



Learners' Attitudes towards Teachers' switching to the mother tongue (The Case of Secondary school learners in Algeria)

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Abstract: *The current study investigates learners' views towards the teachers' switching to the mother tongue in English as a foreign language (EFL) classes in secondary school in Algeria. It aims at revealing the attitudes of secondary school learners towards code-switching to the first language in foreign language classrooms. A total of 120 secondary school learners participate in the study. In order to collect data, a questionnaire is administered to the sample which is randomly selected. The study concludes that learners have positive views towards the teachers' use of their mother tongue in English as foreign classes. Learners are aware of the teachers' switching to the mother tongue. Furthermore, they are in favour of teachers' switching. They believe that teachers resort to the mother tongue to fulfil pedagogical and social functions. The teachers mainly use switching to translate unknown vocabulary and explain grammar lessons.*

Keywords: *Code-switching, Code-mixing, Diglossia, Borrowing, Modern Standard Arabic, BAC, Secondary School*

INTRODUCTION

The sociolinguistic profile of the Algerian society is worth studying because of its diversity and complexity. It is a fertile terrain for any research. Being under French colonization for more than 132 years, French became a part of the Algerian language. Algerians generally mix languages in their conversations; they mix Arabic with French. They have even borrowed words from French. These behaviors are the consequences of language contact. Code-switching is widespread and practiced in different situations amongst the school.

For a long time, investigations and studies have been directed towards code-switching. In the 1980s, much focus was put on code-switching as a phenomenon and a strategy used by foreign language teachers. Until now, there have been a lot of debates about whether it is beneficial for teachers to switch back and forth between the first language and target language in foreign language classrooms.

On one side, some researchers such as Krashen (1982), Turnbull and Arnett (2002) and Littlewood (1981) support intralinguas teaching strategies.

According to them, the teachers should create a natural environment for learning to take place and base their teaching on authenticity. For them, first language use will not only lead to negative transfer but also hinder learning as well. Thus, learners' exposure to the target language exclusively plays a significant role in enhancing learning. On the other side, other researchers are in favor of cross-lingual (code-switching) teaching strategies. They believe that first language use promotes learning; therefore, the mother tongue could be used in foreign language classrooms. They have even gone further to support the use of translation inside the classroom. They claim that using the first language is a humanistic approach.

However, the question of whether the teachers' use of the first language is useful or not is still a subject of debate all over the world. In Algeria, however, less attention has been directed to this issue. The law passed by the ministry of education in 2010, whereby teachers are asked to use translation in foreign language classrooms, has been raising lots of disagreements among those who are for and those who are against its implementation. Thus, the issue has become a controversial topic.

The study is designed to find out what attitudes or beliefs that learners of English have towards code-switching to the first language in the foreign language classroom. Therefore, two hypotheses are to be investigated:

- (1) It may be hypothesised that most English teachers in secondary schools code switch to the first language for pragmatic ends.
- (2) It may also be hypothesised that most secondary school learners are in favour of teachers' code-switching.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Code-switching

Code-switching (CS) is an inevitable consequence of bilingualism and multilingualism. An individual switches codes when communicating with another person who is supposed to know at least something about the second language. However, even monolinguals may switch the code in a diglossic situation. Hence, CS is due to bilingualism, multilingualism, and diglossia.

Code-switching has been defined differently by researchers, and there is no agreement about its exact definition. Brown (2007), for instance, asserts that "CS is the use of a first or third language within a stream of speech in the second language" (p. 139). In other words, it is the use of two or more languages in the same conversation. This occurs when a bilingual or multilingual uses two languages to communicate with another speaker who supposedly knows, at least, some of the two languages. It happens consciously and unconsciously.

However, Bullock and Toribio (2009) restrict CS only to bilinguals. They state that "Code-switching is the ability on the part of bilinguals to alternate effortlessly between their two languages" (p.01). Similarly, Haugen (1956) explains that CS is alternating two languages by bilingual speakers and by using unassimilated words from a different language and introduce them as single words in their language.

In brief, CS is a situation in which speakers with some knowledge in two or more varieties may switch between them in the same conversation within the same context.

Languages in the Algerian educational system

The Algerian educational system is divided into four levels: primary, intermediate, secondary and higher education. The primary education starts from the age of 6 to 11 years old where children are exposed to Modern Standard Arabic, and French is introduced in the third grade. In the intermediate education (11 to 15 years old), children are taught different subjects such as mathematics and physics with Modern Standard Arabic as the language of instruction. Pupils are also taught French as a second language while English is taught as a first foreign language.

In the secondary level (16 to 19 years old), all instructions in all subjects are given in Arabic except for foreign language classes. At the tenth grade, learners are to be oriented either to scientific or literary streams. Those who are in the literary stream are further oriented to foreign languages or philosophy. Learners of foreign languages learn English and French with a substantial rate of 4-5-6 hours per week, and they are even introduced to a second foreign language (Spanish or German). On the other hand, students from the scientific stream will be specialized in experimental science, mathematics, and technical mathematics. They learn the two foreign languages with an equal rate of three hours per week. Moreover, in some regions especially the Berber speaking population, Tamazight is taught. Learners conclude the three years of secondary school by passing the baccalaureate degree (BAC). Students must take a general exam in every subject taught (even Tamazight where it is taught) and must earn a combined average of at least 50% to pass to the higher education (the average must be more or equal ten).

As far as English is concerned, the situation differs from one country to another and even it differs before and after independence. During French colonisation, English was taught as a first foreign language (FL1); four years in intermediate and three years in the secondary level. After independence, since Arabic regained its status as a national and official language, French became a first foreign language, and English was considered as a second foreign language. From the independence up to 1993, English was taught for five years, two years in the intermediate level and three years in secondary schools. From 1993 to 2004, learners have to choose their first foreign language. French or English was to be studied for three years at primary school, three years in intermediate level and three years at secondary school while the second foreign language was taught for five years in primary school, two years in intermediate school and three years in secondary schools. From 2004 until now, English has been introduced at the intermediate level, and it is taught at the intermediate level and the secondary level for four and three years respectively.

RESEARCH METHOD

Sampling and Population

The present study is directed to secondary school learners of English in Constantine¹ who will represent the population of the study. Since the population is vast, only one-fifth of it will be the sample of the investigation. Accordingly, the teachers' sample consists of 80 teachers who are highly representative while learners' sample consists of 120 learners. These samples are randomly chosen from 60 secondary schools in Constantine.

Data Collection

The data was collected only through learners' questionnaires. It is thought that in order to reveal attitudes and perceptions, the best way is to use questionnaires because the respondents may feel free to add or say anything about the topic. The questionnaire is directed to secondary school learners and will provide their opinions about the teachers' use of code-switching in EFL classes.

Since the topic under research is about teachers and learners opinions, the questionnaire is an adequate way of achieving this goal. In this respect, Richards & Lockhart (1996) write: "Surveys and questionnaires are useful ways of gathering information about affective dimensions of teaching and learning, such as beliefs, attitudes, motivation, and preferences, and enable a teacher to collect a large amount of information relatively quickly" (p. 10). Moreover, questionnaires are different from tests. They do not provide bad or good answers as it is the case in tests, and they do not put the respondents in a position where their answers are to be evaluated according to some criteria.

Description of the Questionnaire

As it is mentioned earlier, simple random sampling is followed to select the sample to conduct the research with learners. The population consists of secondary school learners of Constantine of three different levels (first, second or third year) and from various streams (scientific and literary). The total number of secondary school learners in Constantine is about 32421 learners. Thus, the sample size is 120 respondents. Three teachers, randomly selected, have been asked to choose four classes of different levels and streams to administer the questionnaire. The first teacher has selected a class of third-year scientific stream. The second teacher has selected a class of first-year scientific stream while the third teacher has administered the questionnaire to two classes of a second-year literary stream. Bear in mind that the first two teachers work in rural areas while the last one works in the urban area.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This part aims at gathering information about the learner participants in the study. This information includes age and academic level that are thought to be important.

The age of the learner participants varies from 16 to 20 years old because they are randomly chosen from the three different levels first year (33%), second year (25%), and third-year (42%) and different streams (scientific and literary). It is important to mention that those who have 20 years old are repetitive whether in middle school or secondary school especially failed in the BAC exam.

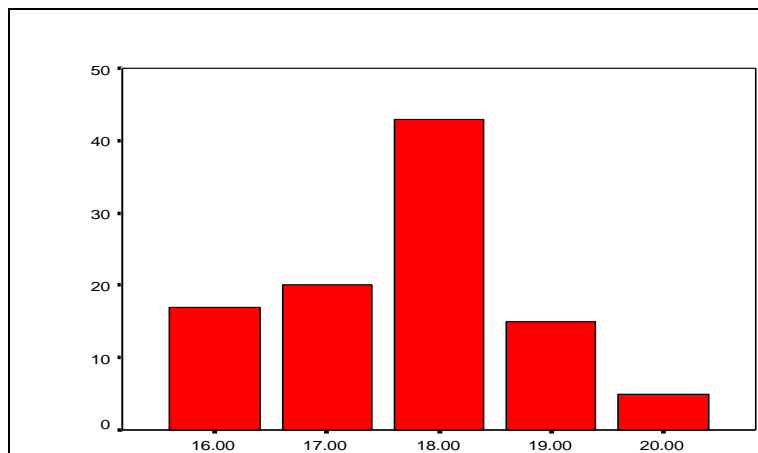


Figure 1: *Age of the Participants*

The following figure displays the academic level of the participants

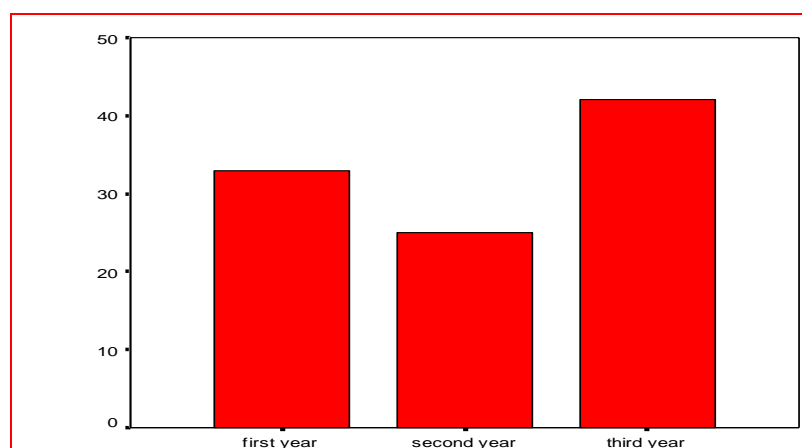


Figure 2. *Academic level of learners' participants*

Question items: 1 and 2

Both questions one and two are asked to investigate whether teachers are using only English and to identify how much it is used.

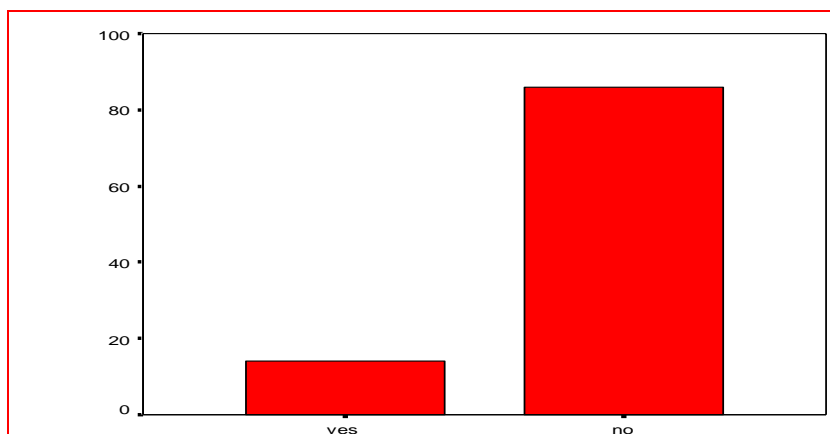


Figure 3. *Using only English*

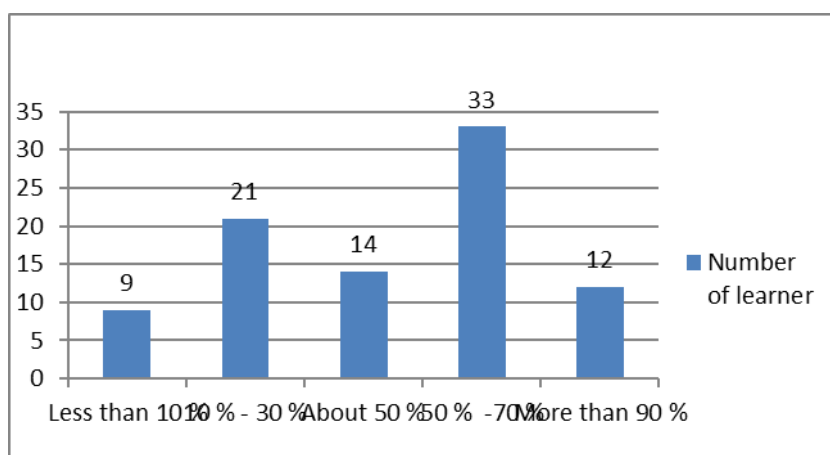


Figure 4. *How much English Used*

According to figure 3 and 4, the results indicate that there is space for L₁ use in EFL classes and that foreign language teachers use some of the first languages but with a different percentage.

Question items: 3 and 4

Both questions three and four aim at investigating whether learners understand teachers’ English and how much they switch to their mother tongue.

Table 1. *Learners’ Understanding of Teachers’ English*

Understand English	Yes	No	Total
Number of Learners	79	21	100
%	79 %	21 %	100 %

From the above table, it can be concluded that most of the participants are not good at English and who could understand teachers’ English are very few. This may be due to their pre-requisite knowledge or to the educational system. Moreover, half of the participants could understand about half to three-quarter of their teachers’ English. This group needs teachers’ help and collaboration to be

able to understand English without any difficulty. Therefore, those who could not understand teachers' English have to be treated alone in order to improve their level and at least help them to learn at their own pace.

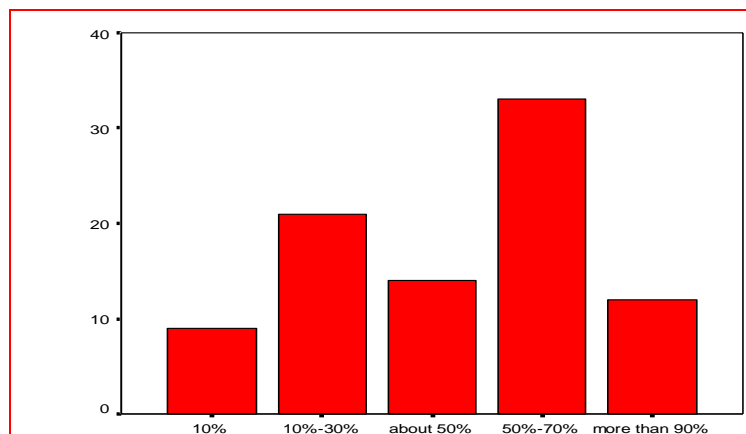


Figure 5. Learners' Understanding of English

Question items: 5, 6, 7, and 8

These questions are intended to uncover learners' opinions about Teachers' exclusive use of English and to examine whether the use of English helps improve learners' level at English.

Table 2. Exclusive Use of English is Beneficial

Exclusive Use of English is Beneficial	Yes	No	Total
Number of Learners	52	48	100
%	52 %	48 %	100 %

The answers of these two questions indicate that the majority of the respondents believe that exclusive use of English is beneficial and just 9% think that it helps them 'little' in improving their level at English.

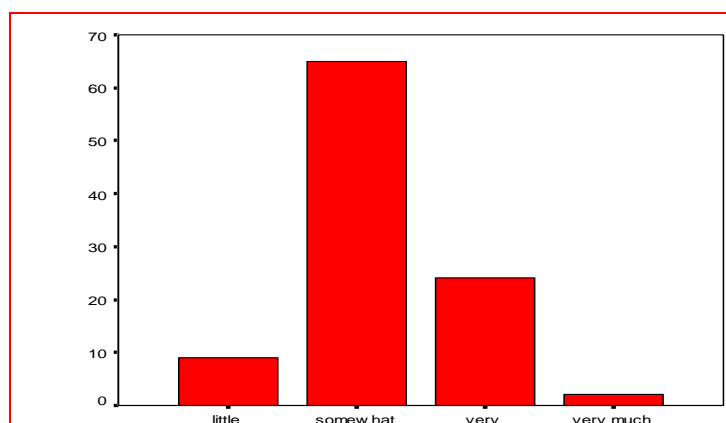


Figure 6. Exclusive Use English is Beneficial

In order to identify exactly at which a language skill exclusive use of English is useful, question six is asked. The following table displays the results

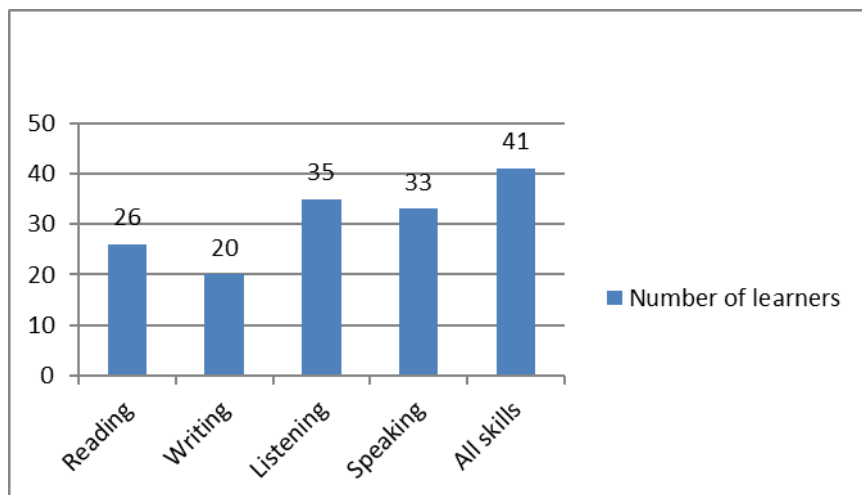


Figure 7. *Language Skills Improvement*

According to these results, learners think that exclusive use of English helps them develop the four skills but particularly the oral ones. Learners, indeed, need to be exposed to English so as they would be able to speak fluently. Likewise, many researchers such as Ellis (1984) Krashen (1987) have pointed out to the importance of language input that learners have to be exposed to as much as possible to guarantee success in language acquisition.

According to the results of this question, 65% of learners have selected listening and speaking. Therefore learners are aware that being exposed to only English helps develop both their speaking and listening skills

In question eight, learners are asked to state why their teachers prefer using only English. Learners’ responses to this question are displayed in the following table.

Table 3. *Reasons for Using Only English*

Reasons for Using Only English	A	B	C	D	E	F
Number of Learners	11	29	51	45	59	22
%	11 %	29 %	51 %	45 %	59 %	22 %

- a. Students and parents tend to regard teachers who use English in class as more qualified and better teachers
- b. Exclusive use of English by the teacher is the best way to enhance students’ English proficiency
- c. Teachers of English are asked to use English by the National Curriculum
- d. It is natural to use English in an English class
- e. Students have more opportunity to be exposed to English
- f. Using the mother tongue prevent you from learning English

Then, in question eight, learners are asked to state why their teachers prefer using only English. Learners’ responses to this question are displayed in the following table.

Surprisingly, more than half (59%) have selected 'e' that exclusive use of English "gives more opportunity to be exposed to the target language." This, in turn, confirms the answer to the previous question that it helps in developing oral skills (listening and speaking). Hence, learners are well-aware about its benefits and that it encourages them to use only English. The least chosen reason is, however, that "both parents and learners see those teachers as competent." Consequently, according to the learners' questionnaire, teachers use only English owing to those reasons mentioned above. Learners are aware that exclusive use of English is beneficial, but it is necessary to investigate their attitudes toward the use of English.

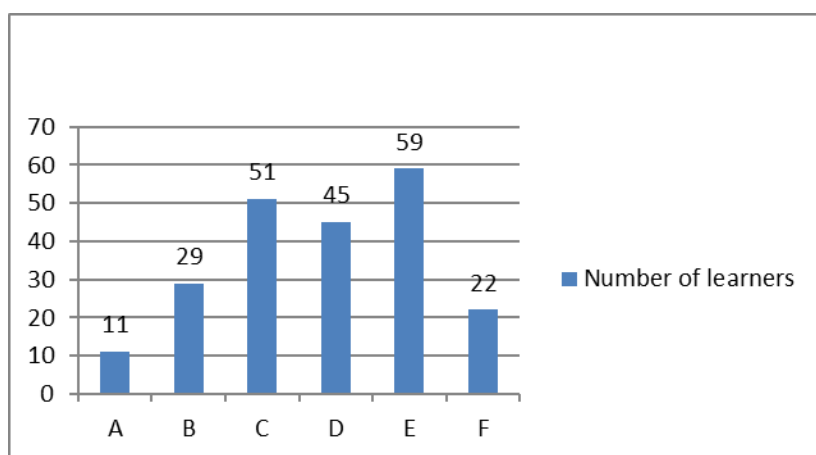


Figure 8. *Reasons for Using Only English*

Question items: 9, 10, and 11

Questions nine, ten, and eleven seek to investigate learners' view concerning the teachers' use of the first language. Beginning with the frequency of L₁ use by the teachers, more than half of the respondents (62%) report that their teachers often use the mother tongue, , while 08% state that they 'always' use it whereas just 04% report that their teachers never use L₁ in EFL classes. This implies that very few are those who do not use the mother tongue and that the majority of the teachers use sometimes or occasionally the L1 when the need calls them upon.

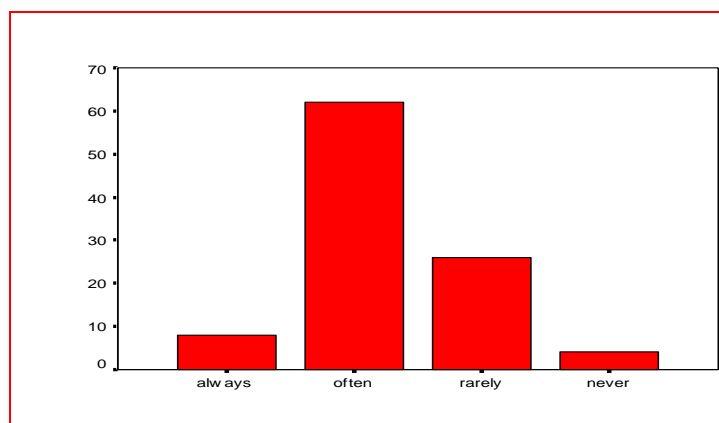


Figure 9. *The frequency of L1 Use*

When participants are asked to state their attitudes towards the teachers’ use of the mother tongue, their answers vary from extremely agreeing to extremely disagreeing, and the following figure displays the result:

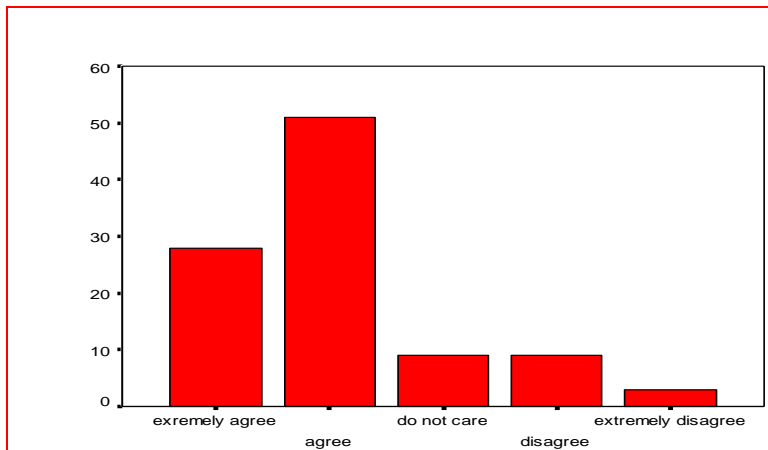


Figure 10. Attitudes towards Switching to the L1

The results presented in the above figure show clearly that a high percentage (79%) of learners ‘agree’ with the teachers’ use of the mother tongue while a low percentage of learners (6%) ‘disagree’ with its use in EFL classes. This, hence, displays a positive attitude towards using the mother tongue which goes hand in hand with the results obtained from the study carried out by Macaro (2007). Furthermore, a very recent study carried out by Yao (2011) in China shows similar results concerning learners’ positive attitudes towards L₁ use.

Question eleven, on the other hand, seeks to investigate whether there is consistency between what is taking place in the classroom and what learners think about the ideal frequency of L₁ in class.

Table 4. Ideal Frequency of the L₁

The Ideal Use	Always	Sometimes	Occasionally	Never	Total
Number of Learners	10	75	13	02	100
%	10 %	75 %	13 %	02 %	100 %

As can be seen in table (4), 75% of the learner participants think that L₁ should ‘sometimes’ be used in EFL classes. A few of them (10%) report that it has to be used ‘always’ while just 13% of the learners believe that it has to be used ‘occasionally.’ Surprisingly, only 2% of them report that it has not to be used in class at all. Those who extremely disagree with its use in class support their point of view that ideally L₁ should not be used at all in EFL classes. If compared with table 14 which is about the frequency of the teachers’ use of the mother tongue, 62% of learners report that their teachers sometimes use L₁. In the case of ideal use of L₁, there is an increase in the number of learners (75%) who think that L₁ has to be sometimes used in the classroom. This implies that learners think that L₁ has to be used in the classroom from time to time to meet their needs especially with the new reform that makes learners at the center of the learning process and

actively engaged in classroom activities. Yet, there are even still very few students who believe that L₁ has not to be used in EFL classes because they indeed want to be exposed as much as possible to the target language.

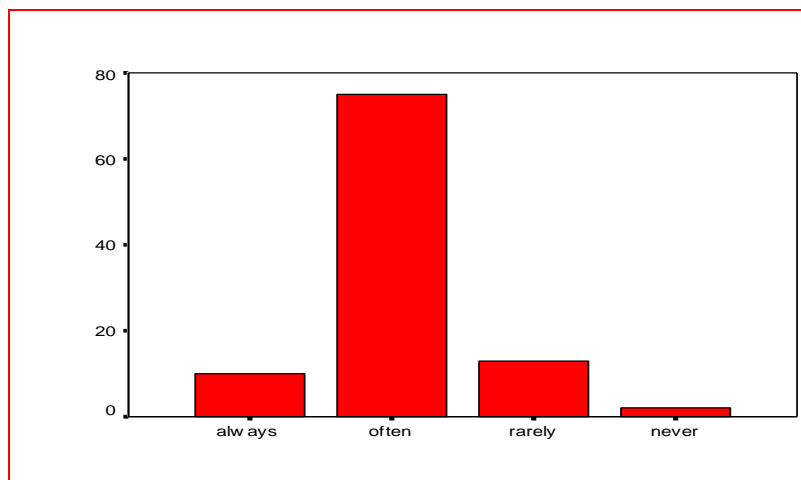


Figure 11. *Ideal Frequency of the L1*

Question items: 12, 13, 14, and 15

When respondents are asked whether they are conscious about the teachers' code-switching to the mother tongue; 55 % report that they are always aware, 35 % of them report that they are sometimes conscious while 3% say that they are rarely conscious. However, just 05 % state that they are never aware of that. 2% of the respondents mention that they do not know and this is because they do not have an answer to this question.

Thus, almost all the participants (93%) are aware of the teacher's switching to L₁. This shows that they know well the situations where their teachers switch the code.

Table 5. *The consciousness of the Switching to the L1*

The consciousness of the Use of Mother Tongue	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Not	Total
Number of Learners	55	35	03	05	02	100
%	55 %	35 %	03 %	05 %	02 %	100 %

Learner participants are further asked to say whether code-switching is an effective strategy for teaching and learning. This question aims at investigating the influence of code-switching.

Table 6. *Influence of Code-Switching on EFL Classes*

Influence of CS	Yes	No	Total
Number of Learners	86	14	100
%	86 %	14 %	100 %

Then, 86 % of the respondents think that CS to L₁ is useful in teaching the foreign language whereas 14 % of them completely disagree. This indicates that

the majority of the learner participants view CS as a beneficial strategy to be used in learning/teaching foreign language.

On the one hand, respondents are further asked to state the reasons behind preferring switching to the mother tongue.

Table 7. Reasons behind Preferring CS

Reasons behind Preferring CS	A	B	C	D	E	F
Number of Learners	51	49	72	73	26	10
%	11 %	29 %	51 %	45 %	59 %	22 %

- a. It helps me understand better grammar rules
- b. It helps me understand the instructions
- c. It facilitates learning
- d. It helps me understand the unknown vocabulary
- e. It creates a sense of empathy
- f. Others(specify).....

Interestingly, most participants 72 %, 73 % have selected ‘c’ or ‘d.’ They believe that CS is beneficial because it helps them to understand difficult words and facilitate learning. 51 % of them have chosen ‘a’ that CS helps them in understanding grammar. A substantial number (49 %) have selected ‘b,’ that CS helps them to understand instructions. Besides, item ‘e’ (creates a healthy atmosphere) has been selected by 26 % of the participants. The, 10 % of the participants have added other reasons that lead them to view CS as beneficial.

- Creates a stock of vocabulary that can’t be forgotten.
- Enriches my vocabulary and help me to learn better.
- Helps me to learn more and better.
- Accelerate comprehension.
- Facilitate learning.
- Helps me understand and take care of the language.
- Helps me understand English.
- Gives me the ability to speak and understand.
- Makes learners motivated and like the target language.

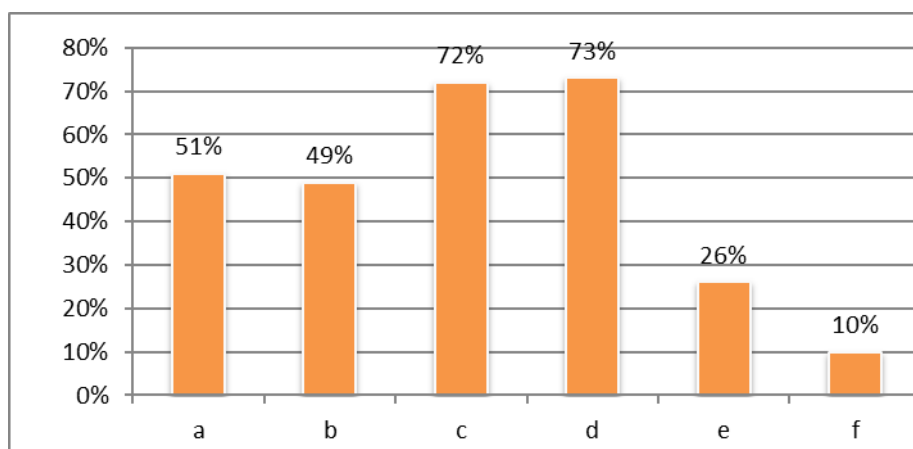


Figure 12. Reasons for Preferring CS

On the other hand, those who do not believe that CS is beneficial are further asked to state the reasons behind their attitude

It gives me more opportunity to be exposed to English

- a. It allows me to understand the teaching without any L1 interference
- b. It gives me more listening practice in English
- c. It is beneficial to me in improving my spoken English
- d. It allows me to have a better overall grasp of the English language
- e. Others (specify).....

As it is shown in the table, the most chosen item is ' d ' that exclusive use of English helps learners develop their oral proficiency .10 % of the respondents have selected ' c ' that using only English trains them on listening to the target language. Both items a' and 'b' have been selected by 9 % of the participants that by using only English they would have more opportunities to listen to the target language. It also helps them to understand the target language without the need to switch the code. Also, only 4 % of the respondents have selected 'e.'

Consequently, learners prefer not to use CS in EFL classroom for many reasons; that being exposed to only English gives those more opportunities to be in an English environment which would improve their listening skills and therefore develops their speaking abilities. Again, the data obtained from question 15 goes by that obtained from question seven. Otherwise, exclusive use of English gives learners the opportunity to be exposed to the target language which develops both their speaking and listening abilities.

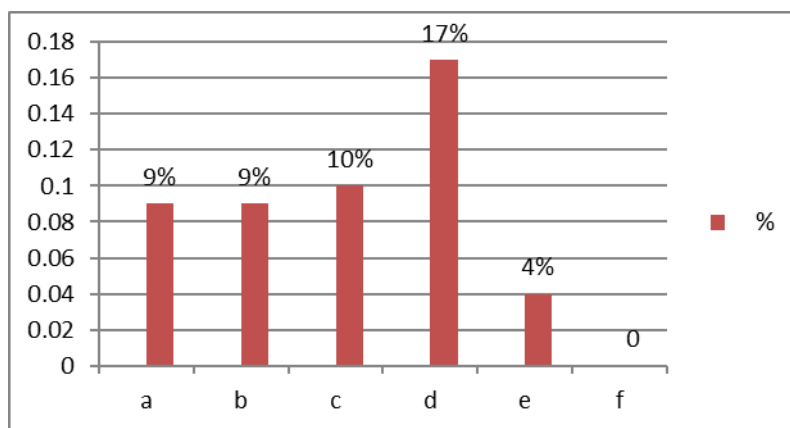


Figure 13. Reasons for not Preferring CS to the L₁

Question items: 16

This question aims at investigating the functions of classroom code-switching. Since the respondents (most of them) are conscious of the teachers' switching to the L₁, their answers would be useful to find out the functions of CS.

Table 8: Functions of CS to the Mother Tongue

Function of CS	A	B	C	D	E	F
Number of Learners	19	95	23	14	43	08
%	19 %	95 %	23 %	14 %	43 %	08 %

From the data obtained, the highly selected item is 'b' that CS is used 'to translate difficult words.' About half the participants (43 %) have selected 'e' that CS is used to 'explain grammar' while 23 % of them have chosen 'c' that CS is used 'to introduce the lesson.' While 19 % of them, believe that CS is used for class management (a).

This finding clearly shows that learners are conscious of the teachers' switching to the mother tongue and the evidence is that they can identify its functions. Further, almost all learners report that CS has many functions to play in EFL classroom namely translating difficult words, class management, explaining grammar, checking to understand and introducing the lesson. It is also handy to explain difficult words that are difficult or impossible to visualize such as abstract nouns.

There are eight learners who have suggested some other functions of CS: 1) to make all learners understand the lesson whether they are excellent or weak; 2) to simplify vocabulary; 3) CS is used when learners do not understand what is said by their teachers or when they cannot find the right words to express their thoughts in English ; 4) to explain the vocabulary of text of exam; 5) to explain exam questions so as to be understood; and 6) used to socialize with learners (talking about daily life). Then, what has been obtained from the learners' questionnaire is to be later compared with the results obtained from the teachers' questionnaire for getting deeper insights into the functions.

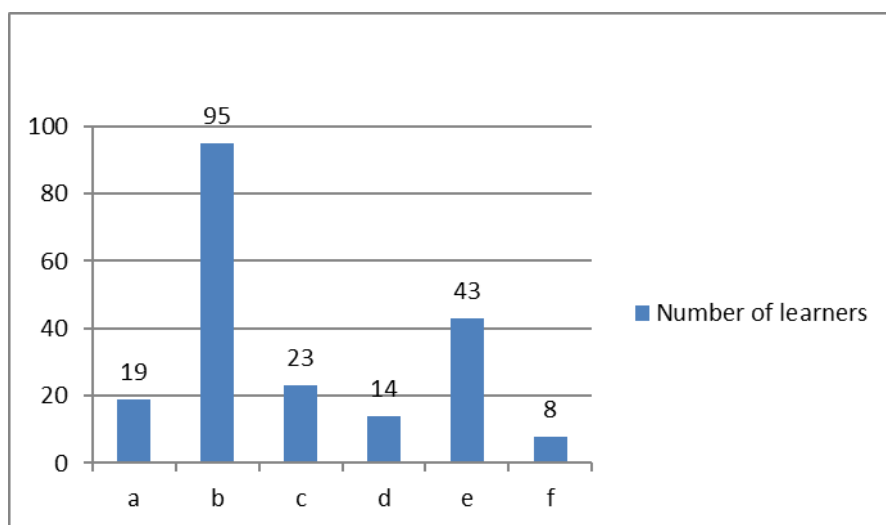


Figure 14. *Functions of CS from Learners*

On the light of what has been obtained from the field of work, the findings of the present study have several implications for curriculum and syllabus designers, teachers, educators, and researchers. Firstly, the Ministry of education has to rely on some researchers to investigate the teachers' use of CS in EFL classes and to reconsider the use of the L1. Further, the ministry of education is asked to provide the means for teachers so that they would be able to do the necessary research to adopt and adapt materials that may maximize FL use and avoid L1 use. Inspectors, in their part, have to hold seminars on this issue to be discussed with teachers who are supposed to know more about their learners' needs and who are normally the only ones to decide whether to use CS or not. Similarly, teachers are supposed to use songs, films and any other authentic

material that may trigger learners' interest and engage them in a natural atmosphere that helps them acquire English without thinking of L1 medium.

Moreover, much attention has to be given to low-level learners by providing them with extra hours and the teachers' use of code-switching to help them overcome the difficulties they may encounter in their programme.

Further, teachers should not treat CS as a sin even if learners use it. It is, therefore, strongly recommended that the use of CS as a strategy should be introduced for teaching English keeping in view the level of learners, and more importantly sensible use of L1. Finally, hopefully, these recommendations would help textbook designers, teachers, researchers, and learners to meet their needs.

CONCLUSION

Code-switching is a reality that cannot be avoided not only because of its widespread use in the wider community but also for the functions it plays in our speech. To be used in the classroom, the debate is still open, and the field of research is welcoming any further findings that may invent a theory for CS, may impose new standards, or even change attitudes. The present study aims to reveal learners' attitudes towards teachers' switching to the mother tongue in secondary schools in Algeria. To start with, learners' questionnaire has shown learners' positive attitudes towards teachers' switching to L1 since about 80 % of them agree with its use in the classroom and view it as a beneficial strategy to be used mainly for translating difficult words and explaining grammar in addition to many other social and pedagogical functions. These results confirm the second hypothesis that learners favor teachers' use of code-switching. This, again, is in accordance with what has already been found by Stern (1992), Tang (2002), Macoro (1997), Jingxia (2010) and Yao (2011).

All in all, learners show more positive attitudes towards switching to L1. They are aware of the teachers' switching. They want code-switching to be used often mainly for pedagogical functions -to translate difficult words and explain grammar- in addition to some social functions. This finding confirms the second hypothesis that learners have a positive attitude towards the teachers' use of code-switching.

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