, it is a source for manifesting one's identity among individuals (Van Vu 79). According to the educational perspective, learners adapt more rapidly through it than through a new medium (Przymus 2). The above proclamation underpins the idea that the native language is the best medium for teaching foreign language learners and increasing their learning pace. However, more researchers are affirming the benefit of permitting the switching of codes in the classroom. As indicated by Metila (2009), code-switching increases the participation of the learners in classroom activities and discussions by inciting a relaxed class environment (63). Shekhawat and Bakilapadavu's Study (2017) mentioned that understanding of soft skills aids learners in assessing context-based requirements, achieving their communicative competence and successful professional life effectively (29). Context-based understanding of language switching accelerates the performance of the learners. Masna (2020) confirms that English language learners switch the codes to fill any social and language gap (96). Jingxia (2010) likewise finds that code-switching provides students the confidence for participation in the class (23). Chowdhury (2012) also opines that it encourages the learning process for learners (57). In brief, code switching helps to adjust the classroom atmosphere. The supporters of code-switching in the classroom regard it as a resource rather than an obstruction (Cook 419).

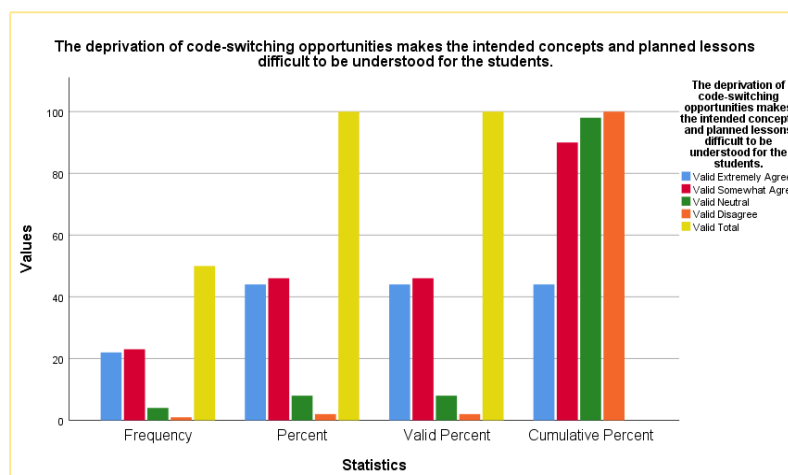
Methodology



The data was collected through questionnaires from 50 BS English language learners at University of Lahore (UOL). The data was analyzed using SPSS version 24.0. The descriptive statistics method was used for data analysis. The questionnaire consisted of ten close-ended and two open-ended questions. Each question had five options, which are the codes on the Likert scale. Coding and Likert scale values 1 to 5, from ‘extremely agree’ to ‘extremely disagree’ were used respectively. Frequencies, averages, and percentages were analyzed. In the end, it was tabulated for comparison.

Data Analysis

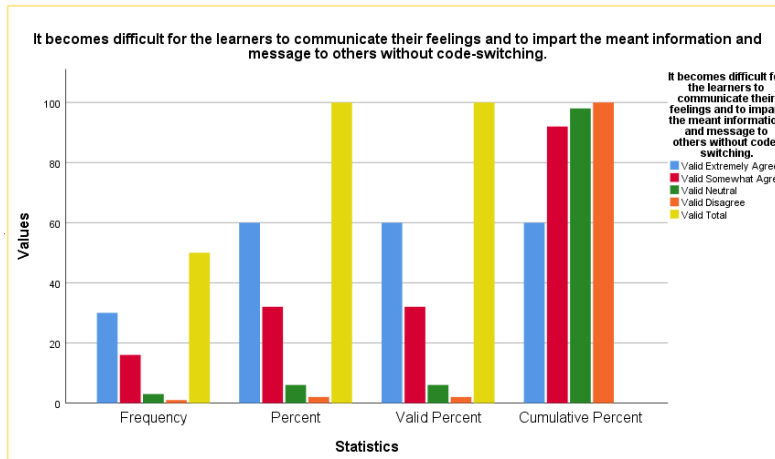
The analysis report confirmed that learners face difficulties in learning the English language when they are deprived of code-switching opportunities in the class. The questionnaires were given to 61 students, and only 50 responded to them. Thematic analysis was chosen for the analysis of open-ended questions. The percentage of each close-ended questionnaire response is shown in the tables and graphs, which provide complete details of the data.



Graph 1

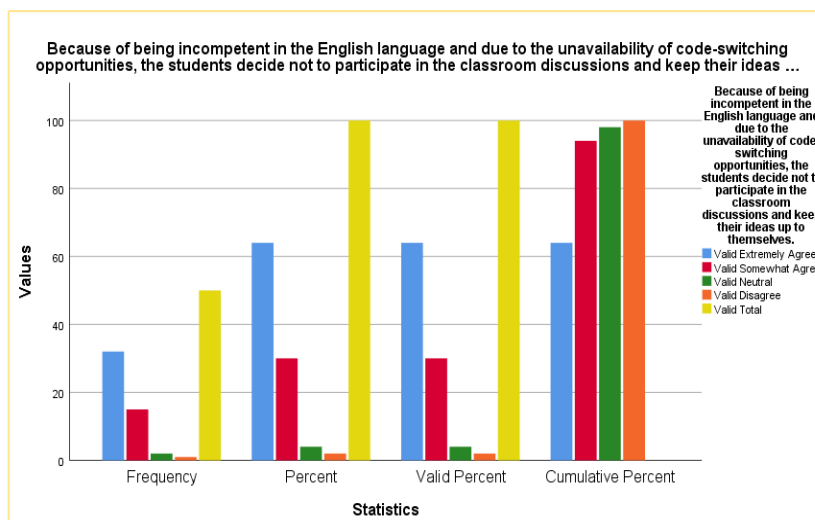
According to Graph 1, out of the 50 respondents, 44% ‘extremely agreed.’ On the other hand, 46% slightly agreed with the statement that the deprivation of code-switching opportunities makes the intended concepts and planned lessons difficult to understand by the students. While 8% decided to stay neutral and 2% disagreed.





Graph 2

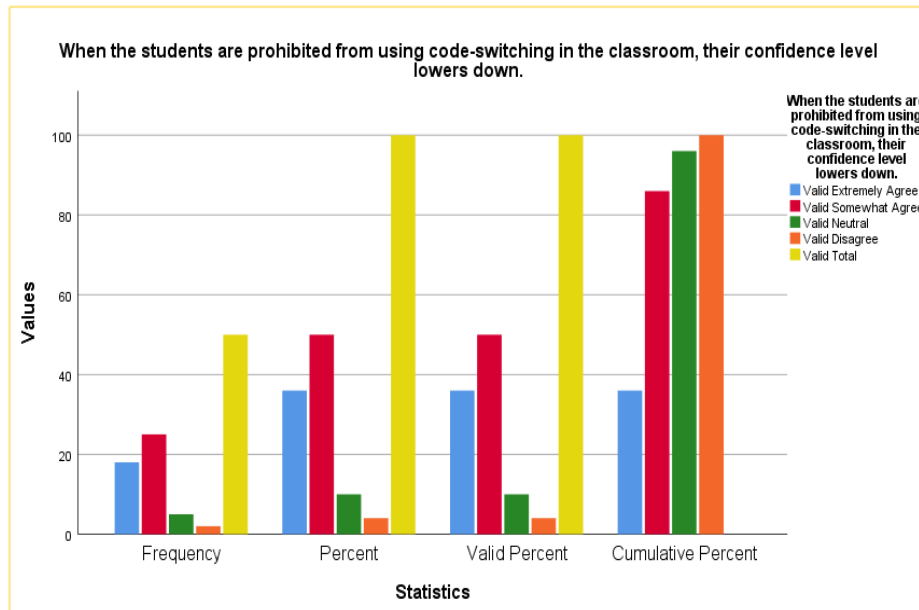
Graph 2 shows that 58% of the respondents extremely agreed, and 32% somewhat agreed that it becomes difficult for the learners to communicate their feelings and convey the meant information and message to others without code-switching. While 6% stayed neutral and 4% disagreed.



Graph 3

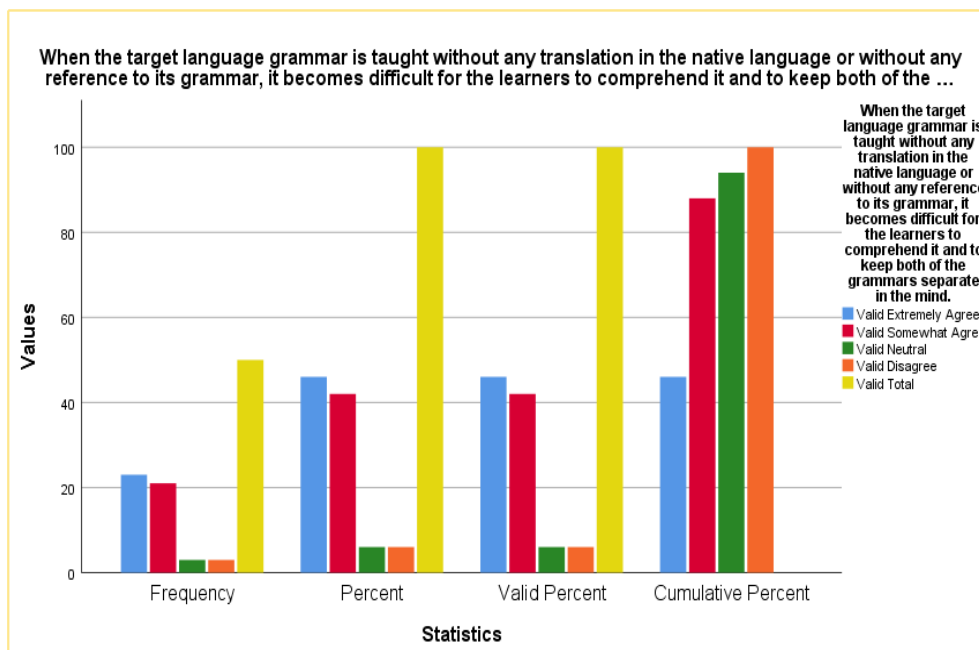
Graph 3 indicates that 64% strongly agreed and 30% slightly agreed with the statement that because of being incompetent in the English language and due to the unavailability of code-switching opportunities, the students decided not to participate in the classroom discussions and kept their ideas to themselves. While 4% stayed neutral and 2% disagreed.





Graph 4

As shown in Graph 4, 36% of respondents extremely agreed and 50% somewhat agreed that when the students are prohibited from using code-switching in the classroom, their confidence level goes down. While 10% chose to say nothing. The remaining 4% did not agree with the statement.

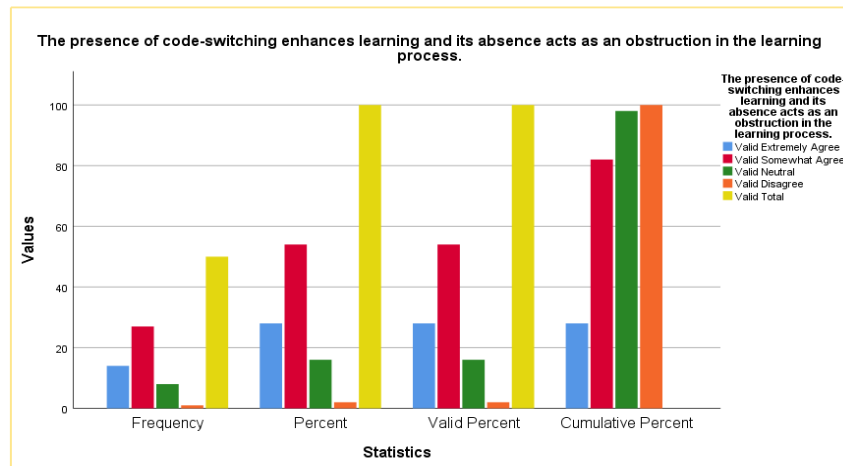


Graph 5

Graph 5 demonstrates that 46% respondents extremely agreed. 42% respondents slightly agreed that when the target language grammar is taught without any translation in the native language or without any reference to the native language's grammar, it becomes difficult for

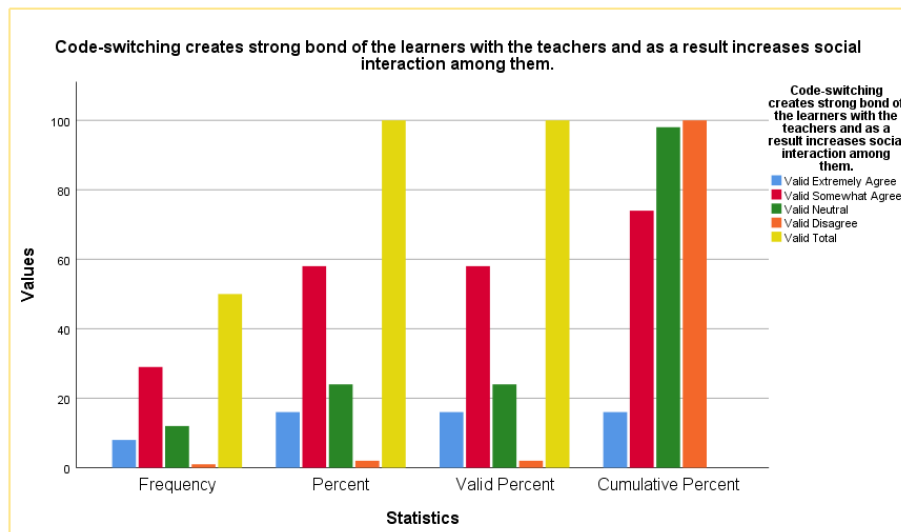


the learners to comprehend it and to keep both the grammars separate in minds. While 6% stayed neutral and 6% disagreed.



Graph 6

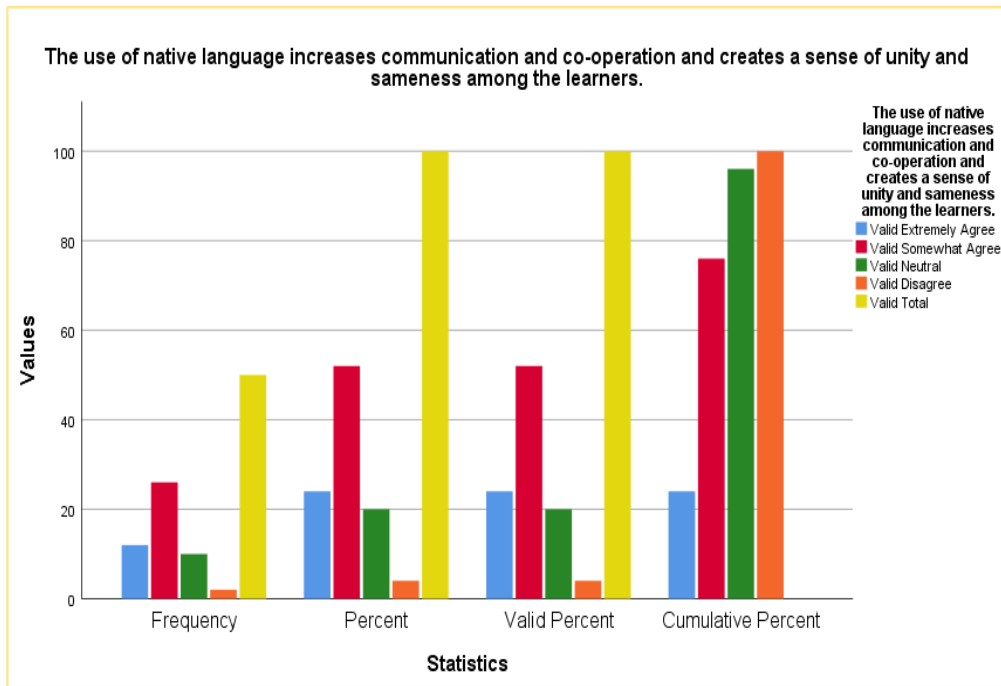
Graph 6 indicates that 28% extremely agreed and 54% somewhat agreed that the presence of code-switching enhances learning and its absence acts as an obstruction in the learning process. While 16% stayed neutral and 2% disagreed.



Graph 7

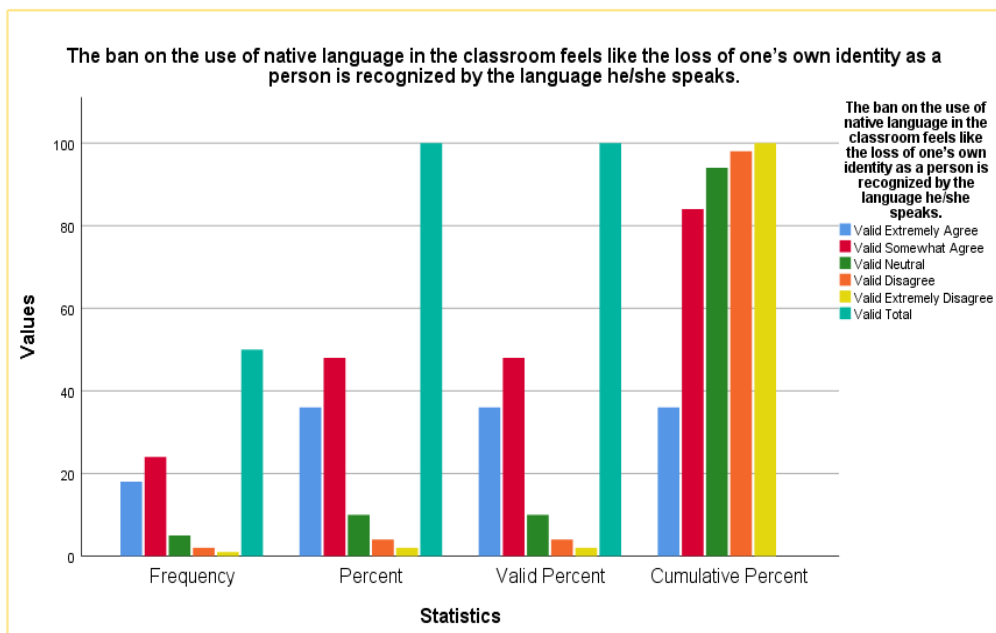
Graph 7 denotes that 16% extremely agreed and 58% somewhat agreed that code-switching creates a strong bond between the learners and the teachers, and as a result, increases social interaction among them. While 24% stayed neutral and 2% disagreed.





Graph 8

Graph 8 shows that 24% of respondents extremely agreed and 52% somewhat agreed that the use of native language increases communication and cooperation and creates a sense of unity and sameness among the learners. While 20% stayed neutral and 4% disagreed.

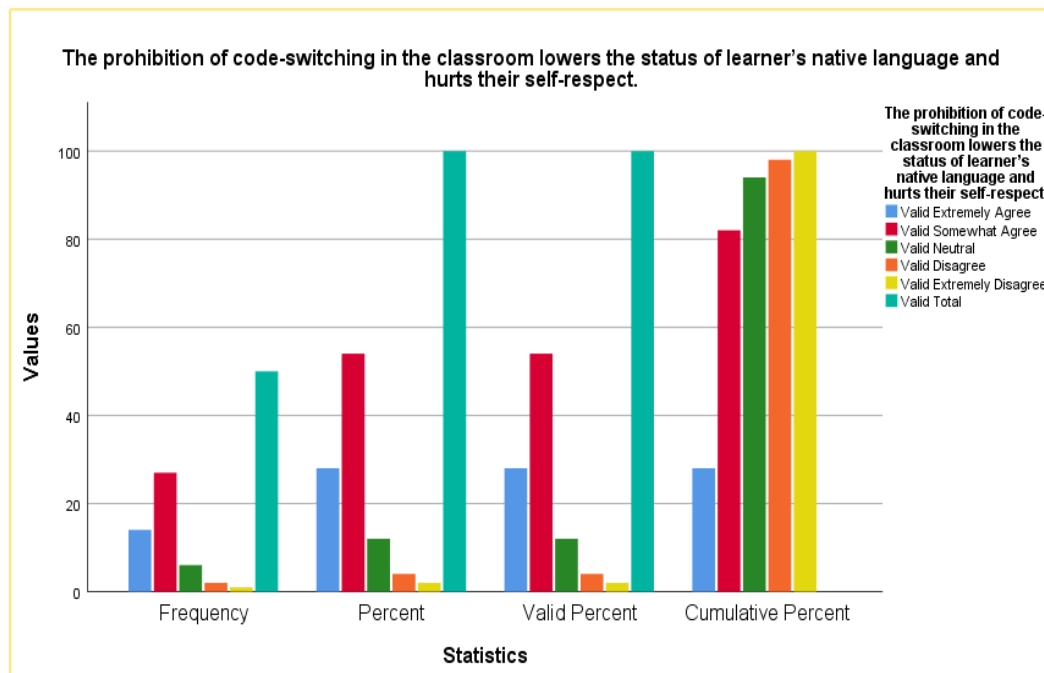


Graph 9

Graph 9 signifies that 36% of the respondents extremely agreed. 48% slightly agreed that the discouragement of the use of mother tongue in the educational settings affects one's identity



as a person is recognized by the language, he/she speaks. While 10% stayed neutral, 4% disagreed, and 2% extremely disagreed.



Graph 10

According to Graph 10, 28% of respondents extremely agreed and 54% affirmed that the prohibition of code-switching during classroom sessions lowers the status of their native language and hurts their self-esteem. While 12% stayed neutral, 4% disagreed, and 2% extremely disagreed.

Analysis of Open-ended Questionnaire

Apart from the close-ended questionnaire, the learners were asked two open-ended questions. In the first question, the learners were asked to share any difficulty they faced in learning English without code-switching, apart from the difficulties mentioned in the close-ended questions. Since the open-ended questions are meant to obtain the free opinion of the respondents, more than 70% of the ELLs said that all the difficulties are already mentioned in the close-ended questionnaire and are sufficient, while others expressed their unwillingness to share their thoughts. A few of them shared some difficulties and said that they feel a sense of self-depreciation and their native language when discouraged from code-switching in the classroom. Some of them mentioned that the teachers and other learners perceive them as low-proficient learners when they switch codes.

In the second question, the learners were asked to make some suggestions regarding the problem. One of the respondents said that the opinions of teachers and students should not be



neglected because they know much more about this issue. Another respondent said that code-switching needs to be allowed, but not completely. The statement of another respondent supported this recommendation. He said that code-switching should be allowed but not exclusively. Another respondent stated that the choice should be made by the learners. The answer from another learner supported this view. He stated that the learners' opinions ought to be considered regarding the usage of code-switching in the class. Another respondent said that undoubtedly code-switching has demerits, but it is not deprived of merits at all. A respondent said that there should be controlled code-switching. Another respondent said that it should be permitted. Another respondent added that it should be allowed but on a limited level. One of the respondents says that the benefits of code-switching should be considered. A few of the respondents did not answer the question.

Summary of the Percentages

| Qs | Extremely Agree | Somewhat Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Extremely Disagree |
|---|-----------------|----------------|---------|----------|--------------------|
| Intended concepts and planned lessons become difficult to understand without code-switching | 44.0% | 46.0% | 8.0% | 2.0% | - |
| Communication of feelings, information, and meant messages become difficult without code-switching | 58.0% | 32.0% | 6.0% | 4.0% | - |
| Learners do not participate in classroom discussions and keep their ideas up to themselves without CS | 64.0% | 30.0% | 4.0% | 2.0% | - |
| The confidence level of the students lowers when code-switching is prohibited | 36.0% | 50.0% | 10.0% | 4.0% | - |
| When language is taught without code-switching, | 46.0% | 42.0% | 6.0% | 6.0% | - |



| | | | | | |
|---|-------|-------|-------|------|------|
| grammar comprehension and keeping the grammar of both languages separate in mind, becomes difficult | | | | | |
| Code-switching enhances learning and its absence obstructs learning | 28.0% | 52.0% | 16.0% | 2.0% | - |
| Code-switching creates a strong bond between the learners and the teachers | 16.0% | 58.0% | 24.0% | 2.0% | - |
| Increases communication and cooperation and creates a sense of unity and sameness | 24.0% | 54.0% | 20.0% | 4.0% | - |
| The ban on native language engenders the feeling of loss of one's own identity | 36.0% | 48.0% | 10.0% | 4.0% | 2.0% |
| Code-switching lowers the status of learners' native language and hurts their self-esteem. | 28.0% | 54.0% | 12.0% | 4.0% | 2.0% |

Discussion

Code-switching is unavoidable among ELL classrooms. The findings uncover that undergraduate learners have positive inclination to code-switching and face difficulties when they are not allowed to switch codes in the classroom. Without switching codes, it is difficult for learners to understand the teacher's intended concepts and planned lessons. The reasons behind learners' decision not to participate in classroom discussions and keep their ideas to themselves, are incompetence in English language and the unavailability of code-switching opportunities, which lower their confidence level. On the other hand, code-switching increases social interaction among teachers and learners, and creates a strong bond of unity and cooperation among them. The prohibition on the usage of their native language in classrooms baffles them about their identity. Some of the respondents did not choose either side and stayed neutral. The minority of the respondents was not in favor of code-switching, and they did not think that the deprivation and absence of code-switching opportunities result in any difficulty



for the learners. So, using or not using the native language should be the decision of teachers and learners only because they know it better than anyone else.

Conclusion

Code-switching is a frequently used linguistic phenomenon in bilingual or multilingual classrooms as in Pakistan. The findings of the study show the need for code-switching practice in a second-language classroom context. The use of code-switching not only helps the learners to comprehend the ideas and concepts in a better way but also boosts their confidence, linguistic flexibility, cultural inclusion, strong socio-emotional bond, and teamwork involvement in the development of the communicative soft skills. This practice also lowers their performance anxiety, identity complexes, audience fear, and feelings of embarrassment towards their mother tongue and its usage. On the basis of the statistical evidence, it is concluded that code-switching facilitates ESL learners at BS level in Pakistan. It should be allowed and considered as a resource because when it is discouraged, the learners have to confront many difficulties. In conclusion, there is still room for discussion about promoting code-switching among undergraduate students in the Pakistani educational context. For a balanced educational approach in the Pakistani context, it is essential to find a balance that addresses possible challenges and disadvantages while acknowledging advantages. To sum up, the practice of code-switching ought to be restricted in classroom areas, and it ought to be allowed but not completely. Lack of competence can encourage excessive use of this practice in an educational environment, so the amount of its usage in the classroom needs to be monitored and assessed periodically. Excessive use of code-switching will hinder students from developing the soft skills and communication necessary for success in professional life. Two recent studies conducted in India also support this suggestion. According to these studies practicing one-on-one conversation tasks (Shekhawat and Nirban 56) and group discussion strategies (Sharma and Shekhawat 12) are useful ways to improve communication skills among the learners. The combination of above mentioned two strategies with balanced code-switching practice in educational settings, can accelerate the learning outcomes of second and foreign-language learners with fewer problems. This type of classroom direction can yield great outcomes by meeting the requirements of the syllabus and help less-proficient students to achieve anticipated objectives.

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