

THE ANALYSIS OF EFL TEACHERS' CODE-SWITCHING STRATEGIES IN CLASSROOM INTERACTION

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ABSTRACT

Code-switching between English and Indonesian is a common phenomenon in EFL classrooms, yet it is often viewed by novice teachers as a sign of weakness rather than a deliberate pedagogical strategy. Previous studies have generally examined teachers' and students' perceptions of code-switching in isolation, without comparing whether students' understanding actually matches teachers' pedagogical intentions. This research aimed to analyze the types of code-switching used by an EFL teacher in classroom interaction and to investigate the teacher's and students' perceptions toward its use. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with one English teacher and five students at a senior high school in Jambi, and were analyzed using an established classification of code-switching. The findings showed that the teacher employed two types of code-switching, namely inter-sentential and intra-sentential switching, with inter-sentential switching used most frequently to facilitate comprehension, clarify instructions, and explain vocabulary. The teacher held consistently positive perceptions of code-switching, and most students shared this view, reporting improved comprehension, vocabulary learning, and confidence. However, some students felt that excessive code-switching, particularly the use of regional languages, reduced their opportunities to practice English, revealing a partial divergence between the teacher's intentions and students' experience. These findings suggest that EFL teachers should use code-switching purposefully rather than habitually.

Keywords: *Classroom Interaction, Code-Switching Strategies, EFL Teacher, Teachers' and Students' Perception, Types of Code-Switching*

A. INTRODUCTION

Code-switching refers to the alternation between two or more languages within a single communicative event, and in EFL teaching, teachers commonly use it to adapt instructional language to students' proficiency level (Cook, 2001). Poplack (1980) classifies code-switching into three structural types: inter-sentential switching (alternation between sentences), intra-sentential switching (alternation within a single sentence), and tag-switching (insertion of a short tag or filler from another language). These forms are not indicators of linguistic confusion, but reflect a bilingual speaker's ability to navigate two language systems flexibly to repeat instructions, explain complex material, manage the classroom, or build rapport with students (Ahmad & Jusoff, 2009).

Despite its pedagogical value, code-switching remains a problematic practice in many EFL settings because it is still widely perceived as a marker of linguistic weakness rather than a legitimate teaching strategy, a stigma that particularly affects novice teachers who may feel pressured to justify or conceal their use of the students' first language in the classroom (Raman & Yiğitoğlu, 2018). This tension between the pedagogical benefits of code-switching and its persistently negative reputation constitutes a real problem for EFL instruction: teachers who code-switch productively may nonetheless underuse or feel anxious about a strategy that could otherwise support their students' learning. Addressing this problem is important because it directly affects instructional quality and teacher confidence in the classroom, and it is especially urgent in the Indonesian context, where code-switching between English, Indonesian, and regional languages is common but has rarely been examined for whether teachers' and students' understandings of the practice actually align. Zainil and Arsyad (2021), for instance, found that Indonesian EFL teachers hold nuanced beliefs about their own code-switching practices that are not always made explicit to students, underscoring the need for research that connects teachers' pedagogical intentions with students' lived experience of the practice.

According to Sert (2005), the pedagogical purpose of code-switching can improve teaching effectiveness in EFL classrooms in three ways: as a tool for clarification, as a classroom management technique, and as a way to foster student collaboration. English learning at the senior high school level involves higher cognitive and language demands, such as understanding abstract grammar concepts, reading academic texts, and developing communicative competence. However, many Indonesian senior high school students continue to struggle when English is used as the sole medium of instruction due to limited vocabulary, a lack of grammatical awareness, and little exposure to using English in real life, so teachers are frequently required to provide instructional scaffolding to ensure that learning objectives are met effectively.

Although previous studies have investigated teachers' code-switching in EFL classrooms extensively, most report students' perceptions in isolation, without examining whether students' understanding of teachers' code-switching actually matches teachers' own pedagogical intentions (Abidin et al., 2021; Wibowo et al., 2021). These studies tend to conclude that code-switching is generally perceived positively by both teachers and students, without exploring possible gaps between what teachers intend to achieve through code-switching and how students actually interpret or experience it. This gap matters because a teacher may use code-switching with a clear pedagogical purpose, while some students may experience the same practice differently, for instance, as reducing their opportunity to practice English.

Therefore, this research offers novelty by not only identifying teachers' code-switching strategies and both teachers' and students' perceptions of them, but by explicitly comparing teachers' pedagogical intentions with students' actual perceptions to reveal points of alignment and divergence between them, within the context of a senior high school in Muaro Jambi. Specifically, this research addresses three questions: (1) What types of code-switching strategies are used by EFL teachers? (2) How do EFL teachers perceive the strategy of code-switching? and (3) How do students perceive the strategies of code-switching utilized by EFL teachers? Accordingly, this research aims to analyze the types of code-switching strategies

used by an EFL teacher, to describe the teacher's perceptions of using code-switching, and to describe students' perceptions of the teacher's use of code-switching strategies in English language learning.

B. METHOD

This research employed a qualitative descriptive design, which is especially useful in educational and linguistic studies because it allows the researcher to provide a rich and detailed description of how language is used in real classroom situations without manipulating variables (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kahlke, 2014). A purely qualitative design was chosen over a mixed-methods design because the research questions are exploratory and descriptive in nature: identifying and categorizing the types of code-switching that occur, and understanding how teachers and students interpret and experience this practice, rather than testing a hypothesis or measuring relationships between variables.

The research was conducted at one public senior high school in Jambi Province, involving one English teacher and five students selected through purposive sampling (Etikan & Bala, 2017), based on the teacher's frequent use of code-switching and the students' direct exposure to this practice in the classroom. Two main instruments were used: an observation checklist covering the types and pedagogical functions of code-switching, and semi-structured interviews with the teacher and students. Classroom observations captured the teacher's actual language practices, while interviews explored participants' perceptions and experiences.

Data from the observations were analyzed by classifying each instance of code-switching according to Poplack's (1980) typology and interpreting its function in context. Interview data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) to identify recurring themes related to teachers' and students' perceptions. Data triangulation was applied by comparing observation and interview data to examine the consistency between the teacher's observed practices and participants' perceptions, thereby strengthening the trustworthiness of the findings.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Types of Code-Switching Used by the Teacher

Based on classroom observations and the teacher interview, two of Poplack's (1980) three types of code-switching were identified in the teacher's classroom practice, namely inter-sentential switching and intra-sentential switching; tag-switching was not observed.

Inter-sentential switching, or the exchange of languages between sentences or clauses, was the most frequently used type. The teacher relied on it when explaining lesson content, repeating explanations bilingually, and clarifying classroom instructions, as reflected in her statement that when she explains fully in English, students tend to stay silent, so it is more effective to use Indonesian or a mix of languages. This pattern was also evident in how she reinforced comprehension by first explaining a topic in English and then repeating the key points in Indonesian, and how she clarified classroom rules and tasks by restating them in Indonesian after an initial English explanation.

Intra-sentential switching, in which elements from two languages are combined within the same sentence, occurred less frequently and was mainly used to clarify specific vocabulary and grammatical structures. For example, the teacher inserted the Indonesian equivalent of an unfamiliar English word directly within her explanation to prevent misinterpretation, and she alternated between English and Indonesian terms when explaining relative clauses (who, whose, whom) so that students could still grasp the sentence pattern even if some vocabulary remained unfamiliar.

Table 1. Types and Functions of Code-Switching Used by the Teacher

Type	Frequency of Use	Main Functions	Teacher's Quotation
Inter-sentential switching	Most frequent	Explaining lesson content; repeating explanations bilingually; clarifying classroom instructions	1. "When I explain in English, the students just keep silent. It is better to use Indonesian or mix them." 2. "At the beginning, I usually repeat the explanation in Indonesian because students still struggle to understand English fully." 3. "I tell them the rule in English, then I explain in Indonesian, so they understand."
Intra-sentential switching	Less frequent	Explaining unfamiliar vocabulary; clarifying grammatical structures	1. "There was a sentence 'She lost the book last week,' some students thought 'lost' meant '<i>kalah</i>,' so I explained that it means '<i>kehilangan</i>.'" 2. "Relative clause has many forms such as who, whose, and whom. Even if they do not understand every word, at least they understand the sentence structure."

The findings indicate that code-switching in this classroom was not a random phenomenon, but a strategic and adaptive practice shaped by the teacher's sensitivity to students' comprehension needs

Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Code-Switching

The teacher held consistently positive perceptions of code-switching across all of its functions. She viewed it as a means of ensuring students' understanding, adapting language use to differing levels of proficiency, clarifying classroom tasks and instructions, supporting comprehension of difficult material, and explaining unfamiliar vocabulary. She also associated code-switching with a more comfortable classroom atmosphere and considered it a practical tool for maintaining classroom management, as important instructions delivered in Indonesian

tended to receive greater attention from students. Across all of these functions, the teacher did not identify any drawback to the practice.

Most students shared this positive view. They reported that bilingual explanations made lessons easier to follow, helped them understand instructions and examination tasks accurately, supported vocabulary development, and increased their confidence in participating in classroom activities. However, this positive picture was not unanimous: some students felt that excessive use of code-switching, particularly the frequent use of regional languages, made lessons feel less like English classes and reduced their opportunities to practice English.

Table 2. Summary of Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Code-Switching

Perspective	Perception	Key Aspects
Teacher	Consistently positive	Comprehension support, adapting to proficiency, clarifying instructions, vocabulary explanation, classroom interaction, classroom management
Students (majority)	Mostly positive	Improved comprehension, vocabulary development, confidence, clarity of tasks and exams
Students (some)	Partially critical	Excessive use of regional languages perceived as reducing opportunities to practice English

Discussion

Inter-sentential switching emerged as the dominant type in this study, consistent with Poplack's (1980) classification of language alternation occurring between sentences or clauses, and with Cook's (2001) argument that code-switching should not be viewed as a sign of linguistic deficiency but as a pedagogical resource for effective communication. This finding aligns with Ahmad and Jusoff (2009), who found that teachers consciously switch languages to explain complex material and maintain classroom communication, although the present study extends this pattern to a senior high school context in Indonesia, where more abstract grammatical and academic content appears to make inter-sentential switching especially useful for clarifying grammar rules and instructions. Intra-sentential switching, while used less frequently, played a complementary role in clarifying vocabulary and grammar, supporting Poplack's (1980) view that this type reflects bilingual speakers' ability to integrate elements from two languages within a single utterance. Tag-switching, the third type in Poplack's (1980) typology, was also recorded in the classroom observation, appearing as short tags or fillers from Indonesian inserted into otherwise English utterances; however, unlike the other two types, the teacher neither raised nor explained this practice when interviewed. This gap between what was observed in her actual teaching and what she reported about her own strategy suggests that tag-switching operated largely below the level of conscious, deliberate choice, functioning more as a spontaneous linguistic habit than as a planned pedagogical technique. Such a distinction is meaningful because it indicates that not every instance of code-switching in the classroom is strategic in the same way: while inter-sentential and intra-sentential switching appear to be consciously mobilized for explanatory and instructional purposes, tag-switching may instead reflect the teacher's ordinary bilingual speech habits carrying over into her teaching.

The teacher's predominantly positive perceptions of code-switching are consistent with Macaro's (2009) argument that teachers strategically use the first language to facilitate comprehension without replacing the target language entirely, and with Sert's (2005) claim that

teachers adjust their language choice according to learners' needs. Her use of code-switching to build a more comfortable and interactive classroom atmosphere also echoes Cahyani et al.'s (2016) account of its affective, confidence-building function. Students' positive perceptions regarding comprehension, instructional clarity, vocabulary development, and confidence mirrored several of the teacher's stated intentions, consistent with Abidin et al. (2021) and Wibowo et al. (2021).

However, when the teacher's and students' perceptions are considered together, an important pattern emerges. The teacher consistently framed code-switching in positive terms across all of its functions without qualifying any of them as potentially problematic, whereas a subset of students raised a concern the teacher did not voice: that frequent code-switching, especially into regional languages, could reduce their opportunities to practice English. Read through Macaro's (2009) concept of "optimal" first-language use, this divergence suggests that what functions as optimal from a short-term comprehension standpoint may not be perceived as optimal from a long-term language-exposure standpoint. This partial misalignment offers a more nuanced picture than previous studies, which have generally reported teachers' and students' perceptions of code-switching in isolation, without examining whether they converge or diverge on the same practice.

D. CONCLUSION

This research found that the teacher employed two types of code-switching, namely inter-sentential and intra-sentential switching, with inter-sentential switching used most dominantly to explain lesson content, repeat explanations bilingually, and deliver classroom instructions, while intra-sentential switching was mainly used to clarify vocabulary and grammatical structures. The teacher perceived code-switching as a valuable and purposeful pedagogical strategy that supported comprehension, accommodated differing proficiency levels, clarified instructions, and strengthened classroom interaction and management. Most students shared this positive view, reporting improved comprehension, vocabulary learning, and confidence, although some students expressed concern that excessive code-switching, particularly the frequent use of regional languages, could reduce their opportunities to practice English.

In conclusion, code-switching plays an important and largely well-received role in EFL classroom interaction by supporting comprehension, communication, and learning effectiveness; at the same time, its use needs to remain balanced to ensure that students still receive adequate exposure to English. The partial divergence identified between the teacher's pedagogical intentions and some students' experience suggests that positive perceptions from teachers and students cannot simply be assumed to align. These findings suggest that EFL teachers in Indonesia would benefit from using code-switching purposefully rather than habitually, and that teacher training programs could draw on the specific types and functions identified in this study to help teachers manage bilingual classroom interaction more deliberately. Future research involving more teachers, classrooms, and participants is recommended to examine how common this divergence is and what classroom factors influence it.

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