

**Inter-Sentential Code-Switching and Identity
Negotiation in the Algerian EFL Classroom**



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Summary:

Code-switching, as a strategic language choice, has received notable attention in educational research, particularly for its instrumental role in EFL settings. Beyond its communicative function, it has been regarded as a socially embedded practice shaped by EFL classroom discourse. The study examines the role of inter-sentential code-switching between English and Algerian Dialectal Arabic in influencing the identity negotiation of Algerian students. Adopting a qualitative-dominant mixed methods approach, a questionnaire was administered to 91 EFL Master 1 students at Ahmed Zabana University of Relizane to investigate their perceptions of how inter-sentential code-switching influence their identity negotiation, chosen based on a preliminary observation indicating students' spontaneous use of this linguistic practice within EFL classroom discourse. Moreover, a semi-structured interview with oral expression teachers provided contextualised accounts of learners' use of this communicative strategy as an identity-driven practice. The findings revealed that students frequently engaged in inter-sentential code-switching to convey culturally embedded meaning, express affective stance, and navigate social roles in response to EFL classroom interactions. Future research could examine how identity-driven inter-sentential code-switching interacts with pedagogy and English language development across different educational contexts.

Keywords: Algerian Dialectal Arabic; EFL classroom discourse; inter-sentential code-switching; strategic language choice; identity negotiation

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INTRODUCTION

Code-switching, defined as the alternation between two or more languages, has long been recognised as a discursive mechanism of bilingual and multilingual communication. Initially viewed as a sign of linguistic deficiency, code-switching is now widely studied as a socially embedded phenomenon in interactional contexts and identity negotiation. Within EFL educational settings, emerging scholarship has highlighted its role in facilitating communication and identity expression in response to classroom interactional demands.

Inter-sentential code-switching—switching between languages at sentence boundaries—has attracted particular attention due to its structural, discourse, and pragmatic significance. Unlike intra-sentential code-switching, which occurs within a sentence, inter-sentential code-switching requires speakers to produce contextually and grammatically coherent sentences in each language. Moreover, its linguistic structure provides pragmatic space for learners to manage interaction, clarify meaning, emphasise a point, and adapt communication to interlocutors' understanding while responding to social and pragmatic demands. Furthermore, it has been examined not only from a linguistic perspective but also within pedagogical frameworks. Learners often employ it to compensate for gaps in the target language, clarify meaning, and engage in discursive identity work, thereby functioning as a scaffold for managing complex concepts, enhancing mutual understanding and social belonging, and facilitating participation in EFL classroom discourse. Hence, it is important to recognise that EFL classrooms are social spaces in their own right, as language learning occurs alongside the acquisition of sociocultural knowledge. In such contexts, inter-sentential code-switching often becomes a natural feature of interaction that supports students' socialisation and classroom engagement. While previous studies have extensively examined its influence on learners' language use (Lam & Matthews, 2020; Somlak et al., 2020; Adder & Bagui, 2020; El Ouali, 2022), few studies have empirically examined its function as a marker of identity, particularly within the Algerian EFL context. To address this gap, the study seeks to examine the role of inter-sentential code-switching in influencing EFL learners' identity negotiation. Thus, the following research questions are raised:

- How frequently do students use inter-sentential code-switching in EFL classroom interaction?

- How does inter-sentential code-switching influence students' identity negotiation within the EFL classroom?

1. Language, Identity, and Culture

Language has long served as a means of communication, enabling individuals to transmit their thoughts and shared sociocultural values across diverse contexts (Hamidi & Belkaid, 2023). Historically, early linguistic paradigms, particularly structuralism and generative grammar, conceptualised language from an autonomous and cognitive lens. Structuralists conceptualised language from a self-contained structural system, detached from its social functions (de Saussure, 1916), while generativists framed it as an innate capacity governed by a universal grammar and internalised rules (Chomsky, 2006). However, such approaches have notably neglected the social dimensions of language, a gap that sociolinguists have addressed to highlight the role of language in reflecting social variation and function (Labov, 1972; Hymes, 1974). More than a means of communication, language serves as a medium of expressing identity, social belonging, and culturally embedded meaning (Bourdieu, 1991; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). That is to say, "language is intrinsically related to culture. It performs the social function of communication of the group values, beliefs and customs, and fosters feelings of group identity" (Mercuri & Patricia, p. 14), thereby enabling individuals to express who they are and transmit cultural knowledge within a given society (Gee, 2014).

A plethora of studies have examined the relationship between language, culture, and identity. For instance, Hamidi and Belkaid (2023), emphasise the symbolic weight of language in influencing speakers' identity and cultural values, highlighting that "*language, identity, and culture are not mutually incompatible, but they do emerge from a feeling of society and ties*" (p. 56). For Example, within the Algerian context, the word "normal", a French borrowed word that is widely used in Algerian Dialectal Arabic, has cultural embedded connotations. It is often used with a cynical irony tone to express the banality of life. Notably, the term reflects a facet of Algerian cultural identity expressed through adaptation to life's challenges. However, this relationship is not universally uncontested. Studies have questioned whether language functions as a key marker for identity, arguing that identity is a fluid context-dependent concept not necessarily tied to language (Edward, 2009). In line with this perspective, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) assert that "*identity is the product rather than the source of linguistic*

and other semiotic practices". (p. 585) That is to say, identity is not a fixed attribute mirrored by language, but rather a fluid and situated practice that is performed and negotiated through interaction. Additionally, it is expressed through both communicative and non-linguistic means. In this regard, Saynur Derman & Yilmaz (2024) emphasise that non-verbal communication conveys individuals' social identity and cultural belonging within a given society. For example, a study conducted by Gyasi et al (2015) highlights that, non-verbal communication, such as facial expressions and physical appearance, tend to influence the speaker's sense of self and identity, indicating that language is not the central detriment across all social and cultural settings. Though contested, there remains a broad consensus that language, identity, and culture are interconnected. Language carries meaning, culture gives it context, and identity transforms it (Cohen et al., 2024).

2. Inter-sentential Code-Switching and Identity

In multilingual speech communities, the alternation between languages emerges from sustained language contact, reflecting both social and cultural patterns of a given speech community (Matras, 2009). Among the various forms of language alternation, code-switching has attracted particular interest (Auer, 1998; Gardner-Chloros, 2009; Kashi, 2018). It consists of two primary types: inter-sentential, which refers to language alternation at the sentence level, and intra-sentential, which refers to code-switching within the sentence. Early linguistic theories primarily focused on the structural analysis of code-switching, further demonstrating the need for grammatical accuracy in both languages. Poplack's (1980) foundational study established the theoretical underpinnings of this approach, proposing that CS is subject to grammatical rules and syntactic constraints. That is to say, while this formalist approach offered a promising contribution to the study of code-switching as a linguistic process, it notably neglected the social and identity-driven functions of language use. The emergence of sociolinguistic approaches in the 1980s and 1990s expanded its analytical scope beyond structural concerns, highlighting how, within a given communicative context, speakers make strategic language choices between marked and unmarked codes for identity negotiation and belonging (Myers-Scotton, 1993). The shift from grammatical models to socially and culturally embedded frameworks has highlighted how individuals engage in code-switching to navigate belonging and self-representation. Thus,

understanding CS requires an integrated perspective that accounts not only for grammatical competence but also for its role in social interaction, identity performance, and cultural belonging (Kipchog, 2024).

Inter-sentential code-switching is defined as a form of code-switching that occurs at sentential boundaries, where one clause or sentence is produced in one language and the subsequent clause or sentence is in the other (Muysken, 2011). It can also occur at phrasal boundaries—when a complete noun phrase or verb phrase is in the other language— or discourse boundaries, where the switch aligns with larger units of speech, such as conversational turns or topic shifts (Zirker, 2007). Importantly, inter-sentential code-switching presupposes fluency in both languages, as speakers are required to adhere to grammatical rules of each language. Therefore, structural competence is essential because it allows individuals to produce contextually coherent sentences across both languages (Poplack, 1980). Studies have highlighted its use among speakers who lack equivalent lexical sources, address different audiences, emphasise a particular point, want to be understood—particularly in contexts where direct translation may be imprecise or open to misunderstanding (Hamdan, 2023), and show belonging to a certain group. Furthermore, it serves pragmatic and social functions, as speakers may switch languages at sentence boundaries to accommodate listeners’ linguistic proficiency, enhance mutual understanding, signal affective stance, express solidarity, and reinforce shared identity (Marzeih et al., 2016; Giles & Coupland, 1991). Thus, it serves as a discursive strategy that reflects speakers’ interactional goals, contextual awareness, and social belonging (Mohamed Khalil & Mohd Shahril Firdaus, 2018). As Holmes (2000) states, “a speaker may switch to another language as a signal of group membership and shared ethnicity within an addressee” (p.35). Established theoretical perspectives have emphasised the indexical and performative functions of inter-sentential code-switching. As an indexical resource, it signals the speakers’ social positioning and group membership. Simultaneously, it functions as a performative act that contributes to the ongoing negotiation of social selves within interactional contexts (Auer, 1998; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Hence, it is a socially and pragmatically oriented practice that allows speakers to negotiate their identity, manage interpersonal contexts, and navigate cultural and social situations, while maintaining communicative clarity (Gafaranga, 2007; Su, 2009; Gumperz, 1982).

Research studies on inter-sentential code-switching have shifted from a linguistic orientation to a pedagogically grounded perspective. Temesgen & Hailu (2022), for instance, demonstrate that inter-sentential code-switching practices are often shaped by learners' needs. In this context, students employ it to facilitate understanding and maintain the flow of interaction. Similarly, Horasan (2014) demonstrates that limited linguistic competence in the target language often prompts learners to use it for clarity and understanding. Moreover, Jingxia (2010), highlights how inter-sentential code-switching serves as a pedagogical tool for supporting comprehension and facilitating the teaching/learning process. Similarly, a study conducted by Kashi (2018) stresses the potential role of inter-sentential code-switching in enhancing language learning, further demonstrating its frequent use and effectiveness compared to intra-sentential code-switching. In doing so, it permits learners to maintain clarity and discourse flow, which makes it particularly relevant for pedagogical analysis. In the same vein, Raeisi and Raeisi (2021) highlight that inter-sentential code-switching was frequently used in Iranian EFL classrooms compared to other types, showing its prominence as a natural and pedagogical practice in bilingual communication. Beyond its pedagogical function, studies have emphasised its role as an identity-driven practice within the EFL classroom. For instance, Liebscher et al. (2005) demonstrate the role of inter-sentential code-switching as a tool for identity negotiation, allowing students to navigate social roles and respond to context-specific classroom interactions. By switching languages at sentence boundaries, learners can invoke shared cultural identity, signal in-group belonging, and manage both cognitive and social interactional goals, thereby reflecting the deliberate and rule-governed nature of inter-sentential code-switching (Haq et al., 2025; Poplack, 1980; Myers-Scotton, 1993). Consequently, it functions not only as a linguistic scaffold but also as a discursive strategy within the EFL classroom, given that its structural form provides speakers a strategic space to negotiate their aspects of their identity, while maintaining grammatical, discourse, and pragmatic coherence (Telic et al., 2025).

4. Methodology

This section presents the methodological framework adopted to examine the role of inter-sentential code-switching as a strategy for identity negotiation among Algerian EFL students. Accordingly, it outlines the research setting, the sample selected for investigation, and the procedures

for data analysis. The study employs a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods approach to provide a context-sensitive understanding of participants' perceptions and identity negotiation as expressed through this form of code-switching during EFL classroom interactions.

4.1 Participants

The sample population of the study is composed of two groups of informants; M1 students specialised in language and communication and oral expression teachers in the English Department. A total of 91 students were purposively selected as a case study for their relevance to the research focus. This selection was prompted by an initial classroom attendance, where their use of inter-sentential code-switching between English and Algerian Dialectal Arabic emerged as a recurrent pattern for identity negotiation within the EFL classroom. In parallel, seven oral expression teachers were selected based on their direct engagement with classroom discourse. Given that oral expression sessions require students to present and discuss speaking-based topics, teachers in charge of this module are more likely to observe students' use of this linguistic behaviour as an identity-driven practice. Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and subsequently gave their informed consent to participate. Hence, ethical considerations were maintained to safeguard their anonymity and to ensure voluntary participation.

4.2 Data collection instruments

To answer the research questions, two research instruments were employed to investigate the research questions upon which the study is based. A questionnaire consisting of closed- and open-ended questions was administered to Master 1 students specialising in language and communication to examine their perceptions of how their use of inter-sentential code-switching between English and ADA influences and reflects their identity negotiation. The questionnaire is deemed appropriate for this study due to its effectiveness in gathering self-reported data on students' language attitudes, perceptions, and linguistic practices, while ensuring consistency across responses (Dörnyei, 2007). To guide the participants into the main focus of the study, the questionnaire began with two preliminary questions; the first question assessed students' familiarity with the concept of inter-sentential code-switching, for which a brief explanation was provided to ensure a conceptual clarity, while the second question examined

the frequency with which students engage with this linguistic practice during oral expressions sessions, particularly as a means of identity negotiation. On the other hand, the semi-structured interview was conducted with seven oral expression teachers to provide contextualised accounts of how students employ this linguistic practice as a discursive strategy for identity negotiation within the EFL classroom. Hence, interviews complemented the students' self-reported data by providing a multi-perspective understanding of the phenomenon.

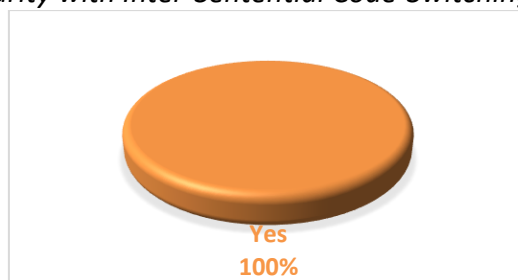
5. Data Analysis

The data collected from the questionnaire and semi-structured interview were thematically coded to identify the recurring patterns relevant to study under investigation. Rather than analysing both instruments separately, teachers' and students' open-ended responses were analysed and interpreted collectively to provide a comprehensive understanding of inter-sentential code-switching as a linguistic practice for students' identity negotiation within the EFL classroom. On the other hand, the close-ended questionnaire items were quantitatively analysed and presented in graphs to report students' familiarity with, and the frequency of, inter-sentential code-switching during EFL classroom interactions. To ensure participants' anonymity, both teachers and students were assigned coded identifiers (e.g., T1, T2 for teachers and S1, S2 for students) throughout the data presentation and analysis.

Prior to answering the questionnaire, students were briefly introduced to the concept of inter-sentential code-switching to ensure conceptual clarity and informed responses. The familiarity item, however, aimed to examine whether they had previously encountered the term on their own. The graph below illustrates students' self-reported familiarity with inter-sentential code-switching before receiving the explanation.

Figure 01

Students' Familiarity with Inter-Sentential Code-Switching

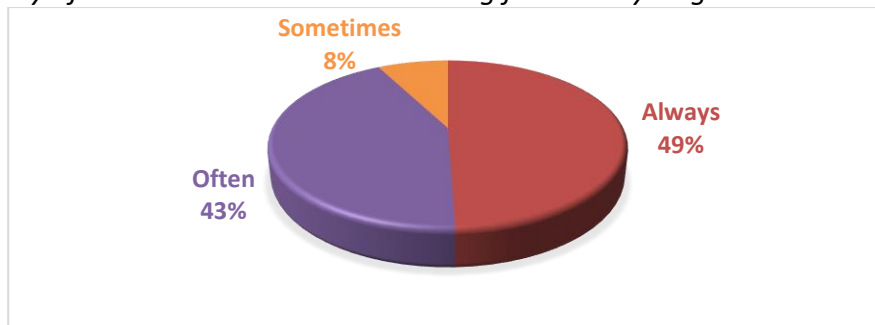


As displayed in the graph above, all students (100%, N= 91) reported familiarity with the term. This response can be attributed to their academic background as M1 students specialising in language and communication, suggesting that the concept is commonly encountered in their academic discourse.

the second item of the questionnaire examines how frequently students engage in inter-sentential code-switching as a discursive strategy for identity negotiation. The graph below illustrates the distribution of their self-reported frequency levels.

Figure 02

Frequency of Inter-Sentential Code-Switching for Identity Negotiation



As illustrated in figure 2, the majority of student reported engaging in inter-sentential code-switching for identity negotiation on a regular basis. Specifically, 49% (N= 45) reported a consistent practice, while 43% (N= 39) demonstrated frequent engagement. Only 8% (N= 7) reported occasional use. Accordingly, the results suggest that inter-sentential code-switching is an established feature of students' classroom discourse.

- **Students' Use of Inter-Sentential Code-Switching for Identity Negotiation**

The following sections presents the thematic analysis of open-ended questionnaire items and teachers' semi-structured interviews. Recurring themes were identified across participants' responses through a thematic coding process. The following themes reflect students' use of inter-sentential code-switching for cultural identity expression and social belonging, affective self-expression, and situational role negotiation within the EFL classroom.

- **Cultural Identity Expression and Social Belonging**

Inter-sentential code-switching served as a salient mechanism for cultural identity expression and social belonging in the EFL classroom. Students acknowledged its significance in conveying culturally embedded meaning within classroom interaction, particularly when discussing cultural values and other socially situated topics. As reflected in a student's response, *"we can't express our cultural values and expressions in English the same way we would do in our native language, which is why switching between both languages at the sentence level is needed"* (S12). The response highlights a tendency among learners to use inter-sentential code-switching as a means of articulating culturally grounded perspectives that are challenging to express solely in English. This perception was further reinforced by oral expression teachers, who also observed students' language choice as a means of cultural expression and social alignment. As T2 noted, *"most of the times, students code-switch at the sentence level to maintain cultural accuracy, not to translate, but to express something that is a part of their culture"*. The same teacher recounted an instance during an oral expression session on life achievements, one student shared a personal experience, then concluded, *"my parents were really proud of me. /galu:li ħammárt wzuhna/* —meaning literally (they told me you reddened our faces). The expression is a culturally embedded phrase with no direct equivalent in English used to convey that one's actions evoke pride among others, aligning with Algerian cultural values of honour and social belonging.

Of particular note was the use of inter-sentential code-switching as a means of humorous expression. According to students' responses, humour is not incidental; it serves as a socially coded practice for shared linguistic and cultural knowledge. This was notably evident in one participant's remark: *"I sometimes use inter-sentential code-switching to joke with my classmates and teachers to lighten up the mood, and I can't do that using English alone because some jokes just don't land in pure English."* (S35). The response highlights the potential role of inter-sentential code-switching convey culturally embedded humour that English alone is perceived as insufficient to deliver.

Another prominent pattern observed across responses was the recurrent use of the pronoun *"we"*. Rather than presenting inter-sentential code-switching as an individual act, students framed it as a socially embedded practice to reinforce social belonging and solidarity.

➤ **Personal Identity and Affective Self-Expression**

A recurring pattern was the use of inter-sentential code-switching as a tool for personal identity expression within the EFL classroom. While English served as the expected medium for formal instruction, students often perceived it as insufficient in conveying their affective stance within the EFL classroom. One student explained, *"I use inter-sentential code-switching between English and my native language because there are certain emotions and experiences English alone will not convey"* (S22). The same student added *"I once presented about a challenging experience; I found myself saying one sentence in English to discuss then I switched to my mother tongue to express what I really feel"*. The response highlights the use of inter-sentential code-switching to convey learners' affective stance and personal emotion, shifting from an academic to a more personal and reflective tone. Accordingly, the findings suggest that this form of code-switching functions as a discursive resource through which students express aspects of their personal identity within the EFL classroom.

➤ **Role Performance and Situational Identity**

Inter-sentential code-switching also emerged as a strategic means of negotiating role and situational identity within the EFL classroom. As S41 explained, *"when I discuss academic topics, I use pure English to sound like an EFL student. But when I want to soften a point and connect with my classmates, I switch to my mother tongue in the next sentence"*. The response highlights the context-dependent nature of identity within the EFL classroom; English was employed to align with the formal expectations of "an EFL student", while ADA was used to signal classroom familiarity and interpersonal connection. Importantly, teachers acknowledged this tendency within classroom discussions. As T1 noted, *"students often alternate between both codes across sentence boundaries depending on the context itself. They exclusively use English to perform their academic persona, then switch to their mother tongue if they want to casually chat with others"*. Accordingly, inter-sentential code-switching enabled students to navigate classroom formality and peer-level familiarity, adapting their linguistic behaviour in response to EFL classroom contexts.

➤ **Pedagogical Limitations of Inter-Sentential Code-Switching**

Though not a central focus, concerns about the pedagogical limitation of inter-sentential code-switching surfaced prominently in teachers' responses. Specifically, several teachers noted that excessive reliance on

inter-sentential code-switching might impede students' language proficiency development, particularly in academic contexts where sustained use of English is required. As T7 observed, *"its use is indeed helpful for students' identity expression, but as teachers, we need to pause and reflect, what are the long-term effects on their English language proficiency?"*. Similarly, another teacher noted, *"we can't deny its positive impact in identity expression, but its role in supporting English language development remains open to question"*. This critical observation highlights a key pedagogical tension: although inter-sentential code-switching enables students to express and negotiate their identity, a careful use is needed to maintain language learning development. Teachers' concerns point to the need for pedagogical approaches that balance between recognising its benefits for students' identity negotiation within the EFL classroom and addressing the linguistic demands of academic English development.

6. Discussion

This study aims to examine the role of inter-sentential code-switching in students' identity negotiation within the EFL classroom. The findings revealed that this form of code-switching was frequently employed for students' identity negotiation, suggesting that besides its linguistic function, it is also an identity-driven practice. Learners employed it to express aspects of their personal identity, particularly in contexts where English alone was perceived as insufficient, to convey their intended meaning, lending credence to the view that language choice is closely tied to memory, affect, and personal experience (Grosjean, 2008; Rojas, 2025). Furthermore, it functioned as a means of conveying culturally embedded meaning to foster social belonging, solidarity, and mutual understanding, aligning with findings from previous studies on the role of inter-sentential code-switching in cultural identity expression (Tobbi, 2024). Another key finding revealed that students engaged with this form of code-switching to negotiate their social roles and enact their situational identity in response to EFL classroom context. Specifically, English was used to construct academic identity, while their native language facilitated classroom interpersonal interaction, enabling students to navigate between the formal role of "student" and the familiar one of "classmate". The findings contribute to theoretical frameworks that center identity as interactional, fluid, and performative (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Hence, Inter-sentential code-switching served as a discursive tool for students' identity-driven dimensions (Gee, 2014).

Teachers' accounts further reinforced this perspective, suggesting that students employ it to express personal meaning, maintain cultural resonance, and negotiate social roles in response to classroom interactions. Accordingly, it is essential to understand that EFL classrooms represent diverse social milieus, where language learning occurs in tandem with sociocultural awareness. In these contexts, code-switching—inter-sentential in particular—becomes an inevitable strategy to facilitate social interaction within classroom discourse (Temesgen & Hailu, 2022).

Although the identity-supportive role of inter-sentential code-switching is evident, teachers' accounts also revealed a critical pedagogical concern. Several teachers noted that over-reliance may hinder students' language proficiency development, highlighting the need to recognise its potential role as an identity-driven practice, while also promoting balanced language use to support learners' academic growth (Maruf et al., 2023). These concerns reflect a broader pedagogical tension between supporting code-switching practices for identity negotiation and maintaining academic rigor in the target language. While the study focused on the role of inter-sentential code-switching in students' identity negotiation within the EFL classroom, teachers' responses highlight the need for future research on pedagogical strategies that could balance students' identity negotiation and language learning development.

Collectively, the findings suggest that inter-sentential code-switching functions as a discursive practice through which students navigate the social, cultural, and academic dimensions of their identity within the EFL classroom. However, in light of the concerns raised by teachers regarding its potential overuse, this linguistic practice should be pedagogically mediated to ensure that students' identity is supported without compromising language proficiency development. The findings of the study align with those of Abubakr, Hassan and Muhedeen (2019), and Kipchoge (2024), who revealed that inter-sentential code-switching is used not only for communication clarity but also as a deliberate strategy for identity expression and social alignment.

7. Conclusion

The present study was conducted to investigate the potential role of inter-sentential code-switching as an identity-driven practice within the EFL classroom. The findings indicate its frequent use was not incidental, but rather an intentional language choice. Students' strategic engagement with

this linguistic practice reflected a notable awareness of how and when to switch between English and Algerian Dialectal Arabic to achieve affective resonance, cultural alignment, and social connection. These patterns were further reinforced by teachers' accounts, which emphasised students' use of this inter-sentential code-switching to negotiate different dimensions of their identity in response to specific EFL classroom contexts.

The investigation of inter-sentential code-switching in the Algerian EFL classroom not only deepens the understanding of students' identity negotiation but also contributes to broader discussions on language choice and identity in bilingual and multilingual classrooms. While the study offers a context-sensitive understanding of this phenomenon, its scope was limited to a specific university context. Building on these findings, future research could adopt a comparative approach across different regions or academic levels to examine the extent to which identity-driven code-switching practices are shaped by educational and sociolinguistic variables. Moreover, several teachers highlighted how over-reliance on this practice may impede students' English language development, particularly in academic settings where sustained use of the target language is essential. Therefore, future research could also examine pedagogical strategies that could balance the use of inter-sentential code-switching as an identity-driven practice and the development of English language proficiency within the EFL classroom. Ultimately, given the context-dependent nature of identity and language choice, ethnographic approaches could further enrich the understanding of the relationship between code-switching and identity in educational settings.

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