

An Examination of Code-Switching: Motivational Factors and Patterns among Saudi EFL University Students

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Abstract

This study investigates the motivations and patterns of code-switching among Saudi EFL (English as a Foreign Language) university students that influence cultural identities on their language practices. The research has used both qualitative and quantitative methods through a set of questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to collect data. The study has exclusively focused female EFL students from the English Language Department at the Applied College of King Khalid University (KKU) in Almajdah. Out of 95 registered, 87 responded to the questionnaire, and seven students took part in interviews on campus. The findings of the study reveal that recalling Arabic equivalents, boosting confidence, talking about Western culture-related subjects, incorporating particular English terms into their speech, and reflecting long-standing habits are the primary causes that Saudi EFL students switch between English and Arabic. Moreover, EFL students get involved in code-switching to converse about Western society, leveraging their professional backgrounds that inspire them with the image of sophistication and intellect. Regarding patterns of code-switching, the research indicates that Saudi EFL university students occasionally insert English words or phrases while speaking Arabic. They frequently employ both languages in social contexts, particularly for expressions such as “thank you,” “hello,” “sorry,” “goodbye,” and “excuse me.” Furthermore, students regularly replace certain Arabic words with their English counterparts during conversation. In conclusion, the study underscores the need for EFL students to embrace code-switching as a legitimate linguistic strategy. It advocates using contextual language, encouraging emotional expression, prioritizing vocabulary development, integrating media resources, and fostering cultural awareness to enrich the overall learning experience for students.

Keywords: code-switching, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), motivations, patterns, Saudi students

1. Introduction

Code-switching has gained prominence in sociolinguistic studies due to its implications for identity, communication, and language learning (Myers-Scotton, 2017). As globalization increases, multilingual interactions are becoming more commonplace, particularly in educational contexts where students engage with their native and target languages (Nguyen, 2014). This phenomenon is especially relevant in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, where learners navigate linguistic boundaries to enhance their communicative effectiveness (Gardner-Chloros, 2009).

One of the primary reasons for code-switching is to facilitate comprehension, especially when students encounter complex concepts or vocabulary in English. By switching to Arabic, teachers can clarify difficult material, ensuring students grasp the content effectively (Algethami, 2025). This practice aligns with Vygotsky’s theory of the Zone of Proximal Development, where learners benefit from support in their native language to achieve higher levels of understanding (Baker, 2011). Additionally, code-switching serves as a means of providing emotional and social support. When teachers use Arabic to express empathy or praise, it fosters a supportive classroom environment that encourages student participation (Zaghlool & Altamimi, 2023). This emotional connection can reduce anxiety and promote a sense of belonging among students, which is essential for effective learning (Alzahrani, 2023).

For many EFL students, code-switching is also a way to maintain their cultural identity while learning a foreign language. Students can convey their cultural peculiarities and individual experiences by incorporating Arabic into their English conversations, which enhances the authenticity of their communication (Al-Rojaie, 2023). This blending of languages allows students to navigate their bilingual identities and reinforces their connection to their cultural roots. Moreover, teachers often employ code-switching as a strategy for classroom management. Using Arabic for instructions or to address behavioural issues can lead to more efficient communication and a smoother learning experience (Alnefaie & Gupta, 2024).

In addition to these factors, peer interaction and collaboration play a significant role in code-switching among students. Students frequently switch to Arabic during group activities to discuss ideas and collaborate more effectively. This practice not only enhances understanding but also strengthens social bonds among peers, fostering a collaborative learning environment (Albahoth, bin Abdul Jabar, & Jalis, 2025). Code-switching can also enhance cognitive flexibility, allowing students to draw on their entire linguistic repertoire. This cognitive engagement promotes metalinguistic awareness, where students become more conscious of the structures and rules of both

languages, ultimately contributing to their language proficiency (Alhazmi, 2024).

Specifically, among EFL learners, code-switching occurs frequently in classroom interactions and peer communications. It allows these students to express complex ideas that may be challenging to articulate solely in English, enhancing their overall learning experience (Zaghloul & Altamimi, 2023). This practice also underscores the sociolinguistic functions of language use in educational contexts as students maneuver through their bilingual abilities to convey meaning effectively (Albahoth, bin Abdul Jabar, & Jalis, 2025).

Moreover, the motivations behind code-switching in this context are multifaceted. Factors such as the desire to maintain cultural identity, social solidarity, and linguistic clarity significantly influence students' language choices (Alnefaie & Gupta, 2024). For instance, in online EFL classes, students have reported that code-switching enhances their engagement and facilitates learning, indicating a positive perception of this linguistic phenomenon (Algethami, 2025).

Code-switching is a useful strategy for EFL students in Saudi Arabia, where Arabic is the official language and English is becoming more widely accepted as a global language. According to research, Saudi students frequently alternate between Arabic and English as a way to improve comprehension and communication in class. (Ismail, 2015). This interplay of languages reflects the students' linguistic repertoire and cultural identity, as they adapt their language use to various contexts (Al-Rojaie, 2023). Understanding the patterns and motivations behind this practice is essential for educators aiming to foster an inclusive and effective learning environment. Therefore, this study aims to identify the patterns and motivations for CS by Saudi EFL university students and to explore how cultural factors affect this practice.

Statement of the Problem

In Saudi Arabia, numerous studies (e.g., Alkhalwaldeh, 2019; Hamoud & Aljumah, 2020; Mahdi & Almalki, 2019) indicate that Saudi EFL students often engage in code-switching during their English language classes. This practice frequently arises when students encounter challenges articulating certain concepts or ideas due to limited English proficiency. In such instances, they may resort to Arabic to bridge lexical gaps or to enhance their communication. Using Arabic allows students to convey cultural nuances and expressions that are more effectively articulated in their native language. By switching to Arabic, Saudi EFL learners can more accurately express their cultural identity, values, and emotions. However, this habitual alternation between English and Arabic may adversely affect their communicative competence and fluency in English (Alkhatheery, 2014; Assulaimani, 2019).

Extensive research on code-switching has been conducted across various social, political, and educational contexts within Saudi Arabia (e.g., Al Alaslal, 2018; Aljasir, 2020; Alsalami, 2021; Abalhassan & Alshalawi, 2000). Most of these studies have primarily focused on code-switching among Saudi speakers, examining its functions in different contexts, user attitudes towards it, and variations in user profiles. However, there remains a notable gap in investigating the patterns and motivations for code-switching specifically among Saudi EFL students, particularly at the university level.

Additionally, the language policy and educational framework in Saudi Arabia may play a significant role in shaping code-switching behaviours among EFL learners (Alkhatheery, 2014). The predominance of Arabic as the official language can influence students as they navigate predominantly Arabic environments and English-learning contexts (Alzahrani, 2023). Therefore, the phenomenon of code-switching between Arabic and English among Saudi EFL students presents a complex interplay of sociolinguistic and educational factors. Despite the growing body of literature on CS in multiple contexts, there remains a significant gap in understanding the specific motivational factors and patterns that characterize its use in EFL classrooms in Saudi Arabia. Previous studies have highlighted the sociolinguistic dimensions of CS, demonstrating its prevalence and significance in both informal and academic settings (Ismail, 2015; Omar & Ilyas, 2018). However, the motivations behind students' choices to code-switch, particularly in an online learning environment, have not been thoroughly explored.

Research by Algethami (2025) indicates that students perceive CS as an effective strategy for enhancing their learning experience, yet the underlying motivations driving these perceptions require further investigation. Additionally, studies on the communicative functions of CS in various contexts, including tertiary settings and online communities (Alrasheed, 2022; AlBathi, 2022), suggest that CS serves various social and cognitive purposes that could influence its use in EFL university settings.

Moreover, the relationship between culture and code-switching Albahoth et al. (2025) introduced another layer of complexity, indicating that cultural differences may play a crucial role in how students navigate language use. Thus, this study aims to fill the research gap by examining the motivational factors and patterns of CS among Saudi EFL university students, providing insights critical for educators and policymakers aiming to enhance language learning outcomes in this context.

Research Questions

This research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the patterns of code-switching exhibited by Saudi EFL University Students?
2. What are the motivations behind code-switching among Saudi EFL university students?
3. How do cultural factors influence the use of code-switching among Saudi EFL university students?

Research Significance

Examining code-switching among EFL university students contributes to the broader understanding of bilingualism. By exploring the motivational factors and patterns of CS, this research can enhance existing theoretical frameworks regarding language use in multilingual

settings. It provides insights into how CS functions as a communicative strategy that can facilitate language learning and comprehension. The study explores the cognitive implications of CS, demonstrating how it can serve as a tool to manage cognitive load, thus providing a nuanced understanding of language processing in learners and the impact of L1 and culture on CS practice.

Practically, this research has several implications for educators, language policymakers, and curriculum developers in Saudi Arabia and similar contexts. Understanding the motivational factors behind students' use of CS can inform teaching methods and strategies that leverage this phenomenon to enhance language acquisition. Educators can design interventions that utilize CS as a pedagogical tool, fostering a more inclusive and effective learning environment. Moreover, insights from this study can guide the development of training programs for teachers to better support students in their language learning journeys. Ultimately, the findings may improve educational practices and outcomes in EFL settings, promoting greater engagement and success among students.

2. Literature Review

Code-switching is the systematic alternation between different languages within a conversation (Baker, 2011). This linguistic practice involves integrating elements from two or more linguistic systems—such as distinct languages or variations of the same language—within a single speech act or interaction (McCormic, 1995). It can occur in various ways, including during exchanges between different speakers, between utterances within a single turn, or even within a single utterance (Milroy & Muysken, 1995). Gumperz (1982) defined code-switching as “the juxtaposition of segments of speech from two distinct grammatical systems or subsystems within a single conversation”. (P. 59). Similarly, Myers-Scotton (1993a) characterized it as the selection of linguistic forms from an embedded language or languages during conversations conducted in a matrix language.

Code-switching is distinct from other related phenomena observed in bilingual speech. For example, while borrowing involves incorporating lexical items from one language into another's lexicon, code-switching entails utilizing two grammatical frameworks and vocabularies to construct sentences or texts (Muysken, 2000). According to Auer (1998), code-mixing and code-switching both entail language transitions and have structural similarities. However, McCormic (1995) argued that code-mixing is more frequently limited to individual words or shorter phrases, whereas code-switching usually involves the alternation of larger speech segments.

Muysken (2000) asserted that code-switching can occur in a variety of ways, including inter-sentential (moving between sentences), intra-sentential (moving inside a single sentence), and tag-switching (moving brief phrases or tags from one language into another). Inter-sentential switching occurs when a speaker alternates languages at sentence boundaries (Mejdell, 2006). For example, a student might say, “I need to study for my exam. اذكر أبدأ لازم.” This pattern is prevalent among EFL students, allowing them to express complete thoughts in one language before transitioning to another (Alzahrani, 2023).

Intra-sentential switching, on the other hand, involves mixing languages within a single sentence (Auer, 1995). An example of this would be, “I think that صعب كان ال يوم ال درس.” This switching type often reflects a speaker's comfort with both languages and their ability to navigate between them fluidly (Akeel, 2016). Tag-switching, which involves inserting a tag phrase from one language into a sentence primarily in another language, is also common. For instance, a student might say, “This is a difficult موضوع, you know?” This pattern highlights the speaker's bilingual identity and ability to draw from both languages to enhance communication (Youssef, 2016).

The motivations behind code-switching among EFL students are multifaceted, encompassing cognitive, social, and emotional factors (Ismail, 2015). One significant reason for code-switching is to facilitate comprehension (Omar & Ilyas, 2018). When students encounter complex vocabulary or concepts in English, they may switch to Arabic to clarify their understanding. For instance, a student might say, “Globalization is complicated. بيعضها على الدول تأثر هو يبعني.” This strategy helps students articulate their thoughts more clearly and ensures they grasp the material being discussed (Algethami, 2025).

Another motivation for code-switching is the desire for social connection and solidarity (AlBathi, 2022). In group discussions, students often switch to Arabic to foster a sense of belonging and camaraderie among peers (Alrasheed, 2022). For example, during a collaborative project, a student might say, “بيعض مع المشروع على نشد تغل ن بدأ خلدنا.” In addition to fostering stronger social ties, this usage of Arabic fosters an inclusive atmosphere where everyone feels free to participate (Zaghlool & Altamimi, 2023).

Emotional factors also play a crucial role in code-switching. Students may switch to Arabic when expressing feelings or personal experiences, as it allows them to convey emotions more authentically (Algethami, 2025). For instance, a student discussing a challenging experience might say, “I felt really overwhelmed. بيال ضغط أشعر كنت.” This emotional resonance is often more profound in their native language, enabling them to connect with their audience on a deeper level (Albahoth et al., 2025). Cultural factors significantly influence code-switching behaviours among EFL students (Alhazmi, 2024). Language is a key component of cultural identity, and for many students, switching between English and Arabic reflects their dual cultural affiliations (Akhtar, 2016). In academic settings, students may need to assert their cultural identity while simultaneously adapting to the globalized context of English-language education. For example, a student might say, “In our culture, we value respect. ال تعلم في مهم وهذا.” This blending of languages allows students to express their cultural values while engaging with the English language (Al-Rojaie, 2023).

Moreover, cultural norms and expectations shape the contexts in which code-switching occurs (Ismail, 2015). In formal educational settings, students may be more inclined to use English to demonstrate proficiency and adherence to academic standards (Omar & Ilyas, 2018). However, in informal settings, such as conversations with friends, they may switch to Arabic to maintain cultural ties and express familiarity. This dynamic is evident in social interactions, where students might say, “المحاضرة بعد,” showcasing their ability

to navigate different linguistic contexts based on social norms (Alhazmi, 2024).

Additionally, it cannot overlook the influence of media and technology on code-switching. AlBathi, 2022). With the rise of social media and online communication, students are exposed to various linguistic styles that blend English and Arabic (Algethami, 2025). This exposure encourages them to adopt similar patterns in their communication. For instance, in online discussions, students might use phrases like “LOL” (“Laugh Out Loud”) or “BRB” (Be Right Back) alongside Arabic expressions, reflecting a hybrid linguistic identity shaped by digital culture (Alsamhan & Almutrafi, 2022).

Moreover, the role of the first language (L1) in EFL classrooms was widely studied. Copland and Neokleous (2011) discovered that when teachers and students share the same L1, translation becomes an effective tool for overcoming learning difficulties. This reliance on translation frequently results in the grammar-translation method, where L1 is utilized to clarify complex elements of the target language, rather than fully immersing students in the foreign language itself. Similarly, Hasrina et al. (2018) investigated the perceptions of L1 use among three teachers and 94 students in EFL classrooms. Their quantitative study revealed that teachers overwhelmingly recognized the advantages of using L1 to facilitate communication and enhance understanding. The findings indicate that L1 significantly improves comprehension and overall learning experiences of students in EFL environments.

Numerous studies have examined the phenomenon of code-switching (CS) among EFL students. Algethami (2025) investigated perceptions of Saudi EFL students on CS in online learning environments. A web-based questionnaire was used to gather data from 72 third-year students who had previously taken online English language classes using a quantitative research approach. The findings reveal that a significant majority of Saudi EFL students view code-switching positively in the context of online classes, suggesting that it serves as an effective pedagogical tool that enhances their foreign language development. Additionally, code-switching was found to facilitate greater participation among students, thereby contributing to their language learning and acquisition.

Abdulloh and Usman (2021) explored the attitudes of EFL students toward code-switching and code-mixing. Their study employed a questionnaire featuring 13 open-ended questions to investigate various dimensions, including opinions of students on CS and CM, the reasons for language shifts, the relationship between the two phenomena, the contexts that prompt engagement in CS, and personal experiences with both practices. The results highlight a spectrum of perceptions, with positive feedback underscoring the role of CS and CM in enhancing communication and reducing misunderstandings. Conversely, some negative feedback pointed to the potential for confusion arising from language alternation.

In another study, Alrasheed (2022) examined the social motivations for code-switching among four Saudi preschool children attending an international school in Saudi Arabia. A parental questionnaire and a narrative activity session served as the main tools in this study, which combined qualitative and quantitative approaches. The study used Poplack’s (1980) categorisation approach to group the many forms of code-switching that were seen in the children’s speech. The results indicate that the children predominantly engaged in inter-sentential code-switching, with this form occurring more frequently than intra-sentential code-switching. Additionally, the findings identified three key communicative functions of Arabic-English code-switching among the pre-schoolers: to reduce social distance, to find equivalent words in the alternate language, and to express feelings and thoughts.

Zaghlool and Altamimi (2023) examined the reasons behind the use of code-switching by Saudi high school EFL teachers and students. Their findings indicated that both groups recognized CS as an effective method to encourage critical thinking about new material, enhance understanding of grammatical rules, promote engagement, and create a more enjoyable classroom atmosphere. Similarly, Ehtsham et al. (2023) investigated the language preferences of Pakistani college students learning a second language, revealing that students favoured code-switching to their native language to boost classroom participation and comprehension. However, they preferred using English exclusively for exam instructions, results, and learning grammatical concepts, demonstrating considerable linguistic flexibility in most situations.

Ye (2023) discussed the perceptions of Chinese secondary school students regarding code-switching, identifying four primary functions: facilitating knowledge acquisition, managing classroom dynamics, building relationships, and adapting to contextual constraints. Zahra et al. (2023) focused on instances of code-switching during online presentations by EFL students in Indonesia, finding that such presentations frequently employed intra-sentential, extra-sentential (tag switching), and inter-sentential CS. The study highlighted that factors like the interlocutor, physical environment, topic of discussion, regional influences, and vocabulary limitations affected code-switching during presentations. Furthermore, code-switching was used to introduce subjects, make ideas clear, ease tension, and lessen anxiety.

Candilas et al. (2023) investigated the motivations behind code-switching among Filipino university EFL students in a related study. Results indicated that students commonly switched codes when prompted, when expressing themselves more fully, when facing difficulties with English, when anxious about making grammatical errors, when struggling with memory, when lacking vocabulary, or when encouraged by their teachers to do so.

Alqarni (2022) analysed the code-switching behaviours of ten Saudi students across three different contexts, examining the relationship between their English proficiency levels and their use of code-switching. Through participant interviews and checklist analysis, the qualitative study revealed that students with higher English proficiency were less likely to code-switch. Most participants acknowledged code-switching in all three contexts, with a notable exception in the Saudi context, where a small minority reported not engaging in it.

Alsalmi (2021) sought to understand the motivations for code-switching among bilingual individuals fluent in Arabic and English. Findings suggested that those with higher proficiency in both languages were more inclined to merge them, likely due to a greater familiarity with English phrases, a broader vocabulary, and enhanced expressiveness in English.

Aljasir (2020) explored how personal characteristics influenced code-switching among Saudi students. The results indicated significant variations in code-switching based on emotional states, types of interlocutors, their English proficiency levels, and conversational contexts. Each of these factors was found to impact the frequency of code-switching in specific situations significantly.

Alhamdan (2019) examined natural instances of code-switching between Arabic and English, concluding that code-switching, **characterised by its structural diversity and variability**, serves as a valuable resource for multilingual individuals proficient in both languages.

Finally, Kniaż and Zawrotna (2018) investigated patterns of code-switching between Arabic and English among students at the American University in Cairo, considering non-linguistic factors that might influence language behaviour. They identified four types of code-switching: insertion, alternation, congruent lexicalization, and discourse marker switching. Their research indicated that code-switching behaviours are learned through socialization and are strongly correlated with speakers' socioeconomic status, exposure to English, and prior experience with code-switching before entering college.

The literature on code-switching (CS) in EFL classrooms reveals a variety of perspectives and practices among EFL learners. However, there remains a notable research gap concerning the use of CS in Saudi EFL university settings. To address this gap, the current study targets Saudi undergraduate female students who study at the English language department in the Applied College in Almajadah, King Khalid University (KKU), Saudi Arabia, to check their perceptions of the patterns and motivations for CS and how the cultural factors affect their perceptions and use of CS.

3. Methodology

Research Design

This study uses the mixed-method approach, where the quantitative approach (a survey) and the qualitative approach (semi-structured interviews) are employed to investigate the motivations and patterns of code-switching among Saudi EFL university students. By combining these two approaches, the study aims to achieve a richer and more nuanced understanding of code-switching among Saudi EFL students. The quantitative data will highlight prevalent trends and general attitudes, while the qualitative insights will offer deeper context and meaning behind those trends (Daniel & Sam, 2011). This mixed-methods design not only enhances the robustness of the findings but also allows for triangulation, where the strengths of one method compensate for the limitations of the other (Patel & Patel, 2019).

Several theoretical frameworks provide an excellent way to understand the examination of computer science among Saudi EFL university students. The Sociolinguistic Theory provides insights into how social factors, such as identity and group dynamics, influence language use, highlighting the role of CS as a social strategy among bilinguals in educational settings (Baker, 2001). Communicative Competence, as proposed by (Hymes, 1972), emphasizes the importance of using language appropriately in various contexts, suggesting that CS can enhance students' ability to communicate effectively in their EFL classes (Gumperz, 1982). Language Identity Theory focuses on how individuals express their cultural and personal identities through language, is particularly relevant for EFL students navigating their bilingual identities in an academic environment (Baker, 2001). Lastly, Cognitive Load Theory posits that learners have a limited capacity for processing information, indicating that CS may serve as a cognitive strategy to ease the learning process by allowing students to utilize their L1 when faced with complex language tasks (Sweller, 1988). Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the motivational factors and patterns of CS among Saudi EFL students, illustrating how language use is shaped by social, communicative, identity-related, and cognitive considerations.

Participants

The participants in this study were Saudi EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students enrolled in the English Language Department at the Applied College of King Khalid University (KKU) in Almajadah, Saudi Arabia which exclusively serves female students. For the academic year 2023-2024, a total of (95) EFL students are registered. The research utilized a complete census sampling method, encompassing all enrolled students. The sample consisted exclusively of female students, whose English proficiency levels varied from intermediate to upper-intermediate, as determined by their annual proficiency assessments. All participants are native Arabic speakers.

Data Collection

This research utilizes two main data collection instruments. The first tool is a questionnaire designed to gather quantitative data.-The second tool comprises semi-structured interviews, aimed at collecting qualitative data. Below is a description of each instrument:

A- A Questionnaire

Questionnaire was considered as a primary data collection instrument and it was **developed by** relevant literature and prior research focused on code-switching. Its objective was to gather data on the motivations and patterns of code-switching among Saudi EFL students. The questionnaire comprised 20 items designed to assess students' perceptions regarding the reasons and patterns associated with code-switching. A five-point Likert scale was utilized for responses, offering the following options: strongly agree (5), agree (4), neutral (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1).

The researcher administered the questionnaire in person, obtaining responses from 87 students, resulting in a response rate of 91.57%. To ensure content validity, the researcher submitted the questionnaire to several experts in Applied Linguistics from the Department of English Language and Literature at King Khalid University. Feedback from these experts was incorporated, leading to a revised final version of the instrument. Additionally, the reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with findings detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of Questionnaire Reliability

Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
20	0.854

Table 1 indicates that the reliability coefficient for the questionnaire items is 0.854, **demonstrating a strong reliability level**. This score confirms that the questionnaire is a dependable instrument for this study.

Participants were informed about the purpose of the questionnaire and provided their consent to participate. The questionnaire was distributed during regular class sessions at the university. Following the data collection process, the researcher analysed the responses obtained from the participants.

B. Semi-structured Interviews

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with seven Saudi EFL students to obtain more detailed insights into the motivations and reasons for code-switching. These interviews aimed to gather real-life examples that illustrate the influence of culture on students' code-switching practices. The interviews were structured with open-ended and follow-up questions designed to elicit in-depth responses. Each interview lasted approximately 20 to 25 minutes, allowing for comprehensive discussions.

Participants were selected based on their proficiency levels, experiences with code-switching, and diverse backgrounds to ensure a representative sample. The interviews took place on campus in a quiet room, creating an informal atmosphere encouraging participants to express their thoughts openly. Following approval from the college administration, the researcher ensured that all participants were informed about the purpose of the interviews and provided their consent.

The discussions were audio-recorded for accurate transcription and data analysis. The researcher documented the students' responses in an Excel spreadsheet and employed narrative analysis for the content analysis, identifying key themes and patterns in the data.

Confidentiality procedures were put in place to address ethical concerns, and participants were made aware of their freedom to leave the research at any moment. Additionally, participants were allowed review their responses to ensure accuracy and authenticity.

The findings from the interviews were presented, including direct quotations from the participants to exemplify how their cultural backgrounds and first languages influence their tendency to switch between English and Arabic during communication. Moreover, the researcher discussed how these qualitative findings complemented the results obtained from the questionnaire, providing a richer understanding of the factors influencing code-switching among Saudi EFL students.

Data Analysis

The researcher utilized SPSS software to process the quantitative data collected from the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were employed, focusing on mean scores and standard deviations to summarize the responses. Frequency distributions were also calculated to illustrate the students' responses to each statement in the questionnaire, providing a clear overview of the trends in code-switching motivations and patterns. For the qualitative data obtained from interviews, narrative analysis was applied to examine the stories and personal accounts shared by participants. This approach offered valuable insights into how cultural factors influence their code-switching experiences, allowing for a deeper understanding of the context and significance of their language practices.

4. Results & Discussion

The following section presents the results of the study and discusses these findings in relation to the relevant literature. Specifically, it includes a detailed analysis of the questionnaire and interview results.

1- Results of the Questionnaire

Table 2. Motivations and Patterns of Code-Switching among Saudi EFL University Students

S. No.	Statements	Frequency					Mean	Standard Deviation
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree		
1	I occasionally incorporate an English word into my Arabic conversation when I cannot recall the Arabic equivalent.	30	42	11	4	0	4.13	1.25
2	I tend to use English terms to emphasize certain points in my speech.	18	20	21	18	10	3.21	1.04
3	Due to the prominence and impact of specific English words, I strive to integrate them into my communication.	24	32	23	8	0	3.83	1.15
4	I sometimes engage in code-switching to express my happiness and excitement.	20	15	29	20	3	3.33	1.05
5	When I need to articulate feelings of anger or sadness, I often blend languages in my dialogue.	19	15	22	27	4	3.21	1.03
6	I use code-switching when discussing topics related to Western culture.	35	26	17	9	0	4.00	1.17
7	In conversations about Western society, I frequently alternate between different languages.	22	29	27	8	1	3.72	1.13
8	I also resort to code-switching in my replies to individuals who employ this practice.	12	21	40	10	4	3.31	1.07
9	I engage in code-switching to demonstrate my knowledge.	16	19	36	13	3	3.37	1.09
10	While shopping for electronic items—such as computers, mobile devices, hardware, and software—I mix Arabic and English.	18	24	38	5	2	3.59	1.11
11	I combine Arabic with English as a reflection of my education and proficiency in the English language.	11	39	19	16	2	3.47	1.07
12	I sometimes use a blend of Arabic and English to ensure that those unfamiliar with English cannot participate in the conversation.	12	34	24	15	2	3.45	1.05
13	To bolster my confidence, I often switch between Arabic and English.	31	35	14	6	1	4.02	1.18
14	My educational background and professional experiences have equipped me to code-switch effectively between Arabic and English.	16	38	23	10	0	3.69	1.09
15	I frequently use both Arabic and English in social contexts, particularly for expressions like “thank you,” “hello,” “sorry,” “goodbye,” and “excuse me.”	21	41	15	9	1	3.83	1.13
16	I engage in code-switching between Arabic and English to project an image of sophistication and intellect.	18	37	21	9	2	3.69	1.08
17	Code-switching between Arabic and English has become a habitual practice for me over the years.	21	37	22	6	1	3.82	1.14
18	In my impersonations of various celebrities, I often switch between Arabic and English.	12	26	25	16	8	3.21	1.03
19	I regularly replace certain Arabic words with their English counterparts in my speech.	13	48	15	9	2	3.70	1.11
20	Occasionally, I insert English words or phrases while speaking in Arabic.	18	52	12	5	0	3.95	1.16
Overall Mean		3.62						

Table 2 presents a comprehensive analysis of the motivations and patterns of code-switching among Saudi EFL university students, arranged in descending order according to mean scores. The findings indicate that these students perceive code-switching as a multifaceted practice shaped by their linguistic needs, cultural contexts, and social aspirations.

Regarding the motivations for code-switching, the results show that Saudi EFL students frequently engage in this practice when they cannot recall the Arabic equivalent of a word (M = 4.13). Additionally, they utilize code-switching to bolster their confidence (M = 4.02) and to discuss topics related to Western culture (M = 4.00). The integration of specific English words into their communication is also prominent (M = 3.83), reflecting a habitual practice developed over the years (M = 3.82). Furthermore, students frequently switch languages when speaking about Western society (M = 3.72) and attribute their ability to code-switch to their educational background and

professional experiences ($M = 3.69$). Other motivations include projecting an image of sophistication and intellect ($M = 3.69$), using code-switching while shopping for electronic items ($M = 3.59$), reflecting their education and proficiency in English ($M = 3.47$), and excluding those unfamiliar with English from conversations ($M = 3.45$).

The findings also reveal that Saudi EFL university students engage in code-switching with moderate frequency to demonstrate their knowledge ($M = 3.37$), express happiness and excitement ($M = 3.33$), respond to individuals who practice code-switching ($M = 3.31$), articulate feelings of anger or sadness ($M = 3.21$), impersonate various celebrities ($M = 3.21$), and emphasize certain points ($M = 3.21$).

In terms of the patterns of code-switching between English and Arabic, the results indicate that Saudi EFL university students occasionally insert English words or phrases while speaking in Arabic ($M = 3.95$). They frequently use both languages in social contexts, particularly for common expressions such as “thank you,” “hello,” “sorry,” “goodbye,” and “excuse me” ($M = 3.83$). Additionally, they regularly replace certain Arabic words with their English counterparts in their speech ($M = 3.70$).

These findings underscore the complexity and contextual nature of code-switching practices among Saudi EFL university students, highlighting the interplay of linguistic, cultural, and social factors that influence their language use.

The current study’s findings align with those of Abal Hassan and Alshawali (2000) and Al Alaslāa (2018), which indicate that EFL students frequently utilize code-switching in English discourse that includes challenging technical terminology. This pattern is further supported by Hamed et al. (2022), who found that EFL students employ code-switching to demonstrate their language proficiency and assert their ability to communicate in English.

Additionally, the results suggest that students engage in code-switching between English and Arabic due to their academic qualifications and the habitual nature of this practice developed over time. This observation is corroborated by Yaseen et al. (2021) and Zahra et al. (2023), who reported that students’ educational levels influence their propensity to code-switch. Nguyen (2015) also noted that pedagogical practices significantly contribute to the habitual use of code-switching among EFL learners.

Moreover, participants indicated that they resort to code-switching when they struggle to find equivalent terms in Arabic or to exclude individuals from discussions if they are not proficient in English. The students also noted that code-switching serves to project a sense of culture and sophistication, as English expressions carry a certain weight and influence. These findings resonate with the work of Ehtsham et al. (2023) and Candilas et al. (2023), who reported that EFL students often code-switch when they lack corresponding words in their first language. Al-Daher (2021) similarly indicated that cultural factors and the desire to speak English in social contexts drive code-switching behavior.

Finally, the results reveal that among the motivations for code-switching are the desire to emulate public figures, enhance self-esteem, and express emotions such as sadness and anger. This observation is supported by Alzahrani (2023) and Alqarni (2022), who found that EFL students utilize code-switching to convey their feelings and reinforce their social identity. Nguyen (2015) verified that EFL students frequently use code-switching to win acceptance from their classmates.

On a different note, the study found that Saudi EFL students exhibit various code-switching patterns between English and Arabic. They frequently use common social expressions such as “hi,” “thank you,” “bye,” and “excuse me,” showcasing their ability to navigate between the two languages. Students sometimes insert English words or phrases into their Arabic speech and often replace certain Arabic terms with their English equivalents. These findings are consistent with the research of Aljasir (2020), Alhamdan (2019), and Alhourani (2018), who noted that EFL students predominantly engage in addition, substitution, and the use of social phrases when switching codes. Alzahrani (2023) also found that EFL students might incorporate Arabic terms into their English sentences to convey specific ideas more accurately or to address gaps in their English vocabulary.

2- Results of the Interviews

Below are the responses to the interview questions. The following responses illustrate the motivations and patterns of code-switching among Saudi EFL students, highlighting their linguistic choices in various contexts. Each student’s answer reflects their unique experiences and the underlying cultural and social factors influencing their language use.

Student 1:

Response: “Sometimes, when I’m talking to my friends, I’ll say, ‘I need to *ذاكر* for the exam,’ because it’s just easier. It’s like, *يعني* studying, but more intense.”

In this instance, “ذاكر” (dhākar) means “to study,” while “يعني” (ya’ni) translates to “meaning” or “like.” This demonstrates intra-sentential code-switching, where Arabic words blend seamlessly into an English sentence. The student’s motivation stems from efficiency and the nuanced meaning of “ذاكر,” which conveys a sense of intense study that feels more authentic in Arabic. The influence of their first language (L1) provides culturally embedded terms, and the usage of “يعني” serves as a common filler, enhancing the conversational flow. Culturally, this reflects Saudi Arabia’s collectivist nature, fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity among friends.

Student 2:

Response: “When I’m in class, I try to speak only English, but sometimes, if I don’t know the word, I’ll just say the Arabic word, like, *الموضوع* is very difficult.”

Here, “الموضوع” (al-mawḍū‘) translates to “the topic.” This response illustrates lexical borrowing and code-switching prompted

by gaps in the student's English vocabulary. The primary motivation is to maintain fluency and avoid communication breakdowns. The cultural context is significant; the student often defaults to Arabic due to the educational system's strong Arabic influence, making academic terms more accessible in their native language. Additionally, the fear of losing face in front of peers or teachers drives the student to quickly use Arabic, thus preserving the conversation's momentum.

Student 3:

Response: *"Sometimes, when I'm angry, I'll just start speaking Arabic, like, 'إخلاص! I'm done!' It just comes out naturally."*

In this case, "إخلاص" (khalās) means "enough" or "finished." This showcases code-switching as a means of emotional expression, where Arabic serves as a more effective medium for conveying strong feelings. The motivation here is emotional release; the student finds it easier to articulate frustration in their native language. Given Arabic's expressive capacity, this aligns with cultural norms that accept the use of the mother tongue for emotional expression.

Student 4:

Response: *"When I'm explaining something complex, I'll say, 'It's like, يعني.. you know, مثلاً..' to make sure my friends understand."*

The terms "يعني" and "مثلاً" (mathalan) mean "meaning" and "for example," respectively. This response exemplifies code-switching for clarification and emphasis. The motivation lies in ensuring comprehension; by incorporating Arabic, the student enhances clarity and provides additional context. This approach aligns with the conversational style prevalent in Arabic-speaking cultures, where providing examples is highly valued, especially in complex discussions.

Student 5:

Response: *"Sometimes, I'll start a sentence in English, then switch to Arabic, like, 'I was thinking about... كيف we can solve this problem?'"*

Here, "كيف" (kayf) means "how," representing inter-sentential code-switching where the switch occurs between clauses. The motivation appears to be cognitive processing, as the student finds it easier to complete their thoughts in Arabic. The influence of Arabic syntax and sentence structure is evident, suggesting that the student is likely thinking in Arabic and thus prefers to articulate their ideas in it.

Student 6:

Response: *"When I'm talking about religious topics, I often use Arabic terms, like, صلاة or قرآن because they have specific meanings."*

In this instance, "صلاة" (ṣalāh) means "prayer," and "قرآن" (Qur'ān) refers to the Islamic holy book. This reflects code-switching driven by domain-specific vocabulary. The motivation is rooted in precision and cultural relevance, as Arabic terms are deemed more appropriate in religious discussions. Given the deep integration of Islam within Saudi culture, religious vocabulary is inherently tied to the Arabic language.

Student 7:

Response: *"Sometimes, I use English words when I'm talking about technology, like, 'I need to download the application,' because those words are more common."*

In this case, "download" and "application" are English loanwords, illustrating code-switching driven by lexical availability and the prevalence of English in technology. The motivation here is lexical convenience, as English terms dominate the technological lexicon. The cultural context reflects Saudi Arabia's modernity and technological adoption, where English technical terms are widely recognized and used.

The diglossic nature of Arabic plays a crucial role in shaping code-switching patterns among Saudi EFL students. Arabic exists in two primary varieties: Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), which is used in formal settings, and various colloquial dialects, which dominate everyday conversation (Ismail, 2015). This linguistic dichotomy influences students' choices when switching between English and Arabic. Research by Al-Daher (2021) highlights that students often navigate between these varieties based on context, employing colloquial Arabic in informal situations while resorting to MSA in academic or formal discourse. This flexibility allows students to communicate effectively, demonstrating their linguistic adaptability and cultural awareness.

Saudi culture places a high premium on social harmony and politeness, which significantly impacts code-switching behavior (Ismail, 2015). As Alzahrani (2023) noted that code-switching serves as a strategic tool to mitigate face-threatening acts, allowing speakers to navigate social interactions with greater ease. For instance, using Arabic expressions within English sentences can foster solidarity and create a sense of belonging among peers. This aligns with Gumperz's (1982) notion of conversational code-switching, where shifts between languages can convey nuances of identity and social relationships. In a collectivistic culture like Saudi Arabia, such practices help maintain group cohesion and reinforce social bonds.

Code-switching also functions as a means for students to negotiate their identities as both Saudis and global citizens. The use of English often signals modernity and global engagement, while Arabic serves as a marker of cultural heritage (Al-Daher, 2021). Yaseen et al (2021)

asserted that bilingual individuals frequently employ code-switching to navigate their multifaceted identities, reflecting their cultural affiliations and personal experiences. In this context, Saudi EFL students utilize English to align themselves with contemporary global trends, while Arabic reinforces their connection to local traditions and values. This duality reflects the broader sociolinguistic dynamics at play in a rapidly globalizing world.

Students' proficiency levels in English are critical factors influencing their code-switching behavior. *Research by Nguyen (2015) indicates* that learners with lower proficiency are more likely to resort to code-switching as a compensatory strategy to address lexical or grammatical gaps. This finding resonates with the experiences of Saudi EFL students, who may find it easier to express complex ideas in Arabic when their English vocabulary is insufficient. Consequently, code-switching becomes a practical solution to maintain communication flow and reduce anxiety in language use (Hamed et al., 2022).

The context of education significantly shapes the frequency and nature of code-switching among students. Studies, such as those conducted by Alqarni (2022) suggest that learners tend to code-switch more frequently in informal environments compared to formal academic settings. In the Saudi educational landscape, where English is often the medium of instruction in higher education, students may still gravitate towards Arabic in casual interactions with peers. This behavior underscores the influence of social context on language choice, highlighting the flexibility of students as they adapt their communication strategies based on situational demands (Baker, 2011).

The pervasive presence of English in media and social platforms further encourages the blending of languages among EFL students. As Ismail (2015) discusses, exposure to English through television, music, and social media creates a linguistic environment where code-switching becomes normalized and even expected. This phenomenon not only reinforces the practice of code-switching but also affects students' language attitudes, making them more comfortable navigating between English and Arabic. Integrating English phrases and terminology into everyday conversation reflects a broader cultural shift towards globalization, where English serves as a lingua franca in many domains (Baker, 2011).

5. Conclusion & Implications

The findings of the study reveal a multifaceted understanding of code-switching practices. EFL Students frequently switch between English and Arabic not only a linguistic strategy but also as a means of navigating cultural identities and social contexts. The analysis highlights key motivations for code-switching, including the need for clarity, emotional expression, and the facilitation of communication when faced with lexical gaps. Additionally, the influence of cultural values, language proficiency, and the educational environment significantly shapes students' code-switching behaviors. Also, his research underscores the importance of recognizing code-switching as a legitimate and strategic communicative tool rather than as a deficiency in language skills. It reflects students' adaptability and their ability to leverage both languages to enhance understanding and connection with their peers.

The findings of this research suggest several key pedagogical implications that can enhance the learning experience for Saudi EFL students. First, educators should embrace code-switching as a natural and strategic communicative tool. Teachers can create a more effective classroom environment that fosters confidence and facilitates effective communication by acknowledging students often switch between English and Arabic. Allowing students to use both languages can enhance their engagement and promote a sense of belonging.

Second, it is essential to focus on contextual language use. Instruction should emphasize the appropriateness of language choices in different situations. By providing opportunities for students to practice code-switching in relevant contexts such as group discussions or role-playing activities educators can help them develop linguistic flexibility and communicative competence.

Additionally, encouraging emotional expression in both languages can significantly enrich the learning experience. Teachers should create a supportive atmosphere where students feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings, fostering emotional engagement. Activities that prompt personal storytelling or reflections can deepen connections to the material and promote authentic language use.

Moreover, since students often revert to Arabic due to lexical gaps, educators should prioritize vocabulary development. Targeted exercises that expand students' English vocabulary through synonyms, idiomatic expressions, and subject-specific terminology can empower students to articulate their ideas more fully and confidently in English.

Leveraging media and technology is another vital implication. With the pervasive influence of English in digital media, integrating multimedia resources into the curriculum can enhance student engagement and provide authentic language exposure. This approach helps students navigate code-switching in digital contexts and familiarizes them with contemporary language use.

Finally, the study asserts that a critical component of education is cultivating cultural understanding and identity. Educators should facilitate conversations in the classroom regarding language use in cultural contexts and assist students in comprehending the linguistic decisions that influence their identities. Educators can empower students to appreciate their bilingualism as a valuable asset by promoting awareness of the interplay between language and culture.

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Authors' contributions

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