

Code-Switching in English Classroom Interaction: A Case Study in an Indonesian Public Senior High School

Manuscript Information

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji praktik alih kode dalam interaksi kelas Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL) di sebuah sekolah menengah atas negeri di Jawa Barat, Indonesia. Penelitian bertujuan mengidentifikasi tipe struktural dan fungsi interaksional alih kode yang digunakan guru dan siswa serta mengeksplorasi persepsi siswa terhadap praktik multibahasa tersebut. Penelitian menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan delapan siswa, dan kuesioner pendukung yang melibatkan sepuluh siswa. Transkrip kelas dianalisis menggunakan kerangka Poplack (1980) untuk tipe struktural dan Gumperz (1982) untuk fungsi komunikatif, sedangkan narasi wawancara dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik Braun dan Clarke (2006). Hasil penelitian menemukan 71 kejadian alih kode yang terdiri atas intra-sentensial (50,7%), inter-sentensial (40,8%), dan tag-switching (8,5%). Guru terutama menggunakan alih kode untuk memberikan dukungan kognitif melalui pengulangan dan kualifikasi pesan, mengelola kelas, dan membangun hubungan, sedangkan siswa menggunakannya untuk mengatasi keterbatasan leksikal. Siswa menilai alih kode secara positif karena membantu pemahaman, mengurangi kecemasan, dan meningkatkan kepercayaan diri untuk berpartisipasi. Namun, siswa lebih memilih penggunaan bahasa pertama secara strategis dan sesekali agar paparan terhadap bahasa Inggris tetap terjaga. Penelitian menyimpulkan bahwa alih kode dapat berfungsi sebagai sumber pedagogis adaptif apabila digunakan secara terarah dan proporsional.

Kata Kunci:

Alih Kode, Kelas EFL, Interaksi Kelas, Persepsi Siswa, Sociolinguistik.

Abstract

This study investigates code-switching in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom interaction at a public senior high school in West Java, Indonesia. It aims to identify the structural types and interactional functions of code-switching used by the teacher and students and to explore students' perceptions of this multilingual practice. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with eight students, and a supplementary questionnaire completed by ten students. Classroom transcripts were analyzed using Poplack's (1980) framework for structural types and Gumperz's (1982) framework for communicative functions, while interview data were examined through Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. The findings identified 71 occurrences of code-switching: intra-sentential (50.7%), inter-sentential (40.8%), and tag-switching (8.5%). The teacher mainly used code-switching to provide cognitive support through reiteration and message qualification, clarify complex instructions, manage classroom interaction, and build rapport. Students used it primarily to overcome lexical limitations. Students also perceived code-switching positively because it supported comprehension, reduced anxiety, and increased confidence to participate. However, they preferred strategic and occasional first-language use rather than excessive reliance, so that exposure to English remained sustained. The study concludes that code-switching can function as an adaptive pedagogical resource when used selectively and proportionally to support comprehension without replacing meaningful target-language exposure.

Keyword:

Code-Switching, EFL Classroom, Classroom Interaction, Student Perception, Sociolinguistics.

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INTRODUCTION

English-medium instruction in EFL classrooms involves a persistent tension between maximizing exposure to English and ensuring that learners can understand and participate meaningfully. Although sustained target-language exposure remains important, exclusive English use may become a barrier when learners lack sufficient linguistic resources. Consequently, students' first language (L1) is increasingly viewed not only as interference but also as a potential instructional resource when used selectively and purposefully (Cook, 2001; Hall & Cook, 2012; Macaro, 2005; Cenoz & Gorter, 2022).

Code-switching is one expression of this multilingual classroom reality. It involves alternating between languages within or across utterances and may serve interactional as well as pedagogical purposes (Gumperz, 1982; Poplack, 1980). Teachers may switch languages to clarify instructions, explain difficult concepts, reiterate information, or manage interaction, whereas students may switch when negotiating meaning or overcoming lexical limitations (Ferguson, 2003; Atas & Sağın-Şimşek, 2021). Its value therefore depends less on whether switching occurs than on how and why it is used.

The issue is particularly relevant in Indonesia, where English is learned as a foreign language within a multilingual environment. Indonesian classroom studies show that teachers strategically draw on English, Indonesian, and sometimes local languages to facilitate explanation, comprehension, and participation (Cahyani et al., 2018; Zainil & Arsyad, 2021; Munawaroh et al., 2022; Liando et al., 2023). More recent evidence likewise describes adaptive code-switching as a form of scaffolding that can support engagement and inclusion when language choices respond to learners' immediate needs (Maflukha et al., 2025; Azzahra et al., 2026).

Learners' perspectives are equally important because pedagogical usefulness cannot be inferred from teachers' practices alone. Studies suggest that students often associate strategic L1 support with clearer explanations, greater confidence, and a more supportive classroom climate (Decristan et al., 2024; Solihin et al., 2025). Yet positive attitudes do not necessarily imply a preference for extensive L1 use. Recent reviews emphasize that multilingual support is most defensible when it complements rather than replaces opportunities to engage with English (Huang & Chalmers, 2023; Zakharova & Lasagabaster, 2026).

Despite substantial research on code-switching in Indonesian EFL classrooms, studies often examine structural forms, teachers' practices, or learner attitudes separately. Fewer studies connect naturally occurring teacher-student interaction with learners' perceptions of the same practices, particularly at the senior high school level. This study therefore investigates code-switching in an English class at a public senior high school in West Java, Indonesia, focusing on (1) its types and functions during classroom interaction and (2) students' perceptions of its use in English learning.

Code-Switching in EFL Classroom Interaction

Code-switching refers to the alternation between two or more languages within interaction and may occur across sentence boundaries, within sentences, or through short tags and discourse markers (Poplack, 1980). In EFL classrooms, this practice remains pedagogically contested because teachers need to maintain meaningful exposure to English while also ensuring that learners can understand instruction and participate. Earlier work questioned strict monolingual assumptions and showed that judicious use of learners' first language can support learning (Cook, 2001; Hall & Cook, 2012; Macaro, 2005). More recent multilingual perspectives similarly view learners' linguistic repertoires as resources for meaning-making when their use is purposeful and planned (Li, 2018; Cenoz & Gorter, 2022; Huang & Chalmers, 2023).

The issue is particularly relevant in Indonesia, where English is learned within a multilingual environment and learner proficiency varies considerably. Indonesian studies show that teachers switch between English and Indonesian to explain difficult material, manage interaction, sustain engagement, and make classroom discourse more accessible (Suganda et al., 2018; Zainil & Arsyad, 2021; Murtiningsih et al., 2022; Liando et al., 2023). Research in bilingual and EFL settings also demonstrates pedagogical, discourse, and sociocultural functions of switching, including clarification, reiteration, classroom management, rapport, and interactional repair (Cahyani et al., 2018; Atas & Sağın-Şimşek, 2021). Recent Indonesian work continues to characterize code-switching as a strategic rather than random classroom resource, particularly when it supports comprehension while English remains the main language of instruction (Maflukha et al., 2025; Azzahra et al., 2026).

Types and Functions of Code-Switching

Poplack's (1980) framework distinguishes three structural types: inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag-switching. Inter-sentential switching occurs across sentence or clause boundaries, intra-sentential switching occurs within a sentence or clause, and tag-switching involves inserting a short tag or discourse marker from one language into an utterance primarily structured in another. This typology remains useful for classroom discourse analysis and has been applied in recent Indonesian EFL studies examining the structural forms of teacher and student switching (Murtiningsih et al., 2022; Azzahra et al., 2026). However, structural classification alone does not explain why a switch occurs. Gumperz (1982) highlights interactional functions such as reiteration and message qualification, while classroom research shows that switching can also support content delivery, clarification, classroom management, participation, and communicative continuity

(Ferguson, 2003; Ataş & Sağın-Şimşek, 2021; Munawaroh et al., 2022). Thus, the present study analyzes both where switches occur structurally and what pedagogical or interactional purposes they serve in context.

Contemporary translanguaging research provides a broader perspective on these practices without replacing code-switching as the analytical construct of this study. Systematic reviews suggest that planned multilingual support may benefit comprehension, participation, metalinguistic awareness, and affective engagement, although effects vary by context and research design (Huang & Chalmers, 2023; Zakharova & Lasagabaster, 2026). Recent Indonesian secondary-school evidence likewise indicates that adaptive switching may scaffold difficult material and lower participation barriers, but learners often still prefer English-dominant instruction (Maflukha et al., 2025). These findings reinforce the need to examine code-switching as a context-sensitive practice rather than assuming that either English-only instruction or unrestricted L1 use is inherently superior.

Students' Perceptions of Code-Switching

Students' perceptions are important because pedagogical usefulness cannot be inferred from teacher behavior alone. Learners commonly value strategic L1 support when it helps them follow explanations, overcome lexical gaps, reduce communication difficulty, and participate with greater confidence (Hall & Cook, 2012; Suganda et al., 2018). Recent research further suggests that multilingual classroom practices can coexist with positive perceptions of classroom climate and instructional support, while excessive reliance on the first language may be viewed as limiting opportunities for target-language exposure (Decristan et al., 2024; Solihin et al., 2025; Azzahra et al., 2026). Therefore, the present study examines not only the forms and functions of code-switching observed in classroom interaction but also how learners evaluate its contribution to comprehension, confidence, participation, and the desired balance between Indonesian and English.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design following Sandelowski (2000, 2010) to examine the types and functions of code-switching in classroom interaction and students' perceptions of its use. The study was conducted in one English class at a public senior high school in West Java, Indonesia. One English teacher and students from the observed class participated in the study; eight students took part in semi-structured interviews, while ten students completed a supplementary Likert-scale questionnaire. Classroom interaction was recorded and transcribed to capture naturally occurring English–Indonesian code-switching, while the interviews explored students' perceptions of its influence on comprehension, confidence, participation, and preferred frequency of use. To protect confidentiality, the teacher was identified as Teacher A and interviewed students as S1–S8.

Data analysis was organized according to the two research questions. Classroom transcripts were examined to identify code-switching instances and classify them using Poplack's (1980) categories of inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag-switching, while their communicative functions were interpreted with reference to Gumperz (1982). Frequencies were calculated descriptively to indicate recurring patterns. Interview data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke (2006) by familiarizing the data, generating initial codes, grouping related codes, and developing broader themes. Questionnaire responses were summarized descriptively and used as supplementary evidence to support or contrast the interview findings, while comparison across observation, interview, and questionnaire data was used to strengthen interpretation through data triangulation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section presents the findings derived from the descriptive qualitative analysis of classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The results are presented in accordance with the research objectives: first, to outline the structural types and interactional functions of code-switching occurring naturally in the classroom; and second, to explore the students' underlying perceptions regarding these multilingual practices.

Types and Functions of Code-Switching in Classroom Interaction

Based on the transcription of the classroom interactions, the study identified a total of 71 occurrences of code-switching. The data illustrates that the EFL teacher predominantly initiated these language alternations (68 instances), utilizing them as a deliberate instructional strategy, whereas the students employed code-switching far less frequently (3 instances) primarily as a communicative coping mechanism. The observed

occurrences were structurally classified using Poplack's (1980) framework, revealing varying frequencies across three main categories:

Table 1. Distribution of Code-Switching Types in Classroom Interaction

Code-switching type	Teacher (n)	Students (n)	Total (n)	%
Intra-sentential	34	2	36	50.7
Inter-sentential	28	1	29	40.8
Tag-switching	6	0	6	8.5
Total	68	3	71	100

The Dominance of Intra-Sentential Switching for Fluidity

The thematic analysis revealed that intra-sentential switching was the most frequently utilized strategy (50.7%) by both the teacher and the students. Rather than abruptly shifting the language of instruction, the teacher seamlessly wove English phrases and their direct Indonesian equivalents within a single, continuous sentence boundary. This allowed the teacher to maintain the momentum of the lesson without causing cognitive disruption. Excerpt 1 (Teacher), "Depending of the users and tergantung pemakaian sama penggunaannya" As demonstrated in Excerpt 1, the teacher incorporates the translation directly into the flow of the English sentence. This linguistic maneuver provides immediate conceptual reinforcement. Similarly, students utilized this intra-sentential structure to navigate their linguistic limitations while remaining actively engaged in the target-language environment.

Excerpt 2 (Student), "Nomer 1 Miss, karena jawabannya langsung ada di dalam." In Excerpt 2, the student anchors their response in a comfortable Indonesian syntactic structure but deliberately mixes in the English address term "Miss". These instances indicate that intra-sentential switching facilitates highly fluid communication; it enables the speaker to maintain conversational flow without enduring awkward pauses or communication breakdowns while searching for an exact English equivalent.

Inter-Sentential Switching as a Deliberate Pedagogical Boundary

Accounting for 40.8% of the identified occurrences, inter-sentential switching was utilized predominantly by the teacher as a more conscious, bounded pedagogical strategy. This type occurs when a complete sentence or clause in English is immediately followed by a complete sentence in Indonesian. The teacher frequently employed this strategy to translate complex instructions or clarify pivotal questions, ensuring that the core meaning was not lost on students with lower language proficiency.

Excerpt 3 (Teacher)"Sebelah sini belum ada suaranya, what do you think?" In Excerpt 3, the teacher establishes the context in Indonesian before delivering the core inquiry fully in English Excerpt 4 (Teacher) "Before I close to this, sebelum saya tutup ya, I have questions. Saya punya pertanyaan."

Conversely, in Excerpt 4, the English instruction is immediately mirrored by its Indonesian translation. This deliberate separation of languages across sentence boundaries functions as a structural scaffolding mechanism, ensuring that all students remain cognitively aligned with the lesson's objectives.

Tag-Switching for Classroom Management

Although constituting the smallest portion of the data (8.5%), tag-switching played a subtle yet vital role in classroom management. The teacher frequently inserted short Indonesian discourse markers or particles into utterances that were otherwise structured in English.

Excerpt 5 (Teacher):

"You can count it by yourself ya for many hours..."

Excerpt 6 (Teacher):

"Nah, ternyata kalau kita kaitkan dengan jenis teks..."

The insertion of familiar tags such as "ya" and "nah" serves to soften the instructional tone, build rapport, and continuously check for student attention and alignment, acting as interactional glue that keeps the students engaged.

Students' Perceptions of Code-Switching Use in English Learning

Understanding the phenomenon of code-switching requires examining not only how it is structurally deployed, but also how it is received by the learners. Data gathered from the semi-structured interviews with eight students (S1–S8) indicate a profoundly positive perception. The thematic analysis of their narratives revealed three major psychological and cognitive dimensions regarding L1 support:

Lowering the Affective Filter and Mitigating Anxiety

One of the most prominent answer to emerge from the interviews was the emotional comfort that code-switching provided. Students confessed that an exclusive, English-only environment often induced feelings of intimidation and a pervasive fear of misunderstanding the material.

Excerpt 7:

S1: "Kalau full Inggris, jujur agak stres, takut salah paham."

S5: "Lebih nyaman, jadi nggak tegang."

As reflected in Excerpt 7, the teacher's strategic use of Indonesian acts as an emotional anchor. By lowering the affective filter, the classroom transforms from a high-stakes environment into a safe, low-anxiety space where students feel secure enough to participate without the paralyzing fear of making linguistic errors.

Facilitating Comprehension and Cognitive Support

Beyond emotional comfort, the students unanimously agreed that code-switching served as an indispensable cognitive bridge. They reported that the teacher's targeted integration of Indonesian drastically reduced the cognitive load required to decipher complex grammar or unfamiliar vocabulary.

Excerpt 8:

S8: "Rasanya jadi lebih gampang ngikutin pelajaran."

Rather than viewing the L1 as a barrier to acquiring English, the students perceived it as an essential tool that made the academic content accessible, allowing them to focus on the core concepts being taught rather than struggling purely with translation.

Learner Awareness: The Preference for Strategic, Occasional Use

Despite the overwhelming consensus on the psychological and cognitive benefits of code-switching, the interview narratives revealed a surprising level of learner maturity. The students explicitly warned against the excessive use of Indonesian, advocating instead for a balanced, strategic approach.

Excerpt 9:

S1: "Sesekali aja, biar tetap belajar Inggris juga."

S7: "Sesekali aja, biar seimbang antara Inggris dan Indonesia."

These statements demonstrate that the students are acutely aware of their own learning needs they recognize that prolonged exposure to the target language is non-negotiable for their ultimate proficiency. They desire code-switching not as a dominant mode of instruction, but as a carefully deployed pedagogical safety net that complements rather than replaces their English learning.

Discussion

This section interprets the findings reported above by linking them to the theoretical framework and previous relevant studies. The discussion focuses on three main themes: Cognitive Support in Classroom Interaction, Affective and Participatory Support for students and Strategic implementation rather than excessive use

Cognitive Support in Classroom Interaction

The findings reveal that code-switching serves as a crucial mechanism for providing cognitive support in the EFL classroom. By employing inter-sentential and intra-sentential switching, the teacher effectively manages the students' cognitive load, particularly when delivering complex grammatical explanations, vocabulary support, or detailed task instructions. This aligns with Gumperz's (1982) concept of reiteration and message qualification, where the L1 is utilized to clarify abstract concepts and ensure that instructional meaning is accurately conveyed. This strategic use of their linguistic repertoire allows them to process difficult information and understand teacher instructions without being overwhelmed. Such practices support recent assertions that multilingual strategies facilitate deeper comprehension and meaning-making when learners lack sufficient target-language resources (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022; Maflukha et al., 2025)

Affective and Participatory Support for Students

Beyond cognitive benefits, the data highlights the significant role of code-switching in offering affective and participatory support. Students consistently reported feeling less stressed, more comfortable, and more confident to answer questions when the teacher incorporated Indonesian into the lesson. This psychological comfort creates a secure environment where the fear of misunderstanding or making linguistic errors is minimized. Such affective engagement is vital for maintaining student motivation, aligning with arguments that learner's value strategic L1 support to reduce communication difficulty and participate with greater

confidence (Hall & Cook, 2012; Suganda et al., 2018). Furthermore, as evidenced by recent classroom studies (Decristan et al., 2024; Solihin et al., 2025), a supportive classroom climate built on strategic multilingual practices not only reduces anxiety but actively encourages students to contribute to classroom discourse, transforming them from passive listeners into active participants.

Strategic Implementation Rather Than Excessive Use

Despite the clear cognitive and affective advantages, the interview findings strongly indicate a consensus among students for the strategic rather than excessive use of code-switching. Students expressed a preference for occasional L1 support to maintain a balance, demonstrating a high level of learner awareness that continued exposure to English is essential for their language acquisition. This perspective aligns with contemporary translanguaging research, which emphasizes that multilingual support is most defensible and effective when it complements, rather than replaces, opportunities to engage with the target language (Huang & Chalmers, 2023; Zakharova & Lasagabaster, 2026). In this context, the judicious use of the first language functions as an adaptive pedagogical resource (Azzahra et al., 2026) that sustains communication and learning. Code-switching is therefore valued by the students not as a substitute for English-medium instruction, but as a calculated safety net designed to maximize both comprehension and target-language exposure.

CONCLUSION

This study has investigated the types and functions of code-switching employed in EFL classroom interactions at a public senior high school in West Java, Indonesia, as well as the students' perceptions regarding its use. Based on the analysis of classroom transcripts and interview data, several key conclusions can be drawn. First, regarding the types of code-switching, the study identified three distinct structural categories used by the teacher and students: intra-sentential switching, inter-sentential switching, and tag-switching. The findings revealed that intra-sentential switching emerged as the most dominant strategy, accounting for 50.7% of the total occurrences. This structural choice allowed both the teacher and students to seamlessly integrate English and Indonesian within a single continuous utterance, effectively maintaining the fluidity of classroom interaction without causing cognitive disruption. Additionally, inter-sentential switching was strategically utilized by the teacher as a deliberate pedagogical boundary to clarify complex instructions across sentence boundaries, while tag-switching served subtle classroom management purposes. Second, the pedagogical and interactional functions of code-switching differed between the teacher and the students. For the teacher, code-switching primarily served to provide cognitive support through reiteration and message qualification, functioning as a strategic scaffolding tool to clarify complex concepts and ensure accurate comprehension. Conversely, for the students, code-switching acted as a vital communicative coping strategy specifically for equivalence search enabling them to overcome vocabulary limitations and participate actively in the lesson. Finally, the study reveals that students hold a profoundly positive perception of code-switching, valuing its dual role in providing cognitive and affective support. The strategic integration of the native language significantly lowered the students' affective filter, minimized anxiety, and built a secure environment that fostered confidence in participation. Crucially, the students demonstrated a mature level of learner awareness by advocating for a balanced approach; they preferred code-switching to be implemented strategically and occasionally rather than excessively. They recognized the absolute necessity of sustained exposure to English for their language acquisition. Therefore, this study concludes that code-switching should be viewed not as a hindrance to English-medium instruction, but as an indispensable, adaptive pedagogical resource that, when used judiciously, maximizes both comprehension and meaningful target-language exposure.

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