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Code Switching in Rural Areas: The Case of Ad Dahinah Public Schools from the Perspective of Sociocultural Theory

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ABSTRACT

Code-switching is a common phenomenon around the globe. It has been the center of long debate among linguists and researchers due to its impact on the process of language learning. This research touches upon this phenomenon in the context of Ad Dahinah, a rural village in Saudi Arabia. The study investigates teachers' and students' attitudes to code-switching in English language classrooms, and its implications for identity and educational outcomes. Employing a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from students ($N = 79$) using a questionnaire and from teachers ($N = 8$) through semi-structured interviews at public schools in Ad Dahinah, Saudi Arabia. The findings show the prevalence of code-switching used as a pedagogical tool to facilitate comprehension and cater to the diverse linguistic needs of students. The analysis reveals that both teachers and students perceive code-switching to be beneficial for bridging gaps in vocabulary and conceptual understanding. However, there are concerns about its impact on English language fluency. Additionally, code-switching has social and cultural implications, playing a role in reinforcing local identity while navigating the pressures of globalization evident through language use. The research contributes to understanding linguistic practices in rural educational settings, suggesting that code-switching, while supportive of learning, requires careful attention to balance language proficiency goals with effective communication.

Keywords: Code-Switching; Rural Areas; Language Use; Identity Construction; Culture; Sociocultural Theory

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1. Introduction

Code-switching (CS) is a sociolinguistic concept defined as using two languages together in a single context by switching between the two languages. There is considerable debate concerning whether CS is beneficial for pedagogical practice or not and several studies have investigated CS in English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. There is an argument that permitting CS in EFL classrooms does not align with optimal practice in acquiring the target language, which should be done by providing “comprehensible input,” and may hinder the learning process^[1]. However, recently, studies have provided empirical evidence that using the L1 in L2 classrooms can have beneficial results for English language learning^[2]. Nonetheless, whether CS has a positive or negative effect on the learning process will not necessarily change attitudes to it, which is the focus of this research.

In the Saudi context, there are many aspects that may affect attitudes to and the practice of CS, in particular religious identity. According to Elyas and Picard^[3], many Saudis perceive English proficiency and the frequent use of CS as indicators of modernity, cosmopolitanism, and higher socioeconomic standing, particularly among the urban and educated elite. However, traditional Saudi identity and reverence for Arabic may be threatened by CS. In Saudi Arabia, much of the society is conservative and proud of its heritage. CS can be seen as a threat to the country’s national and religious identity, and this could affect people’s attitudes towards it.

Unlike previous research, the context of this study was not urban, and the participants were not considered part of an educated elite; however, with the spread use of social media platforms, those in rural areas are increasingly affected by trends on social media and prominent figures (so-called influencers). Ad Dahinah is a small Saudi village about 200 km north of Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia. It has had internet access in the form of 4G service for around 10 years, and almost all the village residents have access to it. The main goal of this study was to explore the phenomenon of CS in this context due to its unique characteristics, which differ from those of urban areas. This paper investigates teachers’ and students’ attitudes to CS in class and the drivers influencing its use. It also addresses the impact of CS on identity, if any. The research questions were as follows:

- (1) What are teachers’ and students’ attitudes to code-switching in their classrooms?

- (2) What types of CS are commonly used among the participants?
- (3) What is the impact of CS on students’ identity?

The main objective of the research was to analyze public school teachers’ and students’ attitudes to the use of CS in Ad Dahinah classrooms, identifying the level of support, opposition, or neutrality. Moreover, the study sought to identify and classify the types of CS most frequently employed by teachers and students in the classroom setting, aiming to describe the specific ways in which the languages were being switched (sentence-level or code-mixing of vocabulary). Finally, it aimed to explore the potential relationship between the use of CS in the classroom and the development of students’ sense of identity and how CS might influence students’ perceptions of themselves, their native languages, and the dominant language used in school.

2. Literature Review

CS is the practice of using two languages in a single conversation or discourse. It is a common phenomenon in sociolinguistics. The term “code” is derived from communication technology and refers to language and a variety of languages. “Switching” means alternating between languages in a single discourse or conversation^[4, 5]. CS is a language selection, a variation of utilizing multiple languages in the same discourse^[6]. As defined by Shafi et al.^[7], CS is employing more than one language in a phrase or speech. It is a natural commixture in bilingual and multilingual speakers using one or more community languages.

There is some confusion in terminology due to the apparent similarities between concepts. For instance, translanguaging and CS might appear similar, but they are not. Translanguaging is a challenging concept to define and an early term in linguistics. García et al. described translanguaging as “a process of meaning and sense-making.”^[8] It refers to the dynamic and flexible use of language by multilingual speakers to move through challenging social and linguistic settings. One of the main differences between translanguaging and CS is that translanguaging concerns alternating between two or more language processes in a one-language context. It focuses on individual efforts to manifest meaning from multiple languages. Translanguaging in an educational context means teaching two or more

languages simultaneously so that learners become bilingual or multilingual^[9]. In contrast, CS describes the use of two or more languages in a single discourse context, namely bilinguals using both languages for a purpose and addressing and acknowledging the differences between the two languages.

Another term is code-mixing, defined by Muysken^[10] as mixing elements of two languages within the same sentence or utterance. It also entails introducing both languages in the same sentence; grammatically speaking, code-mixing is seen as a cognitive learning process in which the speaker selects and combines linguistic features into new syntactic objects. CS, on the other hand, concerns transitioning from one grammar system to another.

Finally, diglossia is a sociolinguistic situation in which two distinct languages are used in the same community for different purposes; the two language varieties can be categorized as low (L) and high (H). Typically, the H variety is used for formal situations, while the L variety is less formal and used in everyday life^[11]. The difference between diglossia and CS is that diglossia consciously uses different codes and does not mix them to fit social standards or rules.

2.1. Types and Functions of Code-Switching

CS occurs naturally in multilingual or bilingual communities^[12]. There have been various attempts to develop models and theoretical frameworks to investigate and analyze this phenomenon. Two approaches to studying CS have been proposed: a socially oriented approach and a grammatical structure approach^[13]. This paper focuses on the sociolinguistic perspective and attitudes towards CS, defining the patterns and reasons for CS in a social context and identifying the social factors that affect its usage.

Appel and Muysken^[14] developed a model focusing on the drivers of CS. They categorized CS according to six functions: referential, expressive, directive, phatic, metalinguistic, and poetic. The referential function is when a concept or idea cannot be understood in one language but can be explained by another. The expressive function is when a speaker switches to express emotions. Directive CS is when the speaker wants to include or exclude other participants in a conversation. The phatic function is when a speaker switches to emphasize or show important ideas or parts of a conversation. The metalinguistic function is when a speaker uses a language to explain something in another language.

The poetic function is when a speaker switches to telling stories or adding humor to the conversation. In this study, the model was applied to determine which functions or types of CS were most common among the participants, as well as providing information on their attitudes toward CS and why they code-switched.

According to Gumperz^[15], there are two types of CS, situational and metaphorical. Situational CS relates to a shift in code necessitated by the situation. In this case, CS happens for a purpose, for example if the topic of the conversation necessitates the use of CS or to increase or lessen the social distance in a conversation^[5]. In metaphorical CS, the switching of code happens when the subject of the conversation changes and the switching occurs to convey a concept easily among the listeners.

Gumperz expanded this typology to encompass six functions^[16]. The first is the quotation function, when a speaker code switches to quote another speaker. Second is the specification function, in which CS is used to specify another speaker. Third is the interjection function, using CS to express emotions in another language. Fourth is the reiteration function, when a speaker uses CS to repeat for emphasis or clarification. Fifth is message qualification and personalization vs. objectification. However, Appel and Muysken's model does not cover or distinguish every conversational function according to^[16, 17]. This study adopted model to explore the functions of CS employed by the participants and address how and why they commonly used CS^[14].

2.2. The Impact of Code-Switching on Identity

As pointed out by Norton^[18], language learning is deeply intertwined with identity formation and transformation. Learners do not simply acquire a language; they use it to engage with the world, continuously shaping their identities. Edwards argued that every sociolinguistics study must deal with identity formation, presentation and maintenance, and considered language an integral part of identity^[19]. Consistent with this viewpoint, this study considered identity and its impact on CS.

According to Bhatt^[20], CS might (1) indicate a new socio-ideological consciousness, (2) offer a new approach to negotiating and managing the relation between a global identity and local practices, and (3) provide a new linguistic diacritic for class-based signs of cultural identity. CS can relate

to the speaker's intent, which impacts how we construct our identity. Chen argued that switching codes links dynamically with speakers' communicative intentions^[21]. There are two intents: CS as a "we-code" to convey group togetherness and CS as a "we-code" to create social distance. We can switch to a standard code (language) to signal to the listener that we are in the same community group and to show solidarity, or we can switch code to distance ourselves from another community group. Yim found that Cantonese-English bilinguals may code switch to legitimize their ingroup membership and identity, but this practice could also harm their cultural identities^[22].

Observational study, conducted with lecturers and students at a university in Pakistan, found a link between CS and identity construction^[23]. The participants were found to have a hybrid identity that employed English and Pashto. In another qualitative study of academic social media conducted with Turkish university students, Ekoç found that English language learners negotiated multiple identities^[24]. Furthermore, Curcón found that CS could be an identity marker, with Catalan immigrants in Mexico using CS to distinguish themselves from Mexicans^[25]. These studies show how people use CS to define their identity.

2.3. Previous Studies of CS

CS has been widely studied across various educational contexts, revealing diverse attitudes and applications. This study extended the investigation to additional educational contexts, exploring the practical applications and outcomes of CS in greater depth.

In terms of general attitudes towards CS, Abdeldjebar et al. conducted a case study of CS among Algerian university students, and identified positive attitudes toward CS in a multilingual context (Arabic, French, English)^[26]. This contrasts with the primarily bilingual Saudi context, indicating how multiple languages in an educational setting influence attitudes toward CS. Alić Topić examined secondary-level students' attitudes toward CS in ESL classrooms, finding generally favorable attitudes^[27]. The study also investigated variables such as grade level and gender and found no significant differences. This could be different in the Saudi context due to gender segregation in public schools. Focused on Ethiopian teachers' attitudes toward CS, finding that while teachers generally did not object to CS, they preferred it to be

used selectively and purposefully for academic, socializing, and classroom management functions^[28]. This underscores the need for CS as a tool in the EFL classroom. Rokni and Khonakdar investigated the attitudes of public-school students toward CS in EFL classrooms in Iran^[29]. The results showed positive attitudes toward CS and identified that one of the main reasons was that the use of CS by teachers eased learning and helped students understand complex subjects.

Turning to the functions of CS, Dendup conducted a quantitative study with Bhutanese teachers in ESL public schools^[30]. Despite having generally negative views of the use of CS, teachers employed it to assess understanding, translate queries, comprehend complex concepts, and foster a sense of community. This suggests that negative attitudes do not necessarily preclude the use of CS, as it can benefit learning and communication. Recently, Sulaiman studied the use of CS among Malaysian public school students' in the classroom^[31]. While they expressed mixed feelings about its use, they generally chose to use it to speak with peers who shared the same L1. This highlights the functionality of CS in peer communication. Hafid and Margana explored the pedagogical functions of CS in multilingual classrooms in Indonesia, identifying three essential uses: knowledge construction, classroom management, and building relationships between students and teachers^[32]. These findings suggest that CS can play a significant role in educational outcomes and identity formation.

To conclude, despite extensive research having been conducted on CS in various contexts, there remains a need to understand how CS functions and how attitudes differ between rural and urban educational settings within the context of Saudi Arabia. This paper therefore examines how CS is utilized and perceived in rural schools, providing insights that can better inform language policies and teaching practices to support students' linguistic and educational outcomes. Moreover, this paper can add valuable insights into linguistic behaviors and identity construction among Saudi students by exploring the implications of CS for educational outcomes and identity formation in the classroom setting.

3. Methodology

This section describes the research methods employed in the study, covering the research design, participants, re-

search instruments, and data collection and analysis procedures.

3.1. Research Design

This research adopted a case study approach undertaken through mixed methods, combining quantitative and qualitative research instruments. A questionnaire was used to measure the attitudes of students toward CS. The questionnaire targeted female and male English students attending public schools in Ad Dahinah, two elementary schools and two high schools. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with English teachers from the same schools to collect qualitative data. Dornyei recommends using semi-structured interviews as the interviewer can guide the interviews and they can yield exciting results^[33]. Moreover, as pointed out by Tashakkori and Teddlie^[34], interviews can provide rich information, particularly when the study examines a cultural issue like CS and its impact on identity.

The mixed-methods design sought to gain comprehensive results. According to Ivankova et al.^[35], many social science researchers have used mixed methods as the optimal approach to understanding a research problem. It enables the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, integrated at some stage of the research process within a single study, helping to shed light on the research problem under investigation^[36]. In this study, an explanatory approach was taken, collecting data in two phases: (i) collecting and analyzing quantitative data, and (ii) conducting qualitative interviews based on the results of the quantitative analysis. Hence, the mixed methods were applied in two consecutive phases within the one study^[37], as shown in

Figure 1.

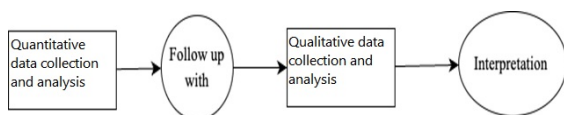


Figure 1. Explanatory mixed-methods research^[35].

3.2. Participants

In total, 79 students currently studying English responded to the quantitative questionnaire. They were both male and female, aged between 12 and 17 years. They would have studied English for at least three years as English is

included in the Saudi curriculum from the first elementary year. The elementary level was excluded due to the young age of the students. To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, the students were asked to confirm that they were still studying at a public school in Ad Dahinah and how long they had lived in the village.

Eight teachers (4 males and 4 females) expressed their willingness to participate in the study. The four male teachers, two still teaching in Ad Dahinah and two who had previously taught there, took part in semi-structured interviews over Zoom. The four female teachers were sent open-ended questions using Google Forms as they could not take part in Zoom interviews for cultural reasons. Written consent forms were obtained from all participants after being read and signed. As for minors, one of the parents was informed and signed the consent form.

3.3. Research Instruments

3.3.1. Questionnaire

The quantitative student questionnaire was created on the Data tab website. The study adopted questionnaire, a comprehensive instrument able to provide answers to the research questions concerning Saudi students' attitudes to CS^[38]. The questionnaire has previously been validated and its reliability established.

The questionnaire comprised four sections. The first section sought background information to ensure the participants formed an appropriate sample for this study. The second section considered the frequency of CS among the participants and their classmates. The third section examined the participants' attitudes to the use of CS in their English classrooms. Finally, the fourth section investigated the reasons for CS in English classrooms.

For all but the first section, responses were given on a Likert-type scale^[34], as recommended for behavioral and psychological studies. In the second section, the response options were 1 = always, 2 = usually, 3 = sometimes, 4 = rarely, and 5 = never. In the third and fourth sections, the options were 1 = strongly agree, 2 = strongly agree, 3 = not sure, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree. For all items, an interval of 0.80 was used to scale the responses in categories, as shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Questionnaire response categories.

Section 2 (Frequency)	Sections 3 and 4 (Attitudes & Reasons)
< 1.80 = always	< 1.80 = strongly agree
1.80 < 2.60 = usually	1.80 < 2.60 = agree
2.60 < 3.40 = sometimes	2.60 < 3.40 = not sure
3.40 < 4.20 = rarely	3.40 < 4.20 = disagree
4.20–5 = never	4.20–5 = strongly disagree

The questionnaire had previously been validated by Alsuhaibani^[38], who established the reliability of the dimensions. This study confirmed the reliability of the questionnaire in the context of this research, calculating the internal consistency using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. The results are shown in **Table 2**. As can be seen, all the values are 0.70 and above, indicating good reliability.

Table 2. Reliability analysis.

Dimension	N	No. of Items	α
Frequency of Arabic use	79	3	0.70
Attitudes toward Arabic in class	79	11	0.789
Reason for using Arabic	79	6	0.806

3.3.2. Semi-Structured Interviews and Open-Ended Questions

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with male teachers and open-ended questions distributed online in Google Forms to female teachers. The same four questions were asked in both. The first asked whether the teacher used CS in the classroom and how frequently. The second examined the teachers’ attitudes toward CS in their classrooms. The third asked about the main reasons for using CS in their classrooms. The fourth question explored the perceived impact of CS on their students’ identities. A pilot to validate the reliability of interview questions was conducted with one teacher prior the data collection.

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis

The quantitative questionnaire created on the Data tab website was distributed to students through WhatsApp with help from the school administrators for one month between April 30th until May 20th, 2024. The semi-structured interviews with male teachers were conducted over Zoom as they did not have time to meet in person. The study employed the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for data analysis. According to Amaraweera^[39], SPSS has comprehensive capabilities in handling quantitative datasets,

offering a wide range of statistical analyses. Using SPSS for in-depth analysis of survey data, it was possible to identify key trends and connections in the data about the use of different languages in Ad Dahinah schools and the participants’ attitudes. Responses given using Likert-type scales to items in the second, third and fourth sections of the questionnaire were analyzed using the mean, median, and mode.

The interviews and the open-ended questions were analyzed qualitatively in the NVivo software using thematic analysis, and they were collated and transcribed for this purpose. NVivo has excellent promise as a valuable instrument for qualitative social science and management studies research. It is recommended that scholars, professionals, and instructors contemplate incorporating NVivo into their research approaches to improve qualitative data handling and evaluation^[40].

4. Results

This section presents the results of the study on CS in rural Saudi classrooms in Ad Dahinah. The findings are divided into two sections: quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative data analysis covers the participants’ demographic variables, frequency of CS, attitudes toward using Arabic in EFL classrooms, and reasons for the use of Arabic from the perspective of the students. The qualitative data analysis includes a thematic analysis of the interview responses, exploring themes such as the usage of Arabic in the classroom, attitudes toward CS, the perceived impact of CS on language acquisition, and the perceived impact on student identity from the perspective of teachers.

4.1. Quantitative Questionnaire

In total 79 students responded to the questionnaire. Their demographic characteristics (gender, years of studying English, years in Ad Dahinah, and school grade), are shown in **Table 3**.

4.1.1. Frequency of Arabic Use During Class

Table 4 presents the results of analysis for the reported frequency of use of Arabic during lessons.

In terms of the frequency of Arabic use during lessons, as can be seen from **Table 4**, most students reported using Arabic “always” (58.2%) or “usually” (22.8%). Similarly,

students reported that their classmates used Arabic “always” (59.5%) or “usually” (24.1%). This is consistent with their view of how often students should use Arabic in the classroom (“always” = 53.2%, “usually” = 27.8%). These results suggest that students are strongly inclined to favor the use of Arabic in the classroom. The consistency in mean scores across all three questions supports this and although the standard deviation values indicate some variability in responses, this is not excessive.

Table 3. Students’ demographic characteristics (N = 79).

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	51	64.6
	Female	28	35.4
Years of studying English	5 years	28	35.4
	7 years	17	21.5
	8 years	13	16.5
	9 years	21	26.6
Years in Ad-Dahinah	≤ 1 year	6	7.6
	4 years	3	3.8
	6 years	3	3.8
	≥ 12 years	67	84.8
School grade	First intermediate	15	19
	Second intermediate	11	13.9
	Third intermediate	10	12.7
	First secondary	9	11.4
	Second secondary	15	19
	Third secondary	19	24.1

4.1.2. Attitudes toward Using Arabic in the Classroom

Table 5 presents the results of the analysis for students’ attitudes toward the use of Arabic in the classroom.

As can be seen from **Table 5**, in response to statement 1, concerning whether Arabic should be used in class, there were similar percentages for “strongly agree” (25.3%), “agree” (27.8%) and “disagree” (22.8%). Thus, most students thought Arabic should be used in English classes, but a substantial proportion did not.

In response to statement 2, “It is natural for a native Arabic-speaking student to use Arabic in the classroom,” most chose either “strongly agree” (41.8%) or “agreed” (36.7%), with only 5.1% choosing “disagree” and “strongly disagree.” However, this was contradicted by the results for statement 3 that “Students should use English all the time in the English language classroom,” where again most students selected either “strongly agree” (35.4%) or “agree” (34.2%). Hence, on the one hand the students viewed it as natural to

use Arabic in class, but on the other thought that English should be the language used.

For statement 4 that “Using Arabic helps students to feel at ease and comfortable and less stressed,” 39.2% of respondents chose “strongly agree” and 30.4% “agree,” indicating that they did find using Arabic helpful and comforting. Furthermore, most students strongly agreed (41.8%) or agreed (31.6%) with statement 5, “Using Arabic helps the students to avoid communication breakdowns.” On the other hand, they were of the view that “Avoiding Arabic in the English language classroom helps students to learn English better” (statement 6: “strongly agree” = 34.2%, “agree” = 26.6%) and that “Using Arabic in the classroom hinders fluency in English” (statement 7: “strongly agree” and “agree” = 26.6% each).

There was also broad support for statement 8 that “Using Arabic limits my exposure to English” (“strongly agree” and “agree” = 24.1% each), although a considerable proportion were unsure (27.8%). In response to statement 9, “The teachers allow me to use Arabic while discussing lessons or topics related to everyday matters during the lesson,” again most students either strongly agreed (27.8%) or agreed (40%), although again some were unsure (17.7%).

For statement 10, “The use of Arabic by students is an indication of a low proficiency level in English,” the data showed mixed responses, with 27.8% of respondents strongly agreeing, 15.2% agreeing, 19% unsure, and 17.7% and 11.4% disagreeing and strongly disagreeing. Finally, in response to statement 11, “The teachers allow me to use Arabic while discussing lessons or topics related to everyday matters during the lesson,” the results were broadly split between “strongly agree” (22.8%), “agree” (21.5%), and “unsure” (27.8%).

These results indicate that while many students consider that using Arabic in class puts them at ease and helps avoid communication breakdowns, they have mixed views on its impact on English proficiency. Many agree that using Arabic is natural for native speakers but recognize that excessive use may limit English exposure. Teachers often allow Arabic use for discussions on everyday matters, although the students seem divided on whether it indicates low English proficiency. Overall, there is a balance between the benefits and potential drawbacks of using Arabic in English classrooms.

Table 4. Frequency of Arabic use during class (N = 79).

Statement	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	M	SD
1. How often do you use Arabic in the classroom?	58.2	22.8	11.4	2.5	3.8	1.69	1.039
2. How often do your classmates use Arabic in the classroom?	59.5	24.1	8.9	3.8	2.5	1.64	0.980
3. How often do you think that students should use Arabic in the classroom?	53.2	27.8	15.2	1.3	1.3	1.68	0.875

Notes: M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation

Table 5. Students' attitudes toward using Arabic in the classroom (N = 79).

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	M	SD
1. Arabic should be used in the English classroom.	25.3	27.8	19	22.8	2.5	2.48	1.188
2. It is natural for a native Arabic-speaking student to use Arabic in the classroom.	41.8	36.7	12.7	3.8	1.3	1.82	0.905
3. Students should use English all the time in the English language classroom.	35.4	34.2	15.2	2.5	7.6	2.08	1.171
4. Using Arabic helps students to feel at ease and comfortable, and less stressed.	39.2	30.4	20.3	2.5	1.3	1.89	0.930
5. Using Arabic helps the students to avoid communication breakdowns.	41.8	31.6	12.7	2.5	3.8	1.86	1.032
6. Avoiding Arabic in the English language classroom helps students to learn English better.	34.2	26.6	20.3	6.3	5.1	2.15	1.163
7. Using Arabic in the classroom hinders fluency in English.	26.6	26.6	22.8	11.4	5.1	2.37	1.184
8. Using Arabic limits my exposure to English.	24.1	24.1	27.8	8.9	7.6	2.48	1.215
9. The teachers allow me to use Arabic while discussing lessons or topics related to everyday matters during the lesson.	27.8	40.5	17.7	1.3	5.1	2.08	1.024
10. The use of Arabic by students is an indication of a low proficiency level in English.	27.8	15.2	19	17.7	11.4	2.67	1.414
11. I care that my use of Arabic will positively affect the development of my English language proficiency.	22.8	21.5	27.8	10.1	8.9	2.57	1.254

Notes: M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation

4.1.3. Reasons for Using Arabic in Class

Table 6 presents the reasons reported by students for using Arabic in class. As can be seen from the data, the responses ranged primarily across “strongly agree,” “agree,” and “unsure.” However, the students broadly agreed that they used Arabic in class for all the reasons given, illustrating a variety of drivers for speaking the L1.

Overall, the results in Table 6, drawing on Appel and Muysken’s model of the uses of L1 in class, show that the students primarily used Arabic to define vocabulary (68.4%), explain grammar points (67%), and clarify complex concepts (68.3%). They also used it to express comprehension gaps (65.8%) and to say something they could not articulate in English (59.5%). In addition, Arabic was used to support classmates’ comprehension (63.2%). These results indicate that the students found Arabic helpful in facilitating understanding and communication in areas where they faced

challenges in English.

4.1.4. Functions or Types of CS Commonly Used by Students

Table 7 illustrates the commonly used functions or types of CS in class.

The results shown in Table 7 indicate that the students most commonly used CS for referential functions, such as defining and translating vocabulary ($M = 1.79$) and clarifying complex concepts ($M = 1.87$). Metalinguistic functions, such as explaining grammar points ($M = 1.93$), were also prevalent. Expressive functions were used to express a lack of comprehension ($M = 1.95$) and to express points that could not be made in English ($M = 2.02$). Directive functions, such as explaining things to classmates ($M = 1.98$), were also notable. This highlights the diverse roles of CS in aiding communication and understanding in the classroom.

Table 6. Reasons for using Arabic in class (N = 79).

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	M	SD
1. To define and translate vocabulary items.	38	30.4	13.9	13	13	1.79	0.800
2. To explain grammar points.	31.6	35.4	12.7	2.5	2.5	1.93	0.958
3. To clarify complex concepts or ideas.	35.4	32.9	11.4	2.5	2.5	1.87	0.968
4. To express a lack of comprehension.	30.4	35.4	12.7	1.3	3.8	1.95	0.999
5. To say something I cannot say in English.	29.1	30.4	16.5	5.1	1.3	2.02	0.976
6. To explain things to my classmates.	31.6	31.6	11.4	3.8	3.8	1.98	0.1068

Notes: M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation

Table 7. Functions or types of CS used in class.

Statement	M	Type or function of CS
1. To define and translate vocabulary items.	1.79	Referential function
2. To explain grammar points.	1.93	Metalinguistic function
3. To clarify complex concepts or ideas.	1.87	Referential function
4. To express a lack of comprehension.	1.95	Expressive function
5. To say something, I cannot say in English.	2.02	Expressive function
6. To explain things to my classmates	1.98	Directive function

4.2. Qualitative Semi-Structured Interviews and Open-Ended Questions

Table 8 illustrates the themes, sub-themes, and key ideas derived from the thematic analysis of the qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions for teachers.

The thematic analysis sought to identify recurring frequent themes and patterns based on the responses provided in the interviews and the open-ended questions. Each theme is addressed in turn.

4.2.1. Theme 1: Attitudes Toward Using Arabic

This theme concerns the teachers' views on using Arabic in English classrooms. It highlights the spectrum of critiques ranging from high-quality endorsements to negative critiques. For example, Interviewee 2 stated, "Yes, it is positive. It eases communication and interaction with the students. Students understand you better in Arabic and pay more attention..." Interviewee 4 was also positive about the use of Arabic, saying "Very much so, and I believe that a teacher should not use more than five percent Arabic in the classroom." In contrast, Interviewee 3 expressed the view that "It is negative, and I am against it. However, because the students complain that they do not understand, they beg, 'Teacher, do not speak in English,' so I either lower the level or switch to Arabic..."

More specifically, Interviewee 2 expressed a positive stance, viewing Arabic as a means of verbal exchange and

comprehension facilitator. He emphasized the practical benefits of using Arabic to ensure students' expertise and engagement at some stage in lessons. In contrast, Interviewee 4 adopted a strongly negative stance, arguing for minimal Arabic usage in the classroom and asserting that immoderate reliance on Arabic would impede students' language development and attainment of proficiency in English. This aligns with the perception of immersion as the optimal method for language acquisition. Interviewee 3 offered a more nuanced perspective, acknowledging the demanding situations related to the use of Arabic, but expressing reservations about its impact on language acquisition. While recognizing the students' struggles with English, he wished to maintain an English-speaking educational environment as far as possible, reflecting a commitment to developing English language proficiency.

Similarly, the female teachers expressed differing views on the use of Arabic in their responses to the open-ended questions sent to them. One stated that "It is preferable not to use it inside the classroom." Others believed it should not be used to avoid encouraging it, while others took the view that it might help with comprehension, especially when teaching complex ideas. Some argued against its use, pointing to it as a possible obstacle to vocabulary growth and language development. In contrast, others viewed it as essential in situations where English skills are limited. One of the teachers said that "Lack of student engagement during the lesson may lead the teacher to use certain terms to clarify a specific idea

Table 8. Themes, sub-themes, and key ideas derived from qualitative analysis.

Theme	Sub-Theme	Key Ideas
Attitudes to using Arabic	Positive perception	Arabic facilitates communication and comprehension in the classroom.
	Negative perception	Excessive Arabic usage may hinder language acquisition and proficiency in English.
Reasons for using Arabic	Facilitating comprehension	Arabic bridges gaps in students' linguistic preparedness and ensures comprehension of complex concepts.
	Instructional efficiency	Arabic saves time and enhances instructional efficiency by conveying information more comprehensively.
	Curriculum expectations	Arabic usage is driven by the need to align with curriculum expectations and support students' academic progress.
Perceived impact on language acquisition	Facilitates comprehension	Arabic may enhance students' understanding and retention of English language concepts.
	Hinders language proficiency	Excessive reliance on Arabic may impede students' ability to develop proficiency in English.
Perceived impact on identity	Reinforces cultural identity	Incorporating Arabic can reinforce students' connection to their linguistic and cultural heritage.
	Minimal influence on identity	Language alone may not significantly impact students' broader cultural, linguistic, and social identities.

or difficult word.”

Teachers can employ Arabic in the classroom for a variety of purposes, such as clarifying difficult vocabulary or linguistic norms, tying grammar to Arabic syntax to improve comprehension, addressing low student involvement, or saving time by outlining responsibilities and strategies. Overall, both male and female teachers expressed a mix of perspectives on the use of CS in the classroom, some viewing it as a positive, helping the learning process, and others seeing it as a negative, potentially hindering learning.

4.2.2. Theme 2: Reasons for Using Arabic in the Classroom

This theme explores the motivations for incorporating Arabic into English language instruction. The interviewees provided insights into the circumstances and considerations that led them to utilize Arabic as a pedagogical tool. For instance, Interviewee 1 stated that *“Most students are not well-prepared...so you are forced to use Arabic from a foundational standpoint because there is absolutely no linguistic proficiency.”* Interviewee 2 argued that *“There are several reasons, such as the ease of conveying information to students and explaining certain information... Also, it saves time since you are constrained to cover a full lesson in forty-*

five minutes...” Also, Interviewee 3 recounted, *“The main reason is the students' development or rising to the expected level with the curriculum... When you address these students in English, they understand without a problem, but eighty to ninety percent of the students don't.”*

Interviewee 1 highlighted the issue of students' linguistic preparedness, noting that many learners need more foundational proficiency to comprehend English-only instruction. In such cases, using Arabic is a pragmatic strategy used to bridge the gap and ensure students' comprehension of essential concepts. Interviewee 2 emphasized the efficiency and effectiveness of using Arabic to facilitate learning and maximize instructional time. He cited the ability to convey complex information more comprehensively and quickly in Arabic, especially when clarifying grammatical rules or explaining unfamiliar vocabulary. Interviewee 3 underscored the discrepancy between the students' actual language level and the expectations set by the curriculum. He identified the need to accommodate students who had not yet attained the desired level of English proficiency, regularly resorting to Arabic to make access to coaching equitable.

In terms of the female teachers' perspectives on using Arabic in the classroom, one of the interviewees stated that *“...the percentage varies depending on the student's profi-*

ciency in the language, and the...percentage ranges from 10% to 40% of my use of Arabic.” The range in percentages of use of Arabic in English lessons varied depending on the teacher’s environment, such as class size, the students’ proficiency, and the students’ comprehension of grammar.

4.2.3. Theme 3: Perceived Impact on Language Acquisition

This theme addresses the perceived impact of using Arabic in English language classrooms on students’ language acquisition and development. The interviewees discussed how Arabic usage affected students’ exposure to English and language development. For instance, Interviewee 4 stated that *“The frequent use of Arabic does not benefit the student at all...the student gets used to it and sees it as normal to speak with English language teachers...”* Interviewee 2 recounted, *“Yes, I feel that it enhances the Arabic language”, but also saw benefits for English, saying, “when you explain some vocabulary or some things in Arabic, they understand it, it reaches them, and it enhances their identity...”*. Moreover, Interviewee 1 stated that he *“sees it as something negative...using Arabic in the English classroom is not good...”*.

Thus, Interviewee 4 highlighted concerns about the potential negative consequences of excessive Arabic usage, suggesting that students may become accustomed to relying on Arabic and consequently struggle to develop proficiency in English. This aligns with the perception that immersion in the target language is needed to attain adequate mastery. However, Interviewee 2 suggested that incorporating Arabic could have benefits, specifically improving students’ understanding and retention of English vocabulary and grammatical standards. He argued that linking English language guidance to Arabic equivalents can facilitate comprehension and improve students’ linguistic competence.

4.2.4. Theme 4: Perceived Impact on Identity

This theme explores the interviewees’ perspectives on how using Arabic in English language classrooms may influence students’ cultural, linguistic, and social identities. The interviewees reflected on whether and how language use in the classroom intersected with broader identity formation processes. For instance, Interviewee 2 said he *“feels that it enhances the Arabic language, especially with the current situation, as many use the colloquial language, and*

with social media, students recently use it extensively...”. Interviewee 4 stated that *“Regarding this question, I believe that it does not affect the student’s identity at all because a person’s identity, whether a student or others, is not much affected by the language alone. Also, given that the Ministry of Education has made sure that the class and curriculum fit our culture, the curriculum is culturally contained, so the effect on identity is minimal to nonexistent.”*

All in all, Interviewee 2 suggested that using Arabic in the classroom could enhance students’ connection to their Arabic language and cultural heritage. He argued that incorporating Arabic vocabulary and grammar into English practice could enhance students’ linguistic and cultural identities, especially in the context of substantial use of colloquial Arabic in social media. Interviewee 3 also acknowledged the ability of language use to affect students’ identities, particularly in shaping their linguistic practices and behaviors outside school. He considered that the use of English and Arabic in distinctive contexts might contribute to subtle shifts in students’ linguistic and cultural identities over the years. However, Interviewee 4 downplayed the significance of language use in shaping students’ identities, emphasizing the primacy of broader societal, familial, and cultural factors. He argued that language alone is not always a factor in identity formation, suggesting that other factors play a more significant role in shaping students’ sense of self. Also, he added that the Ministry of Education established the cultural appropriateness of the curriculum and learning environment in public schools, so the effect of foreign language learning does not affect identity. Therefore, responses regarding the impact of using Arabic in the classroom on students’ identity varied, with some saying that they *“do not see any relationship at all,”* while others believe it certainly affects identity. Some viewed the use of Arabic in class as not enhancing identity, suggesting that this could be fostered through extracurricular activities and other lessons instead.

5. Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the study on CS in rural Saudi classrooms. It highlights the frequency of CS, its pedagogical functions, and the attitudes of both students and teachers toward its use. In addition, it presents the impact of CS on students’ cultural and linguistic identity. The discus-

sion in this section aims to provide insights into the practical implications of CS in educational settings, highlighting the need for balanced language instruction strategies that accommodate diverse linguistic backgrounds while fostering English proficiency.

The results indicate that students prefer using Arabic and English in the classroom to using one language as the medium of instruction. Although many students agreed that using a single language could be advantageous, they tended to view CS as more desirable and found that it made the course easier to understand. Examining the frequency of Arabic use (see **Table 4**), it was evident that most of the students used Arabic in class. They were also dismissive of CS causing any confusion. Although many students appreciated the value of monolingual teaching in strengthening their English language competencies, it should be noted that they also perceived CS as a way of improving their understanding of English subjects. As for teachers, they reported using CS frequently, especially when dealing with complex subjects or when the students were struggling with English. However, they were concerned that excessive use of Arabic might hinder their students' ability to achieve fluency in English.

Analyzing the reasons for using Arabic in class (see **Table 6**), it was apparent that most students used Arabic to define and translate vocabulary items, elaborate on grammar points, understand complex concepts, say something they could not say in English, and explain things to their classmates. **Table 7** shows that the most common types or functions of CS were referential and expressive according to Appel and Muysken's model^[14]. However, the teachers also viewed CS as a practical tool for ensuring students' understanding and facilitating effective communication.

In terms of attitudes toward using Arabic in English class, **Table 5** shows that some students wished to use Arabic in the classroom because it helped them feel at ease and comfortable, as well as avoiding communication breakdowns. However, most students believed that using Arabic in the English classroom was inappropriate and that students should use English in class because speaking Arabic could limit their exposure to the target language and impede the development of fluency in English. Moreover, speaking Arabic would not help improve their English proficiency. The teachers also had mixed attitudes to CS use. Many viewed it as a practical tool for communication and understanding. This reflects the

positive view that CS enhances immediate comprehension and interaction. However, some teachers worried about its negative impact on English proficiency. This point highlights concerns that excessive CS may hinder long-term language development.

The diverse attitudes toward using Arabic in English classrooms reflect the complicated interaction between pedagogical concerns and the demands of practical situations. While some educators viewed Arabic as a valuable device for facilitating verbal exchange and comprehension, others considered it a dilemma for a language acquisition. These various perspectives underscore the need for nuanced language practice techniques that pay attention to students' linguistic backgrounds, stage of development, and needs^[41]. The teachers highlighted that students' linguistic ability, educational efficiency, and curriculum expectations are driving forces for the use of Arabic in the classroom^[42]. These mirror the pedagogical challenges inherent in teaching English to language learners with different language backgrounds and levels of proficiency, underscoring the significance of flexibility and adaptability in educational procedures^[43]. The perceived impacts of using Arabic on students' language acquisition and skills demonstrate a tension between supporting comprehension and the danger of language dependence^[44]. While some teachers noted that incorporating Arabic could enhance students' understanding and retention of English language principles, others were concerned that an immoderate reliance on Arabic could hinder students' ability to develop their English language skills. These contrasting perspectives point to the need for balanced strategies in language teaching and learning that prioritize language immersion while allowing appropriate aid for comprehension and learning^[45].

The impact of CS on identity was more nuanced than anticipated. Some teachers viewed Arabic as reinforcing cultural identity, particularly in response to global influences, while others downplayed its impact. These findings challenge the assumption that CS significantly shapes identity, especially in culturally cohesive rural settings. The relationship between language use in English classrooms and its effect on students' cultural, linguistic, and social identities presents a complicated interplay among language, way of life, and identity formation. While few teachers believed that incorporating Arabic could support students' connection to their linguistic and cultural history, others downplayed

the significance of language in shaping identity, emphasizing broader societal, familial, and cultural effects, consistent with Tamene and Desalegn^[28]. These divergent perspectives highlight the need for sensitivity to cultural and linguistic variety in educational settings and the significance of promoting inclusive and culturally responsive teaching practices. However, identity was not seen as an issue by the teachers or students, which could reflect their frequent use of Arabic in the classroom or their ignorance of the possible impact or that the cultural framing of the curriculum by the Ministry works. The issue of identity in language learning has several implications for language educators and policymakers. First, they should focus on adopting flexible and culturally responsive strategies to language teaching that accommodate students' diverse linguistic backgrounds and learning preferences^[46]. Second, there is a need for ongoing professional development and resources for teachers to improve their ability to teach English to low-level multilingual learners.

6. Conclusions

The primary purpose of this investigation was to explore teachers' and students' attitudes to the use of CS in their classrooms and what types of CS were commonly used among the participants in a rural area. Furthermore, this investigation explored the impact of CS on students' identity. A mixed methodology was used for the investigation. In the quantitative phase, a questionnaire was conducted with English language students and generated 79 responses, analyzed using SPSS version 25. In the qualitative phase, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted, and the data were analyzed using the NVivo software.

The findings indicate that most students favored the use of Arabic in English classes. They perceived it as a helpful tool in facilitating comprehension and communication, making grasping complex concepts and vocabulary easier. Teachers, on the other hand, exhibited mixed attitudes towards CS. While some teachers recognized the pragmatic benefits of using Arabic to ensure understanding, others expressed concern that frequent use of Arabic might hinder the development of English language proficiency. This reflects a dichotomy between the need to use Arabic to ensure immediate comprehension and the long-term goal of attaining English fluency. There are many bilingual classrooms

worldwide where CS is an accepted practice and is used frequently. Identity was not seen as an issue by the teachers or students, which could reflect their frequent use of Arabic in the classroom or their ignorance of its possible impact.

The findings of this study have implications for language policymakers and classroom teachers, as well as potential benefits for researchers. Even though English is the language of classroom materials, examination questions, and assignments, CS is often dominant in classroom communication. There is a significant discrepancy between language policies and students' preference for the medium of instruction, meaning that decision-makers need to revise language policies to ensure that the desired learning goals can be attained and recognizing areas where CS could be included as part of the syllabus planning process. Moreover, English language teachers should consider the language preferences and attitudes of their students in class, encouraging the use of CS when appropriate, for example in explaining concepts to their students so that they can participate actively in lessons. Researchers can assist in determining what level of CS should be utilized and for what purposes to facilitate the discussion of how to approach practical issues in teaching languages and advance classroom teaching and learning, ultimately leading to developments in classroom education.

Future research should compare similarities and differences in CS practices and attitudes between rural and urban settings to understand the influence of context on CS. Longitudinal studies are also needed to examine the long-term impacts of CS on language proficiency and identity. Research could be expanded to include global contexts, comparing CS practices and attitudes in different cultural and educational settings. Moreover, investigating the implications of CS for educational policy, focusing on how to balance CS and target language immersion in diverse classrooms, would be beneficial.

Given the rural context of this study, a small sample size was unavoidable. In future, studies could include larger samples of teachers and students to obtain clearer insights and more generalizable results. The data for this study were collected from Ad Dahinah. A wider geographical scope would enable broader perspectives on attitudes to CS and its usage in rural areas in Saudi Arabia, as well as the potential impact on students' identity. A frequency analysis was conducted in this investigation, but studies could undertake

more in-depth examinations of relations and cause and effect, for example through correlation and regression analyses.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, H.A. and A.A.; methodology, H.A.; software, H.A.; validation, A.A. and H.A.; formal analysis, H.A.; investigation, H.A.; resources, A.A.; data curation, H.A.; writing—original draft preparation, H.A.; writing—review and editing, A.A.; visualization, H.A.; supervision, A.A.; project administration, A.A.; funding acquisition, A.A. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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