



Teachers' Code-Switching in Indonesian EFL Classrooms: Types, Functions, and Students' Perceptions

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Abstract. The use of the first language (L1) in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms remains a contested issue. While monolingual approaches advocate maximum use of the target language, a growing body of research and translanguaging theory recognizes that strategic L1 use can support learning. In Indonesia, where English is learned as a foreign language with limited exposure outside school, teachers frequently switch between English and Indonesian, yet the types and functions of this practice and how students perceive it remain underexplored. This study aimed to identify the types and functions of teachers' code-switching in EFL classrooms and to examine students' perceptions of it. A convergent mixed-methods design was employed at a junior high school in [City X]. Data were collected through audio-recorded observations of 18 lessons taught by three English teachers and a questionnaire administered to 96 students. A total of 412 instances of code-switching were identified. Based on Poplack's typology, intra-sentential switching was the most frequent (48.1%), followed by inter-sentential (38.1%) and tag switching (13.8%). Functionally, code-switching was used mainly for explaining grammar and meaning (29.4%), managing the classroom (21.6%), checking comprehension (15.5%), building rapport (14.1%), giving instructions (12.6%), and repetition or emphasis (6.8%). Most students perceived code-switching as helpful for understanding lessons (84.4%) and instructions (87.5%) and as making them feel more comfortable (79.2%), although 65.6% also wanted teachers to use English predominantly. The findings suggest that code-switching functions as a pedagogical resource, but it should be used judiciously to balance comprehension and target-language exposure.

Keywords: Classroom Discourse; Code-Switching; EFL Classroom; First Language Use; Translanguaging.

1. INTRODUCTION

The role of the first language (L1) in foreign language classrooms has been debated for more than a century. Influenced by the Direct Method and later by communicative approaches, many teachers and teacher education programs have promoted the exclusive use of the target language, on the assumption that maximum exposure to the target language leads to better acquisition (Krashen, 1982). From this perspective, the use of the L1 is seen as a hindrance that reduces opportunities for input and output. However, since the 1980s, scholars have increasingly challenged this monolingual assumption. Atkinson (1987) described the mother tongue as a "neglected resource", and Cook (2001) argued that the L1 can be used deliberately and systematically to support learning. More recently, translanguaging theory has reconceptualized bilinguals' use of multiple languages as a natural and legitimate communicative and pedagogical practice (García & Li Wei, 2014; Li Wei, 2018).

In the Indonesian context, English is a foreign language with limited use outside the classroom (Lamb, 2004). Students share Indonesian as a common language, and many also speak a regional language. In this situation, English teachers frequently switch between English and Indonesian during lessons. This practice, known as code-switching, is often viewed

ambivalently: teachers may feel that it is necessary for students to understand, but also feel guilty because it is considered contrary to the ideal of an English-only classroom (Macaro, 2001; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002).

Previous research has examined classroom code-switching from different perspectives. Structural studies classify code-switching into types based on where the switch occurs in the utterance (Poplack, 1980). Functional studies identify the pedagogical and social purposes of code-switching, such as explaining content, managing the classroom, and building relationships (Ferguson, 2003; Sert, 2005). Lin (2013), reviewing three decades of research, noted that classroom code-switching studies have moved from describing functions toward understanding code-switching as a resource for learning. Studies of students' perceptions show mixed views: students often appreciate L1 use for comprehension but also recognize the value of target-language exposure (Levine, 2003). Hall and Cook (2012), in a comprehensive review, concluded that own-language use is widespread and can play various useful roles, but that research on its effects on learning is still limited.

Although code-switching in EFL classrooms has been studied in many contexts, studies that combine structural and functional analysis of teachers' code-switching with students' perceptions in Indonesian junior high schools remain limited. Junior high school is a critical stage because students are still at a beginner level and their attitudes toward English are being formed. This study aims to fill this gap.

The issue of L1 use is particularly relevant in Indonesia because of the country's multilingual reality. Many students grow up speaking a regional language at home, learn Indonesian as the language of schooling, and study English as a foreign language. In such settings, moving between languages is an ordinary part of daily communication, and classrooms inevitably reflect this multilingual repertoire. At the same time, English teachers often face pressure to maximize English use, and some school policies explicitly promote English-only classrooms. Understanding how teachers actually use code-switching, and how students respond to it, can help reconcile these competing expectations and inform realistic policies on classroom language use.

Moreover, classroom code-switching is closely related to the broader question of teacher talk. In many EFL classrooms, teacher talk constitutes the main source of target-language input, especially for students who have little exposure to English outside school. The way teachers distribute their talk between English and the L1 therefore directly affects the quantity and quality of input that students receive. Analysing code-switching in teacher talk

can thus shed light on how teachers balance the competing demands of comprehensibility and exposure in real classroom conditions.

Code-Switching: Definition and Types

Code-switching refers to the alternate use of two or more languages within the same conversation or utterance (Gumperz, 1982; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). Poplack (1980) distinguishes three types of code-switching: inter-sentential switching, which occurs at sentence or clause boundaries; intra-sentential switching, which occurs within a sentence or clause; and tag switching (extra-sentential), which involves the insertion of a tag or short expression from one language into an utterance in another language. Intra-sentential switching is considered to require the highest level of bilingual competence because it involves integrating the grammatical systems of two languages. Myers-Scotton (1993) proposes the Matrix Language Frame model, in which one language provides the grammatical frame and the other supplies embedded elements.

Functions of Code-Switching in the Classroom

Researchers have proposed various classifications of the functions of teachers' code-switching. Ferguson (2003) identifies three broad functions: code-switching for curriculum access (explaining and clarifying content), code-switching for classroom management (giving instructions, disciplining, and organizing), and code-switching for interpersonal relations (building rapport, humour, and encouragement). Sert (2005) identifies topic switch, affective functions, and repetitive functions as the main functions of teachers' code-switching in ELT classrooms. Macaro (2005) argues that code-switching can be a communication and learning strategy and that the key question is not whether teachers should use the L1 but when and how.

Students' Perceptions of L1 Use

Students' perceptions influence how they respond to code-switching. Levine (2003) found that students and instructors generally supported limited L1 use, especially for grammar explanations, and that higher target-language use was not necessarily associated with higher anxiety. Other studies suggest that beginner learners tend to value L1 support more than advanced learners. Understanding students' perceptions is important for helping teachers make informed decisions about language choice.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions: What types of code-switching are used by English teachers in junior high school EFL classrooms? What are the functions of teachers' code-switching? How do students perceive their teachers' code-switching?

2. METHOD

Research Design

This study used a convergent mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Qualitative data from classroom observations were analysed to identify types and functions of code-switching, which were also quantified as frequencies. Quantitative data from a questionnaire were used to examine students' perceptions. The two sets of findings were then integrated in the discussion.

Participants and Setting

The study was conducted at a public junior high school in Makassar, Indonesia. Participants were three English teachers (T1, T2, and T3) with teaching experience ranging from 5 to 15 years, and 96 eighth-grade students from three classes taught by these teachers. The students were 13–14 years old and were at a beginner to lower-intermediate level of English proficiency. All participants gave informed consent, and the school granted permission for the study.

Data Collection

Classroom observations were conducted over six weeks. Each teacher was observed in six lessons, giving a total of 18 lessons of 80 minutes each. Lessons were audio-recorded with the teachers' permission, and field notes were taken to record contextual information. After the observation period, students completed a questionnaire consisting of 12 items on a five-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*), adapted from Levine (2003) and previous studies on L1 use. The questionnaire was written in Indonesian. Cronbach's alpha for the questionnaire was .82.

Data Analysis

The recordings were transcribed, and all instances of teachers' code-switching were identified. An instance was defined as an utterance containing a switch between English and Indonesian (or a regional language). Each instance was coded for type using Poplack's (1980) typology and for function using a framework adapted from Ferguson (2003) and Sert (2005), refined inductively during coding. The analysis followed the steps of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). To ensure reliability, a second coder independently coded 25% of the data; inter-coder agreement was 89% for types and 84% for functions, and disagreements were resolved through discussion. Questionnaire data were analysed using descriptive statistics.

3. RESULTS

Types of Code-Switching

A total of 412 instances of code-switching were identified in the 18 lessons: 162 by T1, 131 by T2, and 119 by T3. Table 1 shows the distribution of code-switching types.

Table 1. Types of teachers' code-switching.

Type	T1	T2	T3	Total	%
Intra-sentential	80	62	56	198	48.1
Inter-sentential	60	51	46	157	38.1
Tag switching	22	18	17	57	13.8
Total	162	131	119	412	100.0

Intra-sentential switching was the most frequent type (48.1%), followed by inter-sentential switching (38.1%) and tag switching (13.8%). The pattern was consistent across the three teachers. Examples of each type are presented below (Indonesian elements are italicized, with English translations in brackets).

Excerpt 1 (intra-sentential, T1): "Okay, now we use simple past *karena kejadiannya sudah lewat* [because the event has already passed], right?"

Excerpt 2 (inter-sentential, T2): "Please open your book on page forty-five. *Kita akan belajar tentang descriptive text hari ini.* [We are going to learn about descriptive text today.]"

Excerpt 3 (tag switching, T3): "That's a good answer, *ya*. Who else wants to try?"

Excerpt 4 (inter-sentential, T1): "Be quiet, please. *Yang di belakang, tolong perhatikan dulu.* [Those at the back, please pay attention first.]"

Functions of Code-Switching

Table 2 presents the functions of teachers' code-switching.

Table 2. Functions of teachers' code-switching.

Function	Description	Frequency	%
Explaining grammar and meaning	Clarifying grammar rules, vocabulary, and content	121	29.4
Classroom management	Organizing activities, disciplining, managing time	89	21.6
Checking comprehension	Asking whether students understand, confirming meaning	64	15.5
Affective and rapport building	Praising, encouraging, joking, showing empathy	58	14.1
Giving instructions	Explaining task procedures	52	12.6
Repetition and emphasis	Repeating English utterances in Indonesian for emphasis	28	6.8
Total		412	100.0

The most frequent function was explaining grammar and meaning (29.4%), as illustrated in Excerpt 1, where the teacher used Indonesian to explain why the simple past tense was used. Classroom management was the second most frequent function (21.6%), as shown in Excerpt 4. Checking comprehension (15.5%) typically involved questions such as "*Paham, ya?*" [Understand?] or asking students to translate. Affective functions (14.1%) included praise and humour, often realized through tags, as in Excerpt 3. Code-switching for giving instructions (12.6%) occurred especially when introducing new activities, and repetition (6.8%) was used to emphasize key points.

Distribution across Lesson Stages

Further analysis showed that code-switching was most frequent in the main activity stage, particularly during grammar explanations, and least frequent in the opening and closing stages, where teachers mostly used routine English expressions such as greetings and leave-taking. [Insert the distribution of instances per lesson stage, if available.]

Students' Perceptions

Table 3 presents students' responses to selected questionnaire items.

Table 3. Students' perceptions of teachers' code-switching (n = 96).

Statement	Agree/Strongly agree (n)	%	M
Code-switching helps me understand instructions	84	87.5	4.21
Code-switching helps me understand grammar and new words	81	84.4	4.15
Code-switching makes me feel more comfortable in class	76	79.2	4.02
The teacher should use mostly English in class	63	65.6	3.74
Too much Indonesian reduces my chance to learn English	56	58.3	3.55

Most students agreed that code-switching helped them understand instructions (87.5%) and grammar and vocabulary (84.4%), and that it made them feel more comfortable (79.2%). At the same time, 65.6% agreed that teachers should use mostly English, and 58.3% agreed that too much Indonesian could reduce their opportunities to learn English.

Summary of Integrated Findings

Table 4 integrates the observational and questionnaire findings.

Table 4. Integration of observation and questionnaire findings.

Aspect	Observation finding	Questionnaire finding	Integration
Comprehension	Explaining and checking comprehension = 44.9% of switches	84.4–87.5% find CS helpful for understanding	Convergent
Affective climate	Affective functions = 14.1%	79.2% feel more comfortable	Convergent

Target-language exposure	Code-switching occurred in all 65.6% want mostly English lessons (mean 22.9 per lesson)	Partially divergent
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4. DISCUSSION

The first research question concerned the types of code-switching. Intra-sentential switching was the most frequent type, followed by inter-sentential and tag switching. The dominance of intra-sentential switching indicates that teachers often embedded Indonesian explanations within English utterances, using English as the matrix language and inserting Indonesian elements to clarify meaning, consistent with Myers-Scotton's (1993) Matrix Language Frame model. This pattern suggests that teachers tried to maintain English as the main language of instruction while providing immediate L1 support. It also reflects the high bilingual competence of the teachers, as intra-sentential switching requires integration of two grammatical systems (Poplack, 1980).

The second research question addressed the functions of code-switching. The most frequent function was explaining grammar and meaning, followed by classroom management, checking comprehension, affective functions, giving instructions, and repetition. These findings correspond closely to the three broad functions identified by Ferguson (2003): curriculum access, classroom management, and interpersonal relations. They are also consistent with Sert (2005), who identified topic switch and affective functions as major functions in ELT classrooms. The predominance of explanatory functions reflects the beginner level of the students, for whom complex grammar explanations in English would be difficult to understand. As Cook (2001) and Macaro (2005) argue, using the L1 to convey meaning efficiently can free up time and cognitive resources for practising the target language.

The third research question concerned students' perceptions. Most students perceived code-switching as helpful for comprehension and as creating a comfortable atmosphere, but a majority also wanted teachers to use English predominantly. This ambivalence is consistent with Levine (2003), who found that students supported limited L1 use but valued target-language use. The integration of findings shows convergence regarding comprehension and affective functions, but partial divergence regarding exposure: although students appreciated L1 support, they were aware that excessive code-switching could limit their exposure to English. This finding echoes Krashen's (1982) emphasis on comprehensible input: code-switching can make input comprehensible, but the input must still be predominantly in the target language.

From a translanguaging perspective (García & Li Wei, 2014; Li Wei, 2018), the teachers' code-switching can be seen as a pedagogical practice that draws on students' full linguistic repertoire to make meaning. However, the findings also show that its value depends on how it is used. Code-switching for explaining difficult concepts and building rapport appears beneficial, while code-switching for routine instructions that students could understand in English may unnecessarily reduce exposure. Hall and Cook (2012) and Macaro (2005) argue that the key issue is "optimal" rather than "maximal" target-language use.

Table 5 compares the present findings with those of previous studies.

Table 5. Comparison with previous studies.

Study	Context	Main finding	Relation to the present study
Ferguson (2003)	Post-colonial classrooms	Three functions: curriculum access, management, interpersonal	Consistent: all three functions found
Sert (2005)	ELT classrooms, Turkey	Topic switch, affective, and repetitive functions	Consistent: explanation and affective functions prominent
Levine (2003)	University FL classes, USA	Students support limited L1 use for grammar	Consistent: students value L1 for grammar but want mostly English
Hall & Cook (2012)	Review	Own-language use widespread and potentially useful	Consistent: code-switching present in all lessons
Present study	Junior high school, Indonesia	Intra-sentential CS dominant; explanatory functions most frequent	Combines structural, functional, and perception analysis

Compared with these studies, the present study shows a relatively high proportion of intra-sentential switching. This may be related to the beginner level of the students, which encouraged teachers to insert Indonesian words and phrases into English sentences to maintain comprehension without abandoning English entirely. It may also reflect the widespread practice of mixing English and Indonesian in everyday communication among educated Indonesians, so that intra-sentential switching feels natural to both teachers and students.

The variation in frequency among the three teachers (from 119 to 162 instances) also deserves attention. Differences in code-switching frequency may reflect teachers' beliefs about L1 use, their confidence in English, and the characteristics of their classes (Macaro, 2001; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002). Although this study did not investigate teachers' beliefs directly, the variation suggests that code-switching is shaped not only by students' needs but also by individual teacher factors. Understanding these factors would help teacher educators design professional development programs that support principled decision-making about language choice.

Pedagogically, these findings suggest that teachers should use code-switching purposefully, for example to explain complex grammar, clarify key vocabulary, check comprehension, and build rapport, while gradually increasing English use for routine classroom language and instructions. Teachers might also use "sandwich" techniques, in which an English utterance is followed by an Indonesian clarification and then repeated in English. Teacher education programs should move beyond the English-only ideal and help teachers develop principled approaches to L1 use (Turnbull & Arnett, 2002).

This study has limitations. It involved only three teachers in one school, and the observation period was limited to six weeks. The questionnaire captured students' general perceptions but not their perceptions of specific instances of code-switching. Future research should involve more teachers and schools, include stimulated-recall interviews with teachers to understand their reasons for switching, and examine the relationship between code-switching and learning outcomes.

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined the types and functions of teachers' code-switching in Indonesian junior high school EFL classrooms and students' perceptions of it. Intra-sentential switching was the most frequent type, and code-switching was used mainly to explain grammar and meaning, manage the classroom, check comprehension, and build rapport. Students generally perceived code-switching as helpful for understanding and as creating a comfortable learning environment, but most also wanted teachers to use English predominantly. These findings suggest that code-switching is a valuable pedagogical resource when used strategically, but that teachers should balance L1 support with sufficient exposure to English. Developing principled guidelines for L1 use in EFL classrooms is recommended for teachers and teacher education programs.

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