Code-Switching: Pedagogical Method in Bridging the Linguistic Gap between Students' Mother Tongue and English language

Emad Ali Alawad Ali -Religious and Educational Programme , Comboni College, Khartoum , Sudan **Email:** u.emadali@hotmail.com

Abstract

This paper aims at investigating the pedagogical role which code-switching plays to bridge the linguistic gap between the students' mother tongue and English language during EFL classes. The study adopted the descriptive analytic method and it incorporated two data gathering tools which were classroom observation checklist and teachers' questionnaire. To conduct the study, ninety (90) students at Alnokhaba Secondary School in Omdurman Locality besides (15) EFL secondary school teachers were randomly selected to represent the study sample. The statistical results obtained have revealed that code-switching achieved the students' satisfaction and helped them feel more comfortable and more connected with the lesson content in addition to enabling them to take a remarkable part in classroom discourse. Besides what has been mentioned the findings also have indicated that, code-switching actually minimizes both the time spent by the teacher to explain the difficult linguistic concepts and the effort that he/she exerts.

Keywords: pedagogical, code-switching, linguistic gap, EFL classes, mother tongue language

المستخلص

تهدف هذه الورقة الى تقصى الدور التعليمي الذى يلعبه التناوب اللغوي في سد الفجوة اللغوية بين اللغة الام للطلاب واللغة المستهدفة (الانجليزية) اثناء دروس اللغة الانجليزية لغة اجنبية .اعتمدت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي وتضمنت اداتين لجمع البيانات وهما قائمة الملاحظات الصفية واستبانة المعلمين. ولاجراء الدراسة , اختار الباحث عشوائيا عينة من 90 طالبا من مدرسة النخبة الثانوية بمحلية ام درمان الى جانب خمسة عشر مدرسا في المرحلة الثانوية . اظهرت النتائج الاحصائية التى تم الحصول عليها ان التناوب اللغوي حقق رضاء الطلاب وجعلهم اكثر ارتياحا وارتباطا بمحتوى الدرس بالاضافة الي تمكينهم من المشاركة بصورة فاعلة في الخطاب الصفي . .بجانب ما سبق ذكره قد اشارت النتائج ايضا الي ان التناوب اللغوي يقلل من الوقت والجهد الذى يبذل من قبل المدرس لشرح المفاهيم اللغوية الصعبة .

الكلمات المفتاحية: تعليمى ، التناوب اللغوى ، الفجوة اللغوية, دروس اللغة الانجليزية لغة اجنبية, اللغة الام

Introduction

Fundamentally, teaching English as a foreign language (FL) is not as an easy task as it is usually thought since it requires practical teaching techniques, methods and approaches to impact knowledge into EFL learners. Influential methods and updated strategies actually contribute to promoting learning, strongly encouraging learners to involve into the learning process, developing their linguistic skills and affecting development of their attitudes and values. Consequently it can be said that the perfect teaching method is the one that the learners respond to and the master teachers are those who are able to adjust their methods and strategies in response to their learners' abilities.

In the field of ELT, English language teachers have been accustomed to using different methods and strategies to facilitate learning process but it should be noted that the grammar-translation method is still the most widely used and adopted for teaching English language to foreign students despite the criticism made about it . For instance, Zhou & Niu (2015:798) see that this method has its shortcomings. However, the using of first language in foreign language classrooms has been controversial issue since the 19th. Centaury (Hall & Cook (2012) and in order to obtain reliable and valid outcomes which can put an end to this controversy, many scholars in the field have examined this phenomenon from either pedagogical (Levine, 2011) or a sociolinguistic perspective (Auer, 1988)

Recently code-switching has widely been used in EFL classrooms as a practical instructive tool that positively impacts English language teaching-learning process and the studies conducted in this regard have proven the efficacy of this phenomenon in facilitating the linguistic content delivered, building solidarity and intimating relationships between the different parties of teaching-learning process in all its stages before, during and after the lessons. Also some linguists think that using students' first language in teaching English has benefits in acquiring a second or foreign language for example Brown (2006) believes that using the first language can ease the process of learning in the classroom and can harmonize different capacities of language competency. Aurbach, (1993) from his side has touched upon psychological impact of code-switching on learning a foreign language by calming that using learners' mother tongue into the classroom makes them feel safe and let them express themselves. Cook also (2001) reports that, the learners find classroom interaction more natural and easy when code-switching is allowed. (Macaro, 2001) adds that , all the views about discouraging L1 in L2 classrooms , have not provided strong evidence for avoiding L1, nor have clear reasons for banning L1 been identified.

On the contrary, some linguists see that using much native language in the classroom undermines the learning process of the foreign language and they commends that learners should be exposed to the target language to better serve and secure the goal of teaching a target language . According to Eldridge (1996), code switching is a kind of negative transfer and as he states that students must try hard to minimize its use so as to maximize the exposure to and use of the target language in the classroom.

Code –switching is linguistically defined as the alternation of two or more languages within the same conversation, Myers-Scotton (1993) in other words the bilinguals or multilinguals sometimes use elements of multiple languages when conversing with each other. Homes .J, from his part (2013) defines the term code-switching as the movement from one code to another during speech for a number of reasons such to signal solidarity, to reflect one's ethnic identity, to show off, to hide some information from the third party or to achieve better explanation of a certain concept". Trousdale (2010) reports that code switching is the linguistic situation where a speaker alternates between two varieties (code) in conversation with others who have similar linguistic repertoire. From their side, Richards, J.C & Rogers T.S.

(1986:58) describe the phenomenon as a change made by speaker from one language or language variety to another. There are three known types of codes-witching which have been identified by Poplack (1980) as follows: inter-sentential switches, intra-sentential switches, and tag switches. Linguists have mentioned a number of advantages

The growing interest in the role of this phenomenon as an instructive tool has opened the door wide for scholars to conduct a number of studies in this regard. One of the studies reviewed is that conducted by Malik, M. (2014) who investigated (200) low English Proficient learners of various colleges of Khushab and that investigation brought out that the students showed keen interest in language acquisition, which bears ample testimony to code switching is an efficacious and gainful strategy for low English Proficient learners. In another study by Al-Nofaie, H. (2010), the researcher examined the attitudes of Saudi teachers and students towards employing Arabic as a facilitating tool in English classes and the results obtained revealed that the attitudes of the teachers and the students about using Arabic were generally positive. in his study on code-switching, Robert, O. (2013) concluded that code-switching should be viewed in the light of an interference since it does not always serve as a detriment to proficiency in the learning of a language, but may be considered as a usual strategy in classroom interaction, if the aim is to make meaning clear and the transference of knowledge to students in efficient manner.

As an English language teaching practitioner for more than two decades, the researcher has noticed that when difficult linguistic concepts especially the semantic and syntactical ones taught in English, correspondingly some learning problems occur. Therefore, this observation is regarded as the main motive behind conducting this study which is expected to be of great value to English language teachers to be aware of how code switching is a beneficial means to improve the quality of English teaching methodology particularly in dealing effectively with the learners' difficulties in understanding the ambiguous linguistic concepts

In the line with the purpose of this study which mainly focuses on: Investigating the Pedagogical Role of Code-Switching in Bridging the Linguistic Gap between the students' mother tongue and English language, two specific questions were put forth as follows.

1- How can code-switching help the students be connected with the lesson content and enable them to take part in classroom discourse?

2- To what extent can the teachers reap benefits from employing code-switching to facilitate and speed up the lesson?

2- Methodology

2.1 Research Methods

This study is conducted through the analytical descriptive method which is appropriate for investigating the instructive role which is played by code-switching in bridging the linguistic gap between the students' mother tongue and English language in EFL classrooms.

2.2 Tools

Two instruments were used for the purpose of gathering data needed for the study. These instruments were made up of classroom observation checklist and teachers' questionnaire. The classroom observation checklist consisted of seven items which purposely designed to observe EFL students' attitudes towards using code-switching and how it motivates them to interact during EFL lessons.

As for the questionnaires, they were distributed to 15 teachers in the field so as to obtain qualitative data that may contribute to interpreting the advantages of CS phenomenon in expediting students' learning and reducing teacher's ' efforts.

2.3 Participants

The total number of participants who voluntarily participated in this study was (105) and they can be divided into two categories as follows:

(a) Ninety (90) EFL secondary students from Alnokhoba Secondary School were observed in six classes during the school summer course, April 2017. All of the students speak Arabic as mother tongue and they were second and third grades students.

(b) Fifteen (15) EFL teachers who experienced teaching the different levels of (SPINE) in secondary schools.

3- Data Analysis and Results

The data gathered through the two tools were statistically managed and analyzed by using SPSS 16.0 (2010) programme. Then, the results obtained were presented in statistical figures for being interpreted and discussed in the light of the study questions raised above.

3.1. Classroom Observation Checklist Results:

The classroom observation checklist presented the researcher's observations on how code-switching can help the students be connected with the lesson content and enable them to take part in the classroom discourse.

Item [1]: *The students seem to be comfortable when the difficult concepts are explained in their mother tongue*

Figure 1-1 below shows that, during the six observed classes the students all of the time by (50.0%) seemed to be comfortable when the difficult concepts were explained in their mother tongue .The statistical result obtained proves that CS is actually very useful in presenting difficult linguistic concepts during English lessons.
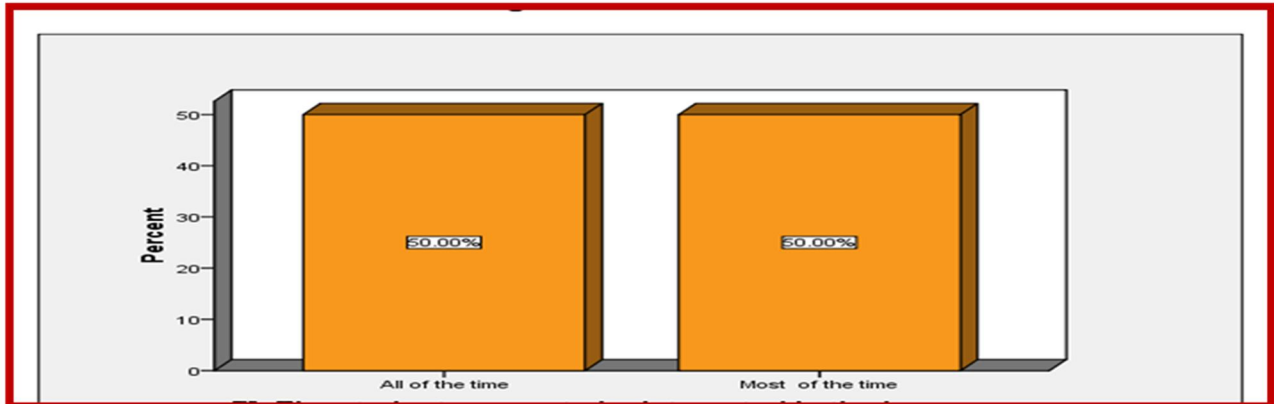

All the time   Most of the time   Rarely

Figure [1-1]: The students seem to be comfortable when the difficult concepts are explained in   their mother tongue

Item [2]: *The students seem to be interested in the lesson and less lost when code-switching is used in the classroom*.

As shown in column figure 1-2, the result concerning this item indicates that, the students who were observed all of the time by (50.0%) and most of the time by (50.0%) seemed to be interested in the lesson and less lost when code-switching was used in the classroom and accordingly this result confirms the advantageous role of CS in EFL teaching process.
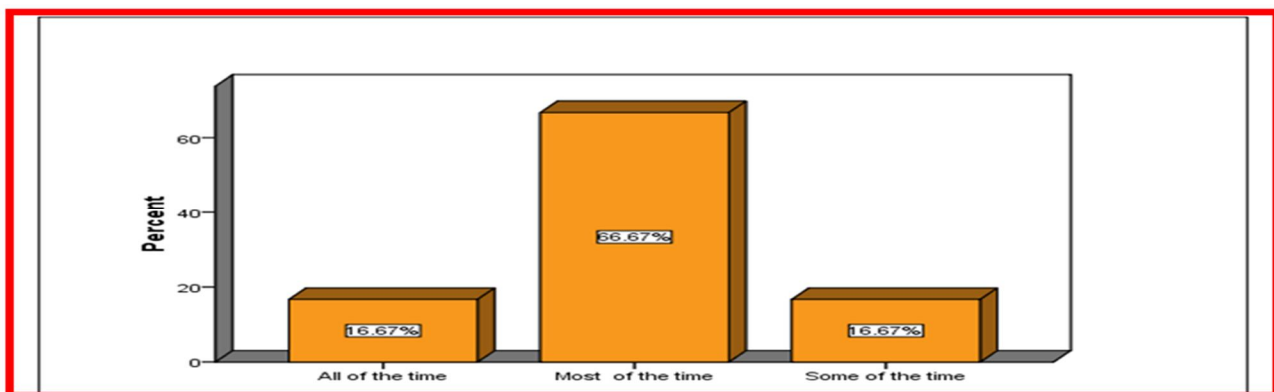

All the time   Most of the time

Figure [1-2]: The students seem to be interested in the lesson and less lost when code-switching is used in the classroom

Item [3]: *The students seem to be confident to interact with their teacher and classmates.*

Referring to the third item of the observation checklist, the statistical information as seen in figure (1-3) shows that most of the time by (66.7%) the students seemed to be confident to interact with their teacher and classmates when two languages were simultaneously used in the classroom. This percentage shown indicates that code-switching certainly enables EFL students to participate in classroom discourse to some extent.

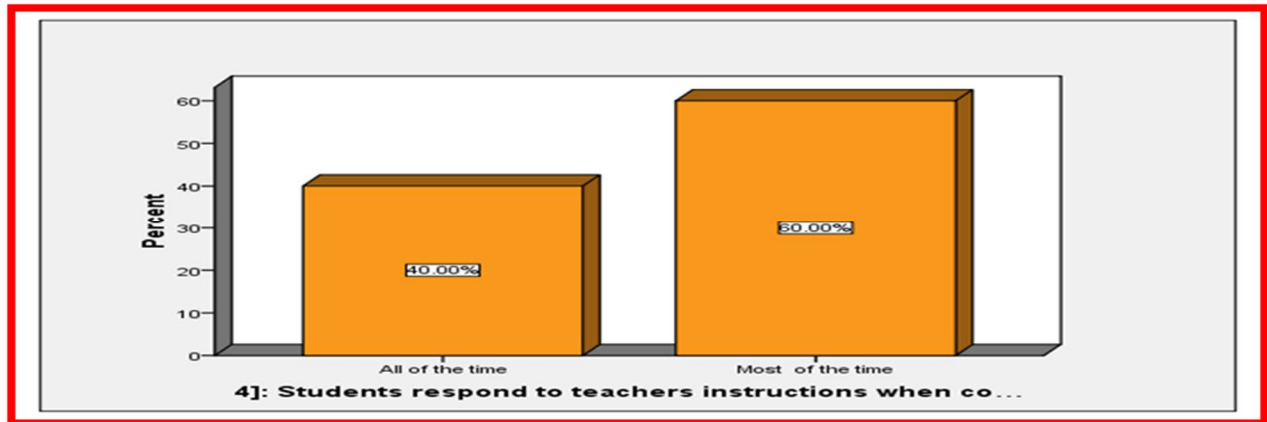All the time   Most of the time   Sometimes

Figure [1-3]: The students seem to be confident to interact with their teacher and classmates.

Item [4]: *Students respond to teachers instructions when code-switching is used*.

The item 4 which is illustrated in figure (1-4) below shows that the students most of the time by (50%) responded to teacher's instructions when code-switching was used.

Therefore, this percentage indicates that, code-switching is an interactive technique in EFL classrooms and that gives positive answer to the first question of the study.
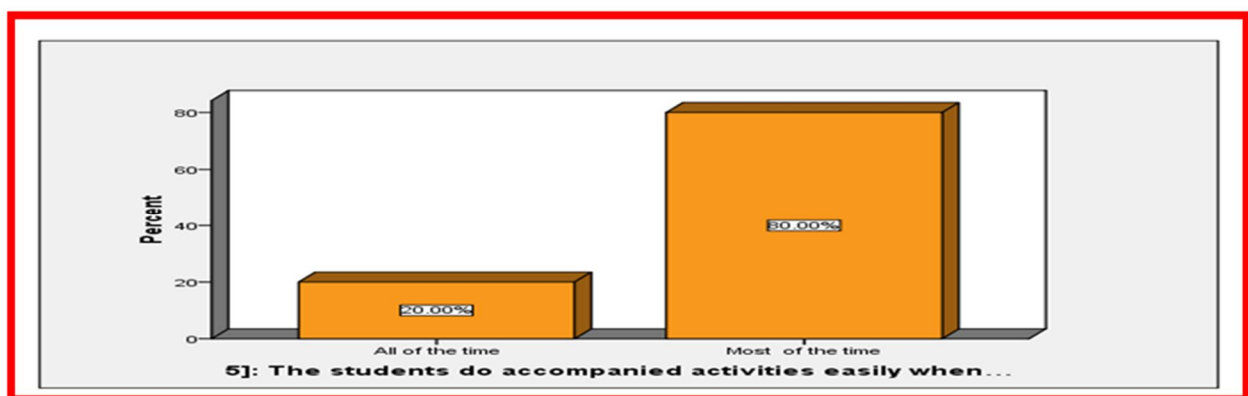

All the time   **Most of the time**

Figure [1-4]: *Students respond to teachers instructions when code-switching is used*.

Item [5]: *The students do accompanied activities easily when code-switching is used*.

The statistical result of checklist item 5 as displayed in figure (1-5) indicates that, the students most of the time by (66.7%) easily did accompanied activities when code-switching was used .Accordingly, the result

obtained clearly shows that, code-switching helps in motivating the classroom interaction and this is without a shadow of a doubt consistent with the answer which the first question sought to find.
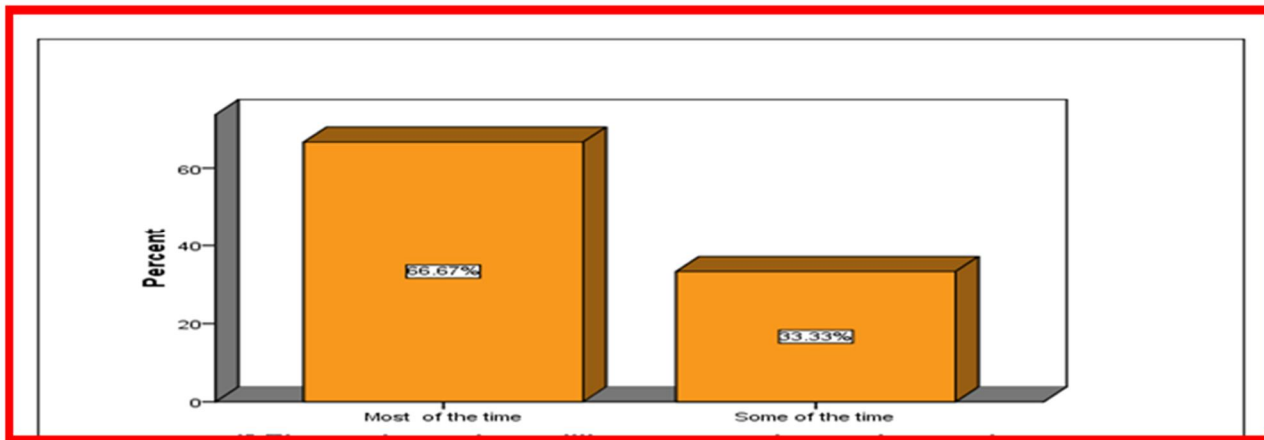

All the time   Most of the time

Figure [1-5]: The students do accompanied activities easily when code-switching is used

Item [6]: *The students show willingness to ask questions and give accurate answers to teacher's questions in the presence of code-switching.*

Figure (1-6) below illustrates that the observation result of the item 6 indicates that, the students most of the time by (66.7) showed willingness to ask questions and give accurate answers to teacher's questions while using code-switching. Thus, this result obviously confirms the claim that, code-switching can enable EFL students to take a remarkable part in classroom discourse.
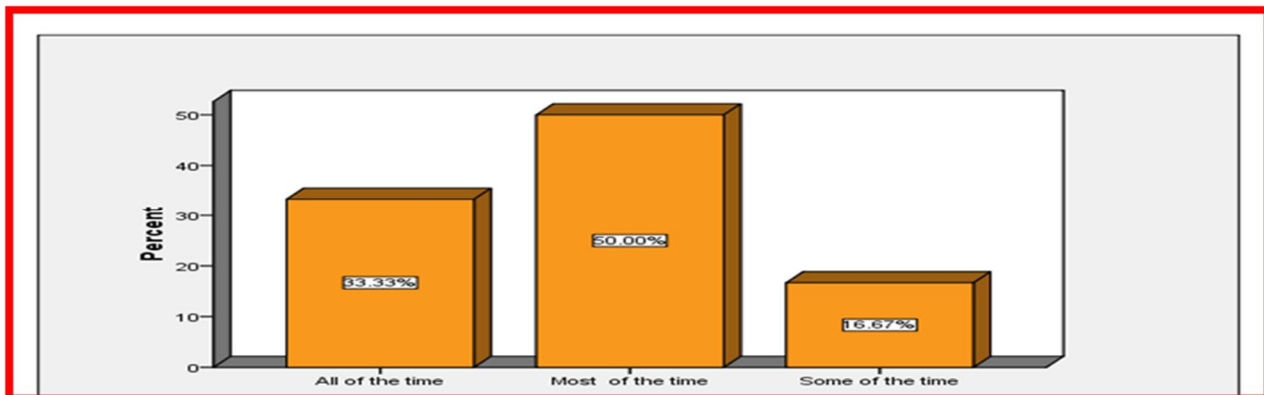

All the time   Most of the time

Figure [1-6]: The students show willingness to ask questions and give accurate answers to teacher's questions in the presence of code-switching.

Item [7]: *The students switch to express the ideas that they are unable to say in English.*

It can be observed that the highest percentage shown in figure (1-7) below signals that, the students most of the time by (60%) switched to express the ideas that they were unable to say in English .Of course, the result provides the study first question with a positive answer that sought to find.

All the time   Most of the time   Sometimes

Figure [1-7]: The students switch to express the ideas that they are unable to say in English.

3.2. The Analysis of Questionnaire Responses:

The questionnaire presents the teachers' responses on the second study question: To what extent can the teachers reap benefits from employing code-switching to facilitate and speed up the lesson?

Below five questionnaire statements are shown in statistical bar figures.

Statement [1]: *Using code switching throughout EFL classes minimizes teacher talking time.*

As can be seen in the figure below the responses towards the first statement show that 46.7% of the teachers strongly agreed, and, 40.0% of them agreed whilst, 13.3% of the respondents strongly disagreed. Thus, the highest percentages 46.7% and 40.0% strongly support the claim that: "using code switching during EFL classes really minimizes teacher talking time."
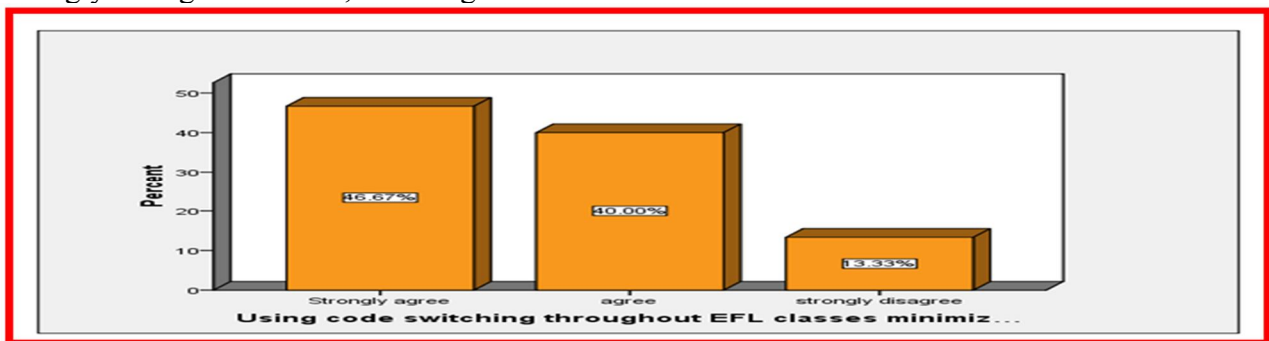

Figure [2-1]: Using code switching throughout EFL classes minimizes teacher talking time.

Statement [2]: *Code-switching helps teachers exert less effort in explaining difficult linguistic elements.*

As displayed in bar figure (2-2) below the statistical results concerning the responses towards this statement show that 46.7% of the teachers strongly agreed and equally 46.7% of them agreed on the claim that , code-switching helps teachers exert less effort in explaining difficult linguistic elements. Yet, only 6.7% of the subjects disagreed so the result obviously confirms the statement 2.

Finger [2-2]: Code-switching helps teachers exert less effort in explaining difficult linguistic elements.

Statement [3]: *Students are spontaneously able to share their ideas throughout the class when they switch from L1 to L2 and vice versa*

In the figure (2-3) below it can be noticed that, 20% of the teachers strongly agreed that students spontaneously are able to share their ideas throughout EFL classes when they switch from L1 to L2 and vice versa. The same percentage 20% of them agreed. However, 13.3% of them were undecided and the highest percentage 46.7.3% of the participants disagreed and that obviously shows that the result obtained is not consistent to what the second question sought to find.

Figure [2-3]: Students spontaneously are able to share their ideas throughout the class when they switch from L1 to L2 and vice versa

Statement [4]: *Students understand the lesson content in less time when their L1 (Arabic) is used.*

As shown in the figure below, (26.7%) of the respondents strongly agreed on the statement that, *"students understand the lesson content in less time when their L1 (Arabic) is used "* and (46.7%) of them agreed. Whilst, (6.7%) of the subjects were undecided, (13.3%) of them disagreed and (6.7%) of them strongly disagreed. Hence, the two highest percentages clarify the positive responses of the participants towards the role of code-switching in reducing teacher talking time.
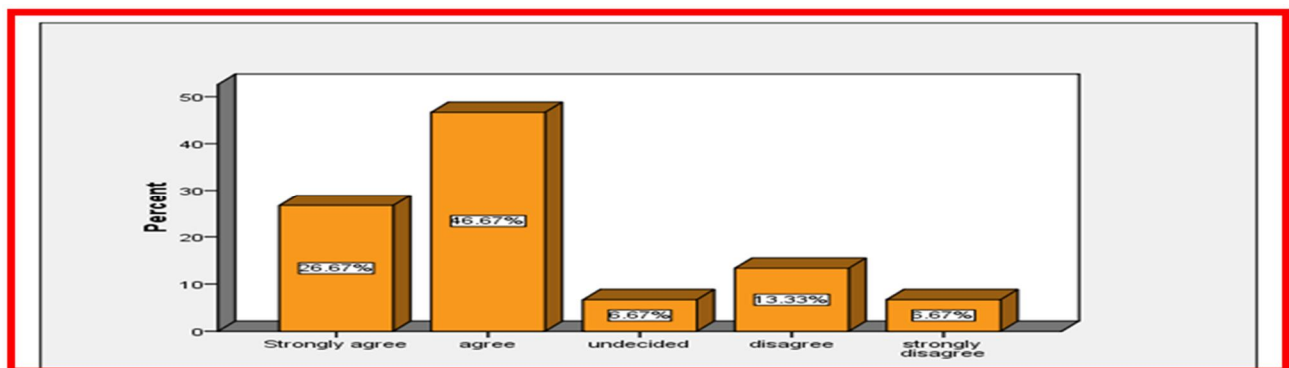

Figure [2-4]: Students understand the lesson content in less time when their L1 (Arabic) is used.

Statement [5]: *Teaching lesson content in English only makes the teacher take much time and effort to carry out the lesson plan*

As shown in the figure (2-5) below , (40.0%) of the participants strongly agreed and (20.0%) of them agreed that teaching lesson content in English only makes the teacher take much time and effort to carry out the lesson plan . However, (13.3%) of the respondents were undecided, (13.3%) of them disagreed and the same percentage (13.3%) of the participants strongly disagreed. The highest obtained percentage is regarded as a positive result which can support the idea that teachers can take advantage of code-switching to reduce teacher talking time and teacher's effort.

Figure [2-5]: Teaching lesson content in English only makes the teacher take much time and effort to carry out the lesson plan

4- Findings and Conclusions

Referring to the statistical analysis concerning the classroom observation checklist which was previously displayed, all the obtained results signal that the responses towards the seven checklist items that were designed to test question one have been positive and in the line of the study.

Based on the statistics, the items (1) and (2) show that the observed students all of the time by (50%) seemed to be comfortable when the difficult concepts are explained in their mother tongue. Moreover, it was observed that the students all of the time (50%) and most of the time by (50%) seemed to be interested in the lesson and less lost when code-switching is used in the classroom. This result clearly proves that code-switching achieves the students' comfort and makes them less lost throughout EFL classes and this does exactly prove what the first question of the study sought to.

Moreover, the percentages of the items 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 indicate the following: the students most of the time by (66.7%) seemed to be confident to interact with their teacher and classmates and they most of the time by (50%) positively responded to teachers instructions when code-switching was used. Also through the observation made, it was clear that, the observed students most of the time by (66.7%) did accompanied activities easily when code-switching was used and most of the time by (66.7%) they showed willingness to ask questions and give accurate answers to teacher's questions in the presence of code-switching.

Add to that, all of the time by (50%) and most of the time by (50%) it was observed that using code-switching made the students' participate in the classroom discussion. Moreover, the classroom observation showed, that the students most of the time by (50%) switch to express the ideas that they are unable to say in English. According to these percentages and positive results, it can be said plainly that, code-switching enables EFL students to participate in classroom discourse.

With reference to the obtained results which came up from the questionnaire statements analysis, it has been noticed that the high percentages shown demonstrate the agreement of participants' responses towards the claim suggesting that, EFL teachers can take advantage of code-switching to reduce talking time and the effort exerted.

In light of the current study outputs, the paper recommends the following:

1- EFL teachers should be fully aware of the pedagogical definite purpose behind using code-switching in their classrooms in order to avoid using it excessively.

To investigate the effectiveness of using code-switching as an instructional tool in bridging the linguistic gap between the Sudanese students' mother tongue (Arabic language) and English language it is recommended that the study should be expanded to cover different schools across the country.

5- References

Al-Nofaie, H. (2010). The Attitudes of Teachers and Students towards Using Arabic

In EFL Classrooms in Saudi Public Schools. Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language), 2010, 4 (1), 64-95.

Malik,M., (2014) . Code-switching as an Effective Technique of Teaching English at

Auer, P. (1988). A conversation Analytic Approach to Code-switching and Transfer. In Heller, M.(ED.), Codeswitching: Anthropological and Sociolinguistic Perspectives (pp.187-213). NEW York,,NY: Walter Gruyter.

Auerbach, E. (1993). Reexaming English only in the ESL classroom. TESOL Quarterly, 27, 1, 9-32

Brown, K. (2006). Encyclopaedia of language & linguistics. Elsevier, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Cook, V., (2001). Using the first language in the classroom. Canadian Modern Language Review, 57(3): 403-423.

Eldridge, J. (1996). Code-switching in a Turkish secondary school. ELT Journa, 50 , 4: 303-311

Grosjean, F. (1982). Life With Two Languages. An Introduction to Bilingualism. USA: Harvard University Press

Gumperz, J. (1982). Discourse Strategies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hall, G. & Cook, G. (2012). Own-language Use in Language Teaching and Learning. Language Teaching , 45,271-308.doi:10.1017/S0261444812000067.

Holmes, J. (2013).An Introduction to Sociolinguistics, England: Pearson Education Limited.

Levine, , G. S.. (2011). Code Choice in the Classroom Language. Bristol, UK: Channel View Publications. Macaro, E. (2001). Analyzing Student Teachers' Code-switching in Foreign Language Classrooms: Theories and Decision Making. Modern Language Journal, 85, p. 531–548.

the Intermediate level in Pakistan. Journal of professional Research in Social Science (JPRSS) Vol. 1(1),

Myers-Scotton, C. (1993). Social Motivations for Code -switching. Evidence from Africa, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Numan, D. & Carter, D. 2001. Teaching English to Speakers of OtherLanguages. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Poplack, Sh. (1980). Sometimes I'll start a sentence in spanish y termino en espanol: Toward a typology of code-switching. **Linguistics**,18 (233-234), 581-618.

Richards, J.C & Rogers T.S. (1986). Approachesand Messages in Language Teaching. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zhou, G. & Niu,X. (2015). Approaches to Language Teaching and Learning. Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 6(4), p.798

25

SUST Journal of Linguistic and Literary Studies (2020)   **Vol.21.No. 4 september (2020)**
ISSN (text): 1858 -828x   **e -ISSN (online): 1858-8565**