Communicative competence in multilingual contexts: Code-switching, translanguaging, and EMI in Naama, Algeria

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Abstract
This study examines self-perceived linguistic and communicative competence and attitudes toward code-switching in the multilingual academic community of Naama, Algeria, addressing the problem that knowledge of grammatical structures alone does not ensure effective communication. In Naama, speakers navigate Arabic varieties, Tamazight forms, and French, with English serving as a global lingua franca. To explore this, the study used a mixed-methods questionnaire administered via Google Forms to 55 participants (49 students and 6 teachers; 45 in English language studies and 10 in scientific disciplines). Closed-ended items measured self-assessed competence, reasons for code-switching, and attitudes, while open-ended questions explored when code-switching helps, communication challenges, and perceived differences between scientific and English students. Code-switching was reported as a conscious, functional strategy: 36 participants (65.5%) said they switch deliberately to achieve a communicative goal, and "it helps me explain better" was the most frequent reason (65.5%). Most participants rated themselves positively on vocabulary (89.1%) and interaction (72.7%), but only 56.4% could often or always explain complex ideas clearly, and limited vocabulary and fear of mistakes were the challenges mentioned most. Attitudes were favourable but cautious: 70.9% agreed that code-switching improves understanding, and no participant rejected the idea that excessive use may reduce exposure to English. The study suggests that purposeful code-switching can support communication and learning in this setting, while the small and unbalanced sample and the reliance on self-report limit generalisation.

Keywords: *linguistic competence, communicative competence, multilingualism, sociolinguistic norms, code-switching, translanguaging, English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI)*

Introduction

Multilingual societies often exhibit complex patterns of language use in both spoken and digital communication, among which code-switching—the alternation between two or more languages within a communicative event (Poplack, 1980)—occupies a central role (Jeghan et al., 2025; Nair, 2025; Shavkatovna, 2025). Traditionally viewed as a spontaneous outcome of language contact, code-switching has increasingly been understood as a deliberate communicative strategy that indexes identity, facilitates meaning negotiation, and responds to social and contextual demands (Gumperz, 1982; Myers-Scotton, 1993; Silverstein, 1976). Recent research across sociolinguistics and digital discourse indicates that code-switching is not simply a by-product of linguistic competence but a strategic resource actively deployed by speakers, especially in online and media-rich environments (Daulay et al., 2024; Haya, 2025; Jofita & Haryanto, 2025). Code-switching is also documented in written multilingual texts and their translations (Alzain, 2024).

In Algeria, a historically and socially multilingual country, speakers habitually alternate between Algerian Arabic (Darja), Modern Standard Arabic, French, and English in both face-to-face and mediated interactions. These practices reflect the layered sociolinguistic ecology of the nation, shaped by colonial histories, educational policies, and globalization dynamics. Although several studies have examined code-switching within Algerian internet and social media contexts (e.g. Facebook, Instagram; Belaidouni & Kherbache, 2024; Hamzaoui & Zerrouk, 2022; Zitouni & Saaid, 2019) as part of broader digital language practices, the relationship between code-switching, linguistic competence, and communicative competence remains comparatively underexplored.

With the rapid proliferation of social media platforms and digital advertising, language practices in these spaces have taken on new sociocultural significance. Code-switching in social media captions, live sales, and influencer discourse has been shown to serve not only expressive and referential functions but also identity performance, audience engagement, and persuasive impact in digital communication (Belaidouni & Kherbache, 2024; Daulay et al., 2024; Haya, 2025; Jofita & Haryanto, 2025). Sociocontextual factors have also been shown to influence code-switching among university students (Prosper, 2025). Within this evolving landscape, understanding how speakers gauge their own competence and negotiate communicative effectiveness through code-switching becomes crucial for sociolinguistic inquiry and educational policy.

The present study addresses these gaps by examining code-switching practices and their relationship to linguistic and communicative competence within the speech community of Naama, Algeria. Using a mixed-methods questionnaire administered via Google Forms, the research investigates patterns of code-switching, self-perceived competence, communicative effectiveness, and attitudes toward multilingual practices. By integrating structural and sociolinguistic perspectives, the study offers a context-sensitive account of how multilingual speakers in Naama report using their repertoires in academic communication, thereby contributing empirically grounded insight to debates on multilingual competence in Algerian higher education.

Theoretical background

This study is grounded in sociolinguistic theories of multilingualism, particularly translanguaging theory and research on English-Medium Instruction (EMI) in Algerian higher education. Algerian universities operate in a complex linguistic ecology, where Arabic, French, and English coexist within academic spaces. Understanding language use in such contexts requires moving beyond monolingual frameworks and recognizing the strategic mobilization of multiple linguistic resources in teaching and learning.

Within this multilingual environment, linguistic competence and communicative competence function as complementary dimensions of academic interaction. Linguistic competence provides knowledge of grammatical and lexical structures, forming the foundation for communicative competence, which enables participants to negotiate meaning, manage discourse, and perform academic identities across languages. In EMI classrooms, effective communication is rarely achieved through English alone; rather, it emerges from the strategic coordination of available linguistic resources in response to contextual demands, pedagogical objectives, and interlocutors' needs.

Strategic code-switching constitutes a key mechanism through which linguistic and communicative competences are jointly realized. In Algerian EMI settings, instructors and students frequently shift between English, Arabic, and French to clarify concepts, scaffold understanding, maintain interactional flow, and ensure disciplinary precision (García & Li, 2014; Jiang & Zhang, 2023). These practices are indicative of sophisticated multilingual communicative competence, rather than insufficient English proficiency.

Integrating translanguaging and code-switching within a unified theoretical framework conceptualizes EMI classroom discourse as a site where linguistic competence, communicative competence, and multilingual practices converge to support meaning-making. This perspective challenges English-only

ideologies and highlights the pedagogical value of strategic multilingualism in Algerian higher education (García & Li, 2014).

Multilingualism as social practice

Recent sociolinguistic scholarship conceptualizes multilingualism as socially situated practice rather than the coexistence of discrete, bounded languages. Language is dynamic, fluid, and interactionally achieved, embedded within broader social, cultural, historical, and institutional contexts. Multilingual speakers actively select, combine, and adapt linguistic resources to achieve communicative goals, reflecting purposeful, context-sensitive language use (García & Li, 2014).

Multilingual competence is holistic and flexible, enabling speakers to draw on multiple resources in complementary ways. In educational contexts, meaning-making and knowledge construction rely on this strategic coordination of languages, highlighting the limitations of monolingual policies that ignore multilingual realities. Empirical studies show that students and teachers routinely employ multiple languages to negotiate meaning, scaffold learning, and manage classroom interaction, practices that are central to academic communication (García & Li, 2014; Jiang & Zhang, 2023).

Translanguaging theory

Translanguaging theory frames communication as an integrated process in which speakers flexibly deploy their full linguistic repertoires to meet interactional, cognitive, and contextual demands. This perspective challenges monolingual ideologies and positions multilingualism as a legitimate, productive, and constitutive dimension of meaning-making (García & Li, 2014).

In educational research, translanguaging has been shown to enhance comprehension, foster participation, and support engagement with academic content by allowing learners to draw on familiar languages alongside the medium of instruction. Translanguaging spaces enable complex concepts to be negotiated effectively and support critical thinking, problem-solving, and metalinguistic awareness (García & Li, 2014; Jiang & Zhang, 2023). Translanguaging also highlights power dynamics and language hierarchies, revealing how dominant languages, particularly English, may marginalize local languages and how speakers navigate or resist monolingual norms to achieve learning goals (García & Li, 2014; Irvine & Gal, 2000).

English-Medium Instruction (EMI)

EMI involves teaching academic subjects in English in contexts where English is not the first language for most participants. Globally, EMI has expanded due to internationalization policies and English's status as the lingua franca of academia. While EMI can enhance access to global scholarship and employability, English-only policies may impede comprehension, restrict interaction, and exacerbate inequalities, especially when students' English proficiency varies.

Research consistently highlights the importance of multilingual practices within EMI classrooms: instructors and students frequently deploy additional languages to clarify concepts, scaffold learning, and manage discourse, indicating that EMI is rarely strictly monolingual in practice (Jiang & Zhang, 2023).

Integrating translanguaging and EMI

Integrating translanguaging theory with EMI research provides a nuanced understanding of language use in higher education. Rather than viewing EMI as English-only, a translanguaging-informed perspective recognizes it as inherently multilingual, shaped by participants' repertoires, institutional norms, and sociopolitical context. This approach emphasizes actual language practice and highlights the dynamic, context-sensitive nature of academic communication (García & Li, 2014; Jiang & Zhang, 2023).

In Algeria, Arabic, French, and English coexist in higher education, and despite policies designating English as the medium of instruction, multiple languages remain in use to facilitate comprehension,

manage interaction, and scaffold learning. By examining these practices in the Naama speech community, the present study addresses the scarcity of empirical research on EMI through a translanguaging lens in North Africa and links this broader framework to concrete self-reported patterns of code-switching, competence, and attitudes.

Research questions

Based on the theoretical framework and prior research on code-switching, linguistic competence, and multilingual practices, the present study is guided by the following research questions:

1. For what reasons, and in which classroom situations, do participants report code-switching?
2. How do participants perceive their linguistic and communicative competence in relation to code-switching?
3. What are participants' attitudes toward code-switching in academic settings?

The following section presents the methodology employed to address these research questions, including participants, instruments, data collection, and analysis procedures.

Methodology

To investigate code-switching practices and their relationship to linguistic and communicative competence within the Naama speech community, this study adopted a systematic methodological framework grounded in sociolinguistic research principles. The following subsections present the research design, participant profile, data collection tools, and analytical procedures, all of which were explicitly aligned with the research questions to ensure validity and transparency.

Research design

The design of the questionnaire, the selection of participants, and the data analysis procedures were all derived from the study's research questions to ensure that each stage directly addressed the intended objectives. Given the exploratory nature of the study, no formal hypotheses were formulated. The research questions directly guided the design of the questionnaire, data collection procedures, and analysis. A mixed-methods research design was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine code-switching practices and their relationship to linguistic and communicative competence in the Naama speech community. This choice reflected the complex and multidimensional nature of code-switching, which involves both observable linguistic patterns and speakers' subjective perceptions, attitudes, and communicative intentions.

The quantitative component aimed to identify general tendencies in participants' self-assessed competence, reasons for code-switching, and attitudes toward it. These data provided an overview of dominant patterns within the sample.

Complementing this, the qualitative component sought to capture interpretive and experiential dimensions of code-switching that cannot be adequately represented through numerical data alone. Open-ended questionnaire items invited participants to elaborate on their language choices, explain the motivations underlying their code-switching practices, and reflect on how multilingual resources contribute to effective communication in different contexts. This qualitative insight enriched the analysis by foregrounding participants' voices and contextualizing statistical trends within lived communicative experiences.

By integrating quantitative breadth with qualitative depth, the mixed-methods design enabled a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of code-switching as both a linguistic phenomenon and a communicative strategy. This approach aligns with sociolinguistic research traditions that emphasize the interplay between language structure, social meaning, and speaker agency, making it particularly suitable for examining multilingual practices in an Algerian context.

Research context

The study was conducted in Naama, a province in western Algeria, characterized by sustained multilingualism and language contact. At the national level, Algeria displays a complex linguistic ecology in which Algerian Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), Tamazight, French, and increasingly English coexist across social, educational, and institutional domains. While MSA holds official status, Algerian Arabic dominates everyday interaction, French remains influential in education and professional communication, and English has gained prominence through higher education, digital media, and globalized discourse.

Within this broader context, Naama constitutes a dynamic multilingual speech community where speakers routinely navigate multiple linguistic resources. Language choice is shaped by context, audience, and communicative purpose, which is reflected in the code-switching practices reported in this study. This environment provides a relevant and empirically rich setting for examining code-switching practices and their relationship to linguistic and communicative competence in contemporary Algerian society.

Participants

The study included 55 participants aged 19–52 (M = 24.9), recruited through convenience sampling, who reported regular engagement in multilingual communication. The sample consisted of 49 students (89.1%) and 6 university teachers (10.9%) from Naama. In terms of field, 45 participants (81.8%) were in English language studies and 10 (18.2%) in scientific disciplines (the 6 teachers and 4 students). Of the 55 participants, 33 (60.0%) were female and 22 (40.0%) male. The student participants were mostly at undergraduate level (L3: 39), with 7 at Master's and 3 at Doctorate level. This composition provided exposure to diverse academic backgrounds and levels of linguistic competence relevant to code-switching practices.

Research instrument

Data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire designed to elicit both quantitative and qualitative information on participants' code-switching practices and perceptions of linguistic and communicative competence. The questionnaire was administered online via Google Forms and was written in English, reflecting its relevance as an academic and professional language within higher education contexts.

The instrument consisted of four parts. The first gathered demographic information: age, gender, status (student or teacher), field of study or teaching, university, and academic level. The second asked participants to rate their general level in English (excellent, good, or average) and to respond to seven self-assessment statements on vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, confidence in expressing academic ideas, explaining complex ideas, compensation strategies, adapting language to the situation, and comfort in academic interaction, using agreement or frequency scales. The third addressed code-switching through a multiple-choice question on the main reasons for switching, a statement on conscious switching, and five attitude items (understanding in academic discussions, teachers' use in lectures, usefulness for students who struggle with English, possible reduction of exposure to English, and overall positive or negative impact). The final part comprised four open-ended questions on when code-switching is most helpful, the challenges of communicating in English in academic settings, how teachers can help, and whether scientific and English students have different reasons for code-switching.

Participants were approached in person prior to data collection and were invited to take part in the study.

Data collection procedure

The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms, allowing participants to complete it at their convenience and ensuring efficient data collection.

Data analysis

Related questionnaire items were first grouped into broader analytical categories (self-assessed competence, reasons for code-switching, and attitudes) to facilitate quantitative analysis. The study then employed mixed-methods data analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of code-switching practices and their relationship to linguistic and communicative competence.

For the quantitative data, frequencies and percentages were calculated for each closed-ended item (N = 55). Responses to the self-assessment items were grouped into three categories: positive (strongly agree or agree, always or often, yes), intermediate (neutral, sometimes, partly, not always), and negative (disagree, rarely or never, no). One response to one item was invalid and was excluded from that item. Results are also reported separately for students and teachers and for participants in English language studies and in scientific disciplines where this is informative; because the groups are small and unequal, these comparisons are descriptive only.

The qualitative data were analysed using a systematic thematic analysis. First, all open-ended responses were read several times to gain familiarity and to identify initial ideas related to code-switching functions, perceived competence, and attitudes. Second, segments of text were coded inductively and deductively, using labels such as “clarifying concepts”, “compensating for vocabulary gaps”, “group work”, “anxiety and confidence”, “field-specific terminology”, and “practice and feedback”, which were informed by the research questions and the theoretical framework. Third, related codes were clustered into broader themes corresponding to the research questions (reasons and situations for code-switching, perceived competence and challenges, and attitudes and pedagogical suggestions). These themes were iteratively refined to ensure that they captured recurring patterns in participants’ perspectives and experiences with code-switching.

Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings enhanced the validity and richness of the analysis. Quantitative results identified overall trends in self-assessed competence, reasons for code-switching, and attitudes, while qualitative themes provided interpretive depth by illustrating how participants themselves explained and evaluated these practices in academic settings. This combined approach allowed for a nuanced account of multilingual practices in Naama and their links to linguistic and communicative competence.

Methodological rigor and alignment

To ensure that the study’s instruments and analyses were rigorously aligned with the research objectives, each questionnaire item was explicitly designed to correspond to one or more research questions. Demographic items contextualized participants’ linguistic repertoires, closed-ended items captured measurable patterns of code-switching and self-rated competence, and open-ended items explored participants’ perceptions and experiences. This careful alignment ensured that data collection directly addressed the study’s aims.

The study employed methodological triangulation, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative analysis provided an overview of trends and distributions in code-switching practices and competence ratings, while qualitative analysis added interpretive depth by revealing participants’ motivations, attitudes, and contextualized experiences. Triangulating these data sources enhanced the validity and comprehensiveness of the findings.

Coding and analysis procedures were conducted transparently and systematically. For qualitative data, open-ended responses were coded thematically following recognized procedures, with codes iteratively refined to reflect emerging patterns. To ensure reliability, inter-coder agreement was checked by having an independent researcher review a sample of coded data, and discrepancies were discussed and resolved collaboratively. This combination of systematic coding, triangulation, and explicit alignment with research objectives strengthened the methodological rigor and credibility of the study.

Ethical considerations

Ethical guidelines were strictly adhered to throughout the study. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed that they could withdraw at any stage without any negative consequences. Before accessing the questionnaire, participants were given an information statement outlining the purpose of the study, its academic nature, the procedures, and the expected time required for completion. Informed consent was obtained verbally during the initial in-person contact and was confirmed electronically when participants submitted their responses after reading the information statement. Anonymity was ensured by not collecting any personally identifying information, all responses were treated confidentially, and access to the data was restricted to the researchers. All data were used exclusively for academic research purposes, in accordance with standard ethical practices in sociolinguistic and educational research.

Results

This section presents the findings in relation to the research questions. Quantitative results from the closed-ended items (N = 55) are reported first, followed by qualitative insights from the open-ended responses. Differences between students (n = 49) and teachers (n = 6), and between participants in English language studies (n = 45) and in scientific disciplines (n = 10), are reported only where the data allow.

Reasons and situations for code-switching (RQ1)

The analysis identified three main themes: deliberate and goal-oriented code-switching, explanation and comprehension as the dominant reason, and group work as the most frequently mentioned situation. Quantitatively, 36 participants (65.5%) said that they consciously switch languages to achieve a communicative goal such as clarifying, explaining, or simplifying, and the other 19 (34.5%) said that they do so sometimes. As Table 1 shows, the most frequent reason was that code-switching helps participants explain better (65.5%), followed by making communication easier (27.3%), lacking vocabulary in English (20.0%), and saving time (18.2%). Participants could select more than one reason, and 22 (40.0%) chose “It helps me explain better” as their only reason. Code-switching was also seen as common among teachers: 49 participants (89.1%) reported that teachers in their department use it at least sometimes during lectures (sometimes 27, often 16, always 6), while 6 (10.9%) said rarely.

Table 1: Reasons for code-switching (N = 55; multiple answers allowed)

Reason	n	%
It helps me explain better	36	65.5
It makes communication easier	15	27.3
I lack vocabulary in English	11	20.0
It saves time	10	18.2

Qualitative responses showed when code-switching was seen as most useful. Twenty-four of the 55 respondents mentioned group work or teamwork, and 23 referred to clarifying, explaining, or understanding difficult ideas or words. Typical comments were: “It helps most when clarifying difficult ideas and ensuring everyone understands” and “Code-switching is helpful when students lack vocabulary or confidence, as it helps them continue communication”. These accounts point to comprehension and keeping communication going as the main functions.

Taken together, these findings address RQ1 by indicating that code-switching is reported mainly as a purposeful strategy for explanation and comprehension, particularly in collaborative work, rather than as a random habit; vocabulary gaps were cited by a minority (20.0%).

Perceptions of linguistic competence (RQ2)

Analysis of self-ratings and open-ended responses revealed two main themes: a generally positive self-evaluation of English, and persistent difficulties with vocabulary and confidence.

Quantitatively, 3 participants (5.5%) rated their general level in English as excellent, 39 (70.9%) as good, and 13 (23.6%) as average. As Table 2 shows, 49 (89.1%) agreed or strongly agreed that they understand most of the vocabulary used in their field, 37 (67.3%) said they often or always produce grammatically correct sentences, and 35 (63.6%) felt confident expressing academic ideas, while 18 (32.7%) felt so only partly.

Qualitative comments about challenges confirmed this picture. Limited vocabulary was mentioned in 33 of the 55 responses, and fear of mistakes, anxiety, or low confidence in 17. Pronunciation or accent (7 responses) and grammar (5) were mentioned less often, and two teachers in scientific disciplines referred to the difficulty of respecting scientific terminology. One student wrote that the main challenges were "limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, understanding academic terms, and expressing ideas clearly and confidently".

These findings address RQ2 by indicating that participants mostly evaluate their English positively but see vocabulary and confidence as the main obstacles, and that code-switching is one of the ways they cope with these gaps.

Communicative competence (RQ2)

Self-assessed communicative competence was also generally positive, though less so for explaining complex ideas. Forty participants (72.7%) said they feel comfortable interacting with classmates or colleagues in English during academic tasks, 38 of 54 valid responses (70.4%) said they can use another expression when they cannot find the right word, and 34 (61.8%) said they can adapt their language to the situation. Only 31 (56.4%) said they can often or always explain complex ideas clearly, and 4 (7.3%) said rarely or never.

Table 2: Self-assessed linguistic and communicative competence (N = 55)

Statement	Positive n (%)	Intermediate n (%)	Negative n (%)
I can understand most of the vocabulary used in my field	49 (89.1)	5 (9.1)	1 (1.8)
I can produce grammatically correct sentences	37 (67.3)	18 (32.7)	0 (0.0)
I feel confident expressing academic ideas	35 (63.6)	18 (32.7)	2 (3.6)
I can explain complex ideas clearly when speaking	31 (56.4)	20 (36.4)	4 (7.3)
I can use another expression when I lack the right word (N = 54)	38 (70.4)	14 (25.9)	2 (3.7)
I can adapt my language to the situation	34 (61.8)	19 (34.5)	2 (3.6)
I feel comfortable interacting in English in academic tasks	40 (72.7)	14 (25.5)	1 (1.8)

Note. Positive = strongly agree/agree, always/often, or yes; intermediate = neutral, sometimes, partly, or not always; negative = disagree, rarely/never, or no. Percentages are of 55 participants, except the compensation item (N = 54; one invalid response).

Qualitative comments linked communicative competence to practice and feedback. When asked how teachers can help, 17 respondents mentioned practice and 14 mentioned feedback, and others suggested interactive activities such as debates, discussions, and group work. Two respondents asked for less code-switching: one suggested "gradually reducing reliance on code-switching" and another "not switching language a lot".

Taken together, these findings suggest that participants feel competent in everyday academic interaction and use strategies such as paraphrasing and code-switching to sustain it, while clarity in complex explanations remains a weaker area, which addresses RQ2.

Attitudes toward code-switching (RQ3)

Analysis of RQ3 revealed two main attitudinal themes: general acceptance of code-switching as helpful for understanding, and caution about excessive use.

Quantitatively, 39 participants (70.9%) agreed or strongly agreed that code-switching improves understanding in scientific or academic discussions, 12 (21.8%) were neutral, and 4 (7.3%) disagreed (Table 3). Asked about its overall impact, 31 (56.4%) said it has both positive and negative effects, 20 (36.4%) said positive, 3 (5.5%) negative, and 1 (1.8%) no impact. No participant rejected the idea that excessive code-switching can reduce exposure to English: 24 (43.6%) said yes and 31 (56.4%) said partly. Twenty-eight (50.9%) said code-switching is a useful strategy for students who struggle with English, and the other 27 (49.1%) said maybe.

Table 3: Attitudes toward code-switching (N = 55)

Statement	Yes / agree n (%)	Neutral / partly / maybe n (%)	No / disagree n (%)
Code-switching helps improve understanding in scientific or academic discussions	39 (70.9)	12 (21.8)	4 (7.3)
Code-switching is a useful strategy for students who struggle with English	28 (50.9)	27 (49.1)	0 (0.0)
Excessive code-switching can reduce students' exposure to English	24 (43.6)	31 (56.4)	0 (0.0)

Group comparisons are descriptive because the groups are small and unequal. Agreement that code-switching improves understanding was 31 of 45 (68.9%) among participants in English language studies and 8 of 10 (80.0%) in scientific disciplines, and 34 of 49 students (69.4%) and 5 of 6 teachers (83.3%). Lack of English vocabulary was chosen as a reason by 8 of 45 (17.8%) participants in English language studies and 3 of 10 (30.0%) in scientific disciplines. When asked whether scientific and English students have different reasons for code-switching, 36 respondents answered yes and 8 answered no. Typical explanations were that scientific students switch mainly to deal with technical terms, while English students switch to practise the language and express ideas: "Scientific students code-switch mainly to clarify technical terms, while English students do it to practice language and express ideas more fluently".

These findings address RQ3 by indicating favourable but cautious attitudes: participants value code-switching for comprehension, yet recognise the risk of reduced exposure to English.

Discussion

The purpose of this section is to interpret the study's findings and relate them to existing research on code-switching, translanguaging, and communicative competence. The discussion follows the structure of the research questions, integrating quantitative trends with qualitative insights to explain how multilingual practices function within the Naama speech community and what they reveal about language use in EMI and everyday academic communication.

RQ1: Reasons and situations for code-switching

The findings indicate that code-switching is reported as a deliberate and mainly functional practice: every participant said they switch consciously at least sometimes, and the leading reasons were to explain better and to make communication easier. This is consistent with the view that code-switching is a strategic resource rather than a by-product of limited competence (Gumperz, 1982; Myers-Scotton, 1993). Only 20.0% cited a lack of vocabulary, which suggests that for most participants switching serves communicative purposes beyond filling gaps.

The open-ended answers point the same way: participants most often linked code-switching to group work and to clarifying difficult ideas. Such reports can be interpreted as translanguaging practices in which learners draw on their full repertoire to make meaning (García & Li, 2014; Jiang & Zhang, 2023). The questionnaire did not ask about frequency by context, language combinations, or online use, so the study cannot show how code-switching differs between informal, digital, and academic settings.

RQ2: Perceptions of linguistic and communicative competence

Participants generally evaluated their English positively, especially their understanding of field vocabulary and their ease of interaction, but were less sure about explaining complex ideas clearly and about confidence in expressing academic ideas. Open-ended responses highlighted vocabulary gaps and fear of mistakes as the main obstacles.

These results are consistent with repertoire-based models of linguistic competence (García & Li, 2014), in which multilingual ability is an integrated resource rather than fragmented proficiency: participants who report difficulty with English vocabulary also report ways of keeping communication going, including code-switching. The data are self-reports and should be read as perceived rather than measured competence.

RQ3: Attitudes toward multilingual practices in EMI and everyday communication

The study also revealed generally favourable but cautious attitudes. Most participants agreed that code-switching improves understanding, and most saw its effects as positive or mixed. Open-ended responses suggested that it helps clarify ideas and sustain group work, while some respondents recommended gradually reducing reliance on it. Agreement was somewhat higher among participants in scientific disciplines and among teachers, but these groups are small and the differences should not be generalised.

These findings are in line with Gumperz's (1982) view of code-switching as a meaningful rather than deficient practice, although the questionnaire did not capture interactional detail. They indicate that participants see multilingual practices as functional and pedagogically useful while recognising the risk of reduced exposure to English. This has implications for EMI-related teaching in Algeria: acknowledging learners' repertoires may promote comprehension and participation, provided that sufficient English input is maintained and institutional expectations for assessment are respected.

Integration and theoretical implications

Across the three research questions, the study indicates that code-switching among these participants is reported as purposeful and functional, and is linked to a generally positive but uneven self-assessment

of competence. Conceptually, the results are consistent with repertoire-based and translanguaging perspectives in an under-researched Algerian province. The study thus extends earlier work on multilingual practices in education (Jiang & Zhang, 2023) by documenting how learners and teachers in Naama perceive them.

Importantly, the findings suggest that strictly monolingual-oriented EMI policies deserve reconsideration. Instead of viewing code-switching as a barrier, educators and policy-makers can adopt pedagogical strategies that integrate translanguaging practices, such as allowing judicious use of L1 or French in explanations, scaffolding comprehension, and encouraging students to draw on their full repertoires in preparatory discussions and collaborative work. Such an approach aligns with the practices reported by participants in Naama and fosters positive attitudes toward multilingual competence, which may support long-term academic success in EMI contexts while maintaining appropriate expectations for formal assessment.

Practical implications for EMI classrooms

The findings suggest several practical implications for EMI classrooms in Algeria.

- Recognize code-switching as an asset: Teachers should acknowledge and validate students' use of multiple languages as a legitimate communicative tool that can support understanding and participation.
- Integrate translanguaging strategies: Instruction can strategically allow or scaffold the use of L1 and French to support comprehension of complex English content, especially in conceptually demanding courses.
- Promote student agency: Encouraging students to alternate languages purposefully can enhance engagement and support the development of both linguistic and communicative competence.
- Develop teacher awareness: Professional development should include training on the pedagogical benefits and practical management of multilingual practices in EMI contexts, helping teachers to balance institutional requirements with students' communicative needs.

Conclusion

This study suggests that, among the 55 participants from Naama, code-switching is a deliberate and mainly functional strategy used to explain, clarify, and sustain communication, especially in group work. Participants evaluated their English positively but reported weaker confidence in explaining complex ideas and persistent vocabulary gaps. Their attitudes were favourable but cautious, since none rejected the idea that excessive code-switching can reduce exposure to English. These findings are consistent with repertoire-based, context-sensitive models of linguistic and communicative competence.

Conceptually, the study supports a view of communicative competence as enacted through the coordinated use of several languages. From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest that multilingual practices can be useful in English-Medium Instruction (EMI) settings when they are acknowledged and guided rather than suppressed, while keeping sufficient exposure to English.

Moving beyond rigid English-only approaches and incorporating translanguaging-informed strategies can foster inclusion, comprehension, and engagement in ways that better reflect students' natural communicative behaviour and local linguistic ecologies. Recognizing code-switching as a legitimate and potentially productive resource allows educators to design more realistic, effective, and culturally responsive teaching and, where appropriate, assessment practices that align classroom instruction with learners' lived multilingual experiences.

The study has several limitations. The sample is small, recruited by convenience, and unbalanced: 49 students and 6 teachers, and 45 participants in English language studies and 10 in scientific disciplines, so group comparisons are descriptive only. The data are self-reported and may not capture spontaneous language use. The questionnaire did not measure how often participants code-switch in different

contexts, which languages they combine, or their proficiency in Arabic and French. Future research could address these limitations through larger and more balanced samples, classroom observation, and longitudinal designs.

Overall, this research contributes to a nuanced understanding of the educational role of language by situating multilingual practices, translanguaging, and code-switching at the centre of academic communication in Algeria and comparable multilingual societies. By documenting how learners and instructors report navigating multiple languages, the study underscores the importance of valuing linguistic diversity as an asset in higher education, with implications for sociolinguistic theory, classroom pedagogy, and language policy.

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