AN ANALYSIS OF TEACHER CODE-SWITCHING PRACTICES IN ENGLISH CLASSROOM AT SMPN 1 PADANG PANJANG

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the use of teacher code-switching in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom interaction within a multilingual context. Code-switching is often viewed as a controversial practice in EFL instruction, yet it remains commonly used by teachers to facilitate learning. This research aimed to identify the types of code-switching employed by the teacher and to explore their pedagogical functions in classroom interaction. A qualitative case study design was applied, involving classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with an English teacher at a secondary school. The data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed that the teacher frequently employed inter-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching during instructional activities. These code-switching practices served several functions, including clarifying instructional content, managing the classroom, emphasizing important points, and supporting students' comprehension. The study concludes that teacher code-switching, when used strategically, can function as an effective pedagogical resource in EFL classrooms rather than as a barrier to language learning.

Keywords : *Code-Switching, EFL Classroom, Qualitative Case Study, Teacher Language Use*

INTRODUCTION

Code-switching has long been recognized as a common phenomenon in bilingual and multilingual communication. In educational contexts, it refers to the alternation between two languages during classroom interaction, particularly between the target language and students' first language (Gumperz, 1982). Early sociolinguistic research has demonstrated that code-switching is a systematic and rule-governed practice shaped by communicative purposes, rather than a random or deficient form of language use (Poplack, 1980). This perspective laid the foundation for understanding code-switching as a meaningful linguistic resource within instructional discourse.

Within the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching, however, the use of code-switching has remained a subject of ongoing debate. While some pedagogical approaches emphasize maximal exposure to the target language, classroom realities often require teachers to draw on students' first language to facilitate comprehension and instructional clarity, particularly when complex concepts are introduced (Karafil et al. 2023). Such practices reflect the dynamic nature of classroom interaction, where effective teaching frequently involves adapting language use to learners' immediate needs and proficiency levels. Classroom code-switching has also been discussed as part of broader multilingual pedagogical practices, where teachers draw on learners' full linguistic repertoires to support meaning-making and participation (Canagarajah, 2011); Ferguson, 2009).

From a pedagogical standpoint, the selective use of the first language has increasingly been viewed as a supportive learning resource rather than an obstacle to language acquisition. Vivian Cook, (2001) argues that the first language can serve a cognitive function by helping learners process new information more effectively when it is used judiciously. Extending this argument, Macaro, (2001) conceptualizes code-switching as a communication and learning strategy that enables teachers to manage meaning, maintain interaction, and respond flexibly to students' understanding during second language instruction.

More recent scholarship has further legitimized code-switching within language education by emphasizing its role in fostering meaningful classroom interaction. Hall & Cook, (2012) suggest that teachers' own-language use can enhance classroom rapport and support learners' comprehension when applied strategically. In contemporary discussions of language pedagogy, the concept of translanguaging has also highlighted the pedagogical value of flexible language practices, viewing bilingual speakers' full linguistic repertoires as resources for learning rather than as constraints (Wei, 2022).

In EFL classroom interaction, empirical studies have shown that code-switching serves a range of instructional and affective purposes. Teachers frequently employ code-switching to clarify lesson content, manage classroom activities, and ensure smooth instructional flow (Anggraini et al., 2023). Beyond instructional support, the use of students' first language has also been associated with affective benefits, such as reducing learners' anxiety and encouraging greater participation, particularly in contexts where exposure to English outside the classroom is limited (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

Despite the growing recognition of code-switching as a pedagogical resource, there remains a need for context-specific classroom studies that examine how teacher code-switching is realized in actual teaching practice. Previous research has often focused either on the structural types or on the pedagogical functions of code-switching in isolation. Consequently, fewer studies have provided an integrated account of how these aspects interact within authentic classroom

settings. Addressing this gap, the present study aims to explore teacher code-switching in an EFL classroom by examining both its types and pedagogical functions as they naturally occur during classroom interaction.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore teacher code-switching in an EFL classroom context. Qualitative research is considered appropriate for examining classroom interaction because it allows for an in-depth understanding of naturally occurring phenomena within their real-life settings (Creswell, 2014) By focusing on descriptive and interpretive analysis, this approach enabled the researcher to capture how code-switching was implemented during teaching and learning activities. Qualitative case study research is particularly suitable for investigating classroom interaction, as it allows researchers to examine pedagogical practices in depth within their real-life contexts (merriam, 2009); Stake, 1995). In applied linguistics research, qualitative approaches are commonly used to explore language use, teacher practices, and interactional patterns in classroom settings (Dörnyei, 2007)

The research was conducted in an English as a Foreign Language classroom at the secondary school level. The participants consisted of one English teacher and students from one class, selected purposively based on their regular use of English as the target language during instruction. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that the data reflected typical classroom interaction in an EFL context (Palinkas et al., 2015)

Classroom observation was used as the primary data collection technique. Observations were carried out during regular teaching sessions to capture authentic teacher–student interaction without experimental manipulation. Classroom observation is widely used in language education research to examine instructional practices and interactional patterns in natural settings Kia Heirati (2015) Field notes were taken to record instances of teacher code-switching, classroom activities, and students' responses during the lessons.

The data analysis followed a qualitative descriptive procedure. Instances of teacher code-switching identified from the observation data were categorized according to their structural types and pedagogical functions. Qualitative content analysis was applied to organize and interpret the data systematically, allowing patterns and themes to emerge from the observed classroom interaction (Matthew B. Miles et al., 2014). To enhance the credibility of the analysis, the categorization process was conducted carefully by repeatedly reviewing the data and ensuring consistency in classification.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of this study indicate that teacher code-switching was used purposefully to support classroom interaction and instructional clarity. Rather than occurring randomly, code-switching emerged as a strategic pedagogical practice shaped by classroom needs and students' language proficiency. This finding supports the view that code-switching is a systematic communicative practice within instructional discourse (Gumperz, 1982).

Classroom observation revealed that the teacher employed three main types of code-switching: inter-sentential code-switching, intra-sentential code-switching, and tag-switching. These types are commonly identified in bilingual and multilingual classroom discourse and reflect

different levels of language alternation during interaction (Poplack, 1980). Inter-sentential code-switching occurred when the teacher shifted from English to the students' first language between sentences, particularly after delivering explanations or instructions. This type of switching was mainly used to ensure students' comprehension of lesson content (Sert, 2005).

Intra-sentential code-switching was observed when the teacher inserted words or short phrases from the first language within English sentences. This practice allowed the teacher to emphasize key terms while maintaining English as the dominant language of instruction. Such selective use of the first language has been shown to support meaning construction without significantly reducing exposure to the target language (Vivian Cook, 2001). Tag-switching appeared in the form of brief expressions or discourse markers in the students' first language, contributing to smoother classroom interaction and reducing social distance between the teacher and students (Lin, 2013)

Beyond its structural realization, teacher code-switching in this study served several pedagogical functions that supported both instructional and affective aspects of learning. One prominent function was topic clarification, in which the teacher used the students' first language to explain difficult concepts or unfamiliar vocabulary. This function aligns with the argument that flexible language use can scaffold learners' understanding in foreign language classrooms (Wei, 2022).

Another function of code-switching identified in this study was reiteration. The teacher frequently repeated important information in the students' first language after presenting it in English. This repetition reinforced key points and helped students retain essential information during the lesson. Reiterative code-switching has been widely recognized as an effective instructional strategy in EFL contexts (Sert, 2005).

Code-switching was also employed for classroom management, particularly when giving instructions, organizing activities, or addressing students' behavior. Using the students' first language in these situations ensured clarity and immediacy, resulting in more efficient classroom organization. Similar uses of code-switching have been reported in studies examining teacher language choice in EFL classrooms (Karafil, 2023)

In addition, teacher code-switching served an affective function by creating a supportive classroom atmosphere. The use of the first language to encourage students or provide reassurance appeared to reduce learners' anxiety and increase their willingness to participate in classroom activities. This finding supports research highlighting the relationship between language use and affective factors in second language learning (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014)

The final function identified was checking understanding, where the teacher switched to the students' first language to confirm students' comprehension of lesson content or instructions. This function enabled the teacher to identify misunderstandings promptly and provide immediate clarification, thereby supporting effective learning processes. Such diagnostic use of code-switching has been noted as beneficial in classroom-based language learning (Anggraini et al., 2023)

Overall, the findings suggest that teacher code-switching in this classroom functioned as a deliberate pedagogical strategy rather than an incidental practice. When used appropriately, code-switching supported instructional clarity, classroom management, and students' affective engagement. These results contribute to current discussions on teacher language use by providing classroom-based evidence that code-switching can play a facilitative role in EFL learning contexts (Hall & Cook, 2012)

Previous classroom-based studies have similarly reported that teachers' code-switching serves interactional and pedagogical functions, including managing classroom discourse and supporting learner engagement (Üstünel & Seedhouse, 2005); Turnbull & Dailey-O'Cain, 2009)To provide a clearer overview of how teacher code-switching was implemented and functioned during classroom interaction in this study, the key categories identified in this study are summarized in Table 1. The table presents both the structural types and pedagogical functions of code-switching along with their corresponding observed classroom outcomes, as derived from classroom observation data. By integrating these elements, the table offers a concise representation of the relationship between the forms of code-switching, their instructional purposes, and their impact on students' classroom behavior and comprehension.

Table 1. Type, Pedagogical Function, and Observed Classroom Outcomes of Teacher Code-Switching Practice in English Classroom

Category	Description	Observed Classroom Outcomes
Inter-Sentential Code-Switching	Switching from English to the students' first language between sentences	Students understood explanations and instructions more clearly and transitioned more smoothly between activities.
Intra-Sentential Code-switching	Inserting words or short phrases from the first language within English sentences	Students identified key vocabulary and important information more easily during lessons.
Tag-Switching	Adding short expressions or discourse markers from the first language	Classroom interaction became more natural and students appeared more relaxed.
Topic Clarification	Using the first language to explain lesson topics or abstract concepts	Students demonstrated clearer understanding of the lesson content.
Reiteration	Repeating information in the first language to reinforce previously explained material	Students retained key points better and responded more accurately during follow-up activities.
Classroom Management	Using the first language to give directions and manage student behavior	Classroom activities ran more efficiently and off-task behavior decreased.
Affective Function	Using the first language to encourage students and reduce anxiety	Students showed increased confidence and willingness to participate orally.
Checking Understanding	Switching to the first language to confirm students' comprehension	Misunderstandings were identified quickly and corrected during the lesson.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study demonstrate that teacher code-switching functions as a meaningful pedagogical resource in the EFL classroom when it is employed strategically and in response to instructional needs. Through its implementation in different structural forms and pedagogical functions, code-switching supported instructional clarity, facilitated classroom management, and fostered a more supportive learning environment. These findings matter to EFL teachers and educators because they challenge the assumption that exclusive use of the target language is always the most effective approach, showing instead that judicious use of students' first language can enhance both comprehension and classroom interaction.

In relation to previous research, this study reinforces earlier views that code-switching can serve cognitive and affective purposes in language learning while offering a context-specific perspective grounded in classroom observation. The originality of this study lies in its integrated analysis of both the types and functions of teacher code-switching within a single classroom context, providing a holistic understanding of how code-switching operates in actual teaching practice. The findings contribute to the growing body of literature that views code-switching not as a pedagogical weakness but as a strategic instructional choice, suggesting that teachers may benefit from developing greater awareness of when and how code-switching can be used effectively in EFL classrooms.

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