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A Qualitative Inquiry into Perceptions and Practices of High and Low EFL Achievers towards the Limitations and Benefits of Code-Switching

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Abstract

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and bilingual language classrooms, code-switching is widespread among teacher-student and student-student interactions; however, there seem to be few or no studies tracking the perceptions and practices of EFL learners toward code-switching. Therefore, the aim of this study was to identify the perceptions and practices of high and low achievers toward teacher code-switching with focus on the possible limitations and benefits that it might have in language classrooms. For this purpose, the researchers used a qualitative design in the form of grounded theory. Accordingly, 11 high and 13 low achievers were interviewed individually and in focus groups. Further, the elicited responses were transcribed and codified using Straus and Corbin's (1998) constant comparative method. In addition, for the purpose of validation, real observations of 10 university classes in different English courses were made. The findings revealed 4 major themes and 26 categories for high and low achievers. Consequently, the findings implicated that code-switching was an advantageous tool at the disposal of English teachers.

Keywords: Code-switching, Bilingual context, Classroom discourse, High and low achievers

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Due to globalization, a significantly large number of people across the globe are speaking English and, in fact, the number of non-native speakers of English is by far larger than the number of native speakers. In the era of technology, most of the world's population is bilingual (Grosjean, 2010). A bilingual can resort to two languages for the purposes of communication simultaneously. There are several definitions for bilingualism, nonetheless, the most prominent one according to Hamers and Blanc (2000) refers to a person who should have native-like control of two or more languages at the same time. Thus, one occasion where bilinguals and non-native English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners might use a combination of two languages is English classes wherein EFL learners and teachers are involved in learning/ teaching. Yet, there has most often been some disagreement on how much L1 should be practiced in English classes.

In other words, there are two opposing views as to the aforementioned notion: on the one hand, Cook (2001) states that quality English should be instructed through the medium of English because chances are less likely for students to receive English on occasions outside the classroom. On the other, there is no other option, but to use code-switching (Nordin, Ali, Zubir, and Sadjirin, 2013) in order to help students develop their English. Similarly, McNamara, (1969) maintains that one of the main aspects of the bilingual development process is code-switching which translates to “the combination of several languages or dialects in the same conversation or sentence by bilingual people (Gardner-Chloros, 2009, p. 4)”. In addition, Cantone (2007) describes CS as a situation in which a speaker changes between two or more languages within a single conversation.

Moreover, Gumperz (1982) suggested that code-switching (Henceforth, CS) is “an element in a socially-agreed matrix of contextualization cues and conventions used by speakers to alert addressees in the course of ongoing interaction, to the social and situational context of the conversation” (p. 132). In the same respect, the use of CS in non-native English classrooms is inevitable and researchers have become more concerned about advantages and disadvantages of

using L1 while teaching in EFL classrooms (Rezaee & Fathi, 2016), because there is a possibility to change between two languages in case teacher-student/student-student interactions fail to carry across the intended message. Part of failure regarding successful communication in L2 which validates the use of code-switching, Persian in English classrooms, might be prone to students' diverse language proficiency level and in this case, high and low achievers may hold different perspectives about code-switching.

Brown (1990) and Brown and Hudson (2002) distinguished masters/high achievers from non-master/ low achievers on certain grounds. They stated that a master or high achiever is a person who knows the material or has the skill if he/ she is to be tested, while a non-master or low achiever does not possess the required skill. As a yardstick, a passing score on an achievement test might be considered 60 percent or higher. Consequently, those students who obtain scores above 60 percent are high achievers and those who catch scores below 60 percent are low achievers (Brown & Hudson, 2002).

Accordingly, although literature has unveiled different purposes for code-switching and a number of studies have, so far, dealt with code-switching (Alenezi, 2016; Azlan & Narasuman, 2013; Grobler, 2017; Ghafar Samar & Moradkhani, 2014; Rahimi & Jafari, 2011; Rasouli & Simin, 2015), to the best of researchers' knowledge, few scholars have worked on proficiency and code-switching (Mirhasani & Jafarpour Mamaghani, 2009; Rezai & Fathi, 2016) in the Iranian context. Nonetheless, they have failed to elicit the perspectives and practices of high and low achievers toward teacher code-switching through qualitative lenses. Therefore, due to paucity of studies in the context of Iran to draw out the perceptions and practices of both high and low achievers, this inquiry integrates EFL learners' perceptions and practices towards teacher code-switching by drawing upon insights from both interviews and observations which can provide a benchmark against which EFL teachers can figure out to what extent, on what occasions and for what purposes

they can use Persian in their English classes. Therefore, the present study aimed to find out answers to the following questions:

Q1: What are the perceptions and practices of low and high achievers towards the limitations and benefits of code-switching in EFL classes?

Q2: What qualitative models regarding the limitations and benefits of code-switching for high and low achievers emerge out of running interviews and observations?

Review of Related Literature

Despite the fact that a couple of studies have, up to now, focused on CS (Alenezi, 2016; Azlan & Narasuman, 2013; Grobler, 2017; Ghafar Samar & Moradkhani, 2014; Mirhasani & Jafarpour Mamaghani, 2009; Rahimi & Jafari, 2011; Rasouli & Simin, 2015; Rezaee & Fathi, 2017) the literature rarely discusses if code-switching is a beneficial tool in the eyes of high and low achievers. In this regard, some of the most salient studies about CS are reviewed to substantiate the above-mentioned claim. Here below, you can discern some of these studies:

Hobbs, Matsua, and Payne (2010) conducted a study in Japan with the aim of comparing how language delivery by teachers differs in the students' native vs. non-native languages. For this purpose, three Japanese teachers, one of British and two of Japanese origins participated in the study. Data were gathered through classroom observation and semi-structured interviews. Consequently, results showed that teacher code-switching practices can and often do differ significantly and are affected by the teacher's culture of learning.

In another study, the function of code-switching as a communicative tool in an English classroom was solicited by Azlan and Narasuman (2013). The participants of the study were 28 students attending a TESL program at the faculty of Education in Malaysia. To tap into the matter, a survey, classroom observations, and interviews were used to elicit data. The results indicated that English was the dominant medium of communication. Yet, code-switching was used in some circumstances to augment solidarity and rapport among students.

Additionally, an inquiry regarding the genders of learners and their perspectives towards code-switching in Saudi Arabia with 189 medical students (111 male and 78 female) of the Northern Border University of Saudi Arabia was made. Alenezi (2016) used a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire. Findings showed no significant difference in the students' perspectives toward code-switching with respect to gender. However, both genders believed that code-switching was a useful and expedited understanding of the course materials.

Besides, Grobler (2017) conducted a study to explore the attitudes of grade 8 students regarding code-switching in natural sciences classrooms in South Africa. The data collection was done by means of a questionnaire. The results revealed that code-switching was not only considered as the source of confusion among students, but it could also lead to poorer than expected performance of students in natural sciences.

Salient overseas findings as indicated above considered teacher culture, the gender of students as well as the use of code-switching in majors other than English and in TESL programs to probe the perceptions and attitudes of their respondents about CS. Findings pointed out to useful and contradictory findings. Similarly, accumulated importance has been placed on CS in the Iranian educational context recently, for instance, Rahimi and Jafari (2011) conducted a study on the function of code-switching in EFL classrooms. For this purpose, data were gathered by classroom observations. The participants of the study were two male and two female teachers and fifty-one language learners, including thirty-five female and sixteen male students at a language institute in Isfahan, Iran. Consequently, the findings showed that code-switching reduces the practice of the target language in the classroom.

Furthermore, Ghaffar Samar and Moradkhani (2014) conducted a qualitative study on the cognitive processes of teachers during teacher code-switching in the EFL classroom in Kermanshah, Iran. Two male and two female teachers were the participants of this study and the data collection instruments were a video recording and the related interviews. Therefore, to obtain the related data, after watching their own video-

recording, EFL teachers were interviewed to brainstorm their logic behind switching codes. As a result, eight factors were introduced by teachers as the reasons why they used CS; the prime reason was to guarantee students' comprehension.

Moreover, Rasouli and Simin (2016) conducted a study to assess students' and teachers' perceptions of code-switching. It was a cross-sectional survey at the aviation training center of Isfahan, Iran. The participants of this study were forty-three Intermediate EFL learners and seven teachers. To gather data, a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire, as well as in-depth interviews, was employed. The results indicated that students had negative perceptions toward teacher code-switching.

Despite the various useful findings on code-switching in EFL classrooms from different backgrounds in Iran, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, code-switching literature has partly failed to resolve the controversies surrounding the limitations and benefits of code-switching. In addition, the researchers assumed that part of the diverse findings as to negative or positive perceptions about CS might reside in proficiency level of achievers which was addressed in the following studies, however, they had not considered a qualitative inquiry to tap into the viewpoints of high and low achievers toward CS.

- a) Rezaee and Fathi (2017) conducted a quantitative inquiry regarding the functions of CS across students of various proficiency levels in a classroom in Tehran, Iran. The participants of this study were fifty teachers and 105 language learners from the University of Tehran Language Center. Having obtained data through a questionnaire, the findings suggested that the elementary learners opted for teacher CS; however, intermediate and upper-intermediate students preferred English-only instruction.
- b) Mirhasani and Jafarpour Mamaghani (2009) aimed to find out if code-switching conducted as a communicative strategy among low intermediate students in Karaj resulted in the establishment of early oral proficiency. The participants of the study were 60 female, adult low intermediate students who were assigned to control and

experimental groups, equally. After assigning pretest and posttest of speaking and running the treatment with experimental students, the results showed that CS improved the oral ability of low intermediate students.

Therefore, the current study considering the niches of the literature about CS and language proficiency aims to fill out the available gaps by seeking the perceptions and practices of high and low EFL achievers as to CS limitations and benefits in terms of a qualitative study.

Method

Participants

The participants of the current study were 24 BA candidates (11 high & 12 low achievers) majoring in English teaching and translation at Islamic Azad University of Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan University and Aviation Industry university. In the context of Iranian universities and in order to truly differentiate real high achievers from low ones, the researchers regarded those students who obtain scores above 75 percent as high achievers and those who receive scores below 60 percent as low achievers based on their GPA in reading, writing, speaking and listening courses in the first fourth semesters (see Appendix 1). The number of participants was decided according to data saturation techniques and their age ranged from 20 to 25 years. Kolb (2012) argued that data saturation is vital because it guarantees the sufficiency of elicited data based on respondents' viewpoints.

Table 1.

Demographic Information of High and Low Achievers

Achievers	Number	Interview type	Gender	Learning experience
high	5	face-to face	male	5-8 years
high	6	face-to face	female	5-8 years
low	6	face-to face	male	1-2 years
low	6	Face to face	female	1-2 years

Achievers	Number	Interview type	Gender	Learning experience
high	3	focus group	male	5-8 years
high	3	focus group	female	5-8 years
low	3	focus group	male	1-5 years
low	3	focus group	female	1-5 years

The participants of the face-to-face interviews were selected based on purposive sampling. Moreover, for the focus-group interviews, the participants were selected based on the students' consent to attend the interviews. On the whole, two focus group interviews (6 high & 6 low achievers), from Aviation Industry university discussed their ideas as to limitations and benefits of code-switching. The number of the face-to-face interviewees was limited to 23, and focus group interviews to 12 EFL learners, simply because no new information was forthcoming and data saturation was reached. The researchers also observed 10 different English courses of B.A levels of English teaching and translation including Linguistics, Teaching Methodology and Language Testing at B.A level from Bandar Abbas Aviation Industry University, Islamic Azad University of Bandar Abbas as well as Hormozgan university in order to spot any probable limitations and benefits of code-switching as practiced among teacher-student/ students-student interactions.

Table 2.

Demographic Information of the Courses Observed

Courses	University type	number	Qualification of instructors
Linguistics	Islamic Azad university	2	Ph.D. student
Linguistics	Aviation industry University	1	MA
Linguistics	Hormozgan university	1	Ph.D
Language teaching	Islamic Azad university	1	Ph.D.
Language teaching	Aviation industry University	1	MA
Language teaching	Hormozgan university	1	MA

Courses	University type	number	Qualification of instructors
Language testing	Islamic Azad university	1	Ph.D
Language testing	Aviation industry University	1	MA
Language testing	Hormozgan university	1	Ph.D

Instruments

This study benefited from semi-structured interviews (face to face & focus group) to address high and low achiever's perceptions toward code-switching, and observations to spot the practices of high and low achievers in EFL classrooms.

Face to Face and Focus Group Interviews

For face-to-face and focus group interviews, the codification procedures of grounded theory approach for data collection and analysis was used. In grounded theory, a researcher does not start a project with a predetermined theory in mind. Yet, the researchers begin with an area of study and allow the theory to appear from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). To elicit the perceptions of Iranian EFL high and low achievers towards code-switching, semi-structured and focus group interviews were planned and conducted with the participants. The participants of the personal interviews were selected based on purposive sampling. The physical position of the interviewer and the interviewees were face to face in the semi-structured interviews. Additionally, for eliciting the students' perceptions in interactions about code-switching, two focus-groups were organized. For the focus-group interviews, the participants were selected based on the students' consent to attend the interviews.

Observations

To tap into the practices of high and low achievers with respect to the limitations and benefits of code-switching, 10 observations were organized. All the observations were done in specialized courses such as Linguistics, Teaching Methodology, and Language Testing at B.A level from Bandar Abbas Aviation Industry University, Islamic Azad University

of Bandar Abbas as well as Hormozgan University. Then, the researchers in the process of observing the specialized courses took a neutral position and did not interfere in the process of teacher-student interactions. Alongside observing the classes, the researchers took field notes and for the purposes of further scrutiny and analysis of data, all the observed classes were video-recorded by the consent of the teachers and students.

Data Collection Procedures

The data of the present research was collected in 4 steps.

Step 1: At the beginning of the academic year 2018, a tentative interview protocol was designed. After reviewing the relevant literature on code-switching, the researchers realized seven questions to be included in the interview guide.

Step 2: With the help of two colleagues and 10 high and low achievers, the interview guide was piloted and based on the received feedback, 2 questions were reworded.

Step 3: After formulating the final draft of the interview guide, the next step was to hold the interview sessions. Semi-structured interviews and focus- group interviews were held to reach an in-depth understanding of the students' perceptions toward teachers' code-switching in EFL classrooms.

Therefore, a 3- session interview was held to elicit data (Samimi, Sahragard, & Razmjoo, 2016; Samimi & Sahragard, 2018). The first session was for the purpose of acquainting the interviewees and the interviewer and also provided a chance for learners to reflect on the subject for the second session.

At the beginning of the second interview session, the researchers thanked the participants for participating in the project. Then, the researchers described the aim of the study to the participants and the interviewees were guaranteed that their personal information and their ideas about code-switching would be used for research purposes. In the meanwhile, when interviews were being held, they were audio-recorded and the medium of the language was Persian. Using Persian, hence, helped

the participants to feel safe and discuss their perceptions with confidence. It is worth noting that, the researchers did not impose any ideas on the interviewees. As a final point, the sessions were terminated by asking the interviewees if there was anything they wanted to add.

After all the interview sessions were done, the researchers transcribed the recorded interviews. The interviews continued up to the point that no new information was gained and data saturation was accomplished.

In the third and final session, three standards of rigor for the interviews were checked. They were dependability, credibility, and transferability of the findings (Ary, et al, 2014). To spell out the dependability of the data, all the interviews done by the researchers as well as the voices of the interviewees were transcribed and codified. Then, the assigned codes were checked and rechecked by the researchers themselves which in turn accounted for intra-coder agreement.

Furthermore, to check the inter-coder agreement, in addition to the researchers' coding, two more experienced colleagues were kindly asked to check the data and write down the codes. Afterward, the written codes were compared with those of the researchers' codes in terms of stability and consistency. Finally, the researchers and the other coders had a meeting to reach final agreements on the codes.

On the other hand, to take into account the credibility of the data, the voices of the interviewees were re-examined and the transcripts were returned to the participants for confirmation of their viewpoints. To support the transferability of the study, the researcher tried to provide rich and accurate descriptions of the participants and the context in order for readers to make sound judgments about the similarity and applications of findings in other settings.

Step 4: To observe the practices of high and low achievers, 10 classes of different subjects were observed by the researchers and two peer observers. Before the observations, the researchers explained the rubrics to the peer observers. The peer observers were informed that they should only observe the classes and take notes of the ongoing procedures. Finally, they provided their written observations to the researches. In addition, 5

classes were video recorded. Moreover, the researchers checked the written memos of themselves and the two peer observers known as dependability where the researchers attempted to minimize disagreement and maximize the consistency of assigned codes. The researchers also re-checked the recorded observations to confirm the trustworthiness of observations. Eventually, the last step was to enter the data from interviews and observations into MAXQDA software.

Data Analysis

To organize the data from both interviews and observations, MAXQDA software was used. The first step in data analysis was reading and re-reading the data to organize and transcribe them (Ary et al, 2014). At that juncture, the transcribed items were entered into MAXQDA software. The next step was assigning a name relevant to the person with whom the interview was held. After organizing the data, the next stage was codifying the raw data and hence reducing them into manageable codes. In this stage, a considerable number of codes emerged. Once the coding of the transcripts was completed, the next step was assigning similar codes under certain categories and in order to ensure if the codes belong together, two more colleagues double-checked them. In the last stage, selective coding was executed. In selective coding, a grounded theorist generates a theory by interpreting the interrelationships that emerge among categories in axial coding (Creswell, 2013). The aforementioned steps led to the emergence of eight themes (four themes for high achievers and four themes for low achievers) which constituted two models for the limitations and benefits of code-switching from the perspectives and practices of high and low EFL achievers.

Results

Based on interviews and observations, high and low achievers' perceptions and practices were summarized into four types, respectively, as follows:

Higher achievers' Results

Barrier to Learning

As it is understood from the students' responses, most of the high achievers do not agree with teacher code-switching in the classroom (7 individuals, 63%). They also argued that switching back and forth between languages by a teacher will not help students improve their speaking and listening. Therefore, students in this situation will not be able to use English properly which hence leads to misunderstanding. Most of the high achievers (8 individuals, 72%) believed that teachers practice code-switching as a compensatory strategy for their deficiency in English. Akindele and Letsoala (2001) have asserted that code-switching is a form of compensatory strategy for some teachers who have a linguistic deficiency. The following comments pinpoint the above-mentioned issues:

- **Student # 2:** *"Speaking English in the class is very essential for all of us and the teacher must help us in this regard. I mean the teacher also must speak English in the class and motivate us to speak English in the class, too."*
- **Student # 4:** *"I think those teachers who switch between English and Persian, lack proficiency in English and teachers use code-switching as a compensatory strategy for their insufficiency in English proficiency"*
- **Focus group # 2:** *"we think the teachers must just speak English in the class and no Persian because we have to use every opportunity in the class to speak English. By teachers' code-switching, the learners will be deprived of learning new items"*
- **Observation: T3:** *In a class observation, the researchers observed that the teacher distributed a text and asked students to read it by themselves to guess the meaning of new words. After a short time, the teacher asked the meaning of new words from students. A proficient student in the class explained the meaning of a new word in English but the teacher asked him to say the meaning of the new word only in L1. So, the students were deprived of learning new vocabulary.*

Reliance Upon Subject Matter

According to Gumpez (1982), code-switching is an inevitable linguistic phenomenon in EFL classrooms. The best-known reason behind teacher code-switching from the target language to the native language is topic change (Mattsson & Burnhult-Mattson, 1999). Some high achievers expressed dissatisfaction with teacher code-switching while a teacher instructed a new grammatical and lexical point in the classrooms (10 individuals, 90%). Yet, they argued that (8 individuals, 72%) when the teacher wants to teach some cultural notions, code-switching should be used in the classroom, because it helps the students to understand the discrepancies between two cultures better. Below are some comments:

- **Student # 8:** *"I believe that when the teacher teaches in English, it will increase our understanding of the subject matter and hence it increases our chances of passing the final exam"*
- **Student # 3:** *"Because learning English is very important, grammar structures are also a part of learning English, I prefer the use of English by the teacher in this era".*
- **Focus group # 2:** *"When the teacher talks about a cultural text because there are lots of differences between two cultures, we prefer code-switching by a teacher, in order to understand these differences better".*
- **Observation: T5:** *In a classroom observation, the researchers observed that in a conversation class by the title of countries, all the students participated in the discussion about the art, culture, and handicrafts of their own country mainly with their mother tongue.*

a. Further Clarification VS. Classroom Management

One of the most important factors that influences learning is classroom management. Therefore, classroom management is defined as "the actions and strategies teachers use to solve the problem of order in classrooms" (Doyle, 1986, p. 397). The results of the interview demonstrated that high achievers argued against the idea that code-switching results in better classroom management. Nevertheless, they

believed that teacher code-switching can support weak students to apprehend the task instructions more wisely (10 individuals, 90%). Below are some comments referring to the very matter:

- **Student # 1:** *“teacher speaking in English has nothing to do with classroom management and issues of the like”*.
- **Student # 9:** *“controlling the classroom is related to the teachers’ skill, and there is no relation between class management and code-switching”*.
- **Focus- group # 2:** *“code-switching is helpful for low students who are confused with the task instructions”*.
- **Focus group # 1:** *“Teacher code-switching cannot help teachers to better discipline learners in the classroom, but it simply can be used for clarification upon fussy materials.*

b. Rapport Enhancing

Code-switching is a communicative strategy that facilitates interpersonal communication. Moreover, code-switching is a tool for making the classroom atmosphere more cheerful. Teachers who switch codes from English to Persian by telling a joke can enliven the atmosphere of English classrooms. In addition, high achievers believed that switching codes can change the atmosphere of the classroom and lead to encouragement on the part of students (7 individuals, 63%). Among high achievers (10 individuals, 90%) were of the opinion that teachers who switch codes from English to Persian can better enliven the atmosphere of class (e.g. tell a joke for humor), provide feedback on students’ reactions, and negotiate meaning which accordingly results in rapport and understanding among students and teachers.

- **Student # 10:** *“The proficient students will be encouraged by the teacher if he uses Persian in the classroom, if a student is proficient in English he/she prefers to be encouraged by logical and feasible quotes and incentives in the mother tongue”*.

- **Student # 5:** *“If the teacher switches between codes for the purpose of entertaining students such as telling a joke, this will enliven the class atmosphere”.*
- **Focus-group# 1:** *“English subject is a difficult lesson, and due to this code-switching is good for telling a humorous point to change the atmosphere”.*
- **Observation: T8:** *In a classroom observation, the researchers saw that in an English grammar class, when the teacher praised and affirmed students in their first language for their correct responses, the result was students’ more cooperation. As English grammar is serious, sometimes the teacher injected humor by using students’ native language.*

Perceptions and Practices of High Achievers toward code-switching

As mentioned above, the perception and practices of high achievers were derived from the close examination of the interview and observation results and the application of the systematic approaches for coding and analyzing the data (Ary et al., 2014) through which 14 categories and four themes were obtained as presented below:

Table 3.

The Main Themes and Categories of High Achievers’ Perceptions and Practices Toward CS

Theme	Category
Barrier to Learning	• Code-switching impedes learning.
	• code-switching deprives learners of the new item
	• Teachers’ lack of standard proficiency may be the cause of code-switching in the classroom which results in poor performance on the part of students
	• Code-switching as a compensatory strategy for teachers’ deficiencies has a destructive role in acquiring new items
	• Topic shift is the main reason for teachers’ code-switching.

Theme	Category
Reliance upon Subject Matter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching grammar points in English results in better grammar scores. Teaching vocabulary item in English helps students pass the final exam easily. Students prefer code-switching for cultural-related texts to understand them better.
Further Clarification VS. Classroom Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no relationship between code-switching and controlling the classroom. code-switching helps to clarify the task instructions. Teacher code-switching helps those students who are puzzled with the procedures.
Rapport Enhancing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> code-switching by a teacher can change the class atmosphere. code-switching makes the classroom atmosphere more lively and dynamic Students' engagement to negotiate meaning increases when code-switching is used in the classroom

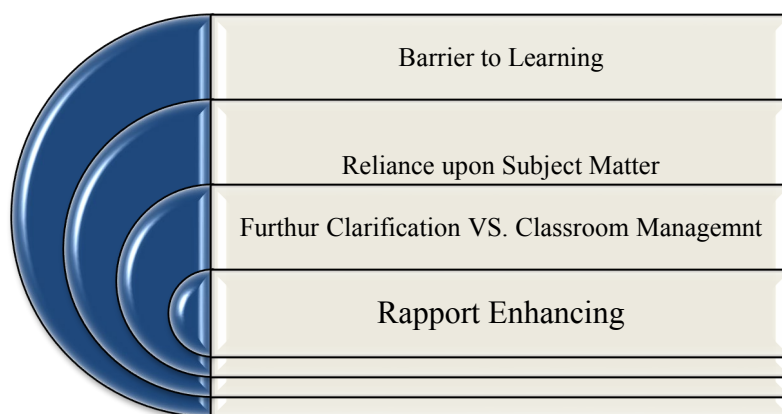


Figure 1.

Emerging model for the perceptions and practices of high achievers toward limitations and benefits of code-switching.

Low Achievers' Results

a. Augmenting Understanding

Having used the students' native language, the teacher forms a bridge from known to the unknown; therefore, the understanding of the subject matter is much easier for the students. Rose (2006) found that learners practice of code-switching for clarification upon meaning. In the same vein, the analysis of lower achievers' data (11 individuals, 84%), highlighted the fact that code-switching was a useful tool for clarification upon the subject matter which is a crucial strategy for expediting understanding. In fact, lower achievers who do not know English very well are most often concerned about misunderstanding; therefore, code-switching can help them resolve the very matter.

- **Student #12:** *"Teaching English together with Persian would help us to understand those parts we didn't get when the teacher taught the points in English"*
- **Student #11:** *"I believed that teachers' code-switching will help students to grasp the subject matter quickly and the result will be better marks on the final exam"*
- **Focus-group # 1:** *"When the teacher translates the new words of a reading text to Persian, we will understand the text better"*
- **Observation: T1:** *In a reading classroom observation, the researchers observed that while some students had difficulty understanding some ideas of the text, the teacher used code-switching to clarify the unknown concepts. As a result, students were satisfied with this strategy and reported that it helped them to understand the texts better.*

b. Obligatory for All Skills

Code-switching is a common strategy at the disposal of EFL teachers in the classrooms. The reason behind the use of this strategy is that all messages are important and teacher code-switching facilitates the process of learning. As it is understood from the students' responses, most students were satisfied with code-switching (12 individuals, 92%) and argued that

code-switching is an apparatus that truly supports low achievers to obtain the necessary information in all four areas of English. Below are the results of the interviews and observations referring to the seriousness of this notion:

- **Student #17:** *“Because English is really hard, I prefer code-switching by the teacher in this era”*
- **Student #16:** *“I have difficulty in listening; I can’t understand the listening section. But when the teacher uses code-switching, it helps me to understand the listening points”.*
- **Focus-group #1:** *“While we are discussing a topic in the class, for example a cultural topic, we prefer teachers to use Persian in the classroom”.*
- **Focus-group:** *In my viewpoint, it seems necessary that code-switching is used in all four skills because switching between the codes is a must for beginners.*
- **Classroom Observation:** As I had the chance of observing English classes of elementary students, I realized that the teacher resorted to Persian in any occasion she felt it was necessary, from speaking to writing, and finally, listening and reading

c. Enhancing Classroom Participation

Through code-switching as a strategy in the classroom settings, the students are able to convey information to their peers and teachers. Therefore, via teachers’ code-switching, students feel more comfortable in English classrooms and participate in classroom activities and discussions (Chi, 2000). In the same respect, some lower achievers (8 individuals, 61%) claimed that the use of Persian, as a useful apparatus, can make them more involved to participate in classroom activities. Below are some related quotes of low achievers:

- **Student #20:** *“I take part in classroom activities when there is no force for speaking English”.*
- **Student #18:** *“First, we start by code-switching and gradually we will become fluent speakers of English”.*

- **Focus-group#2:** "Teacher code-switching helps us to enjoy doing classroom activities".
- **Observation: T7:** In a classroom observation, the researchers noticed that in an English grammar class, when the teacher switched between codes, it reinforced the students' motivation and self-confidence. The consequence of using this strategy was more cooperation and participation on the part of students.

d. Feeling of Security

Sert (2005) stated that code-switching is used by teachers to build intimate relationships with students and to form a safe and secure environment in the classroom. A student who feels accepted, valued, confident, and safe in the classroom can be motivated to succeed (Lightbown & Spada, 2011). The interviewees' responses indicated that code shifting in EFL classroom leads to a sense of safety and security on the part of students. Below are some comments referring to the above-mentioned concepts:

- **Student #14:** "In English classes, I am always anxious. I fell secure when the teacher uses a mixture of Persian and English.
- **Student #13:** I like those English classes that the teacher tries to reduce the stress and anxiety of his/ her students by letting them use whatever language feels comfortable with".
- **Focus-group #1:** "The results of an English classroom is promising if, at first, students are allowed to use Persian words in their conversations, but toward the end of the course, their Persian use should be watched and minimized.
- **Observation: T4:** In a classroom observation, the researchers figured out that students were stress-free in the class because of the code-switching strategy. They attempted to speak English without being worried about making grammatical or vocabulary mistakes. They inserted some Persian words into their sentences if they could not say them in English.

Perception and Practices of Lower Achievers toward code-switching

As mentioned above, the perceptions and practices of low achievers were derived from the close examination of the interview and observation results, and the application of the systematic approaches for coding and analyzing the data (Ary et al. , 2014) through which 12 categories and four themes were obtained as follows:

Table 4.

The Main Themes and Categories of Low Achievers' Perceptions and Practices Toward CS

Theme	Category
Augmenting Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher code-switching is a tool for better understanding. • Teacher code-switching is a tool to gain attention toward the new information. • code-switching decreases misinterpretation.
Obligatory for All Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher code-switching is a tool for transferring all messages in a class. • Teacher code-switching facilitates the processes of learning. • Teacher code-switching is necessary when the teacher shifts the topic. • It is necessary apparently for all skills.
Enhancing Classroom Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • code-switching enables the students to convey information in an EFL classroom. • code-switching helps students participate in classroom activities, and hence, they will learn the subject matter better. • By teacher code-switching, students will not be afraid of participation in the classroom.
Feeling of Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • code-switching establishes an intimate relationship between students and teachers. • code-switching makes the students feel secure and accepted by the teacher. • code-switching makes all the students participate in classroom activities.

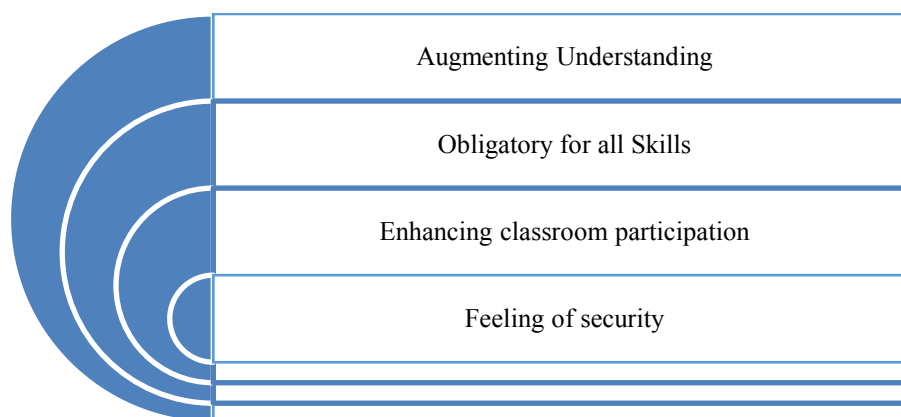


Figure 2.

Emerging Model for the perceptions and practices of low achievers toward limitations and benefits of code-switching.

Discussion

The results of this study pointed out differing perceptions and practices of CS among high and low proficient students. As to limitations of code-switching, high achievers regarded CS a barrier to learning. Such a result concurs some previous studies (Grobler, 2017; Rahimi & Jafari, 2103; Rasouli et al., 2015). Thus, this finding may pinpoint the maximum use of classroom opportunity at the service of language learning, because in an EFL context like Iran, the prime chance to practice English can be achieved inside the classroom and there is little or no practice of English outside the classroom atmosphere. Consequently, high achievers favor English-only classrooms and consider Persian a hindrance to learning. Further, high achievers attached negative tags, including poor language proficiency and English deficiency to the teachers who use Persian in their classrooms. Thus, university teachers of mixed-ability classes should be too wary of the fact and should manage the university classes in such a manner so as not to discourage low proficient students, nor to receive negative feedback from high proficient ones.

On the other hand, low achievers did not attach any limitation to CS. Yet, they perceived CS as a survival tool for augmenting understanding,

enhancing participation, feeling security and a mandatory tool for all skills. Such findings may highlight this fact that Persian is an inevitable part of English learning. Consequently, university instructors should strike a balance between high and low achievers in their classrooms since two sharply opposing perspectives are posed by each group and, in fact, they are two ends of a continuum. To survive the criticisms of an impersonal and discouraging atmosphere which brings about lack of attention and disregard and disrespect to university classes, instructors should add incentives and innovation to deal with the negative consequences.

In fact, regarding augmenting understanding, the findings of the present study are in agreement with Ghafar Samar and Moradkhani (2014) and Alenezi (2016). In addition, low achievers believed that code-switching guarantees their comprehension and discussed this matter in a variety of instances.

On the contrary, High achievers noted that building rapport, subject matter reliance, and clarification issues as benefits of code-switching. Likewise, a couple of studies in the literature have referred to solidarity and rapport in the classroom (Azlan & Narasuman, 2013; Bruney, 2012; Harmer, 2007; Hamre, & Allen, 2012; Nguyen, 2007; Pianta). Put it differently, high proficient students do not totally reject the use of Persian in classroom, but they favor it for demanding issues that require a lot of burden on the part of teacher and for creating a friendly environment that augments rapport among the class members.

On the whole, as inferred from the findings, high achievers mostly focused on interpersonal issues such as rapport and clarification, while low achievers resided generally on educational delivery of materials and ease of understanding. Therefore, it appears necessary to further reflect upon such results and implement the findings of this study in real classes so as to receive feedback and seek reactions of high and low achievers toward the obtained innovations.

Conclusion

The present study may have pushed the borders of knowledge ahead in terms of code-switching research in the Iranian context by presenting two distinct qualitative models of CS for high and low achievers. The novelty of research traces back to qualitative lenses through which the aforementioned models have emerged. The outcome is a local model in the context of Iranian high and low achievers feeding on perceptions of students and real practices observed in English classrooms.

Beneficiaries of this study are local policymakers, textbook developers, EFL teachers, students, and researchers. Policymakers and textbook developers can draw upon the findings of the current research and add a wide range of options in textbooks to expose low achievers to Persian equivalents and explanations of difficult points. On the contrary, to advanced textbooks and materials, a tinge of Persian might be added regarding different cultural points and for further clarification upon complicated issues. In addition, Iranian teachers of advanced English courses should practice caution to resort to Persian on rare occasions, if any, in their classrooms. Yet, they can use Persian outside the language classes to build rapport and to further explain and clarify upon demanding points.

Equally important, the results may contribute to negotiations and interactions of high and low achievers outside the realm of classroom practice; bearing in mind this point that, if interactions are among high-low students, CS can be used for intimacy building and rapport among them. Nevertheless, high-high interactions should sweep away Persian and employ English as the medium of everyday interactions with one another.

Besides, this study was local and focused on university students' perceptions and practices from Bandar Abbas province which limit its generalizability. Another limitation of this study can be its observations which were only done at university classes. To compensate for its limitations, researchers inquiring into the subject of code-switching can further replicate the design of the study in other and similar contexts to corroborate and refine the emerging categories. In addition, researchers

can experimentally practice the components of emerged models to figure out their strengths and weaknesses. Also, future studies of the type can quantitatively validate the proposed models by adding a quantitative questionnaire built upon the components and categories of the qualitative models using Structural Equation Modeling.

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Appendices

Appendix A: high and low achievers GPAs

	Listening marks	Speaking marks	Reading marks	Writing marks	Average
High achiever No:1	20, 20, 20	18,20,15	19.50,18,20,19.50,20	18.50	19.4
High achiever No:2	16, 18 , 19	20 , 19 , 19	20,18,20,18.50, 16	18	18.6
High achiever No:3	19,19.50,20	17,19,18.50	18.50,13,20,18.50,20	17.50	18.2
High achiever No:4	18,19,18	18.50,18,18	17.50,18.50,19,16,18	13.25	17.50
High achiever No:5	16,19.50,14	14,18.50,14	17,18.25,18.50,20,20	17.50	17.40
High achiever No:6	14,15,17	17,19,17	20,19,17.50,19,18.5	12	17.30
High achiever No:7	17,20,15	15,19,15	20,15.50,20,17,19	13.50	17.1
High achiever No:8	15,19.50,20	18,20,15	19,15,16,18.50,16	14	17
High achiever No:9	16,19,16	16,18,16	18,18.25,20,13,14	15.25	16.6
High achiever No:10	14,19.25,17	17,15,17	18,18.50,20,12,16	12.50	16.3
High achiever No:11	18,17.50,14	14,14,14	18.50,18,17,17.50,20	11.50	16.1
Low achiever No:1	10,11.50, 10	11, 10.75, 9.75	10, 11, 9.25,10, 11.50	10.75	10.1
Low achiever No:2	11,14,11	11,10,11	8,16,12.50,10.50,12.50	10	11.4

	Listening marks	Speaking marks	Reading marks	Writing marks	Average
Low achiever No:3	10.25, 10, 14	13,13.5, 12	12, 10.5, 9.75, 14, 15	10	11.55
Low achiever No:4	13.5, 11.25, 10	11, 14, 10.5	10.5, 9.5, 12, 13, 11	16	11.94
Low achiever No:5	16, 15.5, 12	13.5, 11, 13	10.25, 9, 11, 10,16.5	11.25	11.90
Low achiever No:6	11, 13.25, 14	13.75, 12, 12.5	11.75, 10, 12.25,14, 14	9	11.95
Low achiever No:7	10.25, 13.25, 15	10.5, 12.5, 9.25	12.75, 14.25, 16, 10, 11.25	9.75	11.70
Low achiever No:8	10,10.25, 9.5	11, 10.75, 9.25	15, 13.75, 14, 17, 9.5	11.25	11.80
Low achiever No:9	10, 9.75, 11	11, 10.75, 9.25	13.25, 14, 19, 14, 10	10.25	11.96
Low achiever No:10	11, 14, 11,	12, 9.75, 12	12, 15, 11.75, 13, 12	12.25	12.00
Low achiever No:11	13.75, 11.5, 15.5	12, 10.5, 9.75	16,9.75, 12,12.5,13.5	11.50	11.76
Low achiever No:12	15, 12.75, 11.25	10, 10.25, 11	14, 15, 10, 10, 13.75	10.25	11.88
Low achiever No:13	10,12.75,12	12,11.25,12	13,12.75,10,11.50,15	10.5	11.71

Appendix B: The interview Protocol**Part 1. Personal data**

1. Would you please introduce yourself?
2. How long have you been learning English?

Part 2. code-switching data

3. What does code-switching between the languages mean to you?
4. Do you think it is necessary to speak Persian in the classroom why?
5. What are the positive points of teacher code-switching in the classroom?
6. What are the limitations of teacher code-switching in the classroom?
7. Are you allowed to use Persian in English classes?
8. In what situations does your teacher switch between the languages during the lessons?
9. Do your instructor switch to your first language?
10. Why do you think your instructor switch from English to Persian?
11. What is the relationship between teachers' English proficiency and code-switching?
12. Do you feel more confident when the teacher switches to Persian?
13. How do you feel when your teacher switches to Persian?
14. In what courses do you engage more in code-switching?
15. Is code-switching a useful strategy to be used by instructors and students in the EFL classroom?