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### Exploring Code-Switching in the Arab Context: A Systematic Literature Review on the Reasons, Attitudes, and Educational Impacts

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## Exploring Code-Switching in the Arab Context: A Systematic Literature Review on the Reasons, Attitudes, and Educational Impacts

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### ABSTRACT

This systematic review synthesizes findings from 36 empirical studies published between 2018 and 2025, examining the use of code-switching (CS) in Arab EFL classrooms. Guided by two research questions, the review explores how instructional and contextual factors influence CS practices, and how sociocultural and psychological dimensions shape learner and teacher attitudes. Using a PRISMA-based selection process and thematic analysis, the review identifies four dominant themes: communicative and instructional functions of CS, classroom-based practices, reasons for CS use, and attitudinal responses. Findings reveal that CS is widely used as a scaffold to support comprehension, classroom management, and learner confidence, particularly for low- and intermediate-proficiency students. While many teachers and students view CS positively, concerns persist regarding its overuse and potential interference with language immersion. These mixed attitudes highlight the need for pedagogical balance, institutional flexibility, and teacher training on strategic CS use. The review concludes that CS, when applied purposefully, is a valuable resource in multilingual classrooms. It calls for future research into the longitudinal impacts of CS on language development, teacher decision-making, and digital learning environments. Pedagogical implications include the integration of CS-aware practices into teacher education, curriculum design, and language policy across Arab EFL contexts.

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In recent years, bilingual and multilingual classrooms have become increasingly central to global education, prompting a closer examination of linguistic practices that shape learner engagement and instructional effectiveness. One such practice is code-switching (CS, the intentional alternation between two or more languages within a single communicative episode). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context across the Arab world, CS has emerged as a prominent classroom strategy used by both learners and teachers to navigate linguistic, cognitive, and cultural challenges.

Sociolinguistic and applied linguistic research has documented how code-switching functions as more than a linguistic convenience; it is a pedagogical tool, a discourse strategy, and a sociocultural practice shaped by identity, context, and learner needs (Auer, 2020; Hamers & Blanc, 2000; Grosjean, 1982). In Arab educational settings—where English is taught alongside Arabic as the dominant first language—learners frequently switch between languages to clarify instructions, manage anxiety, express solidarity, and access complex content (Omar & Ilyas, 2018; Alenezi & Keble, 2018; Alhazmi, 2016).

Despite the growing body of work exploring the linguistic and social functions of CS, empirical findings remain fragmented. Some scholars view CS as a scaffold for comprehension and learner engagement (Zaghlool & Altamimi, 2023; Hazaymeh, 2022; Alshugithri, 2019), while others warn against its potential to hinder language immersion and proficiency development (Hamouda & Aljumah, 2020; Mahdi & Almalki, 2019). In particular, there is limited synthesis of research exploring the contextual and pedagogical conditions under which CS is most beneficial or problematic.

To address this gap, the present systematic review synthesizes recent empirical studies (2018–2025) that examine CS practices in Arab EFL classrooms. The goal is to uncover patterns in how CS is used by teachers and learners, understand the sociocultural and psychological attitudes that shape its use, and evaluate its instructional implications. The review analyzes 36 peer-reviewed studies

drawn from Scopus- and WoS-indexed journals, using a PRISMA-based framework for selection and thematic analysis.

Two guiding research questions shape this review:

- How do contextual and instructional factors influence the use and perceived benefits of code-switching in Arab EFL classrooms?
- What sociocultural and psychological factors shape Arab EFL learners' and teachers' attitudes toward code-switching in both classroom and digital contexts?

By answering these questions, the study aims to offer a more coherent understanding of CS as a pedagogical and communicative practice in Arab EFL settings. It also seeks to inform educators, curriculum designers, and language policy stakeholders about the nuanced roles CS can play in shaping inclusive, responsive, and effective language instruction.

## **2. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

Code-switching (CS) has been widely studied across disciplines, including sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and applied linguistics. Broadly defined, CS refers to the alternation between two or more languages or language varieties within a single conversation, utterance, or discourse event. Gumperz (1982) characterizes CS as “the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems” (p. 59). In line with this, Muysken (2000) identifies CS as a linguistic phenomenon wherein lexical items and grammatical features from different languages are integrated within a single utterance. Nunan and Carter (2001) similarly note that CS entails a shift between languages within discourse, often to serve communicative, social, or affective functions.

This review adopts Gumperz's (1982) interactional sociolinguistic framework as a foundational lens, particularly his typology of situational and metaphorical code-switching. Situational CS arises when shifts in language are triggered by changes in context (setting, participants, or topic), whereas metaphorical CS

reflects the speaker’s intention to signal identity, solidarity, or emphasis within the same situational frame. Gumperz further identifies several key functions of CS in communication: quoting another speaker, clarifying or qualifying a message, expressing emotion, and signaling discourse boundaries.

Complementing Gumperz’s framework is Myers-Scotton’s (1993, 2006) Markedness Model, which views CS as a negotiation of social meaning. According to this model, speakers choose a “marked” or “unmarked” linguistic code based on perceived social roles, conversational norms, and communicative goals. This theoretical lens is particularly relevant to the current review, as many Arab EFL learners and teachers engage in CS not only to facilitate comprehension but also to express identity, navigate classroom hierarchies, or reduce linguistic anxiety. The review also draws conceptually from Muysken’s (2000) typology of code-switching forms, which includes insertional, alternational, and congruent lexicalization. These forms help to explain the linguistic structures and syntactic patterns observed in classroom-based CS, particularly where learners blend L1 and L2 for clarity or emphasis.

Finally, the conceptual framework of this study is informed by research that situates CS within pedagogical discourse. As discussed by Ferguson (2003) and Adendorff (1996), CS in educational settings serves multiple roles: providing linguistic scaffolding, managing classroom interaction, affirming learner identity, and facilitating emotional comfort. These insights support the central aims of the present review: to synthesize evidence on the functional, attitudinal, and contextual dimensions of CS in Arab EFL classrooms. By integrating these theoretical and conceptual perspectives, the review establishes a foundation for examining CS not merely as a

linguistic shift but as a complex, context-sensitive practice that reflects broader educational, cultural, and affective dynamics.

### 3. Methodology

This systematic literature review adopted a structured approach to identify, screen, and analyze relevant studies on code-switching (CS) in Arab educational contexts. The primary goal was to consolidate empirical evidence on the reasons, attitudes, and pedagogical implications of CS, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom.

#### 3.1. Search Strategy

Code-switching (CS), as a developing area within sociolinguistics and educational linguistics, warrants systematic investigation due to inconsistent findings across studies. Auer (2020) emphasized the growing importance of structured reviews in this domain. To address this gap, the present study conducted a systematic literature review to examine factors influencing CS and its pedagogical implications in Arab EFL contexts. The review process followed a framework that ensured the coverage of relevant studies and minimized any bias. After formulating the research questions, the search strategy focused on studies retrieved from two major academic databases: Google Scholar and ERIC, chosen for their broad coverage of educational and linguistic research. To ensure academic quality, selected studies were limited to those indexed in Scopus or Web of Science. As shown in Table 1, these databases were selected based on accessibility, relevance to education, and inclusion of peer-reviewed publications.

Table 1  
Rationale for Databases Used for Searching

Database	Rationale
Google Scholar	This database includes a large variety of available studies, (free to access studies)
ERIC	This database is rich with educational studies on different topics.

In the second stage of the search process, specific keywords were used to locate relevant literature across the selected databases. These keywords included: “code-switching,” “Saudi Arabia,” “Arab countries,” “Arabs,” “education,” and “classroom.” The keywords were applied to the title, abstract, and keyword fields within both Google Scholar and ERIC. Boolean operators such as “AND” and “OR” were utilized to construct complex and targeted

search queries, enabling both narrow and broad retrieval of relevant records (Uegaki, 2023). To ensure focus and scholarly rigor, the review excluded non-peer-reviewed sources such as books, book chapters, and dissertations. The complete structure of the search strategy, including filters and keywords, is outlined in Table 2.

Table 2  
Overview of Search Strategy

Database	Keywords Related to CS	Boolean Operators	Filters	Retrieved Studies
Google Scholar	“Code-switching” AND “Saudi Arabia” AND “Arab countries” AND “Education”	AND-OR	Year: 2018-2025 Language: English	574
ERIC	“Code-Switching” AND “Classroom” AND “Arab countries” OR “Arabs”	AND-OR	Peer-reviewed only, Year: 2018-2025	373

The review process followed the PRISMA framework (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), which is widely used in educational research to ensure transparency and rigor (Moher et al., 2009). The search and screening process unfolded in three distinct phases: identification, screening, and eligibility. Initially, 947 studies were identified across Google Scholar and ERIC using the search strategy detailed in Table 2.

In the screening phase, duplicate records and studies that did not meet the basic inclusion criteria were manually removed by the researchers. A total of 478 records were excluded due to reasons such as duplication, publication in non-English languages, publication prior to 2018, focus outside the educational context, or format (e.g., books and book chapters). For example, Umami and Ghasani (2021) was excluded because it explored CS in media rather than in classroom-based pedagogy.

Following this, 469 records underwent full-text assessment. An additional 433 studies were excluded after this eligibility check, primarily because they lacked direct relevance to CS in educational settings or did not align with the study’s pedagogical focus. Ultimately, 36 studies were selected as meeting all criteria and were included in the final analysis. The step-by-step

filtering and selection process is illustrated in Figure 1, which presents the PRISMA flow diagram adapted from Moher et al. (2009).

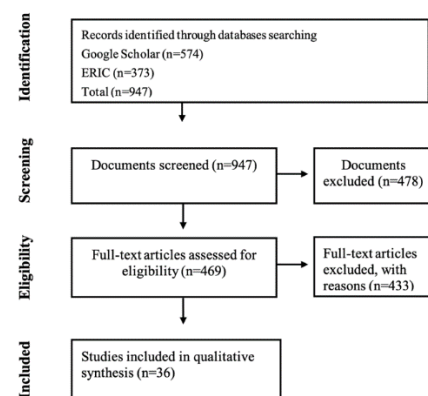


Figure 1  
PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Study Selection Process  
Adapted from Moher et al. (2009)

### 3.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure a comprehensive and focused review, this study implemented clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Initially, the scope was limited to studies conducted in Saudi Arabia; however, due to the limited number of qualifying studies, the review was expanded to include

additional Arab countries within the MENA region. All selected studies were published between 2018 and 2025, aligning with the evolving nature of CS research in educational contexts. Only empirical research, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies, was considered for

inclusion. These studies had to specifically examine CS within classroom-based EFL settings. Non-empirical publications, studies in languages other than English, or those focusing on non-educational contexts were excluded from analysis.

Table 3  
The Number of Studies Conducted in Every Country

Country	Number of Studies
Saudi Arabia	24
UAE	2
Palestine	1
Egypt	3
Libya	1
Jordan	2
Algeria	2
Iraq	1

As shown in Table 3, the majority of the included studies originated from Saudi Arabia, with contributions from countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Libya, UAE, Algeria, and Palestine. Additionally, Table 4 summarizes the specific

inclusion and exclusion criteria applied in the selection process, ensuring the final sample of 36 studies directly addressed the review’s aims.

Table 4  
Paper Selection Criteria

Category	Inclusion and Exclusion	Rationale
Sample	Include: Studies focusing on EFL learners within educational setting. Exclude: Studies focusing on native speakers and other settings.	The review focuses on the utilizations of CS by EFL learners and educators within educational contexts.
Context	Include: Studies within the Arab context Exclude: Studies outside the Arab context	The review focuses on CS usage in Saudi Arabia and Arab countries.
Relevance	Include: Studies focusing on exploring CS inside EFL classroom Exclude: Studies focusing on CS outside the classroom	The review focuses only on CS among Arab EFL students and educators
Period	Include: Studies published in the last 8 years (2018-2025) Exclude: Studied published before 2017	As the dynamic of language is evolving and new evidence on the relationship between CS and language proficiency is needed.
Publication Type	Include: Empirical studies with quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods Exclude: Books and book chapters	Empirical studies provide rigor evidence on the use of CS in educational settings.
Study Design	Include: Empirical studies Exclude: Non-empirical studies	The review included empirical studies (experimental and observational studies) to ensure valid results.

### 3.3. Quality Appraisal of Included Studies

To strengthen the credibility and rigor of the synthesis, each of the 36 included studies underwent a structured quality appraisal adapted

from the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2018) checklist for qualitative research and the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT; Hong et al., 2018), which is widely used in systematic reviews that combine qualitative, quantitative, and

mixed-methods studies. The appraisal focused on five dimensions: (1) clarity of research aims and questions, (2) appropriateness of the research design to the stated aims, (3) sample adequacy and contextual description, (4) validity and reliability of data collection instruments, and (5) transparency of data analysis and reporting of findings. Each study was independently rated by two of the authors on a three-point scale (high, moderate, low) for each criterion; discrepancies were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached. To minimise selection bias, no study was excluded on the basis of quality scores alone; instead, lower-rated studies were retained but interpreted with appropriate caution in the thematic synthesis.

### *3.4. Data Extraction and Analysis*

A total of 36 studies meeting the eligibility criteria were included in the final synthesis. These studies explored various aspects of code-switching in Arab EFL educational settings, including motivations, patterns, attitudes, and pedagogical applications. To facilitate a structured comparison, data were extracted using a standardized coding framework.

The extracted data included each study's authors and year, research objectives, theoretical or conceptual framework, methodological design, sample characteristics and data collection instruments, and key findings (See Appendix A). This comprehensive extraction enabled thematic grouping and critical evaluation, aligning with the overarching goals of the review.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

This section presents the thematic synthesis of findings from 36 studies on code-switching (CS) in Arab EFL classrooms. The discussion addresses both research questions by exploring how contextual and instructional factors shape the functions of CS and how sociocultural and psychological dimensions influence teacher and learner attitudes. The findings are organized into four major themes based on recurring patterns in the literature.

### *4.1. Code-switching and Communication*

The reviewed studies consistently highlighted CS as a communicative strategy that enables learners and instructors to manage discourse, clarify meaning, and express affective intent. Teachers use CS to quote speech, provide real-time feedback, and explain culturally embedded terms, especially in moments when L2 clarity may be compromised (Khafaga et al., 2024; Al-Marzouki & Albeyali, 2024; Seddik, 2023). Similarly, students perceive CS as a means of interactional support, particularly for checking comprehension and maintaining engagement (Binmahboob, 2020; Omar & Ilyas, 2018).

Studies also indicated that CS plays an essential role in maintaining the natural flow of conversation in classrooms, particularly when learners are transitioning between cognitively demanding tasks or engaging in group work (Algethami, 2025; Al-Ahdal, 2020). In such contexts, CS serves not only to resolve moments of misunderstanding but also to enhance the emotional resonance of teacher-student exchanges, reinforcing relational dynamics within the classroom (Hazaymeh, 2022).

Alkhalwaldeh (2019) and Alhourani (2018) noted that CS allows speakers to shift topics, convey emotion, and display linguistic competence, which aligns with Gumperz's (1982) concept of metaphorical switching. Furthermore, audience design plays a critical role in determining the appropriateness and frequency of CS (Hussein et al., 2020; Aljasir, 2020). The decision to switch codes is often made with careful consideration of learners' linguistic needs, their level of comfort with the target language, and the communicative purpose of the interaction.

In addition, several studies observed that CS is often employed during peer-to-peer interaction in student-led discussions and collaborative tasks. Students code-switch to negotiate meaning, simplify instructions, and seek or offer clarification, which contributes to a more inclusive and supportive learning environment (Mohammed & Abdalla, 2025; Al-Farra, 2020). These communicative functions are illustrated in Figure 2, which categorizes CS use across interactional tasks.



Figure 2  
Code-switching Functions Shown in the Reviewed Studies

#### 4.2. Code-switching Inside Classrooms

In classroom environments, CS was frequently reported as a pedagogical resource that supports instructional clarity. Teachers code-switched to Arabic to scaffold difficult grammar explanations, mediate instructions, and support task completion (Alzahrani, 2023; Alsufayan, 2020; Al-Ahdal, 2020). This linguistic flexibility enabled instructors to respond dynamically to real-time challenges, such as when learners failed to grasp content delivered solely in English. It also ensured that students remained engaged and could access core content, particularly in grammar-intensive or literacy-based lessons.

For learners, CS provided both cognitive and emotional scaffolding. It allowed them to navigate complex ideas using familiar linguistic tools while gradually building L2 competence (Hazaymeh, 2022; Al Tale & AlQahtani, 2022). This dual support reduced anxiety and increased willingness to participate, particularly among low- and intermediate-proficiency students. In some cases, learners used CS strategically during oral presentations or collaborative tasks to sustain fluency when encountering lexical gaps. This aligns with sociocultural views of language learning that prioritize meaningful interaction over strict language separation.

Multiple studies emphasized CS as a facilitator of vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension, especially at beginner and

intermediate levels (Mohammed & Abdalla, 2025; Alshugithri, 2019). Algethami (2025) and Razem (2024) demonstrated how young learners engaged in CS not only to access content but also to practice form-meaning connections and construct more sophisticated utterances. Teachers, too, adjusted their use of CS based on student responses, often rephrasing or summarizing in Arabic to reinforce new lexical items or clarify abstract content.

Additionally, CS helped maintain classroom management and fostered a collaborative environment that promoted student confidence (Zaghlool & Altamimi, 2023; Seddik, 2023). Studies showed that CS supported smoother transitions between activities, reduced behavioral disruptions, and provided a relational bridge between teachers and students. Instructors viewed CS as an intentional tool for affirming learner identity, offering emotional reassurance, and creating a low-stress classroom atmosphere conducive to risk-taking and experimentation in the target language. The cumulative classroom benefits of CS reported in the reviewed studies are summarized in Figure 3. These findings suggest that when used judiciously and purposefully, CS can be a powerful mechanism for enhancing both instructional delivery and learner experience in Arab EFL classrooms.

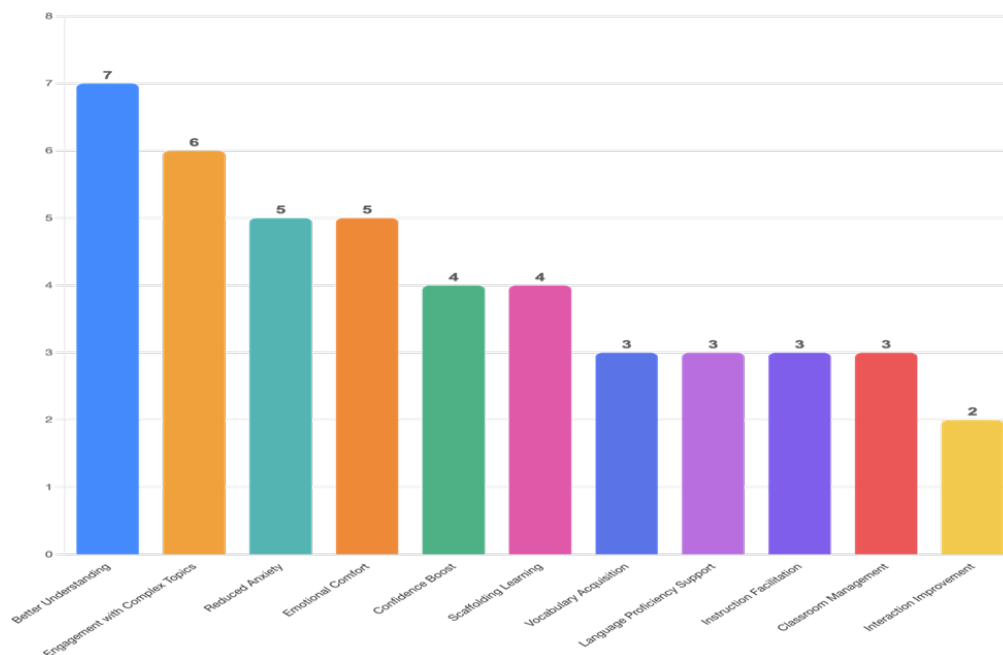


Figure 3  
Frequencies of Reported Benefits of Code-switching in the Classroom

#### 4.3. Reasons for Code-switching

The studies identified a range of motivational factors for CS, extending beyond linguistic limitations to include psychological and sociocultural dimensions. Learners code-switched to articulate complex ideas, assert group identity, and signal formality or informality (Alkhalwaleh, 2019; Alhourani, 2018). English was often used to express nuanced concepts or align with perceived academic prestige (Alsalem & Elsayy, 2025; Alosaimi, 2019).

Gumperz's (1982) distinction between situational and metaphorical switching was supported across multiple studies, where learners shifted codes in response to task complexity, audience, or classroom roles (Khafaga et al., 2024; Hussein et al., 2020). These motivations were context-sensitive and often shaped by social expectations or classroom dynamics. For instance, Zaghlool and Altamimi (2023) found that learners

were more likely to switch to Arabic when seeking clarification or when struggling to articulate ideas in English during collaborative activities. Similarly, Al-Farra (2020) observed that both students and instructors used CS in moments of high cognitive load, such as explaining abstract academic concepts, thereby allowing learners to engage with material more effectively. Algethami (2025) also highlighted that student employed CS as a metacognitive strategy, using it to self-regulate their speech and monitor their learning progress during oral tasks.

Moreover, CS was frequently associated with a desire to maintain social rapport. In the study by Adder and Bagui (2020), students reported switching to Arabic to express humor, solidarity, or empathy, especially in peer-to-peer exchanges. These socially motivated switches functioned as important tools for identity construction and classroom cohesion. Teachers, too, engaged in CS for various pedagogical reasons. According to Hazaymeh (2022), many instructors switched to

Arabic to manage time efficiently, simplify task instructions, or provide quick explanations without disrupting the flow of the lesson. This reinforces the notion that CS is a pragmatic choice rather than a sign of linguistic deficiency. Appendix A presents an overview of the reviewed studies and the primary reasons identified for code-switching, categorized by communicative, instructional, cognitive, and social motivations.

#### *4.4. Attitudes Toward Code-Switching*

The studies reviewed presented a range of learner and teacher perspectives toward the use of code-switching in EFL classrooms. While many recognized its pedagogical advantages, particularly in improving learner comprehension and participation, others expressed concern about its potential to hinder immersion in the target language. To better capture these perspectives, this theme is divided into two sub-themes: one addressing the positive perceptions of CS in enhancing language proficiency, and the other exploring critical attitudes toward its impact on English acquisition.

#### *4.5. Code-Switching in Enhancing Language Proficiency*

A recurring theme across the reviewed studies is the role of code-switching in supporting language development and classroom participation. Several studies view CS as an effective instructional tool, particularly for improving comprehension and explaining unfamiliar grammatical structures in Arab EFL classrooms (Alzahrani, 2023; Hazaymeh, 2022; Hamouda & Aljumah, 2020; Alshugithri, 2019). These findings converge on the point that CS not only clarifies complex content but also encourages learner engagement, as emphasized by Zaghlool and Altamimi (2023) and Hazaymeh (2022).

Age and educational stage also influence attitudes toward CS. For instance, Al-Marzouki and Albeyali (2024) and Omar and Ilyas (2018) reported that younger learners tend to have more favourable views of CS, considering it a helpful and confidence-boosting tool in the learning process.

These positive perceptions are supported by empirical studies that demonstrate improved student outcomes in vocabulary development and reading comprehension through judicious use of CS (Alzahrani, 2023; Alshugithri, 2019).

Although these benefits are widely acknowledged, some studies point to variation in how CS is received and applied. For example, Tubayqi and Al Tale (2021) and Mahdi and Almalki (2019) stressed that CS is particularly beneficial for low-proficiency students, especially in mastering grammar and vocabulary. These observations are echoed by Adriosh and Razi (2019), who found that CS was frequently used for clarification, translation, and concept reinforcement. Sadiq (2022) similarly highlighted CS as a routine strategy for checking understanding during instruction.

Beyond its cognitive value, CS also provides emotional and affective support. Mohammed and Abdalla (2025), Hazaymeh (2022), and Al Tale and AlQahtani (2022) found that learners viewed CS as a buffer against language-related stress and a way to maintain fluency under pressure. This echoes broader findings on how informal peer feedback and reflective interaction, particularly in digital spaces, can enhance confidence and reduce affective barriers (Alharbi, 2025). Hussein et al. (2020) emphasized its role in overcoming communication breakdowns, enhancing learner expression, and maintaining conversational flow. This dual role, cognitive and emotional, is reinforced by Algethami (2025), who found that students using CS reported higher levels of confidence and participation. Similarly, Alenezi and Keble (2018) noted that learners saw CS as a bridge that enabled deeper engagement with instructional content.

Finally, several studies connect CS use with sociolinguistic identity. Alsalami (2021) documented how high-proficiency speakers, particularly in the private sector, used CS to negotiate and display nuanced personal or professional identities. These findings are consistent with those of Mohammed and Abdalla (2025) and Omar and Ilyas (2018), who argued that CS enables alignment with social and cultural affiliations.

Taken together, these findings highlight the multifaceted advantages of CS in Arab EFL classrooms, particularly when it is applied purposefully and in alignment with instructional goals and learner needs. Students reported that CS helped reduce anxiety and enhance confidence, especially in grammar-focused and reading comprehension tasks (Mohammed & Abdalla, 2025; Hazaymeh, 2022). CS was used to make meaning more accessible, allowing students to engage with target-language input without becoming overwhelmed. Instructors similarly acknowledged the usefulness of CS for reinforcing vocabulary, enabling student participation, and delivering culturally contextualized examples (Alzahrani, 2023; Adriosh & Razi, 2019).

These findings support the idea that CS is not merely compensatory but pedagogically strategic. For instance, Alenezi and Kebble (2018) found that students perceived CS as instrumental to their ability to retain content and engage with English meaningfully. Several studies emphasized that learner motivation and participation increased when instructors made judicious use of L1, particularly at lower proficiency levels (Seddik, 2023; Al Tale & AlQahtani, 2022). Thus, positive attitudes toward CS appear linked to its functional value in enhancing comprehension and facilitating academic achievement.

#### 4.6. Negative Perceptions of Code-Switching

Despite its practical utility, CS was occasionally perceived as a barrier to immersive English instruction. Some teachers and advanced learners reported that excessive reliance on L1 hindered target language acquisition and communicative fluency (Hamouda & Aljumah, 2020; Mahdi & Almalki, 2019). These concerns were particularly strong in classrooms where English-only policies were emphasized or where CS was perceived as signaling linguistic inadequacy (Alnefaie & Gupta, 2024; Binmahboob, 2020).

Instructors with higher levels of proficiency or longer teaching experience were often more critical of CS use, arguing that it may prevent students from developing the automaticity required for fluent communication (Tubayqi & Al Tale, 2021). These concerns reflect a more traditional view of language learning that prioritizes immersion over strategic code use. However, even among critics, there was recognition of CS's contextual usefulness when limited to specific pedagogical functions such as giving feedback, checking comprehension, or simplifying instructions. This duality of perception, CS as both facilitator and potential hindrance, reinforces the need for clearer instructional policies and teacher training. These attitudes are visually summarized in Table 5 and relate directly to the second research question, which examines how sociocultural and psychological factors influence perceptions of CS.

Table 5  
Attitudes Toward Code-Switching

Positive Views	Concerns
Enhances classroom interaction	Sign of language deficiency
Support learners	Over-reliance problems
Strategic communication tool	Hindrance of language proficiency
Cultural identity expression	Threat to the purity of the language
Aids better understanding	
Decrease anxiety	
Provide immediate feedback	

#### 4.7. Code-Switching in Online and Digital Learning Environments

A smaller but growing subset of the reviewed studies (Algethami, 2025; Alharbi, 2025; Razem, 2024) examines code-switching in online, blended,

and digitally mediated EFL settings, opening a comparative lens that contrasts with the face-to-face emphasis of the broader corpus. Three patterns emerge.

First, learners in online environments appear to engage in CS more freely and with reduced affective inhibition than in physical classrooms. Algethami (2025), in a study of Saudi students in online EFL classes, reports that asynchronous discussion boards and text-based chat lower the social cost of switching to Arabic, because turn-taking pressures and public oral performance are attenuated. This finding aligns with affective-filter accounts of L1 use (Krashen, 1982) and extends them into the digital domain: when learners feel less monitored, CS shifts from a strategy of last resort to a strategy of expressive precision.

Second, digital platforms appear to foreground translanguaging behaviours rather than discrete language alternation. Razem (2024), in an autoethnographic case study of bilingual children in Dubai, documents how multimodal digital affordances — emoji, voice notes, embedded images, and bilingual typing — allow CS to function as a fluid resource integrated with non-linguistic semiotic modes, in ways that face-to-face oral classrooms cannot easily replicate.

Third, online settings reshape teacher visibility and control over CS. Alharbi (2025) shows that in informal peer feedback exchanges within online reflective blogging, learners use CS to negotiate identity and solidarity in ways that bypass instructor mediation. This stands in contrast to the face-to-face studies in this review, in which teacher-initiated CS dominates the discourse record (e.g., Mahdi & Almalki, 2019; Adriosh & Razi, 2019). Together, these findings suggest that online environments may rebalance CS from a teacher-led scaffolding tool to a learner-led communicative resource. However, the digital-CS evidence base in Arab EFL contexts remains thin, and the three studies cited here cannot yet support firm generalisations. Comparative designs that hold proficiency, age, and curriculum constant while varying instructional mode (face-to-face vs. synchronous online vs. asynchronous online) are

needed to clarify how modality reshapes CS function and frequency.

#### *4.8. Pedagogical Application*

This section presents the practical applications of the review's findings for Arab EFL teaching contexts. These recommendations are aligned with the two guiding research questions and grounded in the recurring patterns identified across the reviewed studies.

First, the findings affirm that code-switching (CS) can be a valuable instructional resource when applied purposefully. Teachers frequently used CS to clarify grammar rules, introduce complex vocabulary, manage classroom tasks, and offer affective support to learners. Such functions highlight the need to reconceptualize CS not as a barrier to English acquisition, but as a legitimate scaffolding tool, especially for low- to mid-proficiency students (Hazaymeh, 2022; Alshugithri, 2019; Adriosh & Razi, 2019). To operationalize this view, teacher education and professional development programs should include training on strategic CS use. Educators must be equipped to decide when CS is instructionally justified, such as during grammar explanation or error correction, and how to maintain a balance that promotes target-language development, particularly within pedagogical contexts where the communicative approach is challenged by linguistic and curricular realities (Alharbi, 2024). Pre-service training programs and in-service workshops should integrate empirical case studies and classroom simulations to help teachers internalize the pedagogical conditions under which CS is most effective (Mohammed & Abdalla, 2025; Al Tale & AlQahtani, 2022).

Second, learner attitudes toward CS should inform language policies. The reviewed studies consistently indicate that students, particularly those at earlier stages of language learning, respond positively to CS for its role in reducing anxiety, increasing motivation, and enhancing content comprehension (Zaghlool & Altamimi, 2023; Hussein et al., 2020). Thus, classroom practices

should create safe spaces for strategic L1 use while promoting gradual immersion in English.

Curriculum designers and policymakers should also reconsider "English-only" mandates: while full immersion may benefit advanced learners, overly rigid restrictions risk alienating struggling students and undermining instructional effectiveness. Flexible guidelines should be developed that empower teachers to adapt language use according to lesson objectives and learner needs (Alzahrani, 2023; Sadiq, 2022; Alenezi & Kebble, 2018). Moreover, materials developers should incorporate CS-compatible strategies into EFL textbooks and digital platforms, such as bilingual glossaries, dual-language task prompts, and structured L1-to-L2 transition activities. These materials would reflect learners' bilingual realities and facilitate more meaningful engagement with English.

Taken together, these pedagogical implications point to CS as a context-sensitive instructional resource rather than a deficit. To fully realise its potential, teacher education, language policy, and materials development must work in concert, equipping educators with the conceptual tools and practical strategies to make CS decisions that are principled rather than incidental. Future curricular reform in Arab EFL contexts should therefore treat bilingual classroom discourse not as a deviation from best practice but as a legitimate object of pedagogical design.

## **5. Conclusion**

This systematic review analyzed 36 empirical studies investigating code-switching (CS) in Arab EFL classrooms, guided by two central research questions. The synthesis revealed that CS is a pedagogically multifaceted practice shaped by instructional goals, learner needs, and sociocultural contexts. It is used by teachers and students alike to clarify meaning, scaffold learning, manage classroom discourse, and foster emotional connection.

Findings demonstrate that CS enhances comprehension and classroom interaction, particularly for low- and intermediate-proficiency learners. Teachers strategically employed CS for

explaining complex grammar, supporting vocabulary development, and managing instructional tasks. Learners reported greater confidence, motivation, and reduced anxiety when CS was used appropriately, reinforcing its value as both a cognitive and affective support mechanism. However, the review also highlighted divergent attitudes toward CS. While many students and instructors viewed it positively, others, particularly more experienced teachers or higher-proficiency learners, expressed concern about its overuse, fearing it may inhibit full immersion in the target language. These tensions underscore the need for pedagogical balance and institutional flexibility.

Implications for practice include the integration of CS-awareness into teacher training, the design of flexible language policies that account for learner diversity, and the development of curricular materials that accommodate bilingual strategies. CS should not be viewed as a fallback for linguistic failure, but rather as a strategic instructional choice that, when used judiciously, can support inclusive and effective language learning.

Future research should examine how CS practices vary across proficiency levels, instructional modes (face-to-face, synchronous online, and asynchronous online), and institutional settings. The preliminary digital-CS findings synthesised in this review suggest that online environments may shift CS from a predominantly teacher-led scaffolding strategy to a learner-led translanguaging resource, but the evidence base remains thin. Comparative studies that hold learner variables constant while varying modality would help clarify whether the affective, participatory, and translanguaging affordances observed in early digital studies generalise across Arab EFL contexts.

Furthermore, Longitudinal and ethnographic studies would offer deeper insights into how teacher beliefs, classroom culture, and learner identity influence CS use over time. By framing CS as a socially situated, pedagogically useful practice, this review contributes to a more nuanced and context-sensitive understanding of bilingual pedagogy in Arab EFL education. The findings suggest that contextual awareness, learner needs, and instructional goals are key to understanding

both the benefits and limitations of CS as a teaching strategy.

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#### **Ethical Statement**

Ethical approval was not required for this study because it is a systematic literature review based exclusively on previously published and publicly available research. The study did not involve human participants, human data, or identifiable personal information.

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Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in a limited and supportive capacity during the preparation of this manuscript. Specifically, Claude Sonnet was used to assist with proofreading by identifying potential language, clarity, and formatting issues. All suggested revisions were independently reviewed, evaluated, and implemented by the authors. Claude Sonnet was also used to generate figures based solely on data, analyses, and information produced by the authors. The AI tool was not used to generate the study design, data analysis, interpretations, conclusions, or substantive intellectual content of the manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of all content presented in this article.

#### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare that they have no known financial, professional, institutional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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**Appendix A: Systematic Literature Review**

Author(s) and Years	Research Objectives	Underpinning Theory/ Model	Method	Sample and Data Collection	Findings
Alenezi and Kebble (2018)	To explore Saudi students' attitudes toward CS in classroom	Gumperz, 1982; Myers-Scotton, 2006 theories of CS and bilingual communication framework	Quantitative design using a survey	189 Saudi students participated in a survey	CS was viewed positively for enhancing classroom comprehension and academic success
Nachoua (2018)	To examine reasons and functions of CS in EFL classes	Appel and Muysken (2006) and Malik (1994)	Quantitative design	50 students participated in a closed-item questionnaire	CS in classroom was used for referential, directive, and expressive functions
Alhourani (2018)	To explore Arabic-English CS among bilingual Saudi speakers	Sociolinguistic Perspective	Qualitative design	Observation, audio taping, and semi structure interviews with 4 Saudi speakers.	CS was used for quoting, changing topics, showing off, and expressing feelings.
Omar and Ilyas (2018)	To investigate the attitudes towards CS in academia	Garner & Lamber's (1972) work in attitude and motivation	Qualitative design	Focus group and interviews with 10 instructors and 40 students from four Saudi Universities	Positive attitude toward CS among younger participants. There was a relationship between education, age, with the acceptance of CS. Positive effect on learners' academic performance.
Mahdi and Almalki (2019)	To explore EFL teachers' perceptions of CS and recognize its functions.	Sert's (2005) Classification	Qualitative and quantitative design	Through detailed questionnaire with English teachers from Jeddah	CS was used to assist low-level learners and to explain tasks. Negative view of CS.
Alkhalwalde h (2019)	To navigate reasons, attitudes, and types of CS among EFL female students	Markedness Model (MM)	Qualitative and quantitative design	Open questionnaire with 70 female students	CS was used to express identity, prestige, and linguistics gap. Positive correlation between language proficiency and the use of CS. Some negative views (showing off). Types including intra-sentential and inter-sentential.
Alshughithri (2019)	To explore the pedagogical functions of CS	A theoretical debate on the supportive and	Quantitative design	Female EFL teachers from Al-Imam	Positive views of CS for clarification, translation, proving

	by Saudi EFL teachers in classroom	opposing views on the use of L1 in foreign language teaching		Muhammad Ibn Saud University and public schools in Saudi Arabia. Data were collected using a questionnaire, recording, and note-taking	instructions, and checking students' understanding. It supported language proficiency
Adriosh and Razi (2019)	To investigate the functions and the teachers' perceptions of CS in EFL Libyan classrooms	Sociocultural Theory, Cognitive Processing Theory, and CS in a Naturalistic Environment	Ethnographic study	Audio recording, classroom observation, and interviews with 6 instructors and 24 EFL students from 3 universities in Libya	CS was used for interpersonal and pedagogical functions, such as socialization and clarification. Students and teachers had positive attitudes toward CS.
Hamouda and Aljumah (2020)	To explore perceptions of students with different proficiency levels regarding CS in EFL Saudi classrooms.	Not specified	Qualitative and quantitative design	64 Saudi University students were classified according to Oxford Placement test into high, mid, and low proficiency. Data collected through classroom observation and questionnaire	Mid and low proficiency learners used CS more than high proficiency learners. CS was seen as a tool to facilitate comprehension. High proficiency perceived CS negatively as it was seen as a sign of unproficiency in English.
Aljasir (2020)	To examine CS behavior in Saudi Arabia	Not specified	Mixed methods approach	400 Saudi adults participated in a questionnaire and only 40 students participated in unstructured interviews and audio-recorded conversations	CS was used mostly when expressing humor followed by anger and irony. Students code switched mostly with friends and least with strangers. Higher proficiency was linked with the use of CS
Al-Ahdal (2020)	To investigate the use of code-switching and its implications among EFL college students	Sociolinguistic Perspective	Quantitative design	26 students from Qassim University responded to a 12-item questionnaire	Positive attitude towards code mixing as it enhances communication and English proficiency
Alsufayan (2020)	To investigate the functions of CS among EFL Saudi female students and	Multi-competence framework (Cook, 2016)	Qualitative method using interviews, surveys, and classroom	5 teachers and 177 students from a university in Riyadh participated in	Teachers and students code switched to access curriculum, managing classroom, and interpersonal

	explore students' and teachers' attitudes towards CS.		audio-recording.	surveys and interviews	relations. The participants had positive attitudes toward using Arabic language as it helps them expressing their needs inside the classroom.
Hussein et al. (2020)	To explore roles and functions of CS among EFL students and teachers in Jordan	Code-switching Theory and Sociocultural	Descriptive study through using questionnaire and classroom observation	330 students and 3 teachers participated in a questionnaire and were involved in classroom observation	Students code switched for pragmatic, personal, and social reasons. SC was used as an effective instructional instrument.
Al-Farra (2020)	To explore the attitudes of teachers and students towards CS	Not specified	Qualitative design	3 female teachers and 10 students participated in open-ended interviews. Data was collected via classroom observations	CS was perceived positively in the EFL classroom. CS was used for clarification, classroom management, providing instructions, and presenting vocabulary and grammar
Adder and Bagui (2020)	To explore functions and reasons of CS among EFL teachers and students	Not specified	Qualitative design	Classroom observations for 16 teachers and structured interviews	Both students and teachers used CS in classes. Teachers held negative attitudes towards CS, but they highlighted its pedagogical benefits. Students code-switched for filling the linguistic gap and emphasizing points
Binmahboob (2020)	To identify teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards CS in EFL classes	The communicative approach	Descriptive analytical approach	30 male EFL teachers participated in a questionnaire	Teachers perceived CS negatively as it limits students' exposure to the target language. They acknowledged that CS serves pedagogical functions when used for specific points only
Alsalamy (2021)	To identify reasons for CS and differences by age, gender, qualification,	Descriptive analytical approach	Quantitative design	Questionnaire (426 Saudi participants)	CS was used for: communication of ideas, better expression among high-proficiency speakers. No gender

	and English proficiency.					differences were found. Age influenced CS patterns
Tubayqi and Al Tale (2021)	To investigate the attitudes of teachers and students towards using CS in EFL grammar classes	Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis	Mixed methods design	110 Saudi beginner students and their teachers participated in questionnaires. Classroom observation checklist was applied		Both teachers and students had positive attitudes toward CS as a tool to support teaching and learning but acknowledging the effect of its overuse. CS was used to explain grammar, translating vocabulary, and giving instructions
Aldalbahy (2022)	To explore the relationship between CS and language proficiency or deficiency	Inhibitory control model (Meuter & Allport, 1999) and Poplack's (1980) insights on bilingual proficiency.	Quantitative and qualitative design	Questionnaire with 24 Saudi students and 6 students were involved in elicited production task. (Survey and recorded tasks)		Positive attitude toward CS. No correlation between CS and language proficiency. High proficiency students used intra-sentential CS.
Hazaymeh (2022)	To explore teachers' perceptions of the functions and effects of CS in EFL classrooms	Not specified	Online group interview and descriptive survey design	46 EFL teachers from 13 schools in UAE. 7 of them participated in the group interview		CS was perceived as a useful tool for checking students' understanding, clarifications, encouraging students' interaction, and giving instruction. They believed that CS facilitate language learning.
Sadiq (2022)	To examine the functions of CS in EFL classes	Gumpers (1982)	Mixed methods approach	Data was collected through classroom observation for 3 instructors and their students and interviews with the instructors		CS was used for clarification, classroom management, giving instructions, and checking understanding. CS was perceived as a tool to enhance teaching quality
Al Tale and AlQahtani (2022)	To explore the impact of CS and target-language-only (TL- only) on Saudi EFL learners	Not specified for CS	Mixed methods design	52 female students participated in a questionnaire and 10 students only participated in semi-structured interviews		Beginner students viewed CS positively as it enhances their learning and emotional well-being. CS was used to make the courses more comprehensible and

Alamaren (2022)	To explore the syntactic features of CS of university students	Poplack's (1980) structural constraints on CS	Explanatory sequential mixed-methods design	20 postgraduate students participated in tape-recorded conversations	provide sufficient support for students CS was used with no harmful impact on grammatical features. Students code-switched nouns followed by objectives in their speech
Zaghlool and Altamimi (2023)	To explore EFL students' and teachers' perceptions toward CS and reasons behind CS in high schools.	Not specified	Quantitative design	122 students and 100 teachers from Riyadh secondary schools participated in a five-point Likert scale questionnaire.	CS was an effective tool in classroom. It was used to explain unfamiliar topics, grammatical structures, and encourage interaction.
Alzahrani (2023)	To investigate the effect of CS in learning outcomes in EFL Saudi classrooms	Bilingualism, Code-switching theory	Experimental study	Pre and post tests with students from (elementary, intermediate, secondary, and university) levels	CS improved students' performance especially in vocabulary and reading.
Khafaga et al. (2024)	To investigate the phenomenon of CS among English instructors	Not specified	Qualitative design	Classroom audio recordings for 5 female university teachers	Teachers used CS for interjections, translation, elaboration, and reducing social distance with students.
Seddik (2023)	To explore reasons for CS among EFL teachers	Mattsson and Burenhult's (1999) clarification of CS	Quantitative design	21 teachers in high school in Egypt participated in a questionnaire	Teachers code switched when they switch topics, for repetition, and effective functions. CS was used to facilitate teaching and to ensure students' understanding
Razem (2024)	To explore types of CS among bilingual children in Dubai	Poplack's (2015) grammatical theory and Gumperz's (1982) theory of situational CS	Autoethnographic case study	3 Arabic-English bilingual boys through video recording their conversations	The intra-sentential CS was used more than inter-sentential CS. Intra-sentential CS was used for metaphorical and situational purposes and children started their sentences with Arabic then switched to English (effortless)
Alowidha (2024)	To investigate CS among bilingual	Structural sociolinguistic and	Qualitative design	Interviews with 5 females and 5 males from large	CS was common in professional contexts. No differences

	Saudis, considering gender differences, and comparing large and small cities	psycholinguistic approaches to CS		and small cities in Saudi Arabia	regarding gender or city-size.
Dooly and Bakri (2024)	To explore the use of CS as a facilitative resource of EFL acquisition in Egypt	Conversational Analysis (CA)	Qualitative design	3 male students and 1 female teacher involved in 10 online sessions that were recorded through Zoom and transcribed	CS was used as a significant resource for EFL Egyptian learners, facilitate comprehension and searching new words. It was used effectively in collaborative learning and negotiate meaning.
Alnefaie and Gupta (2024)	To explore the Saudi English language instructor's experience with CS as a student is linked to her utilization of CD as a teacher	Not specified	Narrative inquiry through qualitative semi-structured interviews	One participant "Sara" who have 5 years of English teaching experience	As a student, Sara perceived CS as useful and helpful for her learning. This perspective shifted as the over reliance on CS may weaken her English language.
Al-Marzouki and Albeyali (2024)	To explore CS functions in classrooms among students and lecturers in Saudi Arabia	Sert's (2005) framework	Quantitative design using a survey	193 Saudi female students and 24 female lecturers from two educational institutes in Saudi Arabia	CS was used for topic-switching and repetitive functions. Students highly used CS for clarification to foster interactions
Algethami (2025)	To explore the perceptions of EFL students of the effectiveness of CS in online classes	Not specified	Quantitative design using a survey	72 undergraduate students participated in a web-based questionnaire	CS was perceived positively during online classes, and it was used to enhance learning process. CS helped students feel more confident and less anxious.
Althobaiti and Alsaawi (2025)	To exploring the attitudes toward CS and identifying its types and impact on students' identity	Appel and Muysken's model for CS and Gumperz's typology.	An explanatory mixed methods design	79 male and female students participated in a questionnaire and 8 teachers participated in semi-structured interviews	CS was widely used in the classroom for referential functions (clarifying concepts and defining vocabulary) and expressive functions (highlight a lack of understanding). Students and teachers perceived CS as crucial to bridge the

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Mohammed and Abdalla (2025)	To explore the motivation behind the use of CS in EFL classes	Not specified	Mixed methods approach	68 undergraduate English language students participated in a questionnaire with both closed-ended and open-ended questions	students' understanding. Teachers were concerned that CS might hinder the learning process. The majority of students use CS for enhancing communication because of the lack of vocabular, reducing anxiety, and increasing confidence
Alsalem and Elsawy (2025)	To examine reasons and pedagogical implications of CS in EFL classes	Not specified	Mixed methods approach	59 students and 34 faculty participated in questionnaires. An observation checklist was applied in random classes	Students used inter-sentential CS for the unknown words in English, while teachers used tag switching for helping students understand difficult information, making them comfortable and less stressed

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