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Tutoring across Languages: How Peer Tutors Navigate Arabic-English Interactions in the Writing Center

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Abstract

This study examines how peer tutors in a multilingual university writing center in the UAE use code-switching during Arabic-English interactions. We explore why tutors code-switch in tutorials and challenge the idea that it is a barrier to learning English. Instead, we show how it can encourage more inclusive and cultural awareness practices. We used audio recordings, stimulated recall, and interviews with Arabic-speaking tutors to understand the reasons for and value of code-switching. We focused on three tutors and three sessions. Our findings show that tutors code-switch to build rapport, lower anxiety, clarify ideas, and respond to cultural expectations. They also switch between Arabic dialects to improve understanding and connection. The results suggest that code-switching is not a problem in tutorials; rather, it is a useful tool that helps students participate and aligns with translanguaging theory. Tutors report that this approach enables students to draw on their full linguistic repertoire, promotes collaboration, and creates a more comfortable learning environment. By considering both teaching and cultural aspects, this study shows how code-switching supports inclusive and supportive writing center sessions. The findings offer practical advice for tutor training and highlight the need to help tutors use language in ways that support communication and respect students' linguistic identities.

Keywords: Code-switching, dialectal variation, intercultural competence, multilingual tutors, peer tutoring, translanguaging, writing centers

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Introduction

Recent research on teaching multilingual speakers uses a translingual approach. This approach values all language practices, encourages "respect for perceived differences within and across languages" (Horner et al., 2011, p. 304), and sees multilingual speakers as bringing new ways to express meaning in English. At our university's writing center, we train tutors to view students' other languages as resources rather than obstacles. By allowing different languages in tutorials, we help students develop as individuals and independent writers.

In this paper, we define code-switching as switching between languages during conversation (Caballero & Celaya, 2022; Raschka et al., 2009). Translanguaging, in contrast, treats language as a flexible process where speakers use all their language skills without strict boundaries. Code-switching involves moving between set languages, while translanguaging blends language practices more freely.

Translanguaging brings languages together during communication (Almashour, 2024) rather than keeping them separate. While code-switching involves moving between languages, translanguaging sees communication as naturally using multiple languages, modes, and senses (Almashour, 2024).

The diverse linguistic and cultural makeup of our writing center offers a rich context for exploring the value of code-switching. Using Byram's (1997) intercultural competence model, tutors help bridge language and meet students' cultural expectations. This is especially important in the UAE, where tutors and students often share similar, but not identical, backgrounds. Being aware of cultural differences and language status is essential for effective tutoring.

Language use in our writing center is complex and has prompted ongoing debate around code-switching. While the center has long permitted the use of any language in tutorials, this practice has been questioned by some faculty and staff. In tutor training, tutors regularly consider whether code-switching supports or limits students' opportunities to practice English. Historically, code-switching has often been framed as a deficit and discouraged in classroom contexts (Palmer, 2009), which has, at times, left tutors feeling distanced from their own linguistic resources. At the same time, limited research on code-switching in writing centers has made it difficult to establish clear, evidence-based guidelines.

Even though writing centers are more linguistically diverse now, we still do not know much about how peer tutors use code-switching. Its impact on learning, engagement, and communication is not well understood. Many still see code-switching as a barrier to learning English, which creates uncertainty and gives tutors little guidance. This issue is even more pronounced in the multilingual UAE, where tutors and students have diverse backgrounds. The benefits of code-switching have not been fully explored.

This study examines how peer tutors at a multilingual UAE university writing center use code-switching during tutorials and explores their views on its teaching and cultural value.

This study is important because it challenges the idea that code-switching is a barrier and shows its value for teaching and culture in a multilingual university. It examines how peer tutors use code-switching in Arabic-English writing center tutorials and across Arabic dialects. The study also considers tutors' views on how code-switching supports student learning and engagement, and how it helps create a supportive and inclusive environment that meets students' language and cultural needs. It provides guidance for tutors on using language to support communication, relationships, and students' language identities. The study's focus on tutors' use and understanding

of code-switching shaped the research questions, which address both what tutors do in tutorials and how they view these practices. The study asks the following research questions.

The Research Questions

- What are the functions of code-switching used by the tutors in writing center tutorials?
- What are peer tutor perceptions of code-switching during tutorials?

To contextualize the role of code-switching in tutorials, the following section reviews relevant literature on multilingual education.

Literature Review

The translingual approach is central to our writing center, where we train tutors to see students' other languages as resources. By encouraging students to use all their languages in writing, we help them become more effective writers.

Code-Switching in Language Classrooms

Research shows that code-switching offers significant value in language classrooms. Studies indicate that using learners' first languages supports instruction through translation, explanation, and concept reinforcement, helping with complex material (Temesgen & Hailu, 2022; Alnefaie & Gupta, 2024; Alshugithri, 2015; Ataş & Sağın-Şimşek, 2021). Scholars also link code-switching to positive emotional outcomes, such as reduced anxiety and more supportive learning interactions (Moafa, 2023). Code-switching plays a pivotal role in shaping relationships and learner identity. Research suggests that using learners' first languages can strengthen social connections and support linguistic identity, increasing motivation and engagement in language learning (Mohammed & Abdalla, 2025). These patterns are evident in the present study, where tutors used code-switching to assist understanding and make tutorials more welcoming and responsive to multilingual students.

Code-Switching in Writing Center Tutorials

This study contributes to the literature on code-switching and translanguaging by providing empirical and contextual evidence from a multilingual university writing center, a setting that has not been sufficiently studied in writing center and applied linguistics research. While earlier research has focused primarily on classroom instruction, this study explores writing center peer tutoring interactions and the language choices tutors make during tutorials. Examining tutors' reflections through interviews and stimulated recall, the study illustrates how translanguaging works in practice and supports the development of context-sensitive training for multilingual writing center tutors. Writing centers, particularly in multilingual contexts, are spaces where linguistic negotiation occurs, yet relatively few studies analyze the functions of code-switching in tutoring interactions. Code-switching offers multilingual tutors a valuable tool for supporting multilingual students during writing center sessions. This strategy can clarify complex concepts, prevent misunderstandings, and create a more comfortable dynamic between tutor and student. Code-switching allows tutors to draw on their natural linguistic repertoire, making feedback more accessible and authentic. Scholars such as Dvorak (2016), Grimm (2009), and Hutchinson and Gillespie (2016) have highlighted its potential. Hutchinson and Gillespie emphasise that the benefits of code-switching extend beyond individual sessions by enhancing the overall inclusivity and value of the writing center. Code-switching allows multilingual tutors to contribute something

distinctive—not only through their language skills, but also through their ability to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps in meaningful ways. Dvorak examines how both tutors and writers perceive the use of multiple languages during tutoring sessions and discusses the potential benefits and challenges of code-switching, including clarifying complex ideas, preventing misunderstandings, and building rapport between tutors and students.

Similarly, in Jurova's (2018) and Al Tale' and AlQahtan's (2023) studies, multilingual tutors/instructors discuss how code-switching is particularly effective when students are struggling to express themselves clearly, appear anxious, or are not understanding explanations. The tutors emphasised that they wait for students to initiate the switch, respecting their desire to either practice English or speak their native language. However, once students signal openness, whether through using a word in their native language or showing signs of confusion, tutors often code-switch to clarify ideas, reduce tension, and move the session forward more efficiently. Similarly, research on peer tutoring in bilingual settings suggests that it facilitates cognitive engagement by allowing students to articulate complex ideas more effectively (Du Plessis, 2014).

The practice can be especially valuable by making students feel comfortable, building rapport, and avoiding misunderstandings. For example, one of the tutors in Jurova's study shared that switching to Spanish calms students down when they're stressed, describing it as a way to "ease their anxiety" and "create a friendly environment." Another tutor echoed this sentiment, noting that switching helped the student work faster and more effectively. Jurova concludes that code-switching is most successful when initiated by the student and helps create a supportive, productive tutoring space, especially for multilingual learners navigating language barriers.

Research on code-switching provides important insights into language use in writing center tutorials. While translanguaging highlights the flexible nature of bilingual communication, code-switching gives a clearer way to analyze how languages are alternated in tutoring. Studies from language classrooms show both cognitive and emotional benefits of code-switching, and new research in multilingual writing centers supports these findings.

While code-switching brings language and relationship benefits, it also involves deeper intercultural work. Tutors in multilingual writing centers do more than switch languages—they navigate cultural expectations, educational norms, and student emotions. As Byram (1997) notes, this means mediating between perspectives, a skill shaped by tutors' cultural backgrounds and multilingual identities. Code-switching is not just about language; it is an intercultural practice shaped by wider institutional and social contexts. Bradley et al. (2018) and Solodka et al. (2023) describe translanguaging spaces as flexible, multilingual environments in which learners use multiple languages to build understanding and express identity. Baker (2016) and Tarabelsi et al. (2019) also argue that in global academic settings where English is dominant, effective communication requires reading cultural cues and adapting language use. Our tutors use this sensitivity to balance the formal role of English with the relational value of Arabic. Wang (2024) uses the term 'spatial repertoires' to describe how multilingual speakers adjust their language based on context and audience, which matches how our tutors move between Arabic and English to meet students' needs during tutorials.

Methodology

Context

The American University of Sharjah (AUS), a university in the Middle East, enrolls students from over 90 nationalities. Many speak English as a second, third, or even fourth language. English is used for instruction, but for many students, it is not their main language for thinking or expressing ideas. This linguistic diversity shapes classroom discussions and academic support.

Since 2004, the AUS Writing Center has run a peer-tutoring program that reflects this diversity. Undergraduate tutors, many of whom are native speakers of Arabic, Urdu, or Hindi, support students from different disciplines in both face-to-face and online sessions. Most tutorials focus on freshman writing assignments, but students also receive help with writing in subjects like Business, Biology, and International Relations. Tutors work 4 to 15 hours per week, and the Center holds about 3,000 appointments each year.

Unlike writing centers in North America, where multilingual students are often tutored by native English speakers, AUS tutors and tutees often share similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This shared experience allows tutors to draw on their own knowledge of working with English as a global language (Canagarajah, 2007) and to address cultural norms of communication and authority. Tutorials become intercultural spaces where tutors navigate not just language, but also politeness, turn-taking, and emotional dynamics.

Participants

After IRB approval, we administered a questionnaire to writing center staff to explore their language practices and attitudes toward code-switching. Ten of 14 tutors responded. Of these, five Arabic-speaking tutors reported using code-switching during tutorials and consented to further participation. All five spoke multiple dialects of Arabic and came from different backgrounds.

The five Arabic-speaking tutors agreed to audiotape their sessions with their tutees' consent over a two-week period to capture any instances of code-switching. Nine tutorials from three tutors who code-switched between Arabic and English were audio-recorded. Two of these tutors also code-switched between Arabic and English. Three sessions (one per tutor) that involved code-switching were selected for analysis. The study focused on three tutoring sessions to allow for a close, detailed analysis of naturally occurring code-switching. The dataset structure per session includes the tutorial interaction transcript, stimulated recall, and interview reflections, all of which underwent systematic analysis. Limiting the dataset to three sessions allowed us to produce high-quality analysis, ensuring a clear connection between the language choices used by the tutors and theirstated intentions, a significant step when studying code-switching. All tutees provided informed consent, and pseudonyms are used throughout. The tutor profiles were as follows:

1. Nadine: a Palestinian-Jordanian student of International Studies born and raised in the UAE. She had two years of experience in the writing center.
1. Omar: an Egyptian student of Computer Science born and raised in Saudi Arabia, but moved to the UAE to complete his education. He had one year of experience in the writing center.
2. Zaina: an Iraqi student of Civil Engineering born and raised in the UAE, with two years spent in Canada. She had two years of experience in the writing center.

The participants were multilingual and had taken academic writing courses similar to those of their tutees. This is different from writing centers in North America, where multilingual students

often work with native English-speaking tutors (Moussu, 2013). Scholars have noted this imbalance and suggested ways to build rapport and empower tutees in those settings (Rafoth, 2014). In our center, tutors share language and educational backgrounds with their tutees, which helps them mediate across cultures during tutorials.

Research Instruments

We used three qualitative data collection methods: audio recordings of writing center tutorials, stimulated recall interviews, and semi-structured interviews with peer tutors. The recordings captured tutors' natural use of Arabic and English during sessions. Stimulated recall interviews focused on tutors' thoughts about specific moments of code-switching, while the semi-structured interviews explored their broader views and experiences with code-switching in the writing center.

Stimulated Recall

To understand why tutors code-switch, we held audio-assisted stimulated recall interviews within 24 hours of each session, following Gass and Mackey (2016). Stimulated recall is useful for studying code-switching because it reveals the reasons behind tutors' language choices. Unlike audio recordings, which do not show what tutors were thinking, stimulated recall lets us hear tutors' decisions in their own words. This helped us see code-switching as a thoughtful practice rather than a random event.

Tutors used playback controls to pause recordings and reflect on moments they found meaningful. We also paused at key moments (e.g., when signs of confusion or comfort emerged) to elicit commentary. Neutral backchanneling was used to avoid influencing responses. Follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted within 72 hours. Data included tutorial recordings, recall transcripts, and interview transcripts.

Data Analysis

We analyzed recorded tutorials, stimulated recall transcripts, and interview data to find the reasons and functions for code-switching. One co-author, who speaks Arabic fluently, reviewed all audio recordings and noted when tutors code-switched, the context, the purpose, and the tutee's response. We examined nine tutorials and chose three for detailed analysis, but we found similar patterns in all of them. Audio data were transliterated into Latin script and then translated into English for coding. We recognize that translating dialectal Arabic into English may have resulted in some loss of meaning, which we consider a limitation.

We assigned each instance of code-switching a preliminary label (e.g., "building rapport," "clarifying ideas," or "softening directive") and refined these labels by reading the transcripts several times. Codes with similar functions were grouped into broader themes, such as *creating comfort* or fostering understanding. Themes about how code-switching was used in tutorials informed our analysis of its functions (RQ1), while themes from tutors' reflections and interviews informed our analysis of their perceptions (RQ2). Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, we read the data repeatedlyhow code-switching was used in tutorials informed our analysis of its functions (RQ1), while themes from tutors' reflections and interviews informed our analysis of their perceptions (RQ2). Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, we read the data repeatedly, coded it line by line, and developed themes that covered both teaching and emotional aspects.

To ensure credibility, the co-authors independently coded the translated excerpts and discussed any differences until they reached agreement. Although we did not calculate inter-coder reliability using statistical methods, our consensus approach yielded strong agreement. This process helped us capture not only how often code-switching occurred, but also its emotional, pedagogical, and cultural importance in tutoring.

Results

This study investigated the motivations for and effects of code-switching between Arabic (the shared L1 of tutors and many tutees) and English during writing center tutorials. In response to Research Question 1, "*What are the functions of code-switching used by the tutors in writing center tutorials?*", the findings indicate that tutors employed code-switching to build rapport, create a more comfortable environment, facilitate comprehension, soften directives or suggestions, and navigate linguistic and cultural nuance. Addressing Research Question 2, "*What are peer tutors' perceptions of code-switching during tutorials?*", all tutors reported positive views of the practice. They recognise its value in enhancing communication and supporting student learning during tutorials. The detailed findings are discussed below.

Building Rapport

In analyzing audio-recorded tutorials, tutors were found to code-switch to build rapport with their tutees. Sometimes, this took the form of inserting Arabic tags into English sentences to ease tutees who seemed more comfortable speaking Arabic. This type of code-switching lets them know that their tutors can speak Arabic and signals to them that they can speak Arabic if they feel it would help them express themselves more easily. Nadine does this when she says,

"**Ah, okay, خلص. Okay — I get you, yeah.**"

(Ah, okay, fine. Okay — I get you, yeah)

[Ah, okay, khalas. Okay — I get you, yeah]

In the stimulated recall interview, Nadine reflected on the instance of code-switching described above. She explained that her occasional use of Arabic helps her establish a stronger rapport with her tutees. Particularly when assisting beginner-level students enrolled in the English language preparatory program at AUS, known as the Bridge Program, Nadine finds that incorporating Arabic words into the tutorial sessions helps strengthen her connection with them. Furthermore, she observed that allowing students to express themselves in Arabic empowers them and emphasizes their existing capabilities as they navigate the complexities of academic writing in a second or third language:

If they're from the Bridge Program, when I speak Arabic with them, I feel like they become much more comfortable. I tell them you can write an essay in Arabic that I could never write. It's very impressive. I tell them what you do in Arabic; I cannot do.

Later in her stimulated recall, when she paused at another instance of her use of Arabic, she said, "Code-switching [to Arabic] builds a different relationship. It feels less intimate when I talk to them in English…. we achieve common ground." The other tutors echoed this view, noting that allowing Arabic relieved student anxiety and strengthened trust.

Creating a Comfortable Environment to Relax the Student

The stimulated recall data revealed that one of the main reasons peer tutors in this study engaged in code-switching was to create a more relaxed and comfortable environment for students,

especially when students appeared anxious or hesitant. All three tutors emphasized that allowing or initiating code-switching into Arabic helped students open up and express their thoughts more clearly. As Omar explained, "If she asks, 'Can I speak in Arabic?' when I tell her, 'yeah, why not,' first of all, she gets comfortable, and then, she delivers what she's thinking much better than in English." He added, "It relaxes the student. When they see that you can speak their native tongue, the session goes much smoother, and they're much happier." Omar also described moments when he proactively initiated code-switching based on cues from the student's writing, stating:

Sometimes, I test it out. If from the writing style I can see that they are Arab, I would start adding Arabic words here or there…if it feels like it's necessary for him or her to be comfortable with the session.

Overall, tutors viewed these moments of switching into Arabic as a practical way to ease tension and create a space where students felt more at ease speaking and continuing the tutorial.

Facilitating Understanding

Tutors code-switched throughout their tutorials as a tool to facilitate understanding and to improve clarity during moments of confusion. They used this approach during discussions on text organisation, the clarification of vague ideas, and attempts to maintain the session's fluency. For instance, in the following exchange, where Nadine and her tutee were comparing the stories of two fairy tales, she used Arabic to signal a shift in focus:

"We're going to another topic هون هلق "

(Now here, we're going to another topic) [Hala hoon, we're going to another topic]

Zaina blended English and Arabic while helping her tutee refine an ambiguous claim:

"By 'stories,' can you be a little more specific? يعني, okay, the 'stories' [are] a similarity, بس يعني من أي ناحية?"

(By "stories", can you be a little more specific? Like, okay, the "stories" [are] a similarity, butfrom what angle?)

[By "stories", can you be a little more specific? Yaany, okay, the "stories" [are] a similarity, bas yaany mn ay naHya?]

Similarly, in the exchange below, Omar and his tutee were discussing the student's compare-and-contrast essay on the Korean and Japanese languages. Omar inserted an Arabic phrase to ensure his instructional point was understood:

"Yeah, in compare and contrast, you can either write how they are different or similar.

Fine." It's, يعني ممكن أي وحدة

(Yeah, in compare and contrast, you can either write how they are different or similar. Like either one is allowed, it's fine.

[Yeah, in compare and contrast, you can either write how they are different or similar. Yaany momken ay waHda, it's fine]

Zaina also employed Arabic while guiding her tutee in developing the background section of her essay:

"background information إي، يعني على مود هالشي اللي تريدين تضيفيه بالـ

(Yeah, it's like it's for this reason that you want to add it to the background information)

[Eh, yaany ala mood halshi elli tredin tdefih bel background information]

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In their stimulated recall interviews, Nadine, Omar, and Zaina emphasised that switching to Arabic allowed them to convey complex or nuanced ideas more efficiently. Zaina explained that some concepts are simply more accessible in Arabic, even for fluent English speakers:

Even if I am a lot more fluent in English than I am in Arabic, sometimes I cannot phrase this in English, like my brain doesn't want to think of the translated version of it. I feel like having the freedom to express it [in Arabic], [is] better for both me and the tutee.

Nadine echoed this view, stating, "[Using Arabic] makes it easier for me, too, because I can deliver the point easier for the tutee to understand."

Code-Switching to Soften Directives and Reinforce Peer Rapport

Tutors also code-switched when offering directives or advice, a strategy they used to soften the force of an instruction and to emphasise the peer-based, non-authoritative nature of the tutor–tutee relationship. Switching to Arabic in these moments made the interaction more familiar and informal and counteracted some tutees' expectations of rigid academic formality. In these cases, code-switching worked as a strategy to manage interpersonal dynamics and encourage openness. For example, Nadine softened a directive by phrasing her suggestion in Arabic:

" ؟'the manager and his coworker' بنحط ما هون ليه"

(Why don't we put here "the manager and his coworker"?) [Leeh hoon ma bnHot "the manager and his coworker"?]

Omar also inserted Arabic into his instructional phrasing:

"Ah, okay. Start with إزاي similar, بعدين you can go and… هو اللي 'their difference is blah blah blah,' okay?"

(Ah, okay. Start with how similar, then you can go and… which is "their difference is blah blah blah," okay?)

[Ah, okay. Start with ezzay similar, badeen you can go and… elli howwa "their difference is blah blah blah," okay?]

During their stimulated recall interviews, both tutors reflected on how deliberately they used Arabic in these moments. Nadine paused the recording to explain that speaking in Arabic helped signal to the tutee that the suggestion was optional and collaborative rather than prescriptive. Omar also noted that code-switching "made it easier" to frame his directive as an accessible, conversational recommendation rather than a directive instruction.

Code-Switching across Varieties of Arabic: Navigating Language and Cultural Nuance

In addition to switching between English and Arabic, tutors in this study engaged in code-switching across different Arabic varieties, particularly when working with students from diverse Arab national backgrounds. This intra-Arabic code-switching was not just a habit; it often facilitated mutual understanding. For example, while tutoring an Emirati student, Zaina, a native speaker of Iraqi Arabic, code-switched not only from English to Arabic but also adjusted her dialect. Rather than using the Iraqi term for "here," she employed the Levantine Arabic word "هون" *(here) [hoon]* in the phrase:

"But, يعني هون, when you're saying the similarity is the story, you mean, like, generally?"

(But, so like here, when you're saying the similarity is the story, you mean, like, generally?)

[But, hoon yaany, when you're saying the similarity is the story, you mean, like generally?]

Later in the same session, she again used Levantine features to gently indicate that the session was ending:

"There are other [tutees], that's the thing آنو ولّسا خلص الوقت إنو المشكلة بس يعني"
(It's just that we've run out of time, and still, there are other [tutees], that's the thing) [Yaany bas el moshkela enno el waqt khalas w lessa enno there are other [tutees], that's the thing]

In her stimulated recall interview, she noted, "I'm adapted to so many different dialects. I have not had an issue." Her comment points to the broader linguistic competence and adaptability many tutors develop in multicultural educational environments where dialectal diversity is expected. Rather than focusing on matching dialects exactly, tutors like Zaina draw on a wide receptive repertoire, and this allows them to build rapport and communicate effectively with students from varied linguistic backgrounds. This adaptability, combined with strategic code-switching between Arabic and English, reflects the tutors' awareness of both institutional discourse and interpersonal dynamics in the writing center context.

Another example from Omar's session with his tutee concerns whether they can discuss the similarity score, which is the percentage reported by plagiarism detection software, during the tutorial. The tutee asks in Arabic:

"ما أتكلم عن الـsimilarity مول مول مول؟ مول؟"
(So, I shouldn't talk about the similarity? Not at all? Not even a little?) [Ma atkallm an el similarity? Mool? Mool mool mool?]

Omar responds firmly:

" ما تتكلميش عن الـsimilarity مول مول خالص"
(Don't talk about the similarity at all, absolutely not at all) [Ma ttklmish an al- similarity mool mool khalis]

The exchange offers a rich example of both dialectal and intra-sentential code-switching in Arabic, where the speaker shifts between different Arabic dialects and between dialects and Modern Standard Arabic within the same sentence. The tutee uses Gulf Arabic "مول" *(at all) [mool]*, and Omar also speaks in Gulf Arabic "مول" *(at all) [mool]* despite being Egyptian. Omar shifts to match his tutee's dialect. Both speakers code-switch into English by using the term "similarity", attaching it to the Arabic definite article "الـ" *(the) [al-]*. This reflects a common practice in academic settings where English terms carry institutional authority and are retained for their specificity. The repetition of "مول" *(at all) [mool]* by the tutee conveys uncertainty and a plea for clarification, while Omar's emphatic response reinforces institutional boundaries. Together, the imitation of dialect and language serve as pragmatic tools for managing rapport, authority, and clarity in tutoring interactions.

In the same interaction, while the tutee uses Gulf Arabic in "أتكلم ما" *(I shouldn't talk) [ma atkallm]*, Omar used the Egyptian dialect in his reply "تتكلميش ما" *(Don't talk) [Ma ttklmish]* instead of saying "لا تتكلمين" *(Don't talk) [la ttklmin],* which is in Gulf Arabic. During his stimulated recall interview, Omar explained this choice, saying, "I also was born in Saudi, and I know the Gulf dialects, and I can pretty much understand it and switch dialects." His comment reveals that his decision to maintain his dialect in part of his response to the tutee was not due to a lack of comprehension but rather a deliberate choice, which may reflect comfort, identity, or a desire to bring a light, familiar tone to the session. Therefore, the fact that Omar used a combination of Gulf Arabic in "مول" *(at all) [mool]*, Egyptian

Arabic in "ما تتكلميش" *(Don't talk) [Ma ttklmish]* and English in "similarity" in the same utterance
reflects a culturally rich interaction between the tutee and him.

Discussion

This study examined how peer tutors in a multilingual university writing center used code–switching during Arabic–English tutorials and explored tutors' perceptions of this practice. This discussion addresses the research questions, connects the findings to the literature reviewed earlier, and highlights the significance of the study.

RQ1: Functions of Code-Switching

The findings show that tutors used code-switching purposefully to support both communication and interaction during tutorials. Tutors moved between Arabic and English to explain concepts more clearly, clarify vague ideas, guide students through the structure, and ensure shared understanding. These functions are consistent with research on educational settings in which instructors use students' first languages to translate, explain, and reinforce meaning, helping students process complex material more effectively (Temesgen & Hailu, 2022; Alnefaie & Gupta, 2024; Alshugithri, 2015; Ataş & Sağın-Şimşek, 2021). The tutors in this study described similar intentions and noted that switching toArabic often allowed them to reach clarity more efficiently than remaining in English.

The affective dimension of code-switching was also evident. Tutors reported that Arabic helped create comfort, trust, and emotional ease. Many studies associate code-switching with reduced anxiety and strengthened relationships (Moafa, 2023; De La Campa & Nassaji, 2009). Canagarajah (2022) emphasizes how strategic shifts toward a shared language can build rapport and reduce power imbalances in academic support settings. For students who may feel more at ease expressing themselves in a particular language or dialect, code-switching can provide a sense of comfort and confidence during writing center sessions. When students are encouraged to use their preferred language, they are more likely to engage actively in the writing process, ask questions, and seek assistance without feeling inhibited by language barriers. This supportive environment can boost students' self-esteem and motivation, leading to improved writing skills and academic success.

Tutors also used code-switching to manage interpersonal dynamics by softening directives and reinforcing a collaborative peer relationship. This reflects work suggesting that multilingual communication can shape interactional tone and support solidarity in educational settings (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Albakry & Hancock, 2008).

Finally, the use of intra-Arabic dialect switching highlights tutors' sociolinguistic awareness and sensitivity to cultural nuance. As Cox (2016) explains, communication styles are often shaped by cultural background, so choosing a particular dialect can help the tutor connect with the tutee's experiences in a culturally sensitive way. In this sense, intra-Arabic code-switching served as a form of cultural negotiation that helped tutors build connections and make communication feel familiar, rather than formal or distant.

Research supports the idea that language variation can deepen interpersonal connections in multilingual writing support contexts. Jurova (2019), in her study of multilingual tutors' online practices, found that shared cultural experiences often strengthen rapport and increase the effectiveness of tutoring sessions. Similarly, Dvorak (2016) observed that multilingual tutors were

at times uncertain about using languages other than English during sessions, due to concerns about appropriateness or institutional expectations. However, his study emphasized the importance of explicitly training tutors in when and how to code-switch effectively. Tutors in both Dvorak's and Jurova's studies often deferred to their tutees by allowing them to lead language choice, especially when students wanted to practice their English. In this study as well, tutors showed awareness of their tutees' preferences and adjusted their language, either by switching to Arabic or changing dialect, when they believed it would support understanding or create a more welcoming and culturally appropriate environment.

RQ2: Tutors' Perceptions

Tutors viewed code-switching positively and described it as intentional, helpful, and responsive to what was happening in the session and to what the student needed. They emphasized that it supported a clearer understanding, helped students express ideas more fully, and strengthened interpersonal connections. They also reported that it made tutees feel more comfortable and more engaged in collaborative work. Rather than perceiving code-switching as a sign of linguistic weakness, tutors understood it as a resource that enabled natural communication and allowed students to draw on their full linguistic repertoires.

These perceptions align with scholarship that views multilingual practices as productive rather than problematic. Canagarajah (2019) describes how multilingual speakers strategically draw on different linguistic resources to negotiate meaning in academic spaces, a pattern reflected in tutors' descriptions of using Arabic to balance clarity, emotional ease, and purpose. Similarly, Creese and Blackledge (2010) claim that code-switching supports learning while maintaining an emphasis on building trust and creating a supportive dynamic. Writing center research offers similar insight. Jurova (2019) reports that multilingual tutors often value code-switching to reduce anxiety and support communication, and Dvorak (2016) shows that tutors recognize its potential to clarify ideas and create a more open conversational space, even when institutional expectations about language use are ambiguous. Cox(2016) notes that multilingual writing support involves attention to students' identities and language backgrounds. Similarly, tutors in this study described code-switching as a way to acknowledge students' languages and create a more inclusive tutorial space.

In this sense, tutors' reflections reveal that code-switching is a deliberate and meaningful practice that shapes how students participate, communicate, and experience the writing center.

Limitations

This study is limited by its small sample size and by the reliance on a single researcher's interpretation of Arabic use, which may introduce bias. Although excerpts were translated into English for analysis, some nuances of dialectal Arabic may have been lost in translation. Future research could include back-translation or multiple bilingual coders to minimize this interpretive loss. In addition, while translated excerpts were independently coded by co-authors and reconciled through discussion, we did not calculate inter-coder reliability statistically. This limits the extent to which coding consistency can be quantified. Finally, because the findings are drawn primarily from tutors' perspectives, the voices of tutees are not represented; these will be examined in a follow-up study. Despite these limitations, the study lays important groundwork for understanding tutors' code-switching practices and offers directions for future, more comprehensive research.

Conclusion

This study is original in its focus on Arabic–English and intra-Arabic code-switching in peer-tutoring interactions within a university writing center in the UAE. By combining tutorial recordings with stimulated recall and interviews, this study highlights tutors' deliberate, context-sensitive language choices, extending writing center and translanguaging research into an underexplored multilingual setting. Analysis of recorded tutorials, interviews, and stimulated recall sessions revealed that tutors code-switched to build rapport, ease student anxiety, clarify meaning, soften instructions, and navigate cultural and linguistic nuance. Dialectal variation within Arabic further demonstrated tutors' sociolinguistic awareness and adaptability. These findings suggest that code-switching is a strategic, context-sensitive tool that enhances communication and supports student engagement.

Implications

This study has several practical implications, particularly for tutor training, which should incorporate communication strategies and structured activities to prepare tutors for effective engagement in cross-cultural interactions. First, tutor training should incorporate communication strategies and structured activities that prepare tutors to respond effectively in cross-cultural interactions. Practical guidance on when and how to code-switch can help tutors make informed decisions during sessions, while encouraging them to recognise and respect the diverse linguistic backgrounds students bring. Such efforts can support more inclusive and effective tutorials.

Theoretically, this study reframes code-switching not merely as a linguistic accommodation but as a pedagogical and intercultural practice. By drawing on their full linguistic repertoires to build understanding and connection, tutors demonstrated the importance of metalinguistic awareness and peer solidarity. These findings challenge monolingual norms in academic writing support and affirm the value of linguistic flexibility in diverse educational contexts.

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