

Code Switching and Code Mixing Used by Students in An English Classroom

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ABSTRAK

Studi ini meneliti penggunaan alih kode (*code switching*) dan campur kode (*code mixing*) di kalangan mahasiswa selama interaksi di kelas bahasa Inggris. Dengan menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif, data dikumpulkan dari satu kelas Bahasa Inggris yang terdiri dari 25 mahasiswa melalui observasi kelas, rekaman audio, dan wawancara. Temuan menunjukkan tiga jenis alih kode (*intersentensial*, *intrasentensial*, dan *tag switching*) serta tiga jenis campur kode (*insertion*, *alternation*, dan *congruent lexicalization*). Mahasiswa melakukan alih kode dan campur kode karena keterbatasan kosakata, kebutuhan akan klarifikasi, suasana kelas, dan solidaritas antarteman. Praktik ini berfungsi untuk tujuan pedagogis, komunikatif, kognitif, dan sosial. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa alih kode dan campur kode merupakan strategi bilingual yang alami dan mendukung pemahaman serta keterlibatan dalam pembelajaran. Guru didorong untuk menerapkan pendekatan bilingual secara strategis guna memfasilitasi pembelajaran sekaligus meningkatkan kemahiran berbahasa Inggris.

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

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This study examines the use of code mixing and code switching among university students during English classroom interaction. Using a descriptive qualitative design, data were collected from one English class consisting of 25 students through classroom observations, audio recordings, and interviews. The findings reveal three types of code switching (intersentential, intrasentential, and tag switching) and three types of code mixing (insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalization). Students switched and mixed codes due to limited vocabulary, the need for clarification, classroom atmosphere, and peer solidarity. These practices served pedagogical, communicative, cognitive, and social functions. The study concludes that code switching and code mixing are natural bilingual strategies that support understanding and classroom engagement. Teachers are encouraged to apply strategic bilingual approaches to facilitate learning while promoting English proficiency.

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1. Introduction

Code switching and code mixing are common linguistic practices among bilingual learners, particularly in English classrooms in Indonesia. As students navigate between two languages—English as a foreign language and Indonesian as their first language—they frequently shift codes to negotiate meaning, reduce communication gaps, or express nuanced ideas. According to Wardhaugh (2010), bilingual speakers often alternate languages depending on context, participants, and communicative needs. More recent studies also

highlight that bilingual learners strategically switch and mix languages to enhance comprehension and interaction in classroom settings (Garcia & Wei, 2021; Cenoz & Gorter, 2022). In Indonesia's multilingual setting, such alternation becomes a natural and frequent phenomenon, especially in educational environments where English is taught as a foreign language.

In classroom settings, code switching and code mixing are shaped by pedagogical and social factors rather than mere linguistic habits. Students may shift from English to Indonesian to clarify difficult concepts, ask questions, or ensure comprehension. Hoffmann (1991) explains that code switching occurs for several reasons, including expressing solidarity, avoiding misunderstanding, and filling lexical gaps. Recent research similarly finds that learners rely on bilingual practices to negotiate academic tasks, reduce anxiety, and maintain interaction (Almoaily, 2021; Setiawan & Qodriani, 2021). Code mixing, on the other hand, often involves the insertion of linguistic elements from one language into another—a process conceptualized by Muysken (2000) as insertion, alternation, or congruent lexicalization. These theoretical classifications help explain how students blend languages during classroom communication, supported by recent studies emphasizing bilingual flexibility in learning environments (Zhou & Chen, 2023).

Although many studies have explored bilingual behavior in informal domains such as social media, peer conversations, and entertainment, fewer have examined bilingual practices within academic settings. Classroom-based research has mainly focused on teachers' code switching as an instructional strategy, while the bilingual behavior of students remains comparatively understudied. Poplack's (1980) frameworks on types of code switching (tag-switching, inter-sentential, and intra-sentential) offer a strong foundation for analyzing student speech patterns. However, empirical evidence on how students perform these types of switching during English learning activities in Indonesia remains scarce, highlighting the need for more focused investigation. Recent educational linguistics research also calls for deeper analysis of students' bilingual practices as part of modern multilingual pedagogy (Sert & Brown, 2020; Lin & He, 2022).

Students' use of code switching and code mixing in group discussions, peer interactions, and classroom tasks also fulfills important communicative and pedagogical functions. Gumperz (1982) notes that code switching can serve conversational functions such as personalization, clarification, and topic shift. In the context of EFL classrooms, these functions help students manage anxiety, maintain participation, express identity, and support collaborative learning. More recent findings strengthen this view by showing that bilingual practices encourage engagement, scaffolding, and cognitive processing in foreign language learning (Li, 2021; Qiu & Han, 2023). Code mixing similarly reflects learners' attempts to demonstrate partial mastery of English while relying on their first language as a cognitive and linguistic support system. Thus, bilingual practices should not be interpreted as weaknesses but as strategic tools that facilitate language acquisition.

Therefore, this study investigates the types, factors, and functions of code switching and code mixing used by students during English classroom activities. By employing theoretical frameworks from Poplack, Muysken, Hoffmann, and Gumperz, this research seeks to provide comprehensive insights into bilingual behavior in academic interactions. The study incorporates contemporary perspectives from post-2020 research to highlight how students' linguistic choices contribute to comprehension, engagement, and communicative efficiency. The findings are expected to enrich sociolinguistic research in multilingual classroom contexts and offer pedagogical implications for English teachers in Indonesia. Ultimately, recognizing students' bilingual practices as valuable resources can lead to more supportive and effective English learning environments.

2. Method

A descriptive qualitative approach was employed. The participants were 25 English education students from the same class. Data were collected through classroom observations, audio recordings of discussions and teacher–student interactions, and semi-structured interviews. Analysis followed Miles and Huberman’s (2014) interactive model: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Code switching was categorized according to Poplack (1980), and code mixing based on Muysken (2000).

3. Result and Discussion

Types of Code Switching

The analysis of linguistic data from 25 students shows that learners employed three major types of code switching as outlined by Poplack (1980). Each type reflects different levels of bilingual proficiency, communicative needs, and classroom functions.

a. Intersentential Switching

Intersentential switching occurs when a speaker alternates languages between sentences or clauses. This type requires relatively higher control of both languages because the switch happens at grammatical boundaries.

Examples:

“Saya belum paham. *Can you explain again?*”

The student expresses confusion in Indonesian, then switches to English to request further explanation. This indicates functional switching triggered by comprehension difficulties.

“Nanti aku tanya teman dulu. *I’m not sure about the answer.*”

The first clause is in Indonesian, then the student shifts to English to express uncertainty. This shows a shift in communicative intent from planning to self-expression.

“Kita lanjut besok saja. *Let’s continue tomorrow.*”

The student repeats the message in English to align with classroom norms. Here, switching functions as a clarification and emphasis tool.

Intersentential switching frequently appeared when students sought clarification, confirmation, or assistance. It reflects a boundary-shifting mechanism between L1 and L2, supporting Poplack’s (1980) claim that language alternation at sentence boundaries indicates functional bilingual use.

b. Intrasentential Switching (Most Frequent)

Intrasentential switching occurs within a single sentence, where Indonesian and English elements are mixed in one syntactic unit. This type is linguistically more complex and indicates moderate to high bilingual proficiency.

Examples:

“Aku belum *submit assignment*-nya.”

The verb *submit* and noun *assignment* are English insertions into Indonesian structure. This shows reliance on English academic terms commonly used in university settings.

“Tadi aku lupa *save* dokumen itu.”

The verb *save* is embedded in Indonesian syntax. Indicates familiarity with digital/academic English terminology.

“Dia sudah *confirm* ke dosen tadi pagi.”

The English verb *confirm* is inserted to convey precise meaning. Shows that certain English verbs feel more efficient or contextually appropriate.

“Kita *present* dulu sebelum diskusi.”

Present (verb) is used within an Indonesian sentence. Reflects common code mixing in academic presentations. This dominant pattern suggests that students have internalized many English lexical items as part of academic discourse. According to Poplack, intrasentential switching is typical of more proficient bilinguals because it involves grammatical integration across languages.

c. Tag Switching

Tag switching occurs when bilingual speakers insert discourse markers, fillers, or short tags from one language into another. This type does not require deep grammatical integration.

Examples:

“Itu gampang, *you know?*”

The English tag *you know?* adds emphasis and conversational tone. This indicates the student’s attempt to guide listener understanding.

“Aku bisa kerjain ini, *right?*”

The English tag *right?* is used to seek agreement. Reflects pragmatic switching for checking confirmation.

“Itu sudah benar, *I think.*”

I think functions as a softening device to reduce assertiveness. Shows how students use English to negotiate politeness.

“Sudah selesai semua, *okay?*”

The English tag *okay?* signals closure and seeks alignment. Enhances interactional flow during group work.

Tag switching was common in peer interactions and informal communication. It serves pragmatic, interactional, and affective functions such as emphasizing points, seeking confirmation, or softening tone. According to Poplack, tag-switching requires minimal syntactic integration and is often used even by less proficient bilinguals. The students’ behavior supports Poplack’s (1980) typology: Intersentential switching used for clarification, requesting help, signaling uncertainty. Intrasentential switching is most frequent, showing academic bilingualism. Tag switching used for interactional purposes and conversational flow. The variation in these types demonstrates that bilingual competence among the 25 participants

ranges from functional to intermediate–advanced, affecting how each student alternates between Indonesian and English.

Types of Code Mixing

Based on Muysken's (2000) classification, the students produced three main types of code mixing: Insertion, Alternation, and Congruent Lexicalization. Each type reflects different patterns of bilingual language integration influenced by linguistic resources and communicative needs.

a. Insertion

Insertion occurs when lexical items or short phrases from one language are embedded into the grammatical structure of another. In this context, English words were inserted into Indonesian sentences. This was the most frequent code mixing pattern produced by students.

Examples:

“Kita buat *conclusion*-nya nanti.”

Conclusion (English noun) is inserted into an Indonesian structure. Shows reliance on English academic terminology.

“Aku belum *upload* filenya ke LMS.”

The verb upload is inserted into Indonesian syntax. Illustrates students' familiarity with digital/technological English terms.

“Besok kita mulai dari *introduction* dulu.”

The English word introduction functions as a content-specific term. Indicates academic mixing common in university discourse.

“Tadi aku sudah *submit* tugas itu.”

Submit is used as a verb inside an Indonesian sentence frame. Demonstrates hybrid academic language commonly heard in classrooms.

Insertion mixing appeared because many English terms especially academic or technical vocabulary do not have efficient Indonesian equivalents or are more commonly used in English. This supports Muysken's notion that insertion reflects the borrowing of lexical items to increase precision and efficiency in communication.

b. Alternation

Alternation occurs when speakers switch between Indonesian and English in longer segments, typically across clauses or phrases. The switch does not occur at individual word level but involves larger syntactic units.

Examples:

“Ayo cepat, *because time is up*.”

A full English clause is inserted after an Indonesian command. Shows a shift in reasoning or explanation.

“Kita kerjakan bagian itu dulu, *then we continue the next one*.”

Alternation between Indonesian instruction and English sequencing. Used to maintain logical flow in task explanation.

“Tadi aku nggak ikut, *so I don’t know the answer.*”

Student switches to English to provide justification. Indicates comfort in expressing reasoning in L2.

“Kalau kamu sudah siap, *just tell me.*”

Indonesian clause followed by an English conditional directive. Suggests that English is used for immediacy or emphasis.

Alternation tends to occur among students with moderate proficiency, as it requires the ability to produce full English clauses spontaneously. The pattern reflects students’ efforts to maintain communication despite vocabulary or grammar limitations in each language. According to Muysken, alternation is typical when both languages play relatively equal roles in the discourse.

c. Congruent Lexicalization

Congruent lexicalization occurs when elements from both languages appear within shared or overlapping grammatical structures. This type reflects deeper bilingual integration and is common in informal or spontaneous interactions.

Examples:

“Kita *discuss* habis kelas.”

The English verb *discuss* blends naturally into Indonesian grammar without affecting structure.

“Aku tadi *miss* bagian itu.”

Miss functions as a verb aligned with Indonesian syntax. Shows shared grammatical space between languages.

“Dia tadi *really* nggak fokus.”

English adverb *really* inserted mid-sentence without grammatical disruption. Illustrates fluid bilingual mixing.

“Mereka udah biasa *mix* bahasa begitu.”

The English verb *mix* is placed in Indonesian sentence order. Reflects shared lexical and syntactic environments.

Congruent lexicalization reflects the highest level of bilingual integration, where Indonesian and English share flexible grammatical compatibility. This type appeared mostly in informal contexts, such as casual peer talk before or after class. According to Muysken, this mixing occurs when both languages coexist in the speakers’ mental grammar, and boundaries between the two become less rigid.

These findings align with Muysken’s argument that bilingual speakers shift between languages depending on: linguistic resources, communicative purpose, proficiency levels, and

contextual demands. Insertion dominated academic talk, alternation supported explanation and reasoning, while congruent lexicalization characterized natural student-to-student interaction.

Factors Influencing Switching and Mixing

The thematic analysis revealed several key factors influencing students' bilingual behavior. These factors are consistent with Hoffmann (1991) and commonly observed in EFL classroom contexts. Each factor is explained in detail below.

a. Limited Vocabulary

Students switched to Indonesian when they were unable to retrieve appropriate English words. Limited lexical knowledge often hindered students' ability to express ideas fully in English. When students could not recall certain vocabulary items, they naturally filled the gap with Indonesian words to maintain communicative flow. This behavior is typical among intermediate-level learners who have not yet developed robust lexical access in the target language. Several studies also confirm that lexical retrieval difficulty is one of the most frequent triggers for code switching in EFL settings (Alharthi, 2022; Qodriani & Setiawan, 2021).

b. Comprehension Support

Switching was used to clarify meaning, confirm instructions, or restate complex ideas. When encountering challenging content or unclear instructions, students shifted to Indonesian to ensure accurate understanding. L1 served as a scaffold that helped them interpret L2 content more reliably. This type of switching supported deeper comprehension and helped prevent misunderstandings during classroom tasks. Research has shown that L1 use enhances comprehension and reduces cognitive load in language classrooms (Li, 2021; Cenoz & Gorter, 2022).

c. Peer Solidarity

Students switched languages to maintain rapport and smooth interpersonal interaction during group work. In collaborative settings, social bonding plays a significant role. Using Indonesian allowed students to feel more relaxed and socially connected with their peers. Switching here is not only linguistic but also relational—strengthening friendships, facilitating humor, and creating a supportive group dynamic. Recent studies demonstrate that code switching helps build peer cohesion, fosters collaborative learning, and reinforces shared identity (Sert & Brown, 2020; Qiu & Han, 2023).

d. Classroom Comfort

Using Indonesian helped reduce anxiety, especially in formal speaking tasks or when responding to the teacher. Because English is often perceived as more formal or demanding, students may feel anxious when required to use it consistently. Switching to Indonesian provided emotional relief and boosted self-confidence. This made students more willing to participate, even if their English proficiency was not strong. Studies in EFL contexts similarly indicate that code switching reduces speaking anxiety and promotes learner confidence (Almoaily, 2021; Tashakori, 2023).

e. Instructional Needs

Students mixed or switched codes to discuss tasks, negotiate roles, and manage learning processes effectively. During task-based activities, students needed to give instructions, clarify procedures, or coordinate roles. Switching and mixing allowed them to communicate these instructional details efficiently. As a result, bilingual practices helped facilitate smoother task management and clearer collaboration. This has been supported by task-based learning research showing that L1 use enhances coordination and improves task completion (Méndez & Cruz, 2021; Tran, 2022).

Overall, these factors indicate that switching and mixing are not merely signs of linguistic limitations; rather, they represent strategic communicative tools that facilitate learning,

interaction, and participation. Current journal research continues to emphasize that bilingual practices in multilingual classrooms contribute significantly to comprehension, engagement, and collaborative learning.

Functions of Switching and Mixing

The functions observed in this study align with the framework proposed by Gumperz (1982) and the arguments of Holmes (2013) and Lin (2012), who emphasize the pedagogical significance of bilingual practices in the classroom. The findings reveal that students' bilingual behavior serves pedagogical, communicative, cognitive, and social functions that meaningfully support learning. Pedagogically, Indonesian was frequently used to clarify explanations, simplify complex information, and check comprehension, enabling students to scaffold new English concepts using familiar linguistic resources. This aligns with recent studies showing that L1 use enhances instructional support and improves understanding of L2 materials (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022; Li, 2021). From a communicative perspective, switching between English and Indonesian helped maintain conversational flow and ensured smooth interaction, particularly when students struggled to express ideas in English. Journal studies confirm that bilingual alternation enables learners to sustain dialogue and negotiate meaning more effectively in group discussions (Qiu & Han, 2023; Setiawan & Qodriani, 2021).

Cognitively, students drew on Indonesian to process complex concepts, reduce cognitive load, and make sense of abstract academic content. This is supported by research indicating that L1 use facilitates cognitive processing and reduces linguistic strain during demanding tasks (Alharthi, 2022; Zheng & Park, 2023). Socially, bilingual practices contributed to reducing anxiety and strengthening group cohesion by enabling students to participate more comfortably and confidently. Studies in EFL learning environments similarly demonstrate that code switching lowers anxiety and fosters a supportive classroom atmosphere (Almoaily, 2021; Tashakori, 2023). Overall, these findings reinforce the perspectives of Holmes (2013) and Lin (2012), showing that bilingual discourse is not merely a compensatory mechanism but a strategic resource that enhances comprehension, promotes participation, and builds students' academic confidence.

4. Conclusion

Students in the English classroom frequently used code switching and code mixing during lessons. The dominant forms were intrasentential switching and insertion mixing, indicating active bilingual processing. Switching and mixing were influenced by linguistic limitations, comprehension needs, and social dynamics. They served essential functions in supporting communication and learning. Teachers should strategically use bilingual practices to scaffold understanding while encouraging the development of English proficiency.

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