

The Communicative Functions and Social Significance of Code-Switching and Code-Mixing Among Multilingual Undergraduate Students of Kaduna State University

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Abstract

This paper investigates the communicative functions and social significance of code-switching and code-mixing among multilingual undergraduate students at Kaduna State University (KASU) within Nigeria's complex linguistic landscape. The study employs a mixed-methods research design underpinned by Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). Quantitative data were gathered from 400 structured questionnaires distributed via stratified random sampling across the faculties of Arts, Science, and Social Sciences. This is integrated with qualitative data from semi-structured interviews featuring 12 participants tracked via alphanumeric identifiers to ensure anonymity. Cross-tabulation analysis demonstrates that the majority of students (over 80%) code-switch or code-mix to emphasise key points, ensure clarity, and handle identity management. The study shows that Faculty of Science students rely most heavily on local codes to bridge cognitive gaps when processing abstract concepts, lower-level undergraduates use language alternation as a persuasive tool, and older, upper-level students shift codes to convey respect and navigate institutional hierarchies. The qualitative analysis reveals five core themes driving student linguistic behaviour, including emotional expression and affective clarity, identity management and cultural assertion, instructional clarity and cognitive processing, peer influence and social belonging, and cultural belonging and group solidarity. The paper highlights that while these practices encourage relational convergence and democratise peer learning, they also bring negative implications, such as the accidental social exclusion of non-Hausa speakers, the masking of deficiencies in standard global English proficiency, the reinforcement of rigid linguistic hierarchies, and increased risks of campus ethnic clustering. The study concludes that code-switching and code-mixing are complex, rule-governed communicative resources rather than signs of linguistic deficiency.

Keywords: Code-switching, Code-mixing, Multilingualism, Communication Accommodation Theory, Kaduna State University.

Introduction

Language is a fundamental resource for communication, identity construction, and social interaction. In multilingual societies such as Nigeria, speakers routinely draw on multiple linguistic codes to navigate diverse communicative contexts. With over 500 indigenous languages coexisting alongside English—the official language and primary medium of instruction—Nigeria presents a highly dynamic sociolinguistic environment (Fishman, 1972; Romaine, 1995). Within this context, code-switching and code-mixing have become widespread features of everyday discourse. Code-switching refers to the alternation between two or more languages within a conversation, while code-mixing involves the integration of elements from different languages within a single utterance (Gumperz, 1982; Muysken, 2000). Far from indicating linguistic inadequacy, these practices are now understood as systematic and purposeful communicative strategies that enable speakers to achieve clarity, express identity, and negotiate social relationships (Holmes, 2013; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). In academic settings, particularly universities where different languages coexist, such strategies are also instrumental in enhancing comprehension, participation, and peer interaction.

Kaduna State University (KASU) exemplifies Nigeria's linguistic diversity and, hence, is a reflection of the country's broader multilingual society. While English serves as the official language of instruction, Hausa, Nigerian Pidgin, and other languages play significant roles in students' everyday interactions. Located in Kaduna, the institution sits at a unique ethno-linguistic crossroads in Northern Nigeria, drawing a student population that bridges the linguistically diverse Middle Belt and the Hausa-dominated far North. Consequently, undergraduate students frequently engage in code-switching and code-mixing across both formal and informal domains, adapting their language use to suit different communicative purposes and social contexts. Although previous studies have examined code-switching and code-mixing in Nigerian universities, much of the existing research has focused on general patterns or pedagogical implications, with limited attention to their combined communicative and social significance within specific institutional contexts, particularly in Northern Nigeria (Chukwu & Okonkwo, 2021; Musa & Adebayo, 2023). This gap underscores the need for context-sensitive investigations that foreground students' lived linguistic experiences. This study, therefore, investigates the communicative functions and social significance of code-switching and code-mixing among multilingual undergraduate students at Kaduna State University. Anchored in Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles et al.,

1973), it examines how students strategically deploy multiple languages to enhance understanding, express identity, and foster social cohesion within a linguistically diverse academic environment.

Literature Review

Code-Switching

Code-switching is broadly understood as the alternation between two or more languages within a single interaction. Gumperz (1982) defines it as the juxtaposition of elements from different grammatical systems within the same speech exchange, emphasising its structural and interactional nature. Similarly, Myers-Scotton (1993) views it as the use of multiple languages in a single conversation by bilingual speakers, highlighting both linguistic competence and communicative context. Expanding this perspective, Romaine (1995) includes variation in language, dialect, or style within discourse, reflecting the fluidity of real-life language use, while Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015) emphasise the alternation between languages or varieties during conversation, making the concept applicable to diverse multilingual settings. In essence, code-switching involves the strategic use of multiple linguistic codes within discourse, whether at the level of sentences, phrases, or conversations (Boro, 2020). It is particularly common in multilingual societies such as Nigeria, where speakers adjust their language based on context, audience, and communicative purpose (Ahmed & Yusuf, 2021). In academic settings like Kaduna State University, students employ code-switching as a functional communicative strategy to navigate both academic demands and social interactions.

Code-switching behaviours, according to Holmes (2013), can be broadly categorised into two primary types based on the motivation behind the linguistic transition. Situational Switching involves a code-switch triggered by observable changes in social context, such as participant dynamics, setting alterations, or topic shifts. Metaphorical Switching (or Code-Mixing) refers to quick transitions between language codes independent of context changes. This enhances communication through the symbolic meanings of both codes, forming complex social identities and requiring advanced bilingual proficiency.

Sociolinguistic code-switching serves various social and communicative functions, which Holmes (2013) categorizes into three primary dimensions: solidarity, social distance, and status; topic and referential functions; and affective functions. Within the first dimension, speakers utilise emblematic or tag switching by inserting interjections from another language to signal ethnic identity and solidarity, while also using deliberate switches to manipulate social distance by

aligning with different cultural values or shifting from a low vernacular code to a high standard code to transition from informal to formal communication. For topic and referential functions, bilinguals may employ topic-triggered switching to articulate specific subjects better in a particular language, or they may switch codes to accurately quote others and recite culturally specific proverbs to enhance message precision and signal identity. Finally, code-switching serves affective functions, allowing speakers to express strong emotions such as humour or dramatic effect, as well as convey authority and disapproval by transitioning to a formal, high-status variety that effectively highlights social distance.

Types of Code-switching

Contemporary studies categorise code-switching into three primary types based on structure and placement.

1. Extra-sentential code-switching involves inserting brief expressions from one language into a sentence framed in another. A common example among KASU students is the use of Hausa exclamations such as *walahi* in English sentences to express emphasis or emotion (Ibrahim & Haruna, 2023).
2. Inter-sentential code-switching occurs when speakers alternate languages between complete sentences. For instance, a student might say, “I will check the timetable later. Zan tafi gida yanzu,” transitioning from academic talk to personal matters.
3. Intra-sentential code-switching, the most complex form, occurs within a single sentence and requires high linguistic competence to maintain grammatical and semantic consistency across languages. An example is: “The lecturer didn’t come today, amma zamu still submit the assignment tomorrow,” which blends Hausa and English seamlessly (Eze & Ogbonna, 2020).

Code-Mixing

Code-mixing is generally defined as the integration of linguistic elements from one language into the structure of another within a single utterance. Kachru (1983) describes it as the embedding of units such as words, phrases, and morphemes from one language into another, emphasising structural integration. Similarly, Muysken (2000) views it as the insertion of elements from one language into the grammatical framework of another. Bokamba (1989) extends this perspective by highlighting the simultaneous use of elements from two distinct grammatical systems within the same sentence and speech event, drawing attention to the role of context. In the same vein,

Hoffman (1991) and Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015) characterise code-mixing as intra-sentential language alternation, where speakers shift between languages at the word or phrase level, reflecting fluid bilingual competence. Overall, these definitions converge on the structural and grammatical nature of code-mixing, while giving comparatively less attention to its social and communicative functions. The conceptual overlap with code-switching further suggests that the distinction between the two remains theoretically contested in sociolinguistic research. Gardner-Chloros (2009) highlights that code-mixing necessitates significant linguistic awareness, particularly in bilingual or multilingual individuals in informal settings. It serves as a vital communication tool, reflecting the dynamic nature of language in various social contexts. Code-mixing is categorised into three main types: lexical, morphological, and syntactic.

Lexical Code-Mixing

Lexical code-mixing involves the insertion of single words, typically nouns, verbs, or adjectives from one language into the sentence structure of another (Ali Khan & Muysken, 2014). This is the most common type among KASU students and is often used to fill lexical gaps, add emphasis, or signal cultural relevance (Fanani & Ma'u, 2018). For example, a student might say, *"I'm not ready for the test; I haven't even read one chapter from the litattafai,"* blending English and Hausa terms in a single utterance.

Morphological Code-Mixing

Morphological code-mixing occurs when morphemes (the smallest grammatical units of meaning) from one language are attached to words or structures from another (Tappe, 2013). This type showcases the speaker's creative linguistic competence and is a marker of deeper language integration. A common example from student interactions is: *"We're submitting the assignment dama tomorrow, so I need to read-na hard,"* where *"read-na"* reflects the fusion of the English verb *"read"* with a Hausa possessive suffix *"-na"* (my reading).

Syntactic Code-Mixing

Syntactic code-mixing involves combining longer syntactic elements such as clauses or phrases from one language within the grammatical structure of another (Fanani & Ma'u, 2018). This may include verb phrases, noun phrases, or conditional structures. A student might say: *"This topic is confusing me; idan lecturer din bai kara explain ba, I will not pass,"* meaning *"if the lecturer doesn't explain further."*

Multilingualism

Multilingualism is generally understood as the use and interaction of two or more languages within individuals or communities. Fishman (1972) conceptualises it in relation to domains, emphasising the use of different languages across social settings such as home, school, religion, and government. Similarly, Romaine (1995) views multilingualism as the coexistence and functional use of multiple languages within a speech community, where language choice depends on context and communicative purpose. Holmes (2013) defines it more broadly as the use of two or more languages by individuals or communities, noting that multilingual competence may be active (speaking and writing) or passive (listening and understanding), and highlighting its normality in many societies. In the same vein, Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015) emphasise varying degrees of proficiency and context-dependent usage, while Edwards (1994) underscores the role of historical, political, and cultural factors in shaping the presence and interaction of multiple languages. Together, these perspectives present multilingualism as a dynamic and context-driven sociolinguistic phenomenon. One can therefore say that Multilingualism is a dynamic sociolinguistic phenomenon, characterised by the use of two or more languages by individuals or communities. It involves not only linguistic ability but also the functional distribution of languages across various social contexts, such as home and education, etc. This concept includes the interaction of languages within a community, where speakers may switch languages based on communicative needs.

Empirical Studies

Akinpelu and Yusuf (2020) explored the sociolinguistic functions of code-switching and code-mixing among university students in southwestern Nigeria, focusing on their use of Yoruba, English, and Pidgin English to enhance peer interactions. The qualitative study revealed that language alternation was common in informal settings, such as group discussions, facilitating rapport, identity assertion, and social cohesion. Students demonstrated adaptability in using their multilingual skills to navigate social contexts. However, the study acknowledged a gap in examining the impact of these linguistic practices on formal academic engagement and language policy. This research is pertinent for its insights into informal communication strategies in student life at KASU. Similar to Akinpelu and Yusuf (2020), the present study investigates the sociolinguistic functions of language alternation among university students. However, a major gap in their work is the exclusive reliance on qualitative methods and a geographical scope limited to

southwestern Nigeria. The current study addresses these gaps by shifting the scope to the unique ethno-linguistic crossroads of Northern Nigeria (KASU) and employing a robust mixed-methods design. It also explicitly utilises the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) to systematically interpret how students converge or diverge linguistically.

Ibekwe and Alade (2021) investigated the use of code-switching in Nigerian tertiary institutions, focusing on how lecturers employ language alternation to aid students' learning. Their qualitative study revealed that lecturers often switch from English to local languages to clarify complex academic concepts, enhancing student understanding and involvement. Students participating in code-switching exhibited improved idea articulation and problem-solving abilities. However, the research highlighted a lack of institutional support and the absence of training or policies for multilingual teaching strategies. The findings are relevant to ongoing research at KASU, which examines the impact of code-switching and code-mixing on academic engagement in a multilingual environment. Both studies share a fundamental interest in the pedagogical value of code-switching within Nigerian tertiary institutions. However, the previous study primarily focused on lecturer-initiated code-switching using purely qualitative data collection tools. This leaves a gap in understanding student-initiated peer-to-peer language alternation and lacks quantitative validation. The current study addresses this methodological and scope-related gap by focusing squarely on undergraduate students' linguistic behaviours across different faculties.

Hajir and McInerney (2022) investigated code-switching and code-mixing among university students in the Middle East, focusing on Arabic and English interactions in higher education. Their mixed-method study used surveys and focus group interviews to assess how bilingual students adapt to an English-dominant curriculum while preserving their linguistic and cultural ties. They found that Arabic was frequently utilised in group discussions for complex academic topics, while code-mixing was prevalent in informal contexts, showcasing bilingual proficiency and socio-cultural adaptability. The study highlighted code-switching's dual role as both an academic support and a social strategy, helping students maintain peer solidarity in a multicultural university setting. Both studies share a fundamental interest in the pedagogical value of code-switching within Nigerian tertiary institutions. However, the previous study primarily focused on lecturer-initiated code-switching using purely qualitative data collection tools. This leaves a gap in understanding student-initiated peer-to-peer language alternation and lacks quantitative validation. The current

study addresses this methodological and scope-related gap by focusing squarely on undergraduate students' linguistic behaviours across different faculties.

Musa and Adebayo (2023) carried out a sociolinguistic analysis of code-switching and code-mixing among university students in Northern Nigeria. The study aimed to explore how students utilise language alternation to navigate interpersonal relationships, social norms, and inclusivity. Through qualitative methods, they found that students shifted their language use between Hausa, English, and regional languages, based on their audiences, including peers, lecturers, and administrative staff. Additionally, code-mixing was identified as a form of linguistic creativity, allowing students to create hybrid expressions that reflected their cultural identities. While the previous study shares a similar geographical scope (Northern Nigeria) and focus on inclusivity, its reliance on strictly qualitative data collection procedures limits the statistical generalisability of its findings. There is also a theoretical gap, as their descriptive approach lacks a structured framework to measure the social motivations behind these language shifts. The current study addresses this gap by introducing a rigorous quantitative procedure (400 questionnaires) alongside qualitative interviews. By rooting the analysis in CAT, this study moves beyond mere description to theoretically map out the specific variables of identity, social significance, and communicative functions across different student faculties.

Awal (2023) examined the sociolinguistic roles of code-switching and code-mixing in enhancing social cohesion and cultural continuity among multilingual Nigerian communities. Utilising qualitative discourse analysis, the study revealed that code-switching facilitates understanding and collaboration during group discussions, while code-mixing showcases bilingual proficiency and cultural expression. The research also highlighted concerns about the potential dilution of linguistic purity and the marginalisation of minority languages. Both the current study and the previous one emphasise the role of language alternation in fostering social cohesion within Nigeria. However, Awal's scope is excessively broad, focusing on general communities, and relies heavily on qualitative discourse analysis as the primary data procedure. This leaves a gap in understanding how these phenomena operate specifically within structured, formal academic environments. The present study fills this gap by restricting its scope to a specific institutional setting (KASU) and employing a mixed-methods framework rather than just discourse analysis. It integrates CAT to evaluate how academic pressures and institutional hierarchies specifically dictate students' communicative accommodation strategies.

Theoretical Framework

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), developed by Howard Giles in 1973, provides a valuable lens for understanding how individuals adapt their communication styles in multilingual contexts. This theory posits that people modify their speech, tone, or language depending on the social environment, often to bridge or highlight social differences. Howard Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) argues that communication is deeply influenced by social variables such as status, group identity, and power relations. According to CAT, individuals modify their communication styles through two primary mechanisms to navigate their cultural, academic, and social identities:

Convergence: This involves adapting language to align with conversational partners to foster rapport, reduce social distance, and promote inclusion (Almelhi, 2020). At KASU, students often switch from English to Hausa during informal interactions to connect with peers, build community, collaborate, and enhance group unity.

Divergence: This refers to the deliberate use of language to emphasise differences, assert individuality, or maintain social distance. At KASU, students may use English during formal discussions to signal authority, handle complex topics, and adhere to institutional standards. This approach allows them to distance themselves from informal communication to project a formal identity, thereby asserting social status and reflecting their academic or professional aspirations (Coupland & Jaworski, 2004).

Ultimately, CAT provides a vital framework for understanding the motivations behind code-switching within KASU's diverse student body, illustrating the complex relationship between individual identity and group dynamics. Furthermore, the theory highlights how these strategic linguistic shifts impact educational outcomes, as the ability to maintain English proficiency in formal settings remains directly linked to academic success.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to comprehensively investigate the language practices of undergraduate students at Kaduna State University (KASU). The quantitative component involved the administration of 400 structured questionnaires, which utilised Likert scale items that were distributed using a stratified random sampling method across the faculties of Arts, Science, and Social Sciences. The quantitative data were analysed to identify

statistical patterns and relationships regarding language alternation across different demographics. To complement the broader statistical data, the qualitative phase involved a semi-structured interview with 12 participants. To ensure a comprehensive representation that mirrored the quantitative sample, these participants were selected from varying academic stages (100 to 400 levels) across the Arts, Science, and Social Sciences faculties. To maintain strict participant anonymity throughout the study, all individuals involved in the qualitative sessions were assigned alphanumeric identifiers, such as INT003 and FGD1-P05, in place of their actual names. The qualitative sessions were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analysed using the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) framework.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The presentation of data and analysis was done in two major segments. The first segment focuses on quantitative analysis, while the second segment focuses on qualitative analysis.

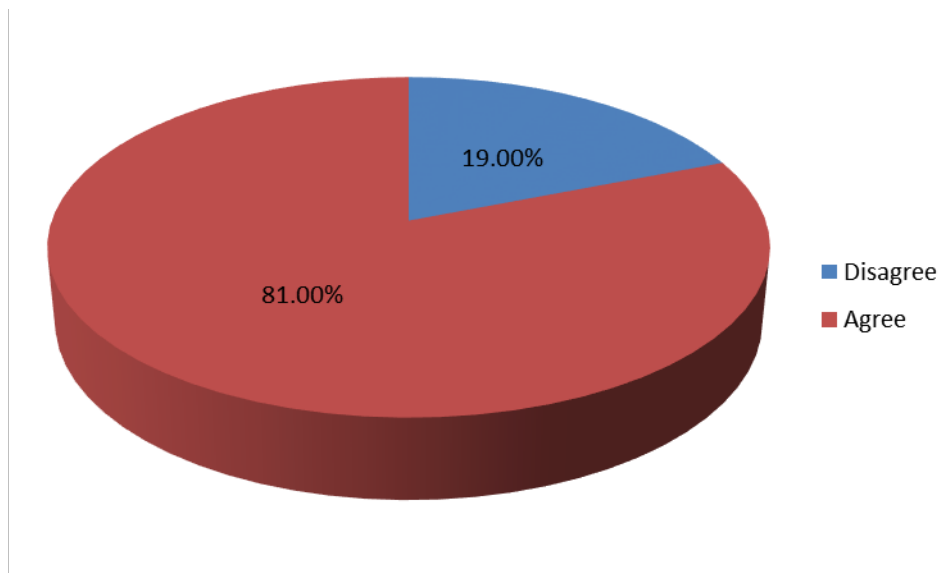
Section A: Quantitative Analysis

Communicative Functions and Social Significance

Table 1: I switch or mix languages to emphasise important points in a conversation.

RESPONSE OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Disagree	76	19.00%
Agree	324	81.00%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025



Demographic Variable	Category	Agree Frequency	Agree Percentage	Disagree Frequency	Disagree Percentage	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Gender	Male	156	39%	51	12.75%	207	51.75%
	Female	164	41%	29	7.25%	193	48.25%
	<i>Gender Subtotal</i>	320	80%	80	20%	400	100
Age Group	Below 20	34	8.5%	12	3%	46	11.5%
	21–25	159	39.75%	38	9.5%	197	49.25%
	26–30	74	18.5%	23	5.75%	97	24.25%
	Above 30	51	12.75%	9	2.25%	60	15%
	<i>Age Subtotal</i>	318	79.5%	82	20.5%	400	100%
Faculty	Arts	91	22.75%	14	3.5%	105	26.25%
	Science	111	27.75%	47	11.75%	158	39.5%
	Social Science	110	27.5%	27	6.75%	137	34.25%
	<i>Faculty Subtotal</i>	312	78%	88	22%	400	100%
Level	100	46	11.5%	13	3.25%	59	14.75%
	200	91	22.75%	8	2%	99	24.75%
	300	93	23.25%	21	5.25%	114	28.5%
	400	91	22.75%	37	9.25%	128	32%
	<i>Level Subtotal</i>	321	80.25%	79	19.75	400	100

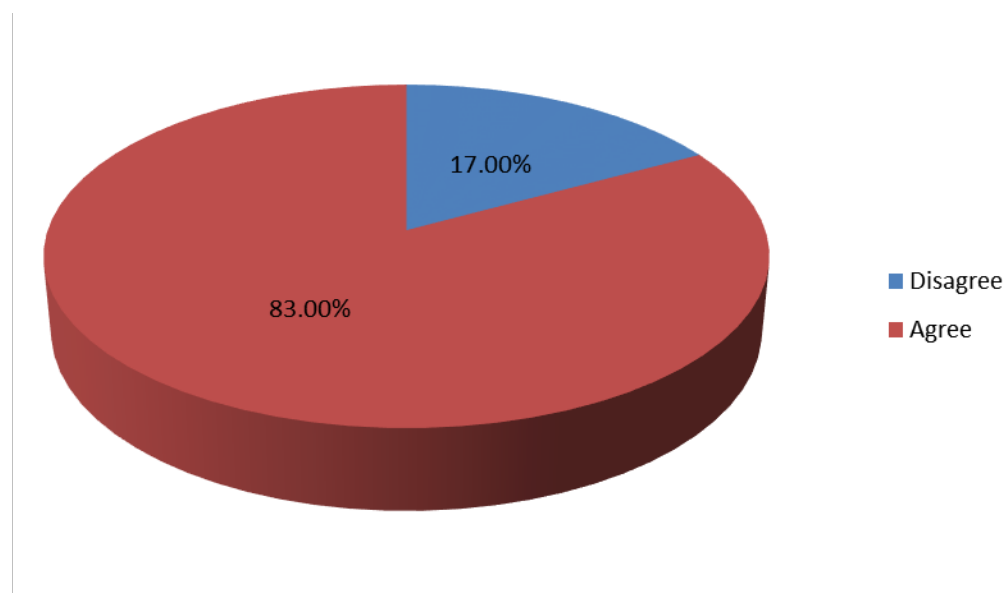
Table 1 shows that 81.0% of respondents agreed that they use language alternation to emphasise key points in conversations. It implies a high level of communicative competence, where speakers consciously manipulate language to achieve academic goals. This reinforces the idea that multilingual speakers possess functional sensitivity to the expressive strengths of each language. An examination of the demographic variables indicates a distinct pattern in how different subgroups utilise language alternation for emphasis. Specifically, students within the Faculty of

Science demonstrate the highest propensity for this practice, which may reflect a greater need to bridge conceptual gaps in highly technical subjects compared to their peers in the Arts and Social Sciences. Furthermore, the nearly equal distribution across genders suggests that the use of code-switching to underscore important conversational points is a universally adopted strategy that transcends male and female communicative differences. This practice, however, can affect formal English proficiency; a heavy reliance on local languages to articulate critical academic points may hinder students' long-term ability to emphasise and defend complex scientific concepts within standard global academic English frameworks.

Table 2: Switch languages to clarify something or to avoid misunderstanding.

RESPONSE OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Disagree	68	17.00%
Agree	332	83.00%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025



Demographic Variable	Category	Agree Frequency	Agree Percentage	Disagree Frequency	Disagree Percentage	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Gender	Male	168	42%	44	11%	212	53%
	Female	156	39%	32	8%	188	47%

	<i>Gender Subtotal</i>	324	81%	76	19%	400	100%
Age Group	Below 20	36	9%	9	2.25%	45	11.25%
	21–25	158	39.5%	42	10.5%	200	50%
	26–30	77	19.25%	18	4.5%	95	23.75%
	Above 30	45	11.25%	15	3.75%	60	15%
	<i>Age Subtotal</i>	316	79%	84	21%	400	100%
Faculty	Arts	88	22%	20	5%	108	27%
	Science	123	30.75%	37	9.25%	160	40%
	Social Science	110	27.5%	22	5.5%	132	33%
	<i>Faculty Subtotal</i>	321	80.25%	79	19.75	400	100%
Level	100	48	12%	11	2.75%	59	14.75%
	200	88	22%	11	2.75%	99	24.75%
	300	90	22.5%	24	6%	114	28.5%
	400	96	24%	32	8%	128	32%
	<i>Level Subtotal</i>	322	80%	78	19.5%	400	100%

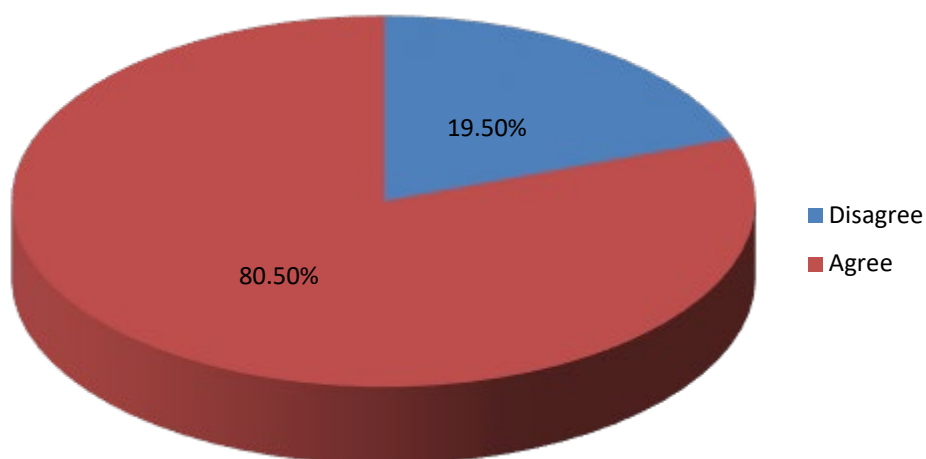
From Table 2, 83.0% of respondents agreed that they switch languages for clarity and to prevent miscommunication. This finding suggests that code-switching functions as a compensatory communication strategy, especially in a linguistically diverse environment. It implies that English alone may not always be sufficient for effective meaning-making, particularly for complex or culturally embedded concepts. Also, the reliance on language alternation for clarity presents observable variations across academic disciplines. Science students are the most frequent adopters of this strategy, likely due to the necessity of decoding complex, abstract course materials into more accessible local codes, a pressure less acutely felt in the Arts faculty. Meanwhile, the balanced gender representation further confirms that the drive to achieve communicative clarity

through code-switching is a shared academic coping mechanism, unaffected by gendered linguistic behaviours.

Table 3: Code-switching helps me be more persuasive or influential in academic discussions.

RESPONSE OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Disagree	78	19.50%
Agree	322	80.50%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025



Demographic Variable	Category	Agree Frequency	Agree Percentage	Disagree Frequency	Disagree Percentage	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Gender	Male	161	40.25%	51	12.75%	212	53%
	Female	164	41%	24	6%	188	47%
	Gender Subtotal	325	81.25%	75	18.75%	400	100
Age Group	Below 20	35	8.75%	13	3.25%	48	11.25%
	21–25	143	35.75%	56	14%	199	50%
	26–30	69	17.25%	26	6.5%	95	23.75%
	Above 30	54	13.5%	4	1.0%	58	15%

	Age Subtotal	301	75.25%	99	24.75%	400	100%
Faculty	Arts	96	24%	12	3%	108	27%
	Science	115	28.75%	46	11.5%	161	40%
	Social Science	105	26.25 %	26	6.5%	131	33%
	Faculty Subtotal	316	79%	84	21%	400	100%
Level	100	46	11.5%	13	3.25%	59	14.75%
	200	91	22.75%	8	2%	99	24.75%
	300	93	23.25%	21	5.25%	114	28.5%
	400	95	23.75%	33	8.25%	128	32%
	Level Subtotal	325	81.25%	75	18.75	400	100

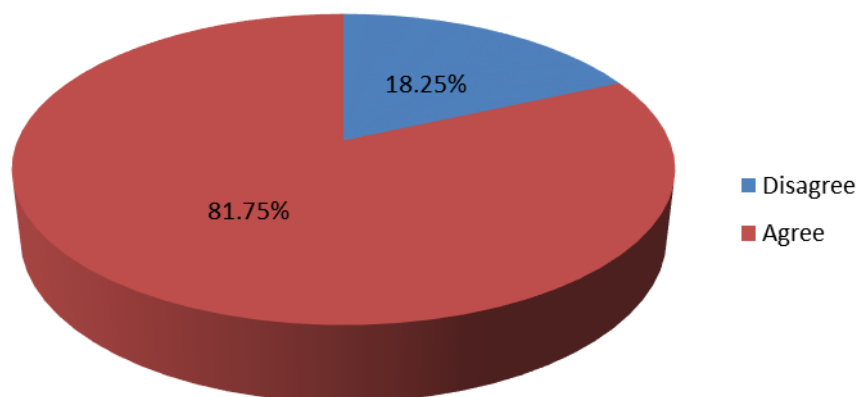
Table 3 indicates that 80.5% of respondents believe code-switching enhances their persuasive abilities in academic contexts. From other variables, a significant portion of this agreement stems from lower-level students (100 and 200 levels), suggesting that newer undergraduates view multilingual ability as a vital discursive advantage when navigating early academic deliberations. Furthermore, males (40.25% of the subset) show a strong inclination toward using language alternation to establish credibility. This indicates that age and academic standing are key determinants in using code-switching to navigate formality and respect. Older students and those in upper academic levels display a significant increase in this behaviour, reflecting a more developed understanding of the university's hierarchical structures and sociolinguistic expectations. This indicates that as students progress through the academic system, their linguistic choices become more calculated to navigate power dynamics between staff and the student body.

Table 4: Switch languages to show respect or formality when addressing certain individuals.

RESPONSE OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Disagree	73	18.25%
Agree	327	81.75%

Total	400	100%
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Source: Field Survey, 2025



Demographic Variable	Category	Agree Frequency	Agree Percentage	Disagree Frequency	Disagree Percentage	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Gender	Male	161	40.25%	51	12.75%	212	53%
	Female	164	41%	24	6%	188	47%
	Gender Subtotal	325	81.25%	75	18.75%	400	100
Age Group	Below 20	35	8.75%	13	3.25%	48	11.25%
	21–25	143	35.75%	56	14%	199	50%
	26–30	69	17.25%	26	6.5%	95	23.75%
	Above 30	54	13.5%	4	1.0%	58	15%
	Age Subtotal	301	75.25%	99	24.75%	400	100%
Faculty	Arts	96	24%	12	3%	108	27%
	Science	115	28.75%	46	11.5%	161	40%
	Social Science	105	26.25 %	26	6.5%	131	33%
	Faculty Subtotal	316	79%	84	21%	400	100%
Level	100	46	11.5%	13	3.25%	59	14.75%
	200	91	22.75%	8	2%	99	24.75%

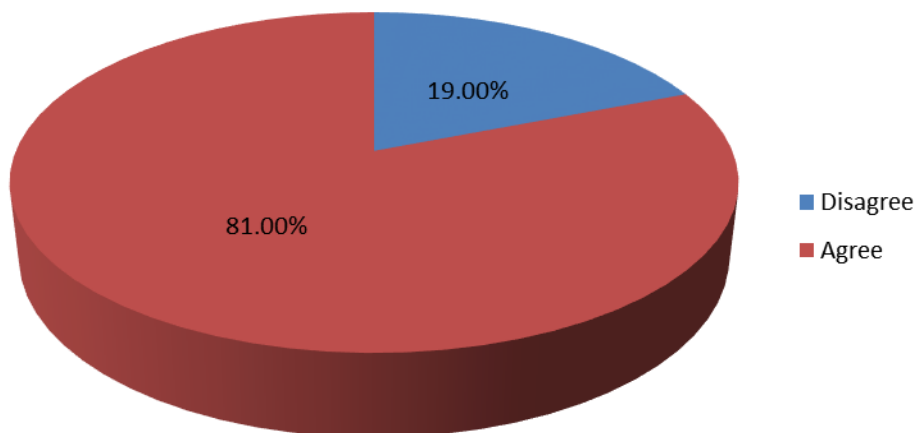
	300	93	23.25%	21	5.25%	114	28.5%
	400	95	23.75%	33	8.25%	128	32%
	Level Subtotal	325	81.25%	75	18.75	400	100

In Table 4, 81.75% of respondents agreed that they adjust their language to convey respect or maintain formality, particularly in academic or hierarchical settings. This implies that students are aware of sociolinguistic norms and power relations. Here, language choice becomes a marker of social positioning, where English is often associated with authority and formality, while local languages signal familiarity. The result suggests that students actively engage in communication accommodation, adjusting their speech to align with expectations of respect and hierarchy. This reinforces the idea that code-switching is not only functional but also socially regulated and context-sensitive. From the table, it is clear that older students (Above 30) and upper-level undergraduates demonstrate a heightened sensitivity to this practice. This suggests that as students mature and progress through the university system, they become more adept at navigating hierarchical relationships, associating English with academic authority and local languages with relational familiarity. However, the strict association of English with academic authority and local languages with relational familiarity serves to reinforce rigid linguistic hierarchies, potentially widening the social distance between university staff and the student body, and perpetuating the notion that indigenous languages lack formal institutional value.

Table 5: I use language alternation to add humour or create a relaxed social atmosphere.

RESPONSE OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Disagree	76	19.00%
Agree	324	81.00%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025



Demographic Variable	Category	Agree Frequency	Agree Percentage	Disagree Frequency	Disagree Percentage	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Gender	Male	167	41.75%	47	11.25%	214	53.5%
	Female	161	40.25%	25	6.25%	186	46.5%
	Gender Subtotal	328	82%	72	18%	400	100%
Age Group	Below 20	38	9.5%	7	1.75%	45	11.25%
	21–25	169	42.25%	31	7.75%	200	50%
	26–30	76	19%	19	4.75%	95	23.75%
	Above 30	47	11.75%	13	3.25%	60	15%
	Age Subtotal	330	82.5%	70	17.5%	400	100%
Faculty	Arts	91	22.75%	17	4.25%	108	27%
	Science	131	32.75%	29	7.25%	160	40%
	Social Science	101	27.75%	31	5.25%	132	33%
	Faculty Subtotal	323	80.75%	77	19.25	400	100%
Level	100	53	13.25%	6	1.5%	59	14.75%
	200	87	21.75%	11	2.75%	98	23.75%
	300	91	22.75%	23	5.75%	114	28.5%

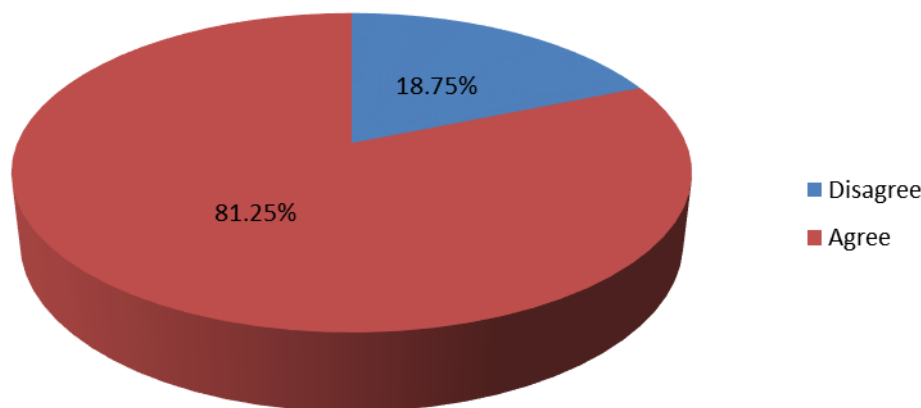
	400	98	25.5%	31	6.75%	129	32.25%
Level Subtotal		329	82.25%	71	17.75	400	100%

Multilingual practices play a key role in creating socially cohesive environments, with 81.0% of respondents mixing languages to introduce humour or ease tension. Looking at the demographic spread, the use of code-switching and code-mixing for humour is notably concentrated among final-year students and those within the Faculty of Science. This pattern suggests that academic seniority and the high-stress environment of technical disciplines may foster a greater need for linguistic stress relief and informal bonding. Conversely, the uniform application across male and female demographics demonstrates that employing multilingual humour remains a collective mechanism for navigating the social pressures of campus life.

Table 5: I use indigenous languages in conversations to affirm my cultural background.

RESPONSE OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Disagree	75	18.75%
++Agree	325	81.25%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025



Demographic Variable	Category	Agree Frequency	Agree Percentage	Disagree Frequency	Disagree Percentage	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Gender	Male	157	40.25%	55	12.75%	212	53%

	Female	161	41%	27	6%	188	47%
	Gender Subtotal	325	81.25%	75	18.75%	400	100
Age Group	Below 20	34	8.5%	11	2.75%	45	11.25%
	21–25	161	40.25%	39	9.75%	200	50%
	26–30	74	18.5%	21	5.25%	95	23.75%
	Above 30	54	13.5%	6	1.5%	60	15%
	Age Subtotal	323	80.75%	77	19.25	400	100%
Faculty	Arts	96	24%	12	3%	108	27%
	Science	118	29.5%	42	10.5%	160	40%
	Social Science	108	27%	24	6%	132	33%
	Faculty Subtotal	322	80.5%	78	19.5%	400	100%
Level	100	46	11.5%	13	3.25%	59	14.75%
	200	91	22.75%	8	2%	99	24.75%
	300	93	23.25%	21	5.25%	114	28.5%
	400	95	23.75%	33	8.25%	128	32%
	Level Subtotal	325	81.25%	75	18.75	400	100

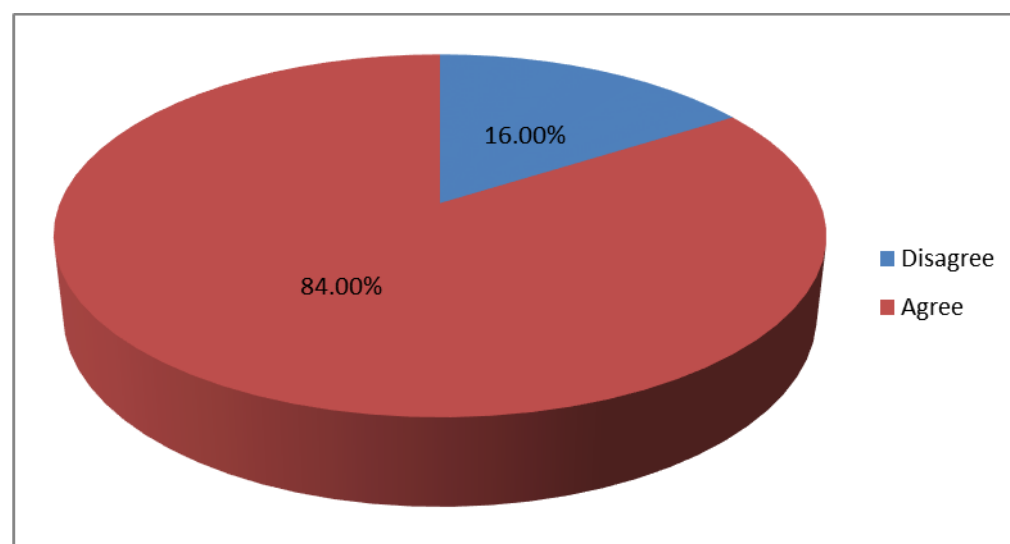
Language alternation functions as a symbolic link to cultural heritage, with 81.25% of students confirming they use indigenous languages to affirm their cultural background and feel connected to their roots. Cultural assertion through language is predominantly championed by the middle-aged bracket of the undergraduate population and is heavily concentrated in the Science and Social Science faculties. This suggests that language use is a deliberate act of identity construction and expression. Students' choice of codes is not meant only to communicate but also to project who they are. This implies resistance to the dominance of English, as students actively maintain their linguistic heritage. This distribution implies that students in these specific cohorts feel a stronger necessity to actively preserve and project their ethnic identities against the homogenising force of

standard academic English. The data reflects a demographic-specific resistance where certain faculties become hotspots for cultural representation and identity management. Conversely, a linguistic divergence for the sake of cultural assertion may reinforce ethnic divides on campus, potentially fragmenting the broader student body if localised identity management overshadows a unified academic culture.

Table 8: Mixing languages helps me maintain relationships with friends from different ethnic groups.

RESPONSE OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Disagree	64	16.00%
Agree	336	84.00%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025



Demographic Variable	Category	Agree Frequency	Agree Percentage	Disagree Frequency	Disagree Percentage	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Gender	Male	161	40.25%	51	12.75%	212	53%
	Female	164	41%	24	6%	188	47%

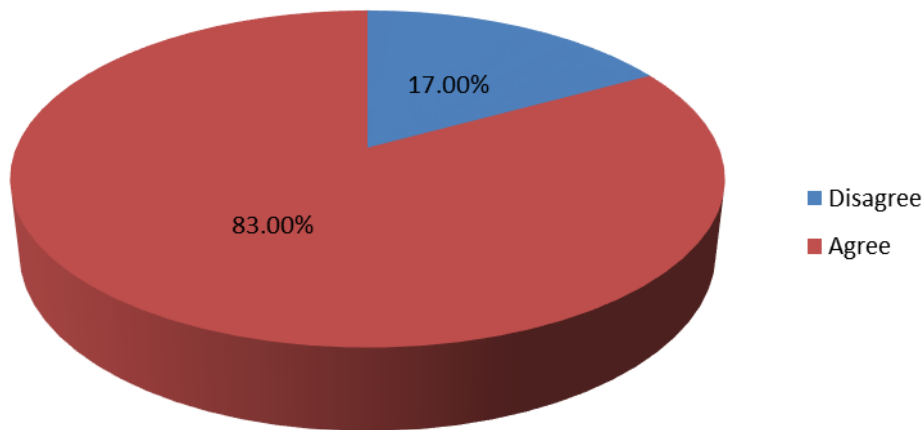
	<i>Gender Subtotal</i>	325	81.25%	75	18.75%	400	100
Age Group	Below 20	34	8.5%	11	2.75%	45	11.25%
	21–25	161	40.25%	39	9.75%	200	50%
	26–30	74	18.5%	21	5.25%	95	23.75%
	Above 30	54	13.5%	6	1.5%	60	15%
	<i>Age Subtotal</i>	323	80.75%	77	19.25	400	100%
Faculty	Arts	96	24%	12	3%	108	27%
	Science	118	29.5%	42	10.5%	160	40%
	Social Science	108	27%	24	6%	132	33%
	<i>Faculty Subtotal</i>	322	80.5%	78	19.5%	400	100%
Level	100	46	11.5%	13	3.25%	59	14.75%
	200	91	22.75%	8	2%	99	24.75%
	300	93	23.25%	21	5.25%	114	28.5%
	400	95	23.75%	33	8.25%	128	32%
	<i>Level Subtotal</i>	325	81.25%	75	18.75	400	100

Code-mixing is considered a vital tool for cross-cultural relationship-building, with 84.0% of respondents supporting this view. The demographic breakdown reflects a consistent distribution, indicating that male and female students across all faculties and academic levels universally utilise this strategy to navigate their heterogeneous environment. Positively, this practice serves as a vital bridge across ethnic and linguistic divides, promoting intercultural competence, social integration, and peaceful coexistence on campus. Nevertheless, some students may not be proficient in some codes used within the institution, and hence may be alienated.

Table 9: I feel more included in group conversations when others switch between English and local languages.

RESPONSE OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Disagree	68	17.00%
Agree	332	83.00%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025



Demographic Variable	Category	Agree Frequency	Agree Percentage	Disagree Frequency	Disagree Percentage	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Gender	Male	164	41%	51	12.75%	215	53.75%
	Female	161	40.25%	24	6%	185	46.25%
	Gender Subtotal	325	81.25%	75	18.75%	400	100
Age Group	Below 20	34	8.5%	11	2.75%	45	11.25%
	21–25	161	40.25%	39	9.75%	200	50%
	26–30	74	18.5%	21	5.25%	95	23.75%
	Above 30	54	13.5%	6	1.5%	60	15%
	Age Subtotal	323	80.75%	77	19.25	400	100%
Faculty	Arts	110	24%	17	3%	127	31.75%
	Science	104	29.5%	42	10.5%	146	36.5%
	Social Science	103	27%	24	6%	127	31.75%

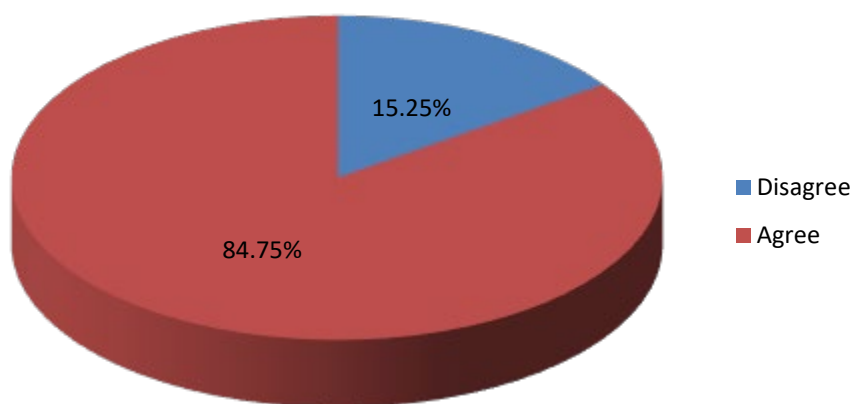
	<i>Faculty Subtotal</i>	317	79.25%	83	20.75%	400	100%
Level	100	38	11.5%	21	3.25%	59	14.75%
	200	85	22.75%	10	2%	95	23.75%
	300	92	23.25%	23	5.25%	115	28.75%
	400	99	23.75%	32	8.25%	131	32.75%
	<i>Level Subtotal</i>	314	78.5%	86	21.5%	400	100

Table 9 reflects that 83.0% of students feel socially included when others use code-switching in conversations. The result from the social variables shows that this sense of inclusion is strong across all academic levels, particularly among upper-level students. This finding indicates that code-switching functions as an inclusive communicative strategy, ensuring that more participants can engage meaningfully in conversations. This trend suggests that as students spend more time in the university environment, they become more deeply integrated into multilingual peer networks, making language alternation a crucial metric for their social belonging. The lack of significant gender disparity further emphasises that linguistic inclusivity is a broad-based demographic need rather than an isolated phenomenon. However, rigid use of a single language (especially English) may lead to exclusion or reduced participation. Therefore, multilingual practices help create a sense of belonging and psychological safety, which is crucial for both social interaction and collaborative learning.

Table 10: Language switching promotes social unity on campus despite cultural differences.

RESPONSE OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Disagree	61	15.25%
Agree	339	84.75%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025



Demographic Variable	Category	Agree Frequency	Agree Percentage	Disagree Frequency	Disagree Percentage	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Gender	Male	167	41.75%	47	11.25%	214	53.5%
	Female	161	40.25%	25	6.25%	186	46.5%
	Gender Subtotal	328	82%	72	18%	400	100%
Age Group	Below 20	38	9.5%	7	1.75%	45	11.25%
	21–25	169	42.25%	31	7.75%	200	50%
	26–30	76	19%	19	4.75%	95	23.75%
	Above 30	47	11.75%	13	3.25%	60	15%
	Age Subtotal	330	82.5%	70	17.5%	400	100%
Faculty	Arts	91	22.75%	17	4.25%	108	27%
	Science	131	32.75%	29	7.25%	160	40%
	Social Science	101	27.75%	31	5.25%	132	33%
	Faculty Subtotal	323	80.75%	77	19.25	400	100%
Level	100	53	13.25%	6	1.5%	59	14.75%
	200	87	21.75%	11	2.75%	98	23.75%
	300	91	22.75%	23	5.75%	114	28.5%

	400	98	25.5%	31	6.75%	129	32.25%
Level Subtotal		329	82.25%	71	17.75	400	100%

In Table 10, 84.75% of respondents believe that switching languages fosters campus-wide unity despite ethnic differences. This belief is common across genders, age groups, and faculties (Science 40%, Social Science 33%, Arts 27%). This suggests that multilingual practices serve as a unifying social force and support integration, countering the idea that linguistic diversity causes division. However, the slightly higher resonance among Science and Social Science students suggests that disciplines fostering intensive collaborative work may naturally encourage a stronger reliance on multilingualism for social cohesion. Overall, the demographic uniformity confirms that code-switching serves as a foundational element of campus unity across diverse student profiles.

Section B: Qualitative Data Analysis and Interpretation

This section discusses qualitative research findings from Kaduna State University involving semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The data analysis included transcription, open and axial coding for category development, and theme refinement, all interpreted through the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), which examines how individuals adjust their language to fulfil social expectations and communication goals.

Theme One: Emotional Expression and Affective Clarity

A key theme from the interviews and focus group discussions highlights the role of code-switching and code-mixing in expressing emotions authentically and clearly. Participants noted that their indigenous languages and Pidgin English allows for culturally resonant expressions that conveyed feelings more effectively than English. This strategy was employed in both informal and semi-formal settings, such as peer conversations and social media. When emotions were heightened, individuals instinctively used expressions from Hausa, Pidgin, or their native languages, often incorporating unique interjections and idiomatic phrases. For example, Participant INT003 from the Faculty of Social Sciences remarked:

“When someone says something funny or shocking, it’s ‘chai’ that comes out first. It is not planned, it just happens. If I say ‘oh my God’ in English, it feels forced. But ‘chai’—everyone knows I really mean it.”

This sentiment was echoed in FGD1, where Participant FGD1-P05, a 200-level student from the Faculty of Arts, observed:

“Even during study group, when I want to explain something difficult, I will first say ‘wallahi’ to show I am serious. It carries more weight than just saying ‘I swear’ in English. Everyone takes you seriously.”

Such emotionally charged expressions are examples of what Communication Accommodation Theory describes as affective convergence, a speaker’s attempt to match the emotional tone and expectations of their interlocutor. The participants’ consistent use of emotionally loaded expressions in their native tongues reflects an effort to make their feelings more accessible and impactful to those around them. This is not merely a stylistic choice but a culturally shaped communicative strategy grounded in shared experience and emotional resonance.

Theme Two: Identity Management and Cultural Assertion

A study on students at Kaduna State University reveals that code-switching and code-mixing are intentional practices used to assert cultural identities. Students switch to their mother tongue, local dialects, or Pidgin English as a way of preserving ethnic identity in a predominantly English academic environment. This practice aligns with the divergence principle of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), allowing students to resist the dominance of English, foster self-representation, and enhance cultural visibility. Such cultural assertions were noted to occur more in semi-formal, student-led situations, where there was greater freedom to diverge from strict language conventions. Participant INT010, a final-year student from the Faculty of Social Sciences, observed:

“I don't usually use Hausa in front of lecturers, but when we are presenting to our coursemates or doing tutorials, I start with Hausa sometimes. It makes me feel grounded and gives me confidence.”

This insight highlights the way students manage multiple identities through code-switching, using English for academic performance while utilising their local language to express personal or group identity in more informal settings. This strategic language alternation underscores the complexity of identity negotiation in multilingual institutions, revealing that linguistic choices bear symbolic significance, particularly for students from underrepresented communities in formal academic discourse.

Interestingly, some students also used code-switching to resist linguistic dominance or to balance perceived power relations. For example, Participant INT004, a 400-level student from the Faculty of Social Sciences, remarked:

“Sometimes, if I feel that a lecturer or student is looking down on people who don’t speak English fluently, I switch into my language to prove a point. It’s my way of saying, ‘I may not speak perfect English, but I am still intelligent and proud of my background.’”

Such moments of divergence are not about communication breakdown, but about resisting erasure and asserting identity on one’s own terms. This reinforces CAT’s understanding of divergence as a mechanism for reclaiming linguistic agency and cultural legitimacy. Through language, students at KASU engage in identity management, utilising code-switching and code-mixing not merely as reactions to external stimuli, but as assertions of ethnic pride and cultural authenticity. This sociolinguistic strategy is framed as a means of empowerment, allowing participation in academia while retaining cultural identity. This behaviour aligns with Communication Accommodation Theory, reflecting personal and symbolic choices influenced by various historical and social factors.

Theme Three: Instructional Clarity and Cognitive Processing

One significant theme from the qualitative data is the importance of code-switching and code-mixing in improving instructional clarity and cognitive processing. Participants indicated that their indigenous languages and Pidgin English were vital for understanding challenging academic concepts, particularly during self-study, peer group tutorials, and exam preparation. Many students often thought in their local language before expressing themselves in English, especially with complex theoretical material.

Across both interviews and focus groups, students indicated that this internal linguistic shift was not simply habitual—it was a deliberate learning strategy. Participant INT001, a 200-level student from the Faculty of Science, shared:

“When I am reading something difficult, especially in chemistry, I try to explain it to myself in Hausa first. Once I understand it that way, it becomes easier to remember and to write it in English later.”

This behaviour illustrates intrapersonal accommodation, as defined by CAT, where language adjustments facilitate cognitive processing. Unlike interpersonal convergence, which seeks

audience alignment, intrapersonal convergence aligns the speaker's internal thoughts with external academic expectations. For multilingual students, using a familiar language can bridge comprehension and performance gaps.

The theme was particularly strong among students in technical disciplines or courses with abstract content. Participant FGD1-P01, a 100-level student from the Faculty of Social Sciences, explained: *"Our lecturers speak fast and use big grammar. If I try to understand in English only, I get confused. But when I break it down in Yoruba or Pidgin, it becomes clear. That is how I survive in engineering."*

Participants indicated that the classroom setting often dissuades visible code-switching; however, internal or peer-assisted code-switching is essential for effective learning. Students mentioned that when they provide answers in English, the conceptual formulation occurs first in their native language. Participant INT011, a final-year student from the Faculty of Social Sciences, observed:

"Sometimes, I translate questions in my head before answering. It's like a mental rehearsal. I think in Hausa or Pidgin, then change it to English so I can speak in class or write in the exam."

This insight highlights the significant effort multilingual students invest in adapting to formal academic standards amid linguistic diversity. Their strategic code-switching is deliberate, aiding comprehension, retention, and confidence in their academic performance.

Furthermore, on this theme, students noted that collaborative learning, particularly through group discussions and revision sessions, frequently depended on indigenous languages or Pidgin English to clarify and simplify content. Participant FGD2-P04, a student from the Faculty of Arts, stated:

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"We don't usually speak English during tutorials. We use Pidgin and sometimes Igbo or Hausa, depending on who is there. That's the only way everybody will understand. If you insist on English, some people will just keep quiet and pretend."

This practical peer-level code-switching supports what CAT would classify as relational convergence, where speakers adjust their language to promote mutual understanding and group cohesion. It also suggests that language alternation serves both cognitive and participatory functions, making learning more democratic and less intimidating for those less confident in their use of English.

Notably, Students perceive bilingual literacy as essential for navigating academic tasks rather than undermining standards. However, they are concerned that reliance on indigenous languages could impair their English writing skills in exams. This reveals a tension between comprehension and assessment, aligning with CAT's concept of a push-pull dynamic where students juggle cognitive accommodation in one language while producing outputs in another for institutional requirements. This shows that code-switching and code-mixing are commonly employed by multilingual students of KASU to enhance instructional clarity and cognitive processing. This strategy helps reconcile academic demands with linguistic realities, demonstrating how accommodation functions both socially and psychologically. With this, students are able to thrive within a system that requires linguistic conformity while drawing on their multilingual background for comprehension.

Theme Four: Peer Influence and Social Belonging

Another prominent theme that emerged is that peer networks significantly influence students' language use in informal academic and social contexts. Students adjust their language—whether in English, Pidgin English, or indigenous languages to enhance clarity, foster relationships, and maintain group cohesion. This behaviour aligns with Communication Accommodation Theory, highlighting relational convergence as individuals adapt their speech to minimise social distance. For some students, code-switching is typically driven by social connection rather than conscious planning. Participant INT005, a 400-level student from the Faculty of Sciences, explained:

“When I am with my guys, we speak mostly Pidgin. If you speak too much English, they will just laugh and say you are forming. So to flow well, you have to blend your language with theirs.”

This sentiment was echoed in FGD1, where Participant FGD1-P02, a 300-level student from the Faculty of Arts, shared:

“You can't go into a group that is speaking Hausa and start speaking pure English. Even if they don't say it, you'll feel like an outsider. But once you switch, it's like they accept you more.”

The above accounts point out that code-switching serves both as a communication tool and a marker of group membership and social adaptability. It helps students establish in-group identity and is often seen as a social skill rather than a linguistic deficiency.

Participants noted a connection between peer language patterns and academic engagement, revealing that in student-led study groups or hostel discussions, the primary language used was

often a blend of English, Pidgin, and local languages, as this mix facilitated better understanding of concepts. Participant FGD2-P06, a student from the Faculty of Social Sciences, explained:

“Even when we are preparing for tests, we don't speak formal English. We use the language we are comfortable with—sometimes Igbo, sometimes Pidgin. Everybody contributes better that way. It is not about impressing; it is about understanding.”

This observation highlights the influence of language choice in peer groups on academic participation, noting that students who feel linguistically excluded tend to withdraw from discussions, whereas those comfortable with the group's language are more likely to engage. Consequently, peer-influenced code-switching fosters both social inclusion and academic collaboration.

Theme Five: Cultural Belonging and Group Solidarity

The fifth major theme from the qualitative data highlights that code-switching and code-mixing enhance cultural belonging and group solidarity among Kaduna State University students. Participants noted that using indigenous languages in various settings fostered comfort, identity affirmation, and emotional safety, creating a sense of home and inclusion within the diverse university community.

Students view code-switching as both a communicative habit and a symbolic gesture that reinforces shared identity and group unity, as evident in the interview and focus group data. Participant INT008, a 400-level student from the Faculty of Sciences, shared:

“When I hear someone speak Tiv around me, even if I don't know them, it makes me feel at home. Immediately, I want to talk to them. It's like we already understand each other because we share something deeper.”

This sentiment was shared by participants from linguistic minority groups, who felt that the presence of their language in a university setting helped address the invisibility they often faced. Participant FGD2-P01, a student from the Faculty of Social Sciences, noted:

“On campus, English is everywhere, but when we speak our own language—even just small—it reminds us where we come from. It creates that sense of pride and connection.”

This behaviour illustrates CAT's concept of symbolic convergence, highlighting that language serves not just as a communication tool but as a means to express shared identity and strengthen

communal bonds. Students noted frequent code-switching in contexts like student associations and informal gatherings to enhance cultural identity and foster group cohesion.

Language alternation was vital for fostering cross-ethnic friendships, with participants noting that mixing languages like English, Hausa, and Pidgin in multi-ethnic groups helped everyone feel represented and valued. Participant INT007, a 300-level student from the Faculty of Science, explained:

“In my department, we are from different parts of Nigeria. So sometimes, I speak Hausa, sometimes Pidgin, sometimes just English. It helps everyone feel included. If I speak only one language, some people will feel left out.”

This multilingual flexibility in CAT allows speakers to adjust their linguistic repertoire based on the identities and expectations of their interlocutors. Code-switching and mixing serve as social equalisers, lowering linguistic barriers and fostering a shared cultural space for easier interaction among students.

Language alternation is found to significantly enhance feelings of unity and emotional connection among students during informal campus events, such as sports and religious programs, as they engage in speaking their native languages and hearing familiar dialects. Participant INT009 described a similar experience during student union meetings:

“When we use different languages during union programs, people pay more attention. It shows we respect each other’s background. Everyone feels they have a place in the school.”

The above responses indicate that code-switching facilitates cultural inclusion and collective identification among students, enhancing communication rather than fragmenting it. Multilingualism fosters respect and mutual recognition within the diverse ethnic landscape of Nigerian universities, promoting openness and cultural sensitivity.

Among first- and second-year students adjusting to university life, familiar linguistic codes from peers and campus spaces significantly help reduce homesickness and foster social confidence. Participant FGD2-P07, a 100-level student from the Faculty of Arts, stated:

“At first, I felt lost. But when I met people from my state, and we started speaking our language, I became more relaxed. I didn’t feel like a stranger anymore.”

Therefore, code-switching and code-mixing among KASU students are crucial for fostering a culturally affirming and socially inclusive environment. These practices enable students to feel

validated and emotionally connected in a predominantly English-speaking institution. Analysed through Communication Accommodation Theory, these language alternation strategies are symbolic actions that enhance community, promote equity, and sustain cultural memory. The findings emphasise that code-switching enriches academic life as a dynamic expression of identity and solidarity in a diverse linguistic context.

Discussion of Findings

This study illustrates that language code-switching and code-mixing serve as a deliberate tool for communicative efficiency rather than a random linguistic breakdown. While the broad statistical trends indicate that students regularly rely on language mixing to clarify intentions, emphasise points, and inject humour into conversations, the qualitative insights reveal how this practice achieves affective convergence. Emotional expressions, cultural idioms, and colloquial exclamations carry an interpersonal depth and immediacy that formal English often fails to replicate. However, a significant drawback emerges within this social dynamic. When dominant regional codes like Hausa are used to drive humour and group bonding, they introduce a distinct mechanism of exclusion. Non-Hausa-speaking students face inadvertent marginalisation, and hence, what is intended to be a unifying social tool becomes an invisible boundary that separates in-groups from out-groups during informal campus interactions.

In academic contexts, the study highlights a strong connection between comprehension of concepts and multilingual flexibility. Quantitative patterns show that alternating codes enhance peer persuasiveness and collaborative learning, while the qualitative evidence clarifies that students engage in intrapersonal accommodation. They internalise complex academic concepts by translating them mentally into familiar indigenous languages or Pidgin English before reframing them for formal output. While this strategy democratises classroom discourse and lowers the performance anxiety associated with strict English-only instruction, it creates a long-term linguistic vulnerability. An over-reliance on local languages for internal processing can mask deficiencies in technical English proficiency. This mismatch becomes highly problematic during formal examinations and standardised assessments, where students must articulate complex, abstract, and theoretical ideas strictly within global academic English frameworks.

Language choice on campus is heavily tied to identity negotiation and situational awareness. Students frequently project their cultural backgrounds by embedding indigenous phrases into daily speech, using linguistic divergence as a tool for cultural self-assertion and resistance against

cultural erasure. On the contrary, there is a clear situational shift toward standard English when interacting with institutional authority figures, such as lecturers, to signal respect and maintain formality. While this shows high sociolinguistic competence, it inadvertently sustains an asymmetrical linguistic hierarchy. By reserving standard English exclusively for intellect, respect, and institutional authority, while confining indigenous tongues to informal or purely casual spheres, the campus community implicitly devalues local languages, reinforcing the notion that they lack formal academic and institutional worth.

Finally, the study demonstrates that multilingual practices are vital for building community within a highly diverse student population. The interview responses point to a widespread perception that language alternation bridges cultural gaps and builds social cohesion, while the thematic data highlight how peer expectations drive this behaviour. Students actively modify their linguistic choices toward relational convergence to secure a sense of peer validation and avoid social isolation. For newer students, hearing familiar linguistic codes creates a form of symbolic convergence that cushions the transition to university life, mitigates homesickness, and establishes a safe space. Profiles of campus interaction reveal, however, that this remains a double-edged sword; if these linguistic boundaries are not navigated mindfully, the reliance on distinct localised languages can trigger ethnic clustering, ultimately replacing institutional unity with fragmented sub-groups.

Conclusion

This study investigates the communicative functions and social significance of code-switching and code-mixing among undergraduate students at Kaduna State University. Anchored in the Communication Accommodation Theory, the research provides empirical evidence that language alternation in a multilingual academic setting is not an indicator of linguistic deficiency, but a complex, rule-governed communicative resource. A key contribution of this research is demonstrating how students utilise these linguistic strategies to successfully navigate institutional demands, utilising intrapersonal accommodation to enhance cognitive processing and instructional clarity. Furthermore, the study contributes to sociolinguistic understanding by showing how language mixing empowers students to manage their identities, assert cultural heritage, and foster campus-wide social unity.

Despite these contributions, the findings highlight potential limitations regarding the broader implications of these linguistic practices. While code-switching fosters immediate in-group solidarity, relying on specific local codes can inadvertently alienate and exclude non-native speakers during informal campus socialisation. Furthermore, utilising linguistic divergence primarily for cultural assertion carries the risk of reinforcing ethnic divides, which may fragment the broader student body. The study also acknowledges that a heavy reliance on indigenous languages to articulate academic concepts may conceal deeper issues in language policy and hinder students' long-term proficiency in standard global academic English.

Building upon these findings, future research should explore the integrated, long-term effects of code-switching and code-mixing on formal academic performance and institutional language policies in Northern Nigeria. Because students expressed concerns about the tension between conceptual comprehension and formal assessment, further studies could investigate how reliance on indigenous languages impacts students' English writing skills during examinations. Finally, subsequent research should more critically examine the negative consequences of language alternation, such as the reinforcement of linguistic hierarchies and social exclusion, to help develop more balanced and inclusive pedagogical frameworks for universities where many languages are spoken.

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