

The students' attitude towards using code-switching at Faculty of Public Health in Khartoum University

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the students' language attitudes towards Arabic and English code switching as a medium of instruction at the faculty of Health in Khartoum University. Questionnaires were used to collect data. The researcher applied the statistical packages for social sciences (SPSS) for analyzing and verifying the hypothesis. The findings of the study revealed that: students' have positive attitudes towards code switching have been consistently supported through all the data. The study highly recommends that: Teachers of science subjects at faculties of health should use English as a medium of instruction.

Key words: bilingualism, code -switching, Language attitude.

المستخلص:

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تقصي معرفة وجهات نظر الطلاب نحو التناوب اللغوي بين اللغة العربية واللغة الإنجليزية كوسيلة للتعليم أثناء تدريس محاضرة العلوم في كلية الصحة بجامعة الخرطوم. استخدم الباحث الإستبيان كوسيلة لجمع البيانات. وقد تم تحليل البيانات لقياس الاختلافات في رؤية الطلاب لاستخدام التناوب اللغوي وتأثيره في تعلم مادة العلوم على المستوى الجامعي. وتوصلت الدراسة إلى: أن الطلاب لديهم ميل إيجابي نحو التناوب اللغوي ويوصي الباحث الأساتذة باستخدام اللغة الإنجليزية كوسيلة للتدريس العلوم.

الكلمات الاستفتاحية: اللغتان، التناوب اللغوي، السلوك اللغوي.

Introduction : Language educational policy for academic institutions in a centralized system of education is often imposed by governing organizations. Such decisions impacts learners' academic performance in all subjects, yet learners' opinions and beliefs rarely considered, and usually excluded from this vital decision.

According to Amin (2009) Science education is carried out in the Arab region in the absence of research-based policies and recommended practices. Amin added that there are small body of research has considered code switching in relation to the learning and teaching science. Extensive research has been carried out on using code switching in the classroom as a contextualisation cue, as Martin-Jones (2000) pointed out that such

contextualisation cue range from phonological, lexical and syntactic choices to different types of code switching and style shifting.

This study is an investigation into the language attitude and preference among Sudanese students at faculty of Health in Khartoum University toward codes switching in classroom teaching, using Arabic/ English as a medium of instruction in one of the science subjects for the occupational therapy major. The investigation highlights the learners' language attitude, including their perceptions toward the effects that differing language attitudes can have on a learners' academic performance in the science subject. The medium of instruction currently adopted by the university is the English language.

Statement of the problem

EFL students reflect that an inability of using of using English language verbally. Thus, low motivation of the students influence in their learning so, it is important that students interest be promoted and kept up as much as possible in order to maximize their verbal interaction. Therefore, this study is conducted in order to help EFL students to develop their oral communication ability in the early stages of learning.

Significance of the study

There is a need for establishing an effective classroom interaction. Thus, this study is important and beneficial for students whose major objective is developing speaking skills at the early stage of learning English language. In addition, it is helpful for the teachers who are interested in creating an effective verbal classroom interaction for the students at the early stages of learning English.

Objectives of the study:

This study is intended:

1- To investigate students attitude of the towards using code-switching at Faculty of Public Health in Khartoum University.

Question of the study:

This study tries to answer the following question:

1- T what extent does students use code-switching at Faculty of Public Health in Khartoum University?

Hypotheses of the study

This study hypothesizes the following:

1- Students use code-switching at Faculty of Public Health in Khartoum University.

Literature review

- Equivalence which is a strategy that bilingual used to find the equivalent of the

Gemperz's (1982, p. 59), defined code switching as "the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems of subsystems." Myers-Scotton's (2006, p. 239) general definition of code switching is "the use of two languages varieties in the same conversation". A related concept to code switching is code mixing. Researches often differentiate between the two terms. One of the differences between the two terms is the way each of them is used as proposed by Muysken (2000) in that code switching is used for cases in which the two codes maintain their monolingual features, while code-mixing is used for cases where there is some convergence between the two languages.

On the other hand, Myers-Scotton (1993) differentiates between the two terms, stating that code switching occurs when bilinguals alternate between two languages during one interaction with another bilingual person while code mixing is the use of words, affixes, phrases and clauses from more than one language within the same sentences. In this study occurrence of code switching is evident in the context of the science class between English and Arabic among Sudanese students in which English is the common foreign language .

Code Switching functions for teachers and students

In a previous study, Eldridge (1996) (cited in Sert, 2005) has listed four purposes in which student code switching as equivalence, floor-holding, reiteration and conflict control.

unknown lexicon of the target language in the speakers' first language to overcome

the deficiency in language competence in second language.

- The second purpose of code switching is for floor holding which is a technique used by bilingual students during conversing in the target language to fill in the stopgap with words in native language in order to maintain the fluency of the conversation.
- The third purpose of is reiteration, as it implies, it is emphasizing and reinforcing a message that has been transmitted firstly in the target language but then students rely on repeating the message in first language to convey to the teacher that the message is understood.
- The last function is conflict control, which is used to eliminate any misunderstanding when the accurate meaning of a word is not known in the communication.

Baker (2006) have discussed the topic of code switching from a sociolinguistics perspective, in which he listed twelve main purposes of code switching, which are relevant to bilinguals talks in general. Some of these functions can be observed in classroom environment and in relevance to teachers and students interactions. According to Baker, code switching can be used to emphasize a particular point, to substitute a word in place of unknown word in the target language, to express a concept that has no equivalent in the culture of the other language, to reinforce a request, to clarify a point, to express identity and communicate friendship, to ease tension and inject humor into a conversation, and in some bilingual situations, codes witching occurs when certain topics are introduced.

In the substituting a word in another language, Man and Lu (2006) (cited in

Baker,2006) found that in Hong Kong schools both teachers' and students' major reason for codes witching was that there was no direct translation of words between English and Cantonese, additionally, the same study of Man and Lu found that teachers in Hong Kong schools use code switching also to ease tension and inject humor in to conversations.

Attitudes about Code Switching : An extensive body of literature studies reported that code switching in classrooms is useful tool of learning. Cook (2001) referred to code switching in the classroom as a natural response in a bilingual situation. Furthermore, in the same study, Cook considered the ability to go from one language to another is highly desirable among learners. Moreover, in eliciting teachers reflections to their classroom teachings, Probyn (2010) noticed that most notable strategy that teachers used was code switching to achieve a number of communicative ends. Cook's studies were mainly in the second language classroom context.

Code-switching has often been perceived as being of lower status, a strategy used by weak language performers to compensate for language deficiency. This view of code-switching and bilingual talk in general is more normatively based than research-based as pointed by Lin(1996) who added that such a view conveys little more than the speaker or writer's normative claims about what counts as standard language.

(Cook, 2001, p.105) and no matter how it might be disruptive during a conversation to the listener, it still provide an opportunity for language development (Skiba, 1997).

However, historically, strong stigmatic beliefs about code switching existed in many countries, which made Ferguson (2003) to conclude that ideological and conceptual sources of suspicion all often attached to classroom code-switching, suggesting that deep rooted attitudes may not be easy to change.

Rollnick and Rutherford's (1996) study of science classrooms found the use of learners' main languages to be a powerful means for learners to explore their ideas. They argue that without the use of code switching, some students' alternate conceptions would remain unexposed. (Cited in Setati *et al* 2002). The recognition to switch codes goes beyond switching between languages; it also recognizes the value of using the vernacular which believes to allow students to draw on useful sense-making resources (Amin, 2009). Researchers see using code switching in the classroom as a "legitimate strategy"

Language education policies

Language educational policy can be defined as "mechanism used to create de fact language practices in educational institutes, especially in centralized educational system" (Shohamy, 2006 p.76). It is these policies, especially in a centralized system, that represent a language manipulation of the what kind of language or languages should be used as a medium of instruction and to what degree that usage is acceptable. In most cases, educational staff of a given institute work, according to Shohamy, as agents of implementing these policies without questioning its quality, appropriateness and relevance to the successful learning for learners. This

notion of acceptance and implementing language policies without questioning its effectiveness and relatedness to students' preference remind us again of Lin's (1996) statement that the view of bilingual talk in general is more normatively-based than research-based.

The language policy that is followed in some departments at University Khartoum stresses considering the usage of English as a language of teaching and learning. This is demonstrated for example in the language policy at faculty of Public Health. The importance of this study is that it shows the break down of the language policy desired by the school in one hand and learners' preferences of medium of instruction in the other hand.

Research Methodology

In order to measure the students' language attitudes towards the language of teaching, a student questionnaire based on the students' experiences of studying Occupational Therapy was administered to the students. The final data were analyzed using percentages to measure the differences in the performance and attitudes of the participants, and the results were then reported.

Sample

The sample the study contained 17 occupational therapy students who voluntarily participated in the study.

Data collection procedures

The questionnaire was completed during a lecture in the faculty of Public Health at Khartoum University. The questionnaire was administered to the students after a brief introductory talk in which the completion procedure was explained to the students.

Data analysis

A total number of 17 students participated in the study. The students' views about the language of teaching were assessed using a Likert type scale consisting of 13 questions. On each

question, students indicated their level of agreement or disagreement with the given statements related to language attitudes. Scores on each question ranges from 1 to 4, with lower values indicating more negative attitudes.

Table (1) Attitudes towards using code switching in teaching

No	Item	SA(4)	AG(3)	DA(2)	SD(1)
1	Mixing Arabic & English leads to weakness my Arabic language	43%	37%		
2	Mixing Arabic & English leads to weakness my English language		60%		
3	Mixing Arabic & English leads to strengthens my English language			49%	43%

From the table above it is clear that 43% of the participants strongly agreed that it was beneficial to them to be taught the course in one language. The next item indicates that 60% of participants agreed that it was desirable to code switch between Arabic and English during teaching. In addition, 55% of the participants agreed that code switching makes the course easy to understand, and 37% strongly agreed with this statement. In a higher percentage, 49% disagreed that having teachers code switch during lessons caused any confusion to them.

Table (2) The impact of code-switching on L1 and L2

No	Item	SA(4)	AG(3)	DA(2)	SD(1)
4	Mixing Arabic & English leads to weakness my Arabic language			31%	60%
5	Mixing Arabic & English leads to weakness my English language			31%	60%
6	Mixing Arabic & English leads to strengthens my English language	25%	49%		

In responding to the questions regarding whether code switching leads to the weakness in participants' Arabic, 60% strongly disagreed while almost 32 % disagreed. This is illustrated in table (2). The next item looked at whether or not code switching led to a weakness in English. The responses demonstrated that 55% strongly disagreed and 31 % disagreed. Yet, 49% of the participants agreed and 25% strongly agreed that teaching language by code switching strengthen their grasp of the English language.

Table (3) The impact of code-switching on teacher's image

No	Item	SA(4)	AG(3)	DA(2)	SD(1)
7	I interact with the teacher when he teaches in Arabic and English		66%		
8	I interact with the teacher when he teaches in Arabic only		31%	49%	
9	I interact with the teacher when he teaches in English only		51%		

The percentages above reflect the participants' responses to whether or not the student respects the instructors more when they are teaching in both Arabic and English. 66% of participants responded to say that they agreed this increased the respect they held for their teachers. But when teaching occurred in Arabic, 49% responded that this didn't increase the respect they held for their teachers, and almost 32 % agreed that it did.

Table (4) The impact of code-switching on passing the exam

No	Item	SA(4)	AG(3)	DA(2)	SD(1)
10	Teaching in Arabic helps me to pass the exam.		37%	49%	
11	Teaching in English helps me to pass the exam.		49%		
12	Teaching in Arabic/English helps me to pass the exam.	66%			

The focus of the questionnaire items in table(4) was on the effect that code switching in two languages as a medium of instruction had on students' academic performance. 49% of the participants disagreed that teaching only in Arabic increases the chances of passing their exams, but 37% agreed. The table also shows that 49% agreed that teaching in English would help them pass their exams. However, on the other hand, 66% strongly agreed and 31% agreed that teaching the course in both Arabic and English increased their chances of passing the course exams.

Section C sought students' responses from the Open-Ended questions. This section of the questionnaire consisted of two open-ended questions. All the responses to these questions were gathered. The responses are interpreted and presented below. This section presents preferences, explanations of these preferences, and the comments, regarding language(s) of instruction.

Findings

The present study clearly indicate students' strong preference toward a specific medium of instruction that is Arabic/English code switching. The results show that students' positive language attitudes towards code switching have been consistently supported through all the data. When comparing the students'

language attitude towards using one in teaching to Arabic/English code switching teaching, the findings indicate a strong preference in using code switching than using one language as a medium of instruction. Although the majority of the students strongly agree that using one language is beneficial to them, they find it more desirable and believe that it makes the course easy to understand if code switching is utilized. In addition, the vast majority of the students dismissed any confusion that might result out of using code switching in teaching. It is of importance to note here that although students appreciate monolingual teaching to strengthen their linguistic competence in English.

When examining in more detail the students' language attitude towards code switching, students stated that the code switching does not weaken the L1, 60% strongly agreed, while the responses to whether using code switching could weaken the L2 led to a relatively high percentage of the participants strongly disagreeing - representing 55% of the participants, with 31% saying that they disagreed. However, by comparing the previous two items, one can see the students' perception of the code switching effects is not the same on L1 and L2.

It appears that the code switching has more negative effect on L2 than L1. In supporting the previous items, students responded very positively to the effects of code switching on their English, with 49% agreeing and 25% strongly agreeing that code switching will have strengthened their grasp of this language. The findings of the previous items show a wide agreement among participants that code switching does not have a negative impact on L1 and L2, although a lesser number of participants think it might weaken the L2. On the other hand, there is a wide agreement among participants of the positive effects of code switching in strengthening the L2, which is a desirable effect amongst foreign students. None of the students portrayed any concerns about the negative effects of code switching on L1, but there is always a reference to the positive effects of code switching on strengthening the L2. Not only does the students' language attitude towards the language of teaching have a variety of effects on L1 and L2, but it also has an impact on students' attitudes toward the image of the instructor, in which 66% of the students agreed that they interact with instructor more who is using code switching in teaching, while only 31% agreed on interaction with the instructor more when he is teaching only in Arabic. Moreover 49% disagreed in their response as to whether they respected the instructor more when he is only teaching in Arabic. The results are reflections of the student's attitude toward the role that language of teaching plays in symbolizing a positive or negative identity for the teachers. The teacher who

is using code switching has a higher status amongst the students, which highlights how powerful code switching could be in redefining the quality of teaching and teachers.

In the effects of code switching on students' academic performance, students' responses to whether teaching the course in Arabic will increase the chances of passing the course exams were divided, with 37% agreeing and 49% disagreeing. However, 49% of the students agreed that teaching in English would increase their chances of passing exams. But when the teaching is delivered in Arabic/English code switching, the responses were the highest, in which 66% of the participants strongly agreed and almost 32% agreed that it had a positive impact on increasing their chances of passing their course exams. Therefore, the students' language attitude toward code switching in teaching has a great impact on their academic performances as it is seen as an influential teaching tool to facilitate learning and therefore helps increase student involvement. The anticipated preference of language used in teaching is monolingual teaching, since the majority of the participants had a monolingual teaching experience in their schooling, in which 8 students had only Arabic, two students had only English and seven students had bilingual (Arabic and English) schooling. However, 14 out of the 17 students strongly agreed in their preference of using code switching (CS) as a medium of instruction.

This shows that the language of previous schooling does not affect the students' preference of the medium of instruction within higher study.

Conclusions

The present study has several implications for language policy makers, classroom teachers, educators, and researchers.

Firstly, According to the the language policy held at the faculty of Public Health in Khartoum University. English is the medium of textbooks, assignments and examinations, in reality and from the researcher's observation, Arabic/ English code switching is the dominant medium of classroom communication. As a large difference exists between language policy and students' preference of medium of instruction, decision makers should revise their language policy in order to reach the desirable goal of learning, in which code switching could be included in the planning of syllable.

Secondly, educators and teachers of science subjects at faculties where English is used as a foreign language might want to consider the students' language preferences and attitudes toward medium of instruction. Teachers should be encouraged to make adequate use of code switching in classrooms when explaining concepts to students so that the students will be able to actively participate in classroom lessons.

Thirdly, researchers can help identify the correct level of utilising code switching as a language of instruction to promote the discussion of newly raised issues related to the effective teaching language, which will eventually contribute to facilitating the advancement of classroom teaching.

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