

## Code-Mixing and Code-Switching Problems among English Language Learners: A Case Study of the University of Sahiwal

1. Maryyam Jabeen,

Department of English, The University of Sahiwal, Pakistan. Email: [jabeenm666@gmail.com](mailto:jabeenm666@gmail.com)

2. Dr. Wasim Hassan

Assistant Professor of English, National Textile University Faisalabad, Pakistan. Email:

[wasimhassan@ntu.edu.pk](mailto:wasimhassan@ntu.edu.pk), Contact No. +92 333 9931343 (Correspondence)

3. Dr. Shabbir Ahmad

Assistant Professor, Department of English, The University of Sahiwal, Pakistan. Email:

[Shabbirahmad@uosahiwal.edu.pk](mailto:Shabbirahmad@uosahiwal.edu.pk)

### Abstract

*Students at universities in multilingual settings sometimes struggle with code-mixing, which is blending two or more languages in a single discussion or speech. This study discusses the code-mixing issues university students encounter while analyzing how they affect linguistic ability, communication effectiveness, and academic performance. The study further explores the causes of code-mixing among university students and looks at its trends and prevalence. It uses surveys and interviews to collect information from a wide range of students in a university context. The research shows that code-mixing can impede the acquisition of language skills and make it more difficult for listeners and speakers to understand each other. Additionally, it might lead to less correctness and clarity in academic writing. Code-mixing may also make it more difficult to negotiate one's identity and maintain linguistic hierarchy within student communities. The findings of this study recommend putting language support programs in place, raising language awareness, and introducing code-mixing knowledge into language education approaches to solve these issues. Universities can promote effective communication, improve language proficiency, and create inclusive learning environments by comprehending and addressing code-mixing difficulties for their varied student populations.*

**Keywords:** Code-switching, Code-mixing, Effective communication, Academic performance

### Introduction:

In the ever-evolving landscape of language acquisition, the phenomenon of code-mixing and code-switching among English Language Learners (ELLs) has gained increasing attention and significance (Dewaele & Wei, 2014). This study delves into the intricate dynamics of code-mixing and code-switching problems faced by ELLs, specifically focusing on a case study conducted at the University of Sahiwal. As English continues to establish its global prominence as a lingua franca, it is imperative to understand the challenges and intricacies that ELLs encounter in their language journey (Gull et al., 2020; Rehman, 2022; Rafique et al., 2018). This research aims to shed light on these challenges, providing valuable insights into the experiences of ELLs and contributing to the broader conversation on language acquisition and pedagogy. Through this comprehensive case study, we explore the multifaceted aspects of code-mixing and code-switching, unveiling the specific hurdles faced by ELLs at the University of Sahiwal while offering recommendations for effective language instruction and support in an increasingly diverse and multilingual educational environment.

Therefore, in today's globalized environment, linguistic diversity is becoming increasingly prevalent, and many university student bodies reflect this trend (Imran & Almusharraf, 2023; Afzaal et al., 2022). As a result, there is currently a phenomenon called "code-mixing," in which several languages or dialects are utilized in a single discussion or form of communication. Code-mixing might highlight how diverse universities are, but it also poses several challenges for higher education (Saud, 2022; Al-Ahdal, 2020). The present study mainly concentrates on the problems with code-mixing in higher education. Also, it discusses the potential consequences it may have

on students' learning, engagement, language development, comprehension, evaluation, and professional readiness. Additionally, it emphasizes how important it is to address these issues in order to give all kids access to a warm and equitable learning environment. In university-level instructional contexts, code-mixing is a growing problem. "Code-mixing" is the practice of combining different languages or dialects in a single discourse or communication. Even though it occurs naturally in a bilingual society, code-mixing can be troublesome when it occurs frequently in academic settings (Kuma et al., 2021; Imran & Ain, 2019; Hamid, 2016). This phenomenon may have an impact on various aspects of student learning and engagement, with the potential to lead to problems with comprehension, the exclusion of non-speakers, unequal participation, limited language development, unfair assessment, and inadequate preparation for professional settings.

To solve these issues, universities must implement effective strategies and policies that promote a linguistically varied and inclusive learning environment. By being aware of the problems that occur at the university level, educational institutions might seek to develop more effective code-mixing regulations. Code-mixing is a common problem among college students for a variety of reasons. First off, universities attract students from a range of linguistic backgrounds who may feel more at ease expressing themselves in their native tongue or the language in which they are most proficient (Nguyen et al., 2022; Lin, 2013). This preference for one's familiar language may result in code-mixing as students switch between their native language and the language of instruction.

Moreover, the academic environment itself might make code-mixing easier. Many concepts and ideas that pupils come across might not have direct analogs in their native tongue (Imran et al., 2019). People may, therefore, utilize code-mixing to fill in the blanks and effectively express their ideas and viewpoints. Additionally, the social dynamics that are present in universities have an impact on code-mixing. Hence, the exploration of code-mixing and code-switching problems among English Language Learners (ELLs) at the University of Sahiwal is not only critical in its own right but also connects to a broader body of literature that delves into language acquisition, multilingualism, and effective pedagogical strategies. Understanding the specific challenges faced by ELLs at the university level is crucial, as it can inform educational policies and practices that enhance their language proficiency and overall academic experience (Gull et al., 2020; Imran & Almusharraf, 2023a).

To this end, the present study has reviewed the recently published related literature to review and synthesize existing studies and findings related to code-mixing and code-switching in ELL contexts. The authors have explored the theoretical foundations of these language phenomena, their implications for language learning and communication, and the factors contributing to their occurrence. By contextualizing our case study within the broader literature, we aim to identify common trends and patterns and highlight the unique aspects of the challenges ELLs face at the University of Sahiwal. Therefore, the literature review section bridges the research's theoretical underpinnings and the practical insights gained from our case study. By examining relevant literature, we will build upon the existing knowledge base and pave the way for a comprehensive analysis of the code-mixing and code-switching issues faced by ELLs at the University of Sahiwal, ultimately contributing to developing effective language instruction and support strategies.

### **1. Literature Review:**

Code-mixing problems can be operationally defined as situations in which university

students mix or switch between languages while communicating, which could cause problems with effective communication, academic collaboration, language proficiency, and language development (Younas et al., 2019). According to Li (2001), code-mixing among university students refers to the practice of incorporating words, phrases, or entire sentences from different languages or language varieties into their speech or written communication, which occurs within the academic environment and is influenced by factors such as language proficiency, social identity, and language attitudes.” (Li, 2001). In Tay’s (1989) views, code-mixing among university students is the intentional and strategic use of multiple languages or language varieties within a single conversation or written text, serving various communicative purposes such as expressing cultural identity, emphasizing certain concepts, or bridging linguistic gaps between speakers of different language backgrounds (Tay, 1989).

Moreover, Nguyen et al. (2022) and Bista (2010) are of the opinion that code-mixing among university students is the phenomenon where individuals blend elements from different languages or language varieties, including vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, in their communication within the university context, influenced by factors such as language proficiency, socialization, and the need to accommodate diverse linguistic backgrounds.

1.1. Understanding Code-Mixing and Code-Switching: Code-mixing and code-switching are intricate linguistic processes that involve the interplay of multiple languages. Researchers have provided various definitions and classifications to better understand these phenomena. Poplack (1980) defines code-switching as “the alternate use of two or more languages in the same stretch of discourse,” while code-mixing refers to the mixing of lexical items or grammatical structures from different languages within a sentence or conversation (Myers-Scotton, 1993).

1.2. Factors Influencing Code-Mixing and Code-Switching: Several factors contribute to the occurrence of code-mixing and code-switching among language learners at the university level. Sociolinguistic factors, such as language proficiency, social identity, and the linguistic environment, play a crucial role (Gardner-Chloros, 2009). Bilingual individuals tend to switch languages to accommodate social contexts, express identity, or display solidarity with specific groups (Wei, 2000). Language proficiency in both the native and target languages can also impact the frequency and patterns of code-mixing and code-switching (Muysken, 2000).

1.3. Challenges Faced by Language Learners: Code-mixing and code-switching can pose several challenges for language learners at the university level. One primary challenge is maintaining linguistic accuracy and fluency in both languages. Research has shown that language learners often struggle to find appropriate lexical items or grammar rules when switching or mixing languages (Wei, 2018; Gull et al., 2020). This can lead to errors, hesitations, or reduced coherence in communication.

1.4. Linguistic and Cognitive Impacts: The occurrence of code-mixing and code-switching can have linguistic and cognitive impacts on language learners. Linguistically, these phenomena can influence language acquisition and production. Some studies suggest that code-switching can have a positive effect on language development, particularly in promoting vocabulary expansion and grammatical awareness (Grosjean, 2001). However, excessive code-switching may hinder language learning, as learners may rely too heavily on their native language (Wei, 2008).

1.5. Social and Cultural Factors: Social and cultural factors also play a role in code-mixing and code-switching among language learners at the university level. Students often code-mix or code-switch to express their cultural identity or connect with peers who share the same linguistic background (Gumperz, 1982). However, social pressures and stigmatization can also affect

language choice, causing language learners to limit their code-mixing or code-switching behavior (Heller, 1988).

1.6. Pedagogical Implications: Understanding the challenges faced by language learners in code-mixing and code-switching has essential pedagogical implications. Language instructors should be aware of the reasons behind these phenomena and provide appropriate guidance and support. Promoting a positive attitude towards code-mixing and code-switching can create a more inclusive environment (Imran & Almusharraf, 2023b; Alenezi, 2010).

These focal areas emphasize essential factors to take into account while analyzing code-mixing issues among university students. Language preferences, communication difficulties, sociolinguistic variables, linguistic norms, academic results, and approaches to dealing with code-mixing are all covered. Knowing these things can help with research, interventions, and policies that support good language and communication development in a variety of academic contexts.

## 2. Research Objectives:

The following are the main goals set for the investigation of this study:

- 1: To determine the typical code-mixing tendencies among university students.
- 2: To look at the variables that affect pupils' code-mixing behavior.
- 3: To investigate how code-mixing affects communication efficiency and academic success.
- 4: To investigate students' and teachers' attitudes and perceptions about code-mixing.
- 5: To put out suggestions and tactics for preventing code-mixing issues in academic environments.

## 3. Research Methodology:

Code-mixing among university students has become a rising source of anxiety in recent years. The phenomenon of combining components from two or more languages into a single discussion or communication event is known as code-mixing (Adjei & Ewusi-Mensah, 2019). Bilingual or multilingual students frequently engage in this behavior, which has become especially widespread in academic environments where students from different linguistic origins coexist (Hughes et al., 2006).

Students, teachers, and the learning environment as a whole are all faced with difficulties as a result of the code-mixing phenomenon. It may impair cognition, hamper communication, and obstruct academic performance. Therefore, it is essential to look into the factors that lead to code-mixing among university students as well as the patterns, effects, and solutions to this problem. The goal of this study is to offer a thorough understanding of the issues with code-mixing that university students encounter. This study aims to illuminate the intricacy of this linguistic phenomenon and its significance for higher education institutions by investigating the underlying reasons causing code-mixing and its effects.

The authors have conducted a mixed-method study based on data collection through a questionnaire and descriptive analysis of the issues and challenges university students face in communication. For this mixed-methods study, 51 students from the University of Sahiwal (31 female and 20 male) were selected randomly. The participants were undergraduate and postgraduate students between the ages of 18 and 24. For this investigation, a straightforward random sampling method was employed. The online survey, through Google Forms, used in this investigation was developed and governed by the Google Docs platform, which enabled real-time communication and collaboration. To assess the students' challenges, a Google Docs survey was conducted. Seven questions make up the survey. The participants were instructed to rate their problems in accordance with each of the seven questions on the questionnaire. Following the successful completion of the survey, Google Docs created a summary of all the scaled responses,

which yielded the percentage of spoken response issues that the findings section interpreted and discussed.

#### 4. Results and Discussion:

Data has been analyzed and the following results have been found:

1: Do you believe that code mixing affects communication and understanding among students?

51 responses

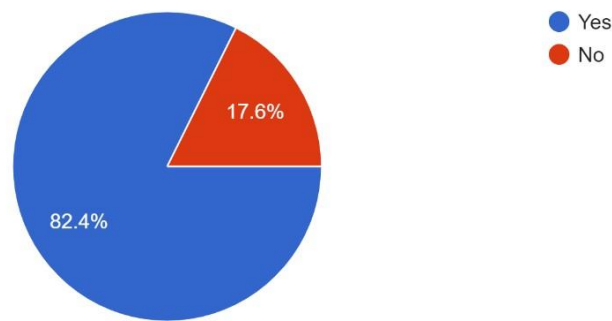


Figure 1

The term code-mixing affects communication and understanding among students as a result of hurdles, misconceptions, and decreased contact; code-mixing hinders student communication and understanding, especially for individuals who do not comprehend all of the languages being mixed. It may obstruct inclusive communication and efficient teamwork among various students. In response to question No. 1, 82.4% of students said yes, and the remaining 17.6% said no.

2: Do you feel that code mixing has any impact on your academic performance?

51 responses

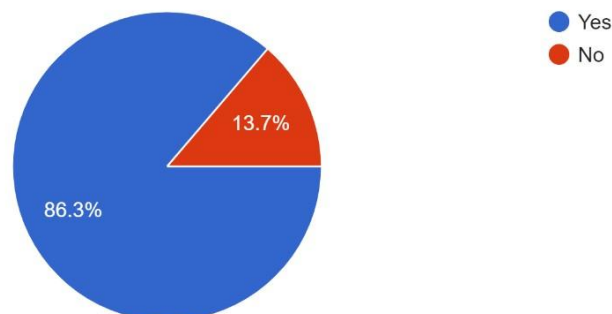


Figure 2

As far as the second question is concerned, code-mixing can have a negative impact on academic performance because it can impair language competence, make it more difficult to understand terminology specific to a given field, and be deemed inappropriate in formal writing assignments or examinations, which could have an impact on students' grades and academic success. From the questionnaire, we found out that 86.3% of students agreed that code-mixing had an impact on their academic performance; the rest of the 13.7% of students didn't feel like that.

3: Are there language support programs or resources available at your university to address code mixing problems?

51 responses

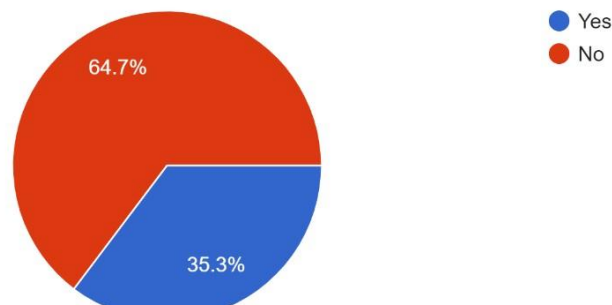


Figure 3

The expression of one's culture and the assertion of one's identity can both benefit from code-mixing. It allows people to speak up about their linguistic background, forge bonds with others in their community, and demonstrate a sense of identity. It can be used as a creative linguistic technique for negotiating meaning and successfully expressing ideas in a multilingual and multicultural setting.

4: Do you feel that code mixing has any positive aspects in terms of cultural expression or identity affirmation?

51 responses

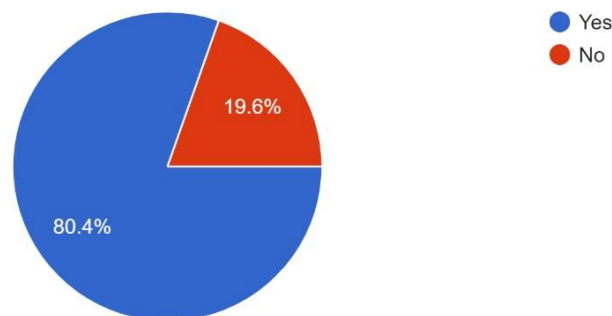


Figure 4

Certain linguistic traits or language combinations can be more difficult for speakers to use

while code-mixing. Grammatical inconsistencies, for instance, might arise by merging languages with various grammatical structures. Pronunciation issues can arise when different phonetic systems in different languages are combined. Comprehension may be more difficult if technical or specialized vocabulary is used from one language to another. Furthermore, it can be challenging to maintain a balance across languages and ensure proper usage and context, especially when jumping between formal and informal registers or when mixing languages with various ability levels.

**5** : Are there specific linguistic features or language combinations that you find more challenging when code mixing?

51 responses

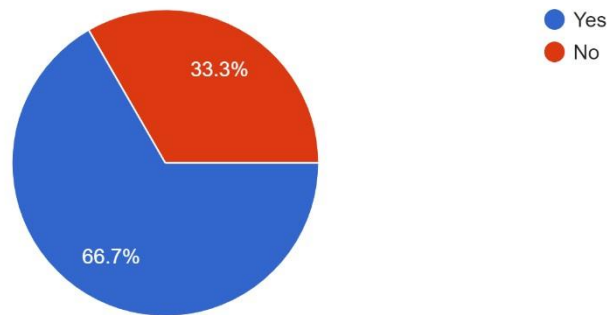


Figure 5:

Code-mixing might indeed make it difficult for students to communicate clearly. When different languages are intermingled, it can cause hurdles and misunderstandings, especially for people who are not fluent in all the languages involved. Code-mixing can make it difficult for listeners to grasp what is being said when several languages or dialects are utilized in the same sentence. As a result, teamwork, group projects, and general interaction among students from various linguistic backgrounds may be hampered.

**6**: Do you believe that code mixing hinders effective communication among students.

51 responses

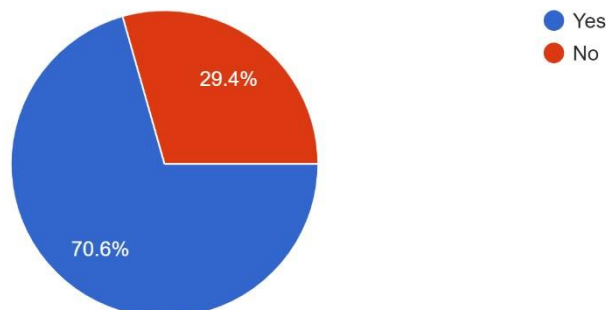


Figure 6:

When it comes to successful communication and academic performance, university students who mix codes face significant obstacles. It is common in many higher education settings for this linguistic phenomenon, characterized by mixing words from several languages in a single speech. Numerous essential implications can be taken from the research done on code-mixing issues among university students.

The study first discovered that code-mixing occurs often among university students, with variable frequencies and patterns. Students mix in various settings, including classrooms, group discussions, and casual talks. Given the students' varied linguistic origins and fluency levels, the types of code-mixing that have been noticed include lexical borrowing, code-switching, and mixing grammatical structures.

Secondly, the investigation discovered a number of variables that affect code-mixing behavior. These characteristics include personal ones such as language competence, language dominance, and bilingual identity, as well as sociocultural ones such as social norms and language preferences in social networks and environmental ones such as vocabulary availability and linguistic accommodations. Understanding these elements is essential to solving code-mixing issues and fostering a friendly language climate.

Thirdly, the impact of code-mixing on communication quality and academic achievement is significant. When two or more languages are mixed together, it can be easier to grasp and communicate nuanced concepts. Still, it can also make communication more difficult, especially for individuals who are unfamiliar with the combined languages. Furthermore, code-mixing may have a detrimental impact on academic achievement because it may cause confusion, inadequate knowledge of the course contents, and problems articulating complicated ideas coherently. The study also emphasized university students' attitudes and beliefs about code-mixing. While some students consider code-mixing a natural and inventive language practice, others see it as a barrier to language learning or an indication of low language competency. To foster a healthy learning environment that supports linguistic diversity and encourages effective communication, educators and institutions must consider these attitudes and address them.

## **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, code-mixing among students in higher education is a challenging linguistic phenomenon that needs careful study and comprehension. It is clear from the research on code-mixing issues among university students that solving these challenges is essential for fostering effective communication, raising academic achievement, and supporting language inclusion in higher education settings. Universities may foster a linguistically diverse atmosphere, allow meaningful connections, and ultimately improve the educational opportunities for all students by putting in place the proper techniques and initiatives.

Code-mixing and code-switching are prevalent phenomena among language learners at the university level. Sociolinguistic factors, language proficiency, and social and cultural dynamics influence these linguistic processes. Language learners face challenges maintaining linguistic accuracy and fluency while engaging in code-mixing and code-switching. However, these phenomena can also have positive linguistic and cognitive impacts, such as vocabulary expansion and grammatical awareness. Creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment that acknowledges the reasons behind code-mixing and code-switching is crucial for language instructors. Further research and pedagogical interventions are needed to better understand and address the challenges language learners face in code-mixing and code-switching at the university level.



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