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# DIGITAL BELONGING AND GAMING CITIZENSHIP: CODE-SWITCHING IN SAUDI GAMERS' ONLINE INTERACTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

In online multiplayer gaming, language serves as more than a communication tool – it is a medium for identity expression and social belonging. This study examines code-switching practices among Saudi gamers, focusing on integrating English into Arabic discourse during FIFA gameplay. Through qualitative analysis of in-game interactions, the research reveals how expressions like "nice," "okay," and "oh my God" are strategically deployed during gameplay moments. These code-switching instances extend beyond linguistic utility, revealing broader socio-pragmatic strategies influenced by global gaming culture and digital socialization. Building upon the concept of "gaming citizenship," this paper examines how Saudi gamers navigate hybrid identities simultaneously grounded in local cultural contexts and aligned with global football discourse. This phenomenon is shaped by regional developments, including Saudi Arabia's growing involvement in global football. The findings offer insights into language adaptation and identity construction in virtual spaces, with practical implications for English language teaching, AI-driven moderation, multilingual game design, and cross-cultural player engagement in the Arab world.

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**KEYWORDS:** Code-switching, Gaming citizenship, Digital sociolinguistics, Linguistic hybridity, Saudi gamers, FIFA, Identity in virtual spaces, English language teaching.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Online multiplayer gaming has become a significant cultural phenomenon in Saudi Arabia, influenced by global trends and local initiatives. As part of Vision 2030, the Saudi government has heavily invested in esports and game development, fostering a digital landscape where gaming serves as entertainment and a space for social interaction (Albiladi, 2022). In these environments, language use is fluid, shaped by the need for effective communication and evolving player identities.

A particularly intriguing aspect of language use in these spaces is code-switching, the practice of alternating between two or more languages within a single conversation. This phenomenon among Saudi gamers reflects broader sociolinguistic shifts, balancing Arabic—the country's dominant language—and English, which is increasingly important in technology and global communication. Gaming platforms provide an informal setting where bilingual practices develop naturally, influenced by game structure, peer interactions, and global gaming culture.

This study examines how Saudi gamers incorporate English expressions into their primarily Arabic discourse during FIFA gameplay. It explores the functions of code-switching, its role in shaping "gaming citizenship" (Bogost, 2007), and the broader sociopragmatic factors that drive its use. Gaming citizenship is particularly relevant given Saudi Arabia's growing involvement in global football, highlighted by the region hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar and Saudi Arabia's confirmed hosting of the 2034 tournament. These international football connections create a unique sociolinguistic environment where virtual FIFA gaming experiences intertwine with real-world regional investment in the sport.

This study highlights the intersection of local identity and global connectivity by situating Saudi gamers' language practices within the broader discourse on globalization and digital culture. It provides a deeper understanding of how language adapts in online spaces, how multilingual speakers manage linguistic choices, and how gaming fosters linguistic hybridity.

This research seeks to address the following questions:

1. How and why do Saudi gamers incorporate English expressions within predominantly Arabic discourse during FIFA gameplay?
2. What triggers code-switching in Saudi gaming communities, particularly about football-specific terminology and emotional reactions?
3. How does code-switching function as a gaming citizenship performance that balances local cultural identity with participation in global football discourse?
4. How have regional investments in football influenced code-switching practices in FIFA gaming contexts?

By answering these questions, this study aims to deepen understanding of how Saudi gamers navigate linguistic boundaries in online spaces, shedding light on the broader implications of bilingualism in digital communication. By understanding these language choices in the context of globalization and technological change, this research highlights the intersection of tradition and modernity, local and international influence, contributing to sociolinguistics, bilingualism, and digital communication discussions.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. *Gaming Citizenship and Procedural Rhetoric*

The gaming citizenship concept provides a central theoretical framework for understanding code-switching in FIFA gaming contexts. First developed by Bogost (2007), gaming citizenship refers to how players learn and enact civic values through gameplay. Bogost argues that games make persuasive arguments about how the world works through their rule-based systems or procedural rhetoric.

In FIFA gameplay among Saudi gamers, gaming citizenship encompasses how players learn about football systems and construct dual identities, navigating between local cultural belonging and participation in global football communities. This dual citizenship is expressed through linguistic practices, with Arabic maintaining connections to local identity while English elements signal participation in global football discourse.

This framework is particularly relevant given Saudi Arabia's increasing investment in real-world football, including hosting major events and the 2034 World Cup. Gazzard's (2016) research on the relationship between virtual and physical spatializations provides a foundation for understanding how these real-world developments influence virtual linguistic practices as boundaries between FIFA gameplay and actual football discourse become increasingly permeable.

### 2.2. *Matrix Language Frame Model*

Myers-Scotton's (1993, 2002) Matrix Language Frame (MLF) model provides a framework for

analysing structural aspects of code-switching in Saudi gamers' discourse. The MLF model distinguishes between the Matrix Language (ML), which supplies the morphosyntactic frame of bilingual utterances, and the Embedded Language (EL), which contributes content morphemes within this frame. In Saudi gaming communication, Arabic typically functions as the ML, providing the grammatical structure for inserting English gaming terminology and expressions (the EL).

This framework helps explain the grammatical constraints governing how English elements are integrated into Arabic discourse during gameplay, revealing patterns in the types of morphemes most frequently switched.

### 2.3. *Communities of Practice and Situated Learning*

Wenger's (1998) "Communities of Practice" concept provides another valuable theoretical lens. Gaming communities can be conceptualized as communities of practice where members develop shared linguistic repertoires, norms, and communicative strategies through participation in joint activities. From this perspective, code-switching represents a community practice that new members acquire through what Lave and Wenger (1991) term "legitimate peripheral participation."

This framework aligns with Gee's (2003) work on gaming as situated learning environments, where players are socialized into discursive practices through gameplay. As Benlarbi (2024) observed in their study of Emirati gamers, players develop competence, and often that includes appropriate code-switching practices specific to different gaming contexts. The communities of practice framework help explain how Saudi gamers learn when and how to incorporate English expressions as part of their socialization into both local and global gaming communities.

### 2.4. *Translanguaging and Fluid Multilingualism*

More recent sociolinguistic theorizing offers additional perspectives that move beyond traditional conceptions of code-switching. García and Wei's (2015) concept of "translanguaging" reframes bilingual practices not as switches between separate linguistic systems but as integrated deployments of a unified linguistic repertoire. This perspective aligns with Blommaert and Rampton's (2011) term "super-diversity" in digital communication, where linguistic resources are mobilized in fluid, hybrid ways that challenge

conventional language boundaries.

Applied to gaming contexts, the translanguaging framework suggests that Saudi gamers are not simply alternating between discrete languages but drawing strategically from their full linguistic repertoires in response to the communicative demands of gameplay. As Androutsopoulos (2015) argues in his work on "networked multilingualism," digital communication environments foster remarkably fluid language practices that reflect the networked nature of online interactions.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a multifaceted qualitative approach centred on naturalistic observation and detailed discourse analysis. The methodology is designed to capture the complex, contextual nature of code-switching practices among Saudi gamers during FIFA gameplay sessions.

### 3.1. *Research Design*

The research utilizes an ethnographically informed sociolinguistic approach, drawing on the principles of interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz, 1982) and digital ethnography (Varis, 2015). This methodology acknowledges that language practices in gaming environments are embedded within broader social, cultural, and situational contexts that must be accounted for in the analysis. Following Androutsopoulos's (2013) recommendations for digital sociolinguistic research, the study emphasizes observing naturally occurring interactions rather than elicited responses.

### 3.2. *Data Collection Procedures*

The study employs a qualitative approach centred on analysing naturally occurring gameplay communication in publicly available YouTube videos and live streams of Saudi gamers playing FIFA. This approach provides authentic language samples without the observer effect that might occur in research-specific recordings.

1. **Video/Stream Selection:** Approximately 25 hours of FIFA gameplay videos and streams featuring Saudi gamers were collected and analysed. Selection criteria included:
  - a) clear identification of players as Saudi nationals through channel information, gameplay language, or self-identification.
  - b) sufficient audio quality to analyse linguistic features; and
  - c) naturalistic gameplay contexts rather than formal presentations.

2. **Spontaneous Language Documentation:** The research focused on capturing instances where players naturally switched between Arabic and English during gameplay, documenting the contextual triggers for these switches.
3. **Multimodal Analysis:** Each code-switching instance was analysed alongside the corresponding gameplay events visible in the video, allowing for examination of the relationship between game mechanics, emotional reactions, and linguistic choices.

This observational approach aligns with digital ethnographic methods (Varis, 2015) and avoids ethical concerns related to direct participant recruitment while providing rich data on authentic linguistic behaviours.

### 3.3. Data Analysis

The analysis of gameplay interactions followed a three-phase process:

1. **Transcription and coding:** All instances of code-switching in the gameplay recordings were transcribed following conventions established by Du Bois et al. (1993) for discourse transcription, with modifications to account for the multilingual and digital nature of the data as recommended by Androutsopoulos (2013). Transcripts included both verbal and relevant non-verbal contextual information (game events, player reactions). Each instance of code-switching was coded according to:
  - a) Linguistic features (word class, syntactic position, morphological integration)
  - b) Trigger type (game event, emotional reaction, technical term, football-specific terminology)
  - c) Communicative function (referential, expressive, phatic, directive)
  - d) Contextual factors (game phase, score situation, player role)
2. **Quantitative analysis:** Basic quantitative analysis was performed to identify patterns in code-switching frequency, distribution of switch types, and correlations between contextual factors and language alternation.
3. **Discourse analysis:** Detailed discourse analysis was conducted on selected episodes of gameplay interaction, following Gumperz's (1982) interactional sociolinguistic approach. This analysis examined how code-switching functioned within the sequential organization of interaction, how it contributed to the construction of player identities, and how it related to the immediate gaming context.

### 3.4. Ethical Considerations

Although the study focused on publicly available content, ethical guidelines for digital research were followed. Pseudonyms were used for all content creators unless they were public figures or esports professionals. The research focused on linguistic patterns rather than individual identities, and care was taken to avoid any content that might be considered sensitive or private.

## 4. RESULTS

The FIFA gameplay recordings analysis revealed distinct code-switching patterns among Saudi gamers, with language alternation serving various communicative and social functions.

### 4.1. Gaming Citizenship and Code-Switching Practices

A central finding is that code-switching in FIFA gameplay functions as a linguistic performance of gaming citizenship—a dual identity that balances local cultural belonging with participation in global football discourse:

1. **Differential language use for local versus global references:** Players consistently used Arabic when discussing Saudi or regional football clubs, players, or leagues but frequently switched to English when referencing international stars, European clubs, or FIFA gameplay mechanics. For example, one player seamlessly transitioned between languages: "[اليوم ممتاز، بس] Saudi Falcons [هجوم]" defence [ضعيف]... Ronaldo can easily break through" (Saudi Falcons' attack today is excellent, but the defence is weak... Ronaldo can easily break through).
2. **Code-switching for authenticating expertise:** English terminology was prominently used when players sought to demonstrate tactical knowledge or technical skill: "[شوف كيف سويت الـ] build-up play... perfect through ball [من الـ] midfield" (Look how I did the build-up play... perfect through ball from the midfield).
3. **World Cup influence:** Following the 2022 Qatar World Cup, there was a notable increase in the use of English football terminology that had been prominently featured in tournament broadcasts. Players incorporated terms like "counter-press," "false nine," and "high line" that had become more familiar through regional World Cup coverage.

### 4.2. Frequency and Distribution of Code-Switching

Quantitative analysis identified 1,642 instances

of code-switching across the 25 hours of recorded gameplay. On average, players switched to English approximately once every 0.9 minutes, though frequency varied by individual, game situation, and emotional intensity (table 1).

Most switches (63%) consisted of single-word insertions, particularly gaming terminology, player names, and football tactics. Phrase-level switches

accounted for 29% of occurrences, while clause-level switches were relatively rare, accounting for only 8% of the total. This distribution aligns with Myers-Scotton's (1993) Matrix Language Frame model, with Arabic as the matrix language, providing the morphosyntactic frame for embedded English elements.

**Table 1: Frequency and Distribution of Code-Switching Types**

Type of Code-Switch	Percentage	Number of Instances
Single-word insertions	63%	1,035
Phrase-level switches	29%	476
Clause-level switches	8%	131
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,642</b>

**4.3. Triggers for Code-Switching**

Analysis revealed several consistent triggers for language alternation during FIFA gameplay:

- 1. Game events:** Highly charged moments in gameplay – such as scoring goals, near misses, fouls, or exceptional plays – frequently

triggered switches to English. These moments accounted for 39% of all code-switching instances. Players typically switched to English exclamations ("Oh my God!" "What a goal!" "No way!") during these emotionally intense moments.

**Table 2: Triggers for Code-Switching in FIFA Gameplay**

Trigger Type	Percentage	Example Expressions
Game events (goals, fouls, etc.)	39%	"Oh my God!", "What a goal!", "No way!"
Football-specific terminology	28%	"Through ball", "Skill moves", "High press"
Player interaction	21%	"Let's go", "Nice one", "Good game"
World Cup references	12%	"Like Saudi vs Argentina", "World Cup quality"

- 2. Football-specific terminology:** FIFA's representation of football tactics and techniques prompted 28% of code-switching instances. Terms related to game mechanics ("skill moves," "through ball," "finesse shot"), player statistics ("pace," "finishing," "stamina"), and tactical concepts ("high press," "counter-attack," "drop back") were predominantly expressed in English, even within otherwise Arabic discourse.
- 3. Player interaction:** Communication directed at teammates or viewers triggered 21% of

switches, particularly for directives ("Pass!" "Shoot!"), encouragement ("Nice!" "Good job!"), or criticism ("What was that?"). These interactional switches often served to intensify the illocutionary force of the utterance.

- 4. World Cup references:** Notably, 12% of code-switches specifically referenced World Cup-related content, including mentions of national teams, tournament moments, or comparisons between FIFA gameplay and real matches from the tournament.

**Table 3: Most Frequent English Expressions in Saudi FIFA Gameplay**

Expression Category	Common Examples	Frequency (%)
Emotional reactions	"Oh my God!", "Let's go!", "Nice!"	42%
Football tactics/moves	"Through ball", "Finesse shot", "Skill moves"	23%
Player positioning	"Pass!", "Center it!", "Man on!"	19%
Hybrid expressions	"Good pass mashallah", "Goal Alhamdulillah"	16%

**4.4. Functional Categories of Code-Switching**

Further analysis revealed distinct functional categories for code-switching during FIFA gameplay:

- 1. Expressive function (35%):** Switches that primarily expressed emotional states, particularly excitement, frustration, or surprise. English interjections and expletives were

especially common in this category, supporting Dewaele's (2010) observation that bilinguals often prefer their second language for emotional expression.

- 2. Referential function (31%):** Switches that named specific game elements, techniques, or football concepts. The prevalence of English for referential functions reflects both the predominance of English terminology in FIFA

itself and the broader status of English as the dominant language of global football discourse.

3. **Directive function** (18%): Switches used to direct other players' actions, often in shortened imperative forms. The brevity and directness of English imperatives ("Pass!" "Move!") made them efficient choices during fast-paced gameplay.

4. **Phatic function** (16%): Switches that maintained social relationships or acknowledged other players or viewers, such as greetings, farewells, and backchannel responses. English phrases like "good game," "nice one," and "well played" served to reinforce player solidarity and community membership.

*Table 4: Functional Categories of Code-Switching*

Function	Percentage	Example Expressions
Expressive function	35%	"Oh my God!", "Let's go!", "What!!"
Referential function	31%	"Through ball", "Finesse shot", "High press"
Directive function	18%	"Pass!", "Shoot!", "Man on!"
Phatic function	16%	"Good game", "Nice one", "Okay"

*Table 5: Chronotropic Variation in Code-Switching*

Game Phase	Code-Switching Frequency	Dominant Function	Typical Expressions
Pre-match setup	Moderate	Referential	"Formation", "Chemistry", "Player stats"
Active gameplay	High	Expressive & Directive	"Pass!", "Shoot!", "Oh my God!"
Goal moments	Very High (76% of goals)	Expressive	"Let's go!", "What a goal!", "No way!"
Post-match analysis	Moderate	Referential & Phatic	"Good game", "Well played", "Next time"

**4.5. Linguistic Features of Code-Switching**

The structural analysis of code-switching instances revealed several notable linguistic patterns:

1. **Morphological integration:** English nouns inserted into Arabic discourse frequently received Arabic morphological treatment, including definite articles, plurality marking, and case endings. For example, the English "skill moves" might appear as "al-skill moves" (the skill moves) or "passes" might become "al-passes-at" (the passes), demonstrating what Poplack (2018) terms "smooth switching."
2. **Football-specific terminology:** Football terminology showed the highest rate of English usage, with terms like "through ball," "skill move," "finesse shot," and "sweeper keeper" rarely translated into Arabic equivalents. This pattern aligns with what Albirini (2016)

describes as domain-specific language alternation, where specialized vocabulary tends to remain in the language of the domain's origin.

3. **FIFA-specific lexicon:** A unique hybrid vocabulary emerged around FIFA-specific game mechanics without direct equivalent in traditional football discourse. Terms like "chemistry style," "skill moves," and "FUT Champions" were almost exclusively expressed in English, even within predominantly Arabic discourse.
4. **Code-mixing innovations:** The data revealed creative hybridized forms combining elements from both languages, such as the use of Arabic verbal structures with English stems (e.g., "ba-score" - I will score) or the application of Arabic plural patterns to English bases (e.g., "goalaat" for "goals"), demonstrating what Al-Khatib and Sabbah (2008) describe as "bilingual creativity."

*Table 6: Structural Patterns of Arabic-English Code-Switching*

Pattern	Description	Example	Percentage
English noun with Arabic article	English nouns preceded by Arabic definite article	"al-through ball" (the through ball)	34%
English verb with Arabic inflection	English verb stems with Arabic verbal morphology	"ba-score" (I will score)	19%
English nouns with Arabic pluralization	English nouns with Arabic plural patterns	"goalaat" (goals)	15%
Unmodified English phrases	English expressions used without morphological integration	"Let's go", "Nice shot"	32%

**4.6. Emotional Dimensions of Language Choice**

The analysis revealed a strong relationship

between emotional states and language choice during FIFA gameplay:

1. **Language preferences for emotional expression:** English was strongly preferred for

expressions of excitement (84% of instances), particularly following goals, skilful plays, or match victories. Arabic, however, was more frequently used for expressions of frustration (61% of instances), especially after conceding goals or experiencing gameplay difficulties.

2. **Emotional intensity and code-switching frequency:** The rate of code-switching increased significantly during emotionally charged gameplay moments. Language alternation was 73% more frequent during

goal-scoring opportunities, penalties, and final minutes of close matches compared to routine gameplay phases.

3. **Celebration routines:** Players developed consistent linguistic patterns for goal celebrations, often combining Arabic religious expressions with English football terminology: "Allahu Akbar! What a finesse shot!" These hybrid celebration routines demonstrate how code-switching serves to integrate local cultural practices with global gaming conventions.

*Table 7: Language Preferences for Emotional Expression*

Emotional State	English Preference	Arabic Preference
Excitement	84%	16%
Frustration	39%	61%
Strategic coordination	56%	44%
Celebration	74%	26%

## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1. Gaming Citizenship and Virtual-Physical Convergence

The concept of gaming citizenship emerged as a powerful framework for understanding the language practices of Saudi FIFA players. The code-switching patterns demonstrate how players navigate between local and global affiliations through strategic language choices. Arabic predominated when discussing local players, Saudi clubs, or regional tournaments, maintaining connections to local identity and community. Conversely, English was preferred for discussing international players, tactical concepts, and gameplay mechanics, signalling participation in the global football gaming community.

This linguistic duality mirrors what Anderson (1998) describes as "long-distance nationalism," where digital technologies enable new forms of belonging that transcend geographical boundaries while maintaining connections to national identity. For Saudi gamers, FIFA provides a virtual space where they can simultaneously perform their Saudi identity and their membership in global football culture through fluid language practices.

The considerable influence of the 2022 Qatar World Cup on gaming discourse illustrates the increasingly permeable boundary between physical and virtual football experiences. Incorporating World Cup terminology, commentary styles, and references into FIFA gameplay demonstrates how real-world sporting events shape linguistic practices in virtual environments.

This convergence has intensified with Saudi Arabia's growing investments in both esports and

traditional sports, including the confirmation to host the 2034 World Cup. Velema's (2024) concept of a football linguistic economy helps explain how these institutional developments create new domains for language alternation, as football terminology flows between physical and virtual contexts.

### 5.2. Code-Switching as Situated Practice

The patterns of code-switching observed align with Auer's (1998) conceptualization of code-switching as a contextualization cue—a linguistic practice that both responds to and helps create interactional context. The systematic relationship between game events and language alternation demonstrates how code-switching is embedded within the situated activities of gameplay rather than being random. This situatedness is evident in the higher frequency of switching during emotionally charged moments and the distribution of English expressions across specific functional domains.

These findings support Gumperz's (1982) argument that code-switching serves as a resource for managing the interactional demands of communication, allowing players to emphasize aspects of their messages, signal shifts in footing, and navigate between different communicative frames. The prevalence of English for expressive functions, particularly during moments of excitement or frustration, illustrates what Georgakopoulou (2011) terms the "performance potential" of code-switching in digital contexts—its capacity to dramatize and intensify emotional displays.

### 5.3. Digital Affordances and Linguistic

### Choices

The influence of FIFA's interface and audio elements on players' linguistic practices highlights the importance of considering technological affordances in analyses of digital language use. The mimicry of English-language commentary phrases from the game itself represents a clear example of what Hutchby (2001) terms technology-in-interaction—the mutual shaping of technological systems and communicative practices.

The predominance of English for technical terminology reflects both the English-dominant nature of the FIFA interface and the broader status of English as the lingua franca of global football culture. As Ensslin (2015) argues in her work on ludolinguistics, players' linguistic choices are constrained by the "procedural rhetoric" of games themselves—the ways that game mechanics, interface elements, and built-in communicative systems predispose certain forms of language use.

At the same time, players demonstrate agency in how they navigate these technological constraints, creatively adapting and transforming gaming terminology through morphological integration and phonological modification. The hybridized forms observed in the data exemplify what Androutsopoulos (2015) describes as "networked multilingualism," where speakers actively blend linguistic resources in response to the affordances and constraints of digital environments.

### 5.4. Implications for English Language Teaching in Arab Contexts

The findings from this study have significant implications for English language teaching (ELT) in Saudi Arabia and other Arab contexts, offering innovative approaches to connect formal language education with students' lived experiences in digital environments.

### 5.5. Gaming as a Resource for Authentic Language Learning

The systematic code-switching practices of Saudi gamers reveal gaming environments as rich sites for authentic English language acquisition. ELT practitioners in the Arab world can leverage these environments in several ways:

1. **Vocabulary acquisition through gaming interests:** The study demonstrates that Saudi gamers acquire extensive domain-specific English vocabulary through FIFA gameplay, even without formal instruction. Teachers can build on this vocabulary foundation by developing activities that bridge gaming terminology with broader English

communicative competence. For example, classroom tasks might involve students explaining gaming strategies using specialized English terminology they already know, then gradually expanding this vocabulary into related domains.

2. **Gaming videos as authentic texts:** The gameplay recordings analysed in this study represent authentic language materials that reflect how English is used in Arab contexts. ELT practitioners can incorporate selected gaming videos as classroom texts for activities such as identifying code-switching patterns, analysing contextual factors that trigger language alternation, and discussing the sociopragmatic functions of English in gaming discourse.
3. **Digital literacy integration:** Teachers can develop critical digital literacy skills alongside language learning by acknowledging gaming as a legitimate context for language use. Activities might include comparing how English functions in gaming contexts versus other digital domains (social media, messaging apps) in Arab communities, helping students develop meta-awareness of their multilingual digital practices.

### 5.4. Reconceptualizing ELT Approaches for Digital Communication

The concept of gaming citizenship provides a framework for reconceptualizing ELT approaches in Arab contexts, moving beyond traditional native-speaker models to acknowledge the hybrid linguistic practices that characterize digital communication:

1. **Translanguaging pedagogies:** Rather than treating code-switching as deficient language use, ELT practitioners can adopt translanguaging approaches that legitimize the fluid, hybrid language practices observed in gaming environments. Classroom activities might encourage students to explore how they strategically deploy their full linguistic repertoires across different communicative contexts, developing metacognitive awareness of their language choices.
2. **Identity-focused language teaching:** The findings suggest that code-switching serves important identity functions for Saudi gamers, allowing them to navigate local and global affiliations. ELT approaches can acknowledge these identity dimensions by exploring with students how English functions as a resource for constructing various aspects of identity in

digital spaces. Discussions might address questions like: When do you choose to use English versus Arabic online? How does language choice relate to how you present yourself in different digital communities?

3. **Community of practice perspective:** The study demonstrates how Saudi gamers are socialized into particular language practices through participation in gaming communities. ELT practitioners can apply this perspective by creating classroom communities of practice where students learn language through meaningful participation in joint activities, rather than through decontextualized grammar instruction. Projects might involve collaborative digital production (e.g., creating gaming guides, commentary videos, or strategy discussions) that mirror the authentic language practices observed in gaming communities.

### 5.5. *Pedagogical Activities Drawing on Gaming Code-Switching*

The specific patterns of code-switching identified in this study suggest several innovative pedagogical activities for ELT in Arab contexts:

1. **Emotion-language connections:** The finding that English is preferred for certain emotional expressions (particularly excitement) while Arabic is preferred for others (particularly frustration) can inform activities exploring the relationship between language choice and emotional expression. Students might analyse when and why they switch languages to express different emotions, developing both emotional literacy and language awareness.
2. **Domain-specific language analysis:** The prevalence of English for technical and tactical football terminology suggests activities where students identify domain-specific vocabulary across different areas of interest (not just gaming but also music, fashion, technology, etc.) and explore why certain domains favour English terminology in Arab contexts.
3. **Chronotropic awareness:** The study's finding that code-switching varies across different gameplay phases can inform activities developing students' awareness of how temporal and spatial contexts shape language use. Students might record and analyse their own language use across different digital activities, identifying how context influences their language choices.
4. **Morphosyntactic creativity:** The creative morphological integration of English terms into

Arabic grammatical structures observed in gaming discourse represents a rich resource for exploring language creativity. Activities might involve students analysing and producing hybridized forms and developing metalinguistic awareness of how languages can be creatively combined within grammatical constraints.

## 6. ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

The findings also have implications for language assessment in Arab educational contexts:

1. **Authentic assessment contexts:** Traditional language assessments often fail to capture Saudi gamers' sophisticated, multilingual competencies. Assessment approaches might be redesigned to include digital communication tasks that allow students to demonstrate their ability to navigate between languages appropriately according to context, purpose, and audience.
2. **Expanding notions of communicative competence:** The complex sociopragmatic functions of code-switching identified in this study suggest the need for expanded models of communicative competence in ELT assessment. Rather than focusing exclusively on monolingual English production, assessments could evaluate students' ability to deploy English strategically within multilingual discourse for specific communicative purposes.
3. **Self-assessment of digital language practices:** Students can be encouraged to document and critically reflect on their own digital language practices, including when, why, and how they incorporate English into primarily Arabic discourse. Such self-assessment develops metacognitive awareness of language choices and supports autonomous language learning beyond formal educational settings.

By incorporating these implications into ELT practice, educators in Arab contexts can bridge the gap between students' lived experiences of language in digital environments and formal language education, creating more relevant, engaging, and effective approaches to English teaching in increasingly multilingual digital contexts.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This study has examined code-switching practices among Saudi gamers during FIFA gameplay, revealing language alternation patterns reflecting the complex interplay between local identity and global participation. Through the

conceptual framework of "gaming citizenship," we have demonstrated how code-switching functions not merely as a communicative strategy but as a performance of dual belonging to Saudi cultural communities and global football gaming culture.

### 7.1. Key Findings

1. Saudi gamers systematically integrate English expressions into their primarily Arabic discourse during FIFA gameplay for multiple functions: to express intense emotions (particularly excitement), employ specialized football and gaming terminology, direct other players' actions, and signal affiliation with global gaming culture.
2. Code-switching is triggered by specific gameplay events (39%), football-specific terminology (28%), player interactions (21%), and World Cup references (12%), revealing the contextual nature of language alternation.
3. English is strongly preferred for expressions of excitement (84% of instances), while Arabic is more frequently used for expressions of frustration (61%), demonstrating a relationship between emotional states and language choice.
4. The 2022 Qatar World Cup significantly influenced gaming discourse, with players incorporating English football terminology from tournament broadcasts into their FIFA gameplay communication.
5. Saudi gamers develop creative hybridized linguistic forms, applying Arabic morphological features to English terms and creating a unique gaming register that blends elements from both languages.

### 7.2. Theoretical Significance

This study contributes to sociolinguistic theory in several important ways:

1. It extends the concept of "gaming citizenship" to encompass linguistic dimensions, demonstrating how language choice functions as a performance of dual identity in digital gaming spaces.
2. It provides empirical support for García and Wei's (2015) translanguaging framework, illustrating how Saudi gamers draw fluidly from their full linguistic repertoires rather than simply alternating between discrete languages.
3. It demonstrates the applicability of Wenger's (1998) communities of practice framework to gaming environments, showing how multilingual practices are acquired through participation in gaming communities.
4. It illustrates the increasingly permeable

boundary between physical and virtual sporting experiences, contributing to understanding how linguistic practices flow between real-world events and digital simulations.

### 7.3. Practical Applications

The findings have significant practical applications, particularly for English language teaching in Arab contexts:

1. **ELT Pedagogy:** Educators can leverage gaming as a resource for authentic language learning, using students' existing gaming-related English vocabulary as a foundation for developing broader communicative competence.
2. **Curriculum Design:** Language curricula in Arab contexts can incorporate digital literacy components that acknowledge and build upon students' existing multilingual digital practices, including code-switching in gaming environments.
3. **Teacher Education:** TESOL programs in Arab contexts should prepare teachers to understand and work with the hybrid language practices characteristic of digital communication, moving beyond native-speaker models to acknowledge translanguaging as a legitimate communicative strategy.
4. **Assessment Approaches:** Language assessment can be redesigned to evaluate student's ability to navigate strategically between languages according to context, purpose, and audience rather than focusing exclusively on monolingual production.
5. **Game Localization:** Developers creating games for Arab markets might consider more flexible localization approaches that acknowledge players' hybrid linguistic repertoires, potentially incorporating bilingual interface elements that reflect actual language use patterns.

### 7.4. Future Research Directions

Several promising directions for future research emerge from this study:

1. **Longitudinal studies:** Research tracking changes in code-switching practices over time, particularly about major sporting events like the upcoming 2034 World Cup, could illuminate how gaming language evolves in response to broader sociocultural developments.
2. **Comparative studies:** Research examining code-switching patterns among gamers from different Arabic-speaking countries could

illuminate how national contexts and educational systems influence digital language practices.

3. **Gender dimensions:** A more focused investigation of gender differences in gaming-related code-switching could build on existing research regarding gendered language practices in Saudi digital communication.
4. **Classroom applications:** Action research examining how gaming-related code-switching might be leveraged in language education could translate the study's findings into practical educational approaches.
5. **Cross-platform analysis:** Research examining how code-switching practices vary across different gaming genres could provide insight into how technological affordance across different gaming genres could provide insight into how technological affordances shape multilingual communication in different digital environments.

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In conclusion, this study contributes to understanding how Saudi gamers navigate between local and global affiliations through their linguistic choices in digital gaming environments. By highlighting the sophisticated multilingual practices that characterize these interactions, the research challenges deficit-oriented perspectives on code-switching and offers a framework for recognizing the creative, strategic nature of language alternation in increasingly connected digital worlds. For English language teaching in the Arab world, these findings suggest innovative approaches that bridge the gap between students' lived experiences of language in digital environments and formal language education, creating more relevant and effective approaches to English teaching in multilingual contexts.

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## APPENDICES

**Appendix A: Saudi FIFA YouTubers and Their Channels****Msdossary (@Msdossary)**

- Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@Msdossary>
- Subscribers: ~609 K
- Profile: Mosaad “Msdossary” Al-Dossary won the FIFAe World Cup 2018 and consistently uploads full eSports matches, tournament highlight reels, and occasional behind-the-scenes vlogs.
- Content Style: High-stakes Division Rivals gameplay, 1v1 finals, plus occasional Q&As and studio interviews (e.g., his appearance on PODBALL).

**9.1.2. Abdulaziz Alshehri (@MrDone)**

- Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/c/MrDone>
- Subscribers: ~272 K
- Profile: 2015 FIFA Interactive World Cup champion from Saudi Arabia, sharing full Grand Final matches, in-depth tutorials (“Custom Tactics”), and post-match reaction videos.
- Content Style: Full tournament broadcasts (semi-finals, finals), “how-to” guides on pro techniques, and occasional coach-style breakdowns.

**9.1.3. مسنر فيفا (MrFifaSA)**

- Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/MrFifaSA>
- Subscribers: ~1 M (videos note the channel hit ~1 M subscribers)
- Profile: Known as “Mr FIFA,” this creator blends FIFA gameplay with celebrity interviews, fan challenges, and a monthly podcast series “تكيية سام” featuring fellow gamers and personalities.
- Content Style: Post-match analysis, challenge segments (e.g., “تحدي المشجع الأصيل”), and interview episodes providing rich qualitative data for code-switching research.

**9.1.4. MjrmGames (@mjrmgames909)**

- Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCesOgVkywcnbAtyNf-XZ4AA>
- Subscribers: ~10.4 M
- Profile: One of the largest Saudi gaming channels, offering FIFA pack-opening challenges, Ultimate Team tutorials, and multi-

hour “challenge” series (e.g., “تحديات\_مجرم\_فيماز – الخطة السرية #fifa15”).

- Content Style: Rapid-fire 5–30 min segments, extended challenge playlists, and occasional live-style commentary.