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CODE -SWITCHING PRACTICES IN EFL CLASSROOM INTERACTION

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the use of code-switching in offline EFL classroom interaction and examine its functions in supporting students speaking performance. The study employed a qualitative descriptive design involving 10 students from the English Education Study Program at Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng. The participants were determined purposively. Data were collected through observation and semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that students frequently used inter-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching when they experienced difficulties in expressing ideas, understanding complex materials, and maintaining communication during speaking activities. The participants generally perceived this strategy positively because it helped reduce speaking anxiety, improve confidence, enhance comprehension, and support smoother classroom interaction. In addition, linguistic limitations and psychological factors were identified as the main reasons influencing students' use of code-switching. Despite its benefits, the participants emphasized the importance of balancing the use of Indonesian and English to promote continuous language development. Therefore, code-switching should be applied strategically as a pedagogical tool in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: code-switching, EFL classroom, speaking skills, classroom interaction

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the most essential skills in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), particularly in classroom interaction. However, many students experience difficulties in expressing their ideas orally due to limited vocabulary, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes (Sert, 2015; Puspawati, 2018). In multilingual contexts such as Indonesia, students often draw on multiple languages to support communication. One common phenomenon in this context is code-switching, which refers to the alternation between two or more languages within a conversation to facilitate meaning-making and interaction (Sert, 2015; Puspawati, 2018).

From a theoretical perspective, code-switching is widely recognized as a communicative and pedagogical strategy in language learning. It helps learners connect new linguistic input with prior knowledge, particularly when full proficiency in the target language has not yet been achieved. It also contributes to lowering anxiety and fostering a more supportive learning environment (Macaro, 2018; Istifci, 2019). In EFL classrooms, code-switching is often used as a form of scaffolding to clarify complex input and support learner participation during interaction.

In the context of Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng, classroom interaction is characterized by multilingual communication involving English, Indonesian, and local languages. In speaking activities, both teachers and students naturally switch between languages to maintain interaction, express meaning, and negotiate understanding. This dynamic reflects how code-switching operates as a practical communicative resource in real classroom discourse (Munawaroh et al., 2022; Tahang et al., 2022).

Previous studies have shown that code-switching can increase student participation, support classroom management, and reduce speaking anxiety (Taufiq et al., 2022; Maruf et al., 2023; Murtiningsih et al., 2022; Haq et al., 2024). However, most of these studies primarily emphasize teachers' use of code-switching or describe its general functions without closely examining how it emerges naturally during ongoing student speaking activities. In addition, limited attention has been given to micro-level classroom interaction, where code-switching occurs spontaneously as part of learners' meaning negotiation. Research in specific multilingual higher education contexts such as Ruteng also remains scarce.

Addressing these gaps, this study focuses on how code-switching is used by both teachers and students during speaking activities in natural classroom interaction. It also examines the functions of code-switching in supporting students' oral communication. Specifically, the study seeks to answer: (1) How is code-switching used during speaking activities in EFL classrooms? and (2) What communicative functions does code-switching serve in students' speaking performance?

By focusing on naturally occurring classroom interaction in a multilingual setting, this study aims to provide a more contextualized understanding of code-switching as a communicative strategy. The findings are expected to contribute to more effective and responsive EFL teaching practices, particularly in supporting students' speaking development

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design grounded in a sociolinguistic perspective of classroom interaction (Walsh, 2016). The study focuses on naturally occurring code-switching during EFL speaking activities and aims to understand how it functions in real classroom communication. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to explore participants' lived experiences, meanings, and interpretations of language use in authentic learning contexts. Rather than measuring frequency, this study emphasizes an in-depth understanding of how code-switching emerges and functions during interaction.

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at students of English Education Department Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng. Participants were selected using purposive sampling. The criteria for selecting participants were: 1) Students who had taken EFL speaking courses; 2) Students who actively participated in classroom interaction. 3) Students who had experience using code-switching during speaking activities; 4) Students willing to participate voluntarily in the research. A total of ten undergraduate students participated in this study. The small number of

participants is appropriate for qualitative research, which prioritizes depth of data rather than generalization.

Data Collection and Data Analyses

Data were collected through observation and individual semi-structured interviews conducted in Indonesian to allow participants to express their ideas clearly and naturally. Before the interviews, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and gave informed consent. Each interview lasted approximately 10–15 minutes and was audio-recorded with permission. The interviews focused on students' real experiences of using code-switching during EFL speaking activities in classroom interaction.

The main instruments of this study were observation sheet and a semi-structured interview guide. The interview questions were developed based on Hoffman's (1991) typology of code-switching and Macaro's (2018) theory of classroom language use, particularly the role of L1 in supporting L2 learning. The interview questions were organized into three main areas: 1) Students' use of code-switching in speaking activities; 2) Situations that trigger code-switching in classroom interaction; 3) Functions and perceptions of code-switching in supporting English learning. To ensure content validity, the interview guide was reviewed by an expert in English Language Teaching. Feedback was used to improve clarity, relevance, and alignment with research objectives.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis process included: 1) Familiarizing with the data; 2) Transcribing interviews; 3) Generating initial codes; 4) Searching for themes; 5) Reviewing themes; 6) Defining and naming themes; 7) Producing the final interpretation.

RESULTS

How Code-Switching Occurs in EFL Classroom Interaction

Based on the findings, code-switching appears as an important communicative strategy in classroom interaction, particularly when students experience linguistic difficulties in using English. The students frequently shift from English to Indonesian to overcome vocabulary

limitations, grammatical uncertainty, or difficulties in expressing ideas fluently. This phenomenon can be categorized as both inter-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching. Inter-sentential code-switching occurs when students switch languages between complete sentences, while intra-sentential code-switching occurs within a single sentence or utterance. For instance, a student say, "I want to explain my opinion, tetapi saya lupa vocabulary-nya," which reflects intra-sentential code-switching because Indonesian and English are mixed within one sentence. Meanwhile, inter-sentential code-switching can be observed in expressions such as, "I cannot answer the question. Saya belum memahami materinya." These examples demonstrate that students use code-switching as a spontaneous strategy to maintain communication despite their limited English proficiency.

Furthermore, code-switching also frequently occurs during classroom instruction and peer discussions, especially when students and lecturers attempt to clarify complex concepts or unfamiliar material. In instructional settings, lecturers may intentionally switch languages to ensure students' comprehension of the lesson. Similarly, students often rely on Indonesian during collaborative discussions to sustain interaction and avoid misunderstanding among peers. In this context, inter-sentential code-switching can be seen in utterances such as, "Please discuss the topic first. Nanti kita presentasikan bersama." Intra-sentential code-switching also appear in classroom interaction, for example, "This topic is very difficult untuk dipahami tanpa contoh." These language alternations indicate that code-switching functions not only as a linguistic support mechanism but also as an interactional strategy to maintain the continuity and effectiveness of classroom communication.

Psychological aspects also contribute significantly to the occurrence of code-switching in classroom interaction. Students reported that they tend to switch to Indonesian when they feel nervous, anxious, or lack confidence in speaking English publicly. This suggests that code-switching serves as an emotional coping strategy that helps students reduce communication pressure and participate more comfortably in classroom activities. One participant stated, "I feel more comfortable using Indonesian when I am not confident". This highlights the relationship between emotional security and language choice. In such situations, students may begin speaking in English

but switch to Indonesian to avoid embarrassment or communication breakdown. Thus, code-switching is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced not only by linguistic competence but also by cognitive processing, classroom interactional needs, and psychological comfort during communication.

Functions of Code-Switching

Based on the findings, code-switching serves several important functions in supporting students' English learning. First, it functions as a compensatory strategy. It allowed students to continue communication when they lack vocabulary or grammatical knowledge. This helped students avoid communication breakdowns and maintained fluency in interaction.

Second, code-switching plays an important role in enhancing comprehension. Students reported that using Indonesian helps them understand explanations, instructions, and complex material more easily. It acts as a bridge between new knowledge and prior understanding. This makes learning more accessible and reducing confusion.

Third, code-switching has an affective function by reducing students' anxiety and increasing their confidence. Students feel less stressed when they are allowed to use Indonesian, especially when speaking English makes them nervous or afraid of making mistakes. In addition, code-switching supports classroom interaction and collaboration, especially in group discussions where students use Indonesian to ensure that all members can participate actively and understand each other.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that code-switching is a common practice in EFL classroom interaction, especially among students who face difficulties expressing their ideas in English. Participants reported switching to Indonesian when they encountered gaps in vocabulary or were unsure about grammar structures, highlighting code-switching as a compensatory strategy (Sert, 2015; Macaro, 2018). In group discussions, students frequently used Indonesian to maintain interaction with peers, ensuring that everyone could participate actively despite linguistic limitations

(Taufiq et al., 2022; Maruf et al., 2023). These results suggest that code-switching is a strategic tool to sustain communication and learning flow in multilingual classrooms.

Teacher-initiated code-switching was also observed in classroom interactions. Lecturers often switched to Indonesian to explain complex materials, difficult vocabulary, or grammatical structures, which helped reduce misunderstanding and clarified meaning (Puspawati, 2018; Istifci, 2019). Such practices highlight the role of teachers in applying code-switching strategically as a pedagogical tool to scaffold student learning while maintaining lesson progression. Using the first language allows teachers to make lessons comprehensible without interrupting the learning process.

Code-switching in classroom interaction is influenced by both linguistic and social factors. Linguistically, students switch languages to overcome lexical gaps, manage cognitive load, and express ideas more accurately (Macaro, 2018; Jingxia, 2015). Socially, code-switching enables smoother peer communication, supports collaborative problem-solving, and prevents conversation breakdowns during discussions (Taufiq et al., 2022; Maruf et al., 2023). These findings suggest that code-switching is adaptive and context-sensitive, responding to both interactional and learning needs.

Participants emphasized the importance of balancing the use of Indonesian and English. Although code-switching facilitates comprehension and communication, overreliance on the first language can limit opportunities for English practice and hinder language development (Walsh, 2016; Haq et al., 2024). Therefore, students viewed code-switching as a transitional strategy rather than a permanent solution, highlighting its pedagogical role in supporting gradual proficiency development.

In terms of function, code-switching plays an important role in reducing students' speaking anxiety. Participants reported feeling nervous, shy, or afraid of making mistakes when required to speak only in English. Switching to Indonesian provided psychological support and allowed them to express ideas more confidently (Haq et al., 2024; Munawaroh et al., 2022). This illustrates the affective benefits of code-switching. It creates a supportive environment that encourages active participation in speaking

activities.

Code-switching also functions to enhance comprehension. Students reported that explanations in Indonesian helped them understand complex instructions and new concepts more easily, reducing cognitive load and enabling them to focus on meaning rather than language form (Macaro, 2018; Jingxia, 2015). Teacher-led code-switching further reinforced comprehension, as instructors clarified difficult content without disrupting the lesson. This highlights code-switching's cognitive function as a scaffolding tool in EFL classrooms.

Another function code-switching is to ensure smoother interaction during pair or group discussions. Students use Indonesian to maintain conversation flow, negotiate meaning, and avoid misunderstandings (Taufiq et al., 2022; Maruf et al., 2023). These results indicate that code-switching supports social interaction and communication in the classroom. It allows students to participate even when their English proficiency is limited. It functions as a bridge for effective collaborative learning rather than a barrier.

Students and teachers agreed that code-switching should decrease gradually as learners gain confidence and proficiency. This serves as a transitional strategy to enhance both linguistic competence and communicative confidence (Walsh, 2016; Maruf et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that EFL students at Unika Santu Paulus Ruteng frequently rely on code-switching during classroom interaction, particularly in speaking activities, as a strategy to overcome linguistic and psychological barriers. The main factors triggering code-switching include limited vocabulary and grammar mastery, difficulty understanding complex materials, lack of confidence, speaking anxiety, and fear of making mistakes. These challenges negatively affect students' ability to express ideas fluently, participate actively in discussions, and maintain communication in English. The findings also show that code-switching is not only influenced by linguistic factors, but also by psychological factors such as nervousness and low self-confidence, as well as situational factors such as cognitively demanding topics and peer interaction. Therefore, improving students'

speaking performance in EFL classrooms requires attention to linguistic competence, emotional support, and strategic classroom practices simultaneously.

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