



## Exploring Code Switching and its Educational Implications Among Lower Primary Bilingual Students

*Original scientific paper*

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### Abstract

*This research investigates language practices, including code-switching and code-mixing, among lower primary bilingual students, age 8-11, in an Albanian language instruction school. The primary aim is to explore the dynamics of language use, perceptions, and behaviors among students and teachers. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study incorporates student and teacher questionnaires, as well as observational data. Findings reveal the prevalence of Bosnian in home environments, with students exhibiting a preference for Albanian in classroom settings. Teachers recognize code switching as a pedagogical tool but express concerns about students' overreliance on Bosnian. Observational data illuminate nuanced language choices and patterns of code switching among students, highlighting the complexity of bilingual communication in educational contexts.*

**Keywords:** code switching, bilingualism, language acquisition, multilingualism, elementary school students

In multilingual societies, the phenomenon of code-switching and code-mixing holds significant relevance, especially within educational contexts where diverse linguistic practices intersect. This research delves into the intricacies of language use among lower primary bilingual students, aged 8-11, attending an Albanian language instruction school. The primary objective is

to elucidate the dynamics of code-switching, alongside code-mixing, examining the perceptions and behaviors of both students and teachers. By adopting a mixed-methods approach encompassing student and teacher questionnaires alongside observational data, this study endeavors to provide comprehensive insights into the prevalence, motivations, and implications of code-

switching in this specific educational setting.

Code-switching and code-mixing have garnered substantial attention in bilingualism and language acquisition research due to their pervasive presence in linguistic interactions. These phenomena offer a lens through which the complex interplay between languages and socio-cultural contexts can be understood (Grosjean, 2016). Understanding the dynamics of code-switching in primary education is particularly crucial for effective language instruction and the cultivation of bilingual proficiency (García, 2009). Previous studies conducted in Kosovo have shed light on code-switching practices among Albanian students in educational settings, emphasizing its facilitative role in comprehension and communication (Shabani, Munishi, & Sadiku, 2022; Sallauka & Janusheva, 2023).

Beyond Kosovo, research in other contexts has contributed valuable insights into code-switching and code-mixing in primary education. For instance, studies conducted in the United States have highlighted the scaffolding function of code-switching in promoting learning among bilingual students (García & Wei, 2014). Poplack (1980) contributes to the understanding of code-switching by proposing a typology that categorizes different types of code-switching instances, offering a framework for analyzing this linguistic phenomenon. Blommaert (2013) provides insights into the complexity of linguistic landscapes and their relationship with super diversity, emphasizing the need for ethnographic approaches to understand the intricacies of language use in diverse settings. This perspective enriches our understanding of how linguistic practices are embedded within broader sociocultural contexts.

In the specific context of bilingual education, understanding the motivations and implications of code-switching is imperative for informed pedagogical practices and language policy development. By scrutinizing the linguistic practices of students and teachers, researchers can advocate for educational approaches that embrace linguistic diversity, foster inclusivity, and enhance academic outcomes among bilingual learners (Grosjean, 2016; García, 2009).

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys, observational data, and qualitative interviews to comprehensively investigate code-switching and code-mixing among lower primary bilingual students. Such an approach allows for the triangulation of data sources, offering a nuanced understanding of language practices, perceptions, and their socio-cultural underpinnings within the educational context. Through this research endeavor, we aim to contribute to the burgeoning discourse on bilingual education, informing evidence-based practices that support the linguistic and academic development of diverse student populations.

## Literature Review

Code-switching and code-mixing have been extensively studied phenomena in bilingualism and language acquisition and educational research. These linguistic behaviors, prevalent in multilingual societies, offer insights into the complex interactions between languages and the socio-cultural contexts in which they are used (Grosjean, 2016). According to Bialystok (2001), "bilingualism involves far more than learning two languages; it entails the acquisition of a set of cognitive skills and the ability to manage two linguistic systems effectively," highlighting the cognitive benefits and complexities of bilingualism.

In the context of primary education, understanding code-switching and code-mixing practices among students and teachers is crucial for effective language instruction and bilingual development (García, 2009). Hoff (2006) emphasizes that "social contexts support and shape language development," which underscores the importance of understanding the environments in which bilingual children are learning. Research conducted in Kosovo has shed light on the dynamics of code-switching in educational settings. For instance, Shabani, Munishi, and Sadiku (2022) investigated code-switching among Albanian students in international schools in Prishtina, highlighting the influence of English on Albanian speech patterns. Similarly, Sallauka and Janusheva (2022) explored code-switching in English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms in Kosovo, emphasizing its role in facilitating comprehension and communication among

teachers and students.

Furthermore, studies conducted outside Kosovo have provided valuable insights into code-switching and code-mixing practices in primary education. For example, García and Wei (2014) examined code-switching among bilingual students in elementary schools in the United States, emphasizing its role in scaffolding learning and promoting linguistic diversity. Myers-Scotton (1993) discusses the "duelling languages" concept, explaining how grammatical structures are negotiated in code-switching, which provides a deeper understanding of the linguistic mechanisms involved.

Studies focusing on code-mixing in primary education have highlighted its significance in language development and literacy acquisition. Li Wei's (2000) research on code-mixing among bilingual children in early childhood education settings underscored its role in cognitive development and bilingual proficiency. Additionally, studies by De Houwer (2009) and Muysken (2000) have explored the cognitive and sociolinguistic aspects of code-mixing, emphasizing its adaptive functions in multilingual environments. In the specific context of primary education in bilingual settings, understanding the motivations and implications of code-switching and code-mixing is essential for effective pedagogy and language policy development. By examining the linguistic practices of students and teachers, researchers can inform educational practices that promote linguistic diversity, cultural inclusivity, and academic success among bilingual learners (Grosjean, 2016; García, 2009).

Research on code-switching and code-mixing in primary education, both within and outside Kosovo, offers valuable insights into the complex dynamics of bilingualism and language acquisition. By integrating theoretical frameworks, empirical studies, and pedagogical insights, researchers can contribute to a deeper understanding of language use in educational contexts and inform evidence-based practices that support bilingual learners' academic and socio-cultural development.

### Methodology

This research employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative methods to comprehensively investigate code-switching and code-mixing phenomena among bilingual students in primary education settings. The combination of these methods allows for a multifaceted exploration of language use, pedagogical practices, and socio-cultural dynamics within the classroom environment.

Quantitative data is collected through structured questionnaires administered to both students and teachers. The questionnaires are designed to gather demographic information, language proficiency levels, attitudes towards code-switching, and perceptions of its impact on language development and classroom dynamics. This method enables the researchers to quantitatively analyze patterns, frequencies, and correlations related to language use and attitudes among participants.

**Table 1.**  
*Demographic profile*

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.547	.459	10

Results out of reliability test and analysis demonstrate that the questionnaire has a reasonable degree of consistency, supporting its use in the study. Additionally, quantitative data is obtained through systematic classroom observations. Observations focus on students' language interactions, teacher-student communication, and instructional practices involving code-switching and code-mixing. A standardized observation protocol is utilized to document language patterns, contexts of code-switching, and its perceived effectiveness in facilitating comprehension and participation among students.

Qualitative data is gathered through open-ended survey questions, semi-structured interviews, and in-depth focus group discussions with students and teachers. These methods enable the exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and beliefs regarding code-switching in educational contexts. Interviews provide rich, detailed insights into individual language practices, pedagogical strategies, and socio-cultural influences on language use.

### **Justification**

The utilization of both quantitative and qualitative methods offers several advantages in studying code-switching and code-mixing in primary education settings. Quantitative surveys and observations provide systematic, structured data collection approaches that allow for the examination of broad patterns and trends in language use among students and teachers. On the other hand, qualitative interviews and focus group discussions offer depth and nuance to the research findings by capturing the subjective experiences, attitudes, and contextual nuances surrounding code-switching practices. These methods allow for the exploration of individual perspectives, cultural influences, and pedagogical strategies that shape language use and

communication dynamics within educational settings.

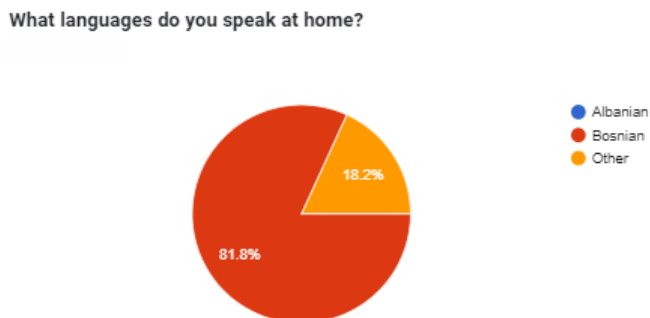
The integration of qualitative and quantitative methods enhances the validity and reliability of the research findings by triangulating multiple sources of data and perspectives. By employing a mixed-methods approach, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of code-switching and code-mixing phenomena in primary education, thereby informing pedagogical practices, language policies, and curriculum development initiatives aimed at promoting bilingualism and multilingualism in diverse educational contexts.

### **Discussions**

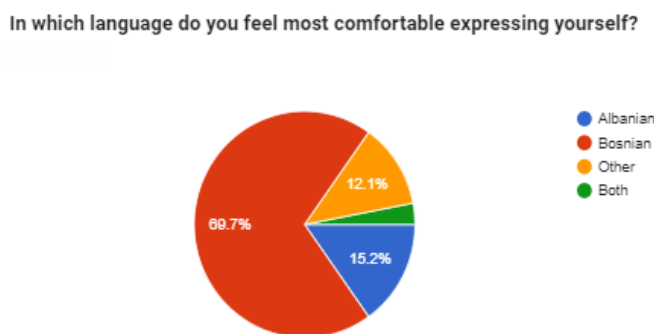
Findings from student responses  
The survey results offer insights into the code switching behaviors and attitudes of students in the bilingual setting under study. Analysis of the data reveals several key patterns and trends regarding language use, code switching frequency, perceptions, and the role of code switching in the classroom environment.

A predominant theme emerging from the findings is the significance of Bosnian as the primary language spoken at home among the students. This underscores the deep-rooted influence of familial and social environments in shaping linguistic practices and preferences. The prevalence of Bosnian suggests a strong connection to cultural and familial identities, which in turn can impact students' language use and interaction patterns within the school context. Furthermore, the survey indicates that students exhibit a high level of comfort expressing themselves in Bosnian, with a substantial proportion feeling proficient in the language. This finding underscores the importance of linguistic familiarity and cultural affinity in fostering effective communication and social interaction among students.

**Figure 1.**  
*What languages do you speak at home?*



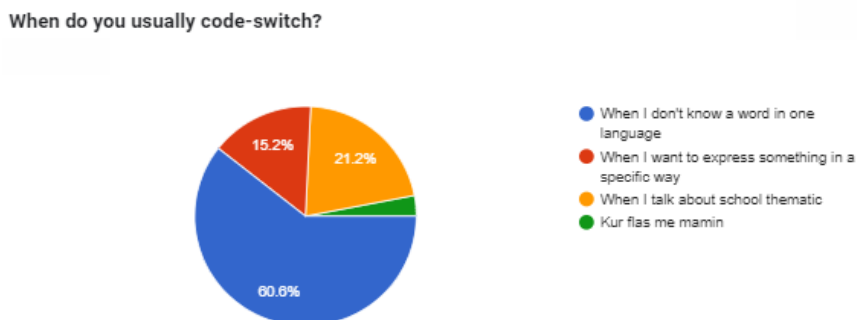
**Figure 2.**  
*In which language do you feel most comfortable expressing yourself?*



In terms of code switching behavior, a significant number of students reported engaging in code switching during conversations with peers. The primary reasons cited for code switching include filling lexical gaps and conveying nuanced meanings. This suggests that code switching

serves as a functional tool for navigating communicative challenges and expressing complex ideas within the bilingual environment. Interestingly, despite variations in individual experiences, the overall perception of code switching among students tends to be positive.

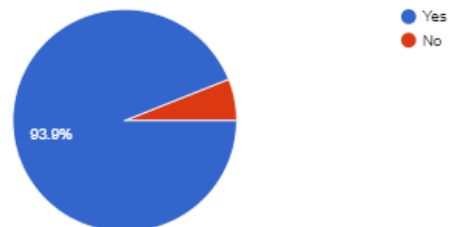
**Figure 3.**  
*When do you usually code-switch*



**Figure 4.**

*Do you find yourself switching between Albanian and Bosnian during conversation with friends or classmates*

**Do you find yourself switching between Albanian and Bosnian during conversations with friends or classmates?**



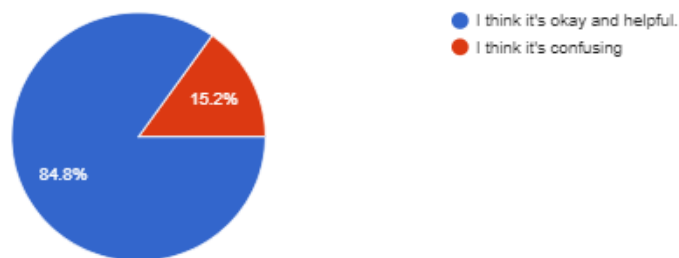
Many students view code switching as a helpful tool for effective communication, highlighting its functional role in facilitating comprehension and expression within diverse linguistic contexts. Moreover, students reported frequent encounters with code

switching by their teachers during lessons. This underscores the pervasive nature of code switching in the classroom environment and its potential impact on students' language acquisition and comprehension strategies.

**Figure 5.**

*How do you feel about code-switching in the classroom?*

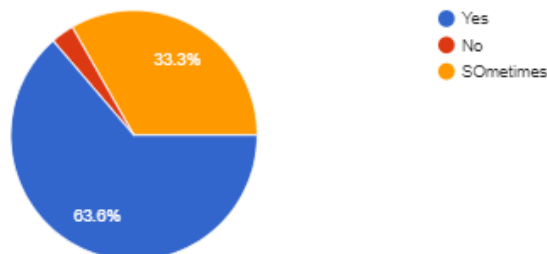
**How do you feel about code-switching in the classroom?**



**Figure 6.**

*Do you think code-switching helps you communicate better?*

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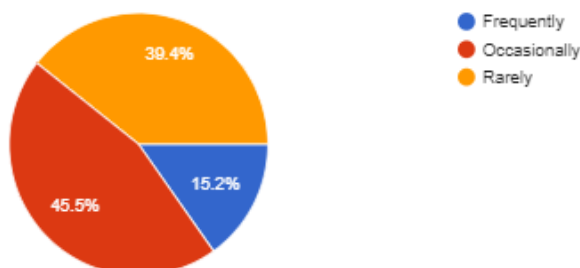
The prevalence of teacher-initiated code switching reflects efforts to accommodate students' diverse linguistic

backgrounds and promote inclusive learning environments.

**Figure 7.**

*How often do you hear your teachers code-switching during lessons?*

How often do you hear your teachers code-switching during lessons?



The findings suggest that code switching plays a significant role in mediating communication and social interaction among students in the bilingual setting studied. Understanding students' code switching behaviors and attitudes is essential for informing pedagogical practices that promote effective bilingual education and foster inclusive learning environments. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics of language use and interaction in bilingual educational settings.

**Findings from teacher responses**

Analysis of the teacher questionnaires revealed valuable insights into language practices, perceptions of code switching, and its impact on student learning within the bilingual classroom context. The responses, anonymized for privacy, provide nuanced perspectives on the role of language and code switching in facilitating effective communication and promoting bilingualism among students.

In regard to the primary language of instruction, the majority of teachers indicated a preference for using Albanian within their classrooms. This finding



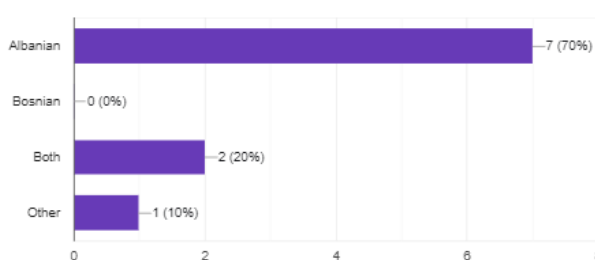
underscores the importance of adhering to established language policies within bilingual educational settings. As one teacher expressed, "Albanian is the primary language of instruction, helping to clarify concepts for students." Teachers generally view code switching as a useful tool for clarifying complex concepts and enhancing student understanding. They often consciously

code-switch between Albanian and Bosnian during lessons, particularly when addressing students with different language proficiencies. For instance, one teacher mentioned, "Yes, for clarification purposes, I consciously code-switch between Albanian and Bosnian during explanations of complex concepts".

**Figure 8.**

*In your classroom what languages do you primarily use for instructions?*

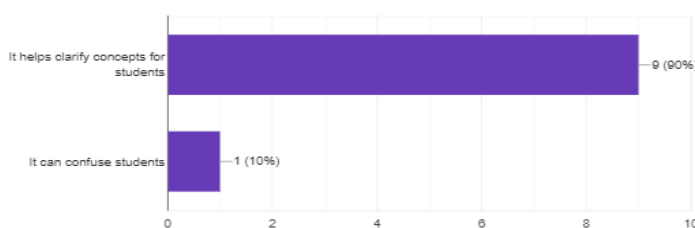
**In your classroom, what languages do you primarily use for instruction?**



**Figure 9.**

*How do you perceive the role of code-switching in facilitating student understanding and participation during lessons?*

**How do you perceive the role of code-switching in facilitating student understanding and participation during lessons?**





However, some teachers expressed concerns about potential challenges associated with code switching. They highlighted instances where students' reliance on Bosnian during informal interactions hindered their acquisition of Albanian. One teacher noted, "Students often use Bosnian during breaks, which I believe impedes their mastery of Albanian." Despite these challenges, teachers recognize

the importance of code switching for clarification purposes. They emphasize the need for ongoing support and strategies to address potential drawbacks associated with code switching practices. As one teacher remarked, "It supports bilingualism and language development, but it can be challenging to manage without appropriate support".

**Figure 10.**

*Overall, what are your thoughts on the role of code-switching in promoting effective communications and learning outcomes among bilingual students?*

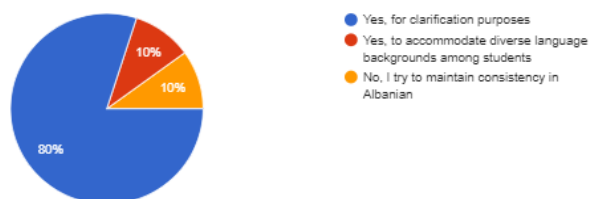
Overall, what are your thoughts on the role of code-switching in promoting effective communication and learning outcomes among bilingual students?



**Figure 11.**

*Do you consciously code-switch between Albanian and Bosnian during classroom interactions?*

Do you consciously code-switch between Albanian and Bosnian during classroom interactions?



The findings from teacher questionnaires underscore the complex dynamics of language use and code switching within the bilingual classroom context. While code switching serves as a valuable tool for enhancing communication and comprehension, its effective implementation requires careful consideration and support to optimize language development outcomes among students.

**Findings from Observation**

During classroom observations, several notable patterns emerged regarding students' communication and language use while engaging in tasks assigned by the teacher.

**Code Switching Due to Vocabulary Limitations and Clarity:**

Students frequently code-switched between Albanian and Bosnian, primarily due to vocabulary limitations and the perceived clarity of expression in each language.

For instance, when describing their artwork, students utilized code switching to articulate details effectively. One student expressed, "Unë kam vizatu një vajzë, flokët I kam ngjyros me të kuqe, fustanin me pembe, a kravata som ga ubojala u plavo," seamlessly blending both languages to convey specific details.

- **Language Choice When Addressing Teachers:** Observations indicated that students predominantly utilized Albanian when addressing teachers, reflecting their respect for authority and adherence to language norms within the educational setting. For example, a student stated, "Mësues, unë I kam kryer detyrat," demonstrating a preference for Albanian when engaging with teachers directly.
- **Prevalence of Bosnian in Peer Communication:** In contrast, students predominantly used Bosnian when communicating with peers during collaborative tasks or informal interactions. The use of Bosnian was observed to be more prevalent in casual conversations, reflecting students' comfort and familiarity with the language in social contexts. However, when discussing academic concepts or utilizing educational terminology, students tended to integrate Albanian words, indicating a nuanced approach to language choice based on context and subject matter.

These observations highlight the dynamic nature of language use and code switching among students in the bilingual classroom environment. While students demonstrate proficiency and fluency in both Albanian and Bosnian, their language choices are influenced by various factors such as social dynamics, task requirements, and individual preferences. Understanding these patterns of language use is crucial for creating inclusive learning environments that support students' linguistic development and academic success.

### Conclusions

The comprehensive examination of language practices, perceptions, and behaviors among lower primary bilingual students in the Albanian and Bosnian bilingual setting has provided insights into the complexities of code switching and its implications for language acquisition and

educational outcomes.

Through the analysis of student questionnaires, it became evident that Bosnian predominates as the language spoken at home among the majority of students, underscoring its significant role in shaping familial communication patterns and cultural identities. However, students also exhibit a strong preference for expressing themselves in Albanian within the classroom environment, highlighting the nuanced interplay between language proficiency, social dynamics, and cultural affiliations.

Similarly, insights gleaned from teacher questionnaires shed light on the multifaceted nature of code-switching practices within the classroom. Teachers recognize code switching as a valuable tool for enhancing student understanding and participation, particularly when addressing diverse language proficiencies and clarifying complex concepts. However, concerns regarding students' overreliance on Bosnian and its potential impact on their mastery of Albanian underscore the importance of balanced language development and strategic language instruction.

Observational findings further elucidated the dynamics of language use and code switching among students during collaborative tasks and informal interactions. Students exhibited a nuanced approach to language choice, often integrating Albanian and Bosnian based on contextual factors such as vocabulary limitations and perceived clarity of expression. While students predominantly used Bosnian in peer communication, they demonstrated a preference for Albanian when addressing teachers, reflecting their awareness of language norms and respect for authority within the educational setting.

The findings underscore the intricate interplay between language, culture, and social dynamics in bilingual educational contexts. Effective language instruction and support mechanisms are essential for promoting balanced bilingualism, fostering inclusive learning environments, and enhancing student academic achievement. By acknowledging and leveraging students' linguistic diversity, educators can create enriching educational experiences that empower students to navigate linguistic and cultural landscapes with confidence and proficiency.

For future research, delving deeper

into the longitudinal effects of code switching on language development and academic achievement among lower primary bilingual students is crucial. Additionally, exploring the role of teacher training and pedagogical strategies in effectively supporting students' bilingual proficiency and mitigating potential challenges associated with code switching would provide valuable insights for educational practice.

## Appendix

### Questionnaire:

- What languages do you speak at home?
  - Albanian
  - Bosnian
  - Other
- In which language do you feel most comfortable expressing yourself?
  - Albanian
  - Bosnian
  - Both
  - Other
- Do you find yourself switching between Albanian and Bosnian during conversations with friends or classmates?
  - Yes
  - No
- When do you usually code-switch?
  - When I want to express something in a specific way
  - When I don't know a word in one language
  - When I talk about school thematic
- Do you think code-switching helps you communicate better?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Sometimes
  - Unsure
- How do you feel about code-switching in the classroom?
  - I think it's okay and helpful.
  - I think it's confusing.
- How often do you hear your teachers code-switching during lessons?
  - Frequently
  - Occasionally
  - Rarely
- What do you think about using both Albanian and Bosnian in classroom discussions?
  - It's helpful for understanding
  - It's confusing

- It doesn't matter to me
- Do you think code-switching affects your learning experience in any way? If so, how?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Unsure
- Overall, how do you feel about using both Albanian and Bosnian in school?
  - Positive
  - Neutral
  - Negative

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