

Exploring The Pedagogical Function and Students Perception of Code-Switching in an Indonesian EFL Classroom

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Abstract

This study explores the pedagogical functions of code-switching and students' perceptions of its use in an Indonesian EFL classroom. Using a qualitative case study design, the research involved one English teacher and approximately 30 seventh-grade students at a public junior high school in Semarang, Indonesia. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, then analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings demonstrated that the teacher employed code-switching to explain difficult material, give instructions, manage classroom interaction, and support students' comprehension. Code-switching occurred most frequently during explanation and instruction stages, especially when students were confused or had trouble understanding English. Although the teacher stated that code-switching was used spontaneously rather than as a planned strategy, classroom observations revealed that code switching consistently appeared in specific teaching contexts. Students generally perceived code-switching positively because it helped them understand the material more easily, reduced anxiety, increased confidence, and encouraged classroom participation. The study suggests that code-switching serves as an effective and responsive pedagogical strategy that supports students' comprehension and engagement, particularly for learners with low English proficiency in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: Code Switching; EFL Classroom; English Language Learning

INTRODUCTION

Classroom communication within English as a Foreign language (EFL) settings, especially at the junior high school level, frequently presents significant challenges due to students' varying levels of language proficiency (Konipa et al., 2025). These differences in proficiency levels among students can cause misunderstandings and impede effective interaction in the classroom, so it is crucial for teachers to use teaching strategies that not only increase students' understanding but also can build meaningful interactions among students in the learning process. As a result, teachers are required to employ teaching strategies that promote students' understanding while maintaining classroom interaction. One strategy commonly used by teachers to overcome these issues is code switching. Code switching refers to the technique of alternating between two or more languages in a conversation or discourse (Poplack, 1980) In EFL classrooms, code-switching serves as a communicative and instructional resource, teachers alternate between English and Indonesian during class, in order to bridge the communication gap between students and teachers (Kana et al., 2023). In terms of linguistic code-switching may appear in many different forms, such as tag-switching, intra-sentence switching, and inter-sentence switching, with intra-sentence switching being the most frequently used in classroom interactions (Murtiningsih et al., 2022). In order to ensure clarity and student engagement, teachers often switch between languages while giving instructions and teaching complex material (Susilowati et al., 2025) From a pedagogical perspective, code-switching serves a

number of crucial purposes in the classroom (Hazaymeh, 2022). Ferguson (2003) states that it can facilitate access to knowledge (curriculum access), manage the classroom, and foster interpersonal relations. Teachers can create a more encouraging learning environment, give clearer instructions, and help students in understanding complex material by using students' first language and the target language through code switching strategies (Estremera & Gilbas, 2022). According to Elias et al. (2022) and Immanuel & A. (2023), using students' first language can also minimize language anxiety and boost participation since it lowers the affective filter and makes students feel more comfortable engaging in class.

Despite these benefits, code-switching is sometimes mistaken for a lack of linguistic proficiency or professional failure (Rejeki et al., 2023). The pedagogical advantages of code switching, which can enhance students' comprehension and interaction with various language skill levels, are neglected by this misunderstanding. However, reality shows that code-switching represents a natural and pedagogically responsive strategy to students' low levels of comprehension, especially in public schools where the majority of students are categorized as low-proficiency learners (Pandiangan & Tarigan, 2025). In line with these findings, the importance of students' mother tongue in education is becoming more widely acknowledged, according to recent advances. International organizations and education scholars now emphasize that students' mother tongues can be beneficial in their learning. For instance, UNESCO (2025) highlights the significance of multilingual integration in education, enabling students to learn using a language they are already proficient in. Similarly, earlier research states that "home languages are essential scaffolds, not obstacles, in additional language learning" (UNESCO, 2021). In the Indonesian context, the "English-only" approach often triggers significant levels of language anxiety, causing students to feel overwhelmed and eventually withdrawing from classroom interactions (Rahmawati et al., 2025) Therefore, there is an urgent need to validate code-switching as a legitimate instructional strategy. This aligns with the principles of Kurikulum Merdeka, which demands adaptive and inclusive teaching methods (Lestari & Margana, 2024)

As a result of this increasing awareness of multilingual practice in education, the usage of code-switching in EFL classrooms has been the subject of several studies in Indonesia. This study is related to the earlier research on teachers' perceptions of code-switching practices by Zainil & Arsyad (2021). The study found that teachers often rely on instinctive decisions and are not fully conscious when they decide to use code switching. This finding aligns with the most recent study by Pandiangan & Tarigan (2025), that this practice is often based on teachers' "gut feeling". Additionally, this study is connected to research by Bonyadi et al. (2021), which explored how teachers perceived and used code-switching in EFL classrooms. The study also found that, rather than being a systematically planned pedagogical approach, code-switching is often used as an instinctive way to enhance students' understanding. Also, several studies have only focused on the viewpoints of students. A study from Manik et al. (2025) which investigated students' perceptions of code switching revealed that code-switching has a beneficial impact on their motivation, confidence, and comprehension in language acquisition. Similar to the earlier research by Haq et al. (2025), which analyzed the types and frequency of code-switching in classroom interaction. The study mainly focused on how many times teachers switch between Indonesian and English in classroom settings, as well as describing the linguistic patterns. Likewise, other studies conducted in Indonesia have mostly focused on identifying and categorizing types of code-switching.

However, even though code switching is commonly used in EFL classrooms, several important gaps still exist. Many previous studies only focus on one aspect, such as teachers' perceptions, students' attitude, or linguistic classification, but have rarely combined them into one comprehensive analysis. In addition, although many studies discuss the frequency and types of code switching, they do not clearly explain its significant roles in classroom activities. Furthermore, most previous studies in Indonesia have focused more on identifying types of code switching, but have not sufficiently explored the direct impact of this practice on specific psychological and cognitive aspects of students, especially those with low English proficiency (Miftakh et al., 2025). This shows the need for more context-specific studies that connect teachers' instructional goals with students' learning experiences in the classroom. Based on these gaps, this study aims to explore the pedagogical functions of teacher code-switching in an Indonesian junior high school EFL classroom and to examine students' perceptions of its impact on their comprehension and learning motivation. In particular, the study seeks to identify the instructional purposes behind teachers' language choices and to understand how students interpret and experience these bilingual practices within their classroom learning context. To achieve these aims, the study is guided by the following research questions: (1) For what pedagogical purposes do teachers use code-switching during classroom interactions? (2) In which teaching contexts or learning materials does code-switching occur most frequently? and (3) How do students perceive the teacher's use of code-switching in terms of their comprehension and learning motivation?

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative case study design to explore the use of code-switching in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom at a public junior high school. A qualitative approach is appropriate as this study seeks to understand the meanings and perceptions underlying teachers' instructional practices and students' learning experiences (Creswell, 2014). The case study design allows for an in-depth investigation of code-switching as it occurs in its real-life classroom context (Yin, 2018). The participants in this study include one English teacher and approximately 30 seventh-grade students from SMP Negeri 11 Semarang; the teacher had more than five years of teaching experience and understood the learning characteristics of students' low English proficiency levels, while the students were chosen as this level frequently represent a beginner stage where students' language proficiency is still at a basic level, increasing the possibility of students to experience language anxiety and communication gaps. Data were gathered using a combination of classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to ensure triangulation. The researcher observed the classroom while acting as a non-participant observer to capture the natural use of code-switching within the classroom context in an EFL setting.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with the teacher and selected students to investigate the pedagogical reasons and students' perception, providing for flexibility while remaining focused on the research objectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The students interview was adopted using a structured questionnaire adopted from Yana & Nugraha (2019). In addition, to identify whether code-switching was planned or happened spontaneously, a document analysis of the teacher's lesson plan was also carried out (Bowen, 2009). The instruments used included, field notes, interview guides, and teaching modules; field notes were used to document classroom interactions and instances of code-switching also students' responses, while the interview guide included open-ended questions about instructional strategies and students' learning experiences. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. A lesson plan was examined to analyze instructional language use. Data collection was conducted in a single

session during a regular two-hour English lesson in the classroom, followed by interviews with the teacher and selected students. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun & Clarke (2006). The analysis began with familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts and field notes. Initial codes were generated by identifying meaningful units related to pedagogical purposes, classroom contexts, and students' perceptions of code-switching.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section presents the findings of the study based on the data collected which were gathered through semi-structured interviews with the teacher and students and classroom observations. The following analysis highlights several key themes related to the use of code-switching in EFL classroom, including its pedagogical function, the classroom contexts, and its impact on students' comprehension. In order to provide a comprehensive knowledge of the usage of code-switching in EFL classrooms, the findings are presented by combining data from teacher interviews, student interviews, and classroom observations.

Pedagogical Functions of Code-Switching

These findings revealed that teacher used code-switching for several pedagogical purposes during EFL classroom, particularly to explain new or difficult material, give instruction, manage the classroom, check students' understanding, and build rapport with students. The use of both English and Bahasa Indonesia was observed as a strategic approach to facilitate communication and enhance students comprehension. The results showed that teachers applied code-switching in EFL classrooms for several kinds of pedagogical purposes, including explaining new or challenging material, giving instruction, managing the classroom, and building rapport with them.

According to classroom observation, the teacher most commonly used code-switching to give instruction to students and explain new or difficult topics. To make sure the students understand the content of lesson material, the teacher would frequently switch to Bahasa Indonesia. During the classroom observation session, the teacher made this assertion during a lesson on descriptive language.

“The teacher explained that descriptive text is a type of text used to describe something specific. The teacher then switched to Indonesian to help students understand the explanation more clearly.”

This example clearly demonstrates how the teacher repeats the content of material in Bahasa Indonesia in order to make sure that students fully understand the key concepts of the material being given. As a scaffold, the Indonesian translation assisted students in making connections between the new English term along with what they already understood in their first language. Another pedagogical function that teachers frequently employ related to the code-switching observed in the classroom is when giving instructions. To ensure that all students understand what is required of them and to prevent common misunderstandings regarding the information delivered to them, teacher usually provide instructions in English first, then repeat it in Indonesian.

“The teacher instructed the students to read the sentence and decide the answer. The teacher then switched to Indonesian to ensure that the students understood the instruction clearly.”

During task-based activities, this pattern of bilingual instruction repetition was regularly detected. Additionally, observation data revealed that immediately following the teacher's switch to Bahasa Indonesia, the students became more focused and responsive. After the

explanation was explained in Indonesian, a few students who had previously appeared confused started to nod or follow the instructions given. This suggests that code-switching played a crucial aspect in facilitating students' understanding.

This observation is further supported by the outcome of the teacher interview. The teachers stated in the interview that the main purpose for switching languages during class activities was to explain new or difficult material in order to improve students' comprehension of the material and to provide instructions; teachers decided to switch languages, especially when students appeared confused.

"When giving instruction, I usually use English from the beginning to the end, and then switch to Indonesian. When explaining new material, I usually present it to the students in English, but later I repeat it and emphasize certain points in Indonesia." (Teacher)

Additionally, the teacher pointed out that because Indonesian encourages students to participate more actively, it is occasionally needed for them to switch between languages in order to maintain a classroom participation and manage the class. Interestingly, the teacher also emphasized how code-switching could potentially assist students to expand their vocabulary. Students can learn new vocabulary in English and comprehend the meanings of English concepts by being introduced along with their Indonesian equivalents.

"When I translate it into Indonesian, they understand the meaning better, and it also helps students expand and improve their vocabulary." (Teacher)

This statement indicates that code-switching not only facilitates understanding but also supports the language learning process, one way being by expanding students' vocabulary.

Similarly, during student interviews, students who participated in student interviews stated that using Indonesian in English classes improved their comprehension of the material. The results reveal that students largely supported the practice of code-switching in the classroom. The majority of students reported that in order to fully comprehend the lesson and instructions, the teacher had to switch to the language. They clarified that they frequently felt confused when the teacher only communicated in English, but that the material and instruction became more understandable when followed by Indonesian.

"Because, in my opinion, most students don't fully understand some English words, so I think it's necessary to translate them into Indonesian to make it easier for students to learn." (Student 4)

They clarified that students frequently feel confused when teachers only speak English; on the other hand, when teachers repeat explanations in Indonesian, students perceive the content as being more understandable and clear.

"This helps us better understand the material, because we don't know the meaning of all English words yet, so we can learn the meanings of those words in Indonesian." (Student 2)

Students added that by using code-switching, they can increase their vocabulary in English since they can instantly understand the concept in Indonesian.

Classroom Context of Code-Switching

The findings show that rather than happening at random, code-switching happened in particular classroom situations. It was most commonly employed in the explanation and instruction sections, especially when the teacher presented new material or gave instructions for a task. This indicates that code-switching was strongly correlated with both the students' comprehension level and the instructional needs.

Based on classroom observation, Code-switching was most commonly observed during the explanation section. When delivering new or difficult material, the teacher would frequently switch to Bahasa Indonesia, particularly when the students showed signs of confusion, such as staying silent or being hesitant to respond. This suggests that during the material delivery

process, code-switching was employed as a strategy to ensure students' comprehension and clarify meaning.

“The teacher gave an example by asking the students to describe their English teacher. The teacher switched between English and Indonesian to help students understand both the task and the required structure of the text.”

Furthermore, code-switching was frequently implemented in the instruction stage. The teacher would frequently repeat instructions in Bahasa Indonesia after giving them in English to prevent misunderstandings. The actions were more obvious when students had assignments to finish, as the teacher made sure that every student knew exactly what was expected of them.

One observation note showed that students were more responsive and started tasks more quickly after the instruction was given in two languages. Although less frequently, code-switching also appeared during classroom activities and feedback sessions. Throughout these stages, the teacher might frequently respond to students' responses in Indonesian or provide guidance during class discussions. This shows that code-switching is applied in an adaptable way based on the classroom context.

These observations are further supported by outcomes of the teacher interview. The teacher clarified that code-switching typically happens when a teacher is teaching new material, particularly if it involves new grammar that is addressed in that topic.

“It is most commonly used when discussing or explaining a new topic and its usually related to grammar” (Teacher)

The teacher pointed out that, depending on the classroom conditions and the students' responses, language switching frequently occurred on its own.

“It happened spontaneously and wasn't part of the lesson plan. I just went with the flow to see how the students would respond.” (Teacher)

The teacher interview indicates that code-switching occurred situationally, depending on the students' typical responses and comprehension level. The teacher stated that when students appeared confused or when a particular vocabulary was considered challenging, language switching occurred. Instead, code-switching emerged naturally during classroom interactions, especially when students faced difficulty comprehending explanations, instruction, or uncommon English vocabulary, according to the teacher interview and classroom observation. This suggests that code-switching was employed as an adaptable teaching strategy rather than a planned approach.

The analysis of the lesson plan revealed no proof that the teacher had planned to use code-switching. The findings also showed that the lesson plan did not specifically address the teacher's use of code-switching. The document analysis focused on examining the instructional language presented in the teaching procedures, learning activities, and pedagogical strategies described in the lesson plan. The analysis revealed that the lesson plan emphasized the English language learning through activities such as analyzing descriptive text, identifying the language features, group discussion, and classroom presentation. The lesson plan also outlined several classroom stage, including BKOF, MOT, JCOT, and ICOT, which required students to actively engage with English materials and classroom observation. However, there were no explicit instruction or strategies regarding the use of Bahasa Indonesia or bilingual instruction during the learning process. Furthermore, although the lesson plan described various classroom activities, it didn't mention when teacher should switch language or how code-switching should be implemented to support students' comprehension. This indicates that the use of code-switching was not systematically planned as a part of instructional design.

From the students' perspective, they said that teachers should switch to Indonesian during explaining the material. The students reported that teachers usually switch languages after

explaining the material, which suggests that they are aware of the times when code-switching often occurs. These results show that code-switching is closely connected to the flow of classroom interactions and depends on the context. Code-switching is generally employed during critical learning stages, especially when comprehension and clarity are essential. This indicates that teachers implement code-switching as an adaptable approach based on the requirements of their students and the dynamics of the classroom rather than randomly.

Students' Perception of Code-Switching

The findings showed that students' opinions on code-switching that used in the classroom were largely positive. Code-switching was perceived as beneficial for enhancing their understanding, boosting their self-esteem, as well as encouraging their involvement in class activities. Students viewed the usage of both English and Indonesian as a beneficial strategy that facilitated their learning process rather than as an obstacle.

"Of course, I understand the material better, and I feel more confident, too." (Student 5)

Based on interviews with the students, the majority of them reported that switching between English and Indonesian during a class helped them feel more comfortable. They emphasized the essential function that code-switching has in helping students' comprehension by explaining how this language change made the material easier for them to understand and decreased confusion, particularly when they came across unfamiliar vocabulary or difficult material.

"The material is easier to understand when it's mixed in. After all, Indonesian is our everyday language." (Student 3)

This statement shows how the use of students' native tongue in English language learning in EFL classrooms acts as a crucial bridge, facilitating students' more efficient access to the material being taught. In addition to comprehension, students also reported improved confidence when code-switching was implemented. They were more eager to engage in class activities and felt less nervous. This was particularly evident when students were offered the chance to respond to questions or share their ideas. They felt more confident in their response because Indonesian was used to encourage them.

These results were confirmed by observations in the classroom. It is clear that when the teacher switches from English to Indonesian, students become more engaged and responsive. For instance, after getting explanations in Indonesian, students who had previously been quiet or appeared confused started responding to questions and taking part in class discussions. The teacher also validated this perception, stating that students were "more willing to respond and participate when both languages are used". This means that code-switching improves students' affective factors, such as motivation and confidence, in addition to supporting cognitive understanding.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that code-switching is not just a random linguistic habit but also a purposeful and pedagogically significant strategy. The patterns observed in classroom interactions indicate that code-switching serves certain learning objectives, despite teachers reporting that it was not properly planned and that its usage was situational, dependent on classroom environments. This aligns with Ferguson's (2003) theory, which divides the purposes of code-switching into three categories: classroom management, interpersonal interactions, and curriculum access. These functions were demonstrated in this study by the teacher's efforts to manage the classroom, explain difficult concepts, give clear instructions, and maintain students engaged in the material they were studying. This indicates that code-switching serves as an educational tool that helps bridge the comprehension gap between students and the target

language. The teacher's use of Bahasa Indonesia during explanations in this study illustrates how it assists students, particularly for students who have limited English proficiency, access the material.

These results are in line with earlier research that highlights the pedagogical advantages of code-switching in EFL contexts. As an instance, code-switching can improve pedagogical efficiency and comprehension, according to Estremera & Gilbas (2022). The findings also support the findings of Elias et al. (2022), who discovered that code-switching boosts students' engagement and participation in class. However, this study offers a more integrated viewpoint by linking teachers' pedagogical purpose with students' learning experiences in an actual classroom setting, where many earlier studies mainly focused on defining the functions or frequency of code-switching. In terms of classroom context, the findings show that code-switching occurs more commonly during the explanation and instruction stages. This suggests that code-switching is context-dependent and closely associated with moments where clarity is essential. The teacher's tendency to switch languages when students show signs of confusion indicates that code-switching is used as a responsive strategy rather than a strictly planned one. The result of this study partially challenges earlier research that suggests teachers use code-switching mostly based on "gut feeling" (Zainil & Arsyad, 2021; Pandiangan & Tarigan, 2025). A closer analysis of classroom observations shows that code-switching was not completely random, even though the teacher in this study also reported using it spontaneously. Rather, it constantly happened particularly in teaching circumstances, as when new material was explained and instructions were given. This implies that teachers' implicit educational knowledge gained from experience may actually be reflected in what is commonly referred to as "gut feeling". Consequently, code-switching can be considered as a context-sensitive and pedagogically motivated technique rather than just an instinctive one. Furthermore, the findings of this study show that students have positive perceptions of code-switching, especially in terms of enhancing comprehension, boosting confidence, and encouraging student involvement. This lends support to the idea that learners' first language functions as a cognitive scaffold that makes learning a target language easier. According to UNESCO (2021; 2025), using students' first language can improve access to knowledge and produce more significant learning experiences. Students in this study stated that using Bahasa Indonesia improved their comprehension of the subject matter and reduced their sense of confusion, particularly when it came to complicated explanations.

The results show how code-switching affects students' affective factors in addition to its cognitive advantages. When both languages were used, students reported feeling less nervous and more confident, which motivated them to engage more fully in class activities. This result is in line with earlier research studies that demonstrate how code-switching in the classroom can boost motivation and reduce anxiety in students (Immanuel & A., 2023). According to the affective filter hypothesis, using the first language may minimize psychological obstacles to learning, enabling students to participate more fully in class. Another significant interpretation of the findings is that code-switching assists in addressing the variety of student proficiency levels. Since students' levels of comprehension are different, the teacher can make sure that every student can follow and comprehend the lesson by using Bahasa Indonesia. This implies that code-switching serves as an inclusive teaching method that encourages equitable access to learning. By emphasizing the function of code-switching as a pedagogical tool as well as a way to facilitate inclusive education in diverse classrooms, this feature adds nuance to earlier research. In terms of novelty, this study contributes to the existing literature by combining three viewpoints classroom observation, teacher practice, and students' perceptions into a single

analysis. This study offers a more thorough knowledge of how code-switching functions in real classroom interaction, whereas many other studies tend to concentrate on only one aspect, such as teachers' perspectives, students' attitudes, or the linguistic types of code-switching. Furthermore, this study provides context-specific insights from a junior high school in Indonesia, with a particular focus on students who have relatively low English proficiency, a topic that has not received enough consideration in earlier studies. Despite these contributions, this study has a number of limitations that should be acknowledged. The findings may not be as broadly relevant as they could be because the study was carried out in a single classroom with a single teacher and a small number of student participants. Furthermore, the data collection was completed in a rather short amount of time, which would not have well captured the variety in code-switching techniques among various lessons or subjects. However, by using a variety of data sources, such as observation and interviews, the results' reliability is strengthened through triangulation. In order to provide a more thorough knowledge of code-switching practices, future research is advised to include a larger number of participants and a wider diversity of classroom circumstances. Deeper understanding of how code-switching affects students' language development over time may also be provided by long-term studies.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the pedagogical purposes of code-switching, the classroom contexts in which it occurs, and students' perceptions of its use in an EFL classroom. Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that code-switching contributes significantly to the process of teaching and learning. Initially in terms of pedagogical purposes, code-switching is employed as a strategic teaching tool to manage the classroom, give instructions, explain difficult material, and maintain interaction. This suggests that code-switching is a pedagogical tool that helps bridge the gap between the learning material and students' insufficient proficiency in English as well as being a communication support system. Additionally, regarding the classroom setting, code-switching is most common during the explanation and instruction stages. This demonstrates that code-switching is context-dependent and typically occurs when comprehension and clarity are crucial. Therefore, rather than being arbitrary, the teacher's use of code-switching is sensitive to the demands of the students. Following that code-switching is seen favorably by the students, it boosts students' confidence, improves their comprehension, and motivates them to participate in class activities. The use of Bahasa Indonesia alongside English offers cognitive support and lowers anxiety, allowing students to participate more actively in the learning process. Overall, the results show that code-switching is a beneficial and effective teaching method in EFL classes, especially for students with various proficiency levels. Teachers are therefore urged to purposefully employ code-switching to enhance students' comprehension and classroom interaction rather than avoiding it.

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