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Teachers' Code-Switching in Pekanbaru Vocational Schools

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ABSTRACT

The aims of this research are to identify the functions of code-switching and to explain why teachers employ code-switching in English classrooms. This study utilized a qualitative research design to investigate the phenomenon of code-switching in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Code-switching data were collected from three schools through classroom observations and audio recordings. To support the analysis, interviews with teachers were conducted to gain deeper insights into their reasons for using code-switching. The findings show that teachers use code-switching in the classroom to give instructions, provide feedback, build students' confidence and comfort, and support students' understanding of new English vocabulary. The functions of code-switching performed by teachers are not limited to pedagogical purposes but also relate to behavior management and interpersonal or affective interactions with students. Teachers also use code-switching as a strategic tool by transferring and integrating two languages to enhance student engagement and communication during the teaching and learning process.

1. Introduction

UNESCO has strongly supported the teaching and learning process using multilingualism since 1953 (UNESCO, 2023). One of UNESCO's objectives in the application of multilingual learning is in order to respect Indigenous Peoples. In addition, the United Nations General Assembly through UNESCO and the International Indigenous Languages (IDIL) declared 2022-2032 as the time to preserve history and traditions. The use of multilingual learning not only enhances multilingual education but also helps revitalize lost or endangered languages. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to use code-switching in teaching and learning English in the classroom.

The use of switching codes has often brought controversy among experts. Some scholars argued that code-switching is beneficial, while others said the opposite (Littlewood & Yu, 2011). However, based on Macaro's (2005) research, it was proven that the use of L1 in the class could be ideal, since it could benefit both teachers and students. Teachers can decide when, where, and how they should switch languages, which can also train the teacher's linguistic abilities. The use of CS by students can also help them to become more adaptable at picking up new languages. According to Wang and Mansouri (2017), CS is a significant component of the multilingual community. A community that is multilingual has members who are proficient in two or more languages, allowing for the incorporation of individual multilingual talents through the use of switching codes.

Code-Switching

According to Cantone (2007), code-switching has become a phenomenon in our understanding of Bilingualism. Meanwhile, Gardner-Chloros (2009), argues that bilingualism is the alternative use of two or more languages in speech or conversation for communicative purposes. This code-switching research has benefits in providing understanding between interlocutors (Losey, 2009;). Code-switching is a natural way for teachers to communicate with students in the teaching and learning process (Kirkpatrick, 2014; Mulyani et al., 2024). According to Martin (2005, p. 89), code-switching offers students the ability to think creatively, pragmatically, and easily understand the lessons in class. Code-switching not only transfers the language of two separate monolingual codes, but also combines the two languages as a unit to achieve effective communication.

Translanguaging shows that bilinguals have a linguistic repertoire strategically in order to communicate effectively (García, 2011b; Saqinah et al., 2025). Thus, the focus in the concept of translanguaging is not on language but on bilingual communicative practices (García, 2011a). Translanguaging is viewed as part of monolingual to multilingual education and as a model for bilingual classrooms (García, 2009). Heugh (2015, p. 283) also views translanguaging as a strategic use of code-switching that involves cognitively when using two or more languages or simultaneously and separately. This study was conducted to identify the pedagogical and sociocultural functions of code-switching carried out by teachers in order to carry out the teaching and learning process of English in the classroom.

Sociolinguistic Interaction and Pedagogical Functions of Code-Switching

This study uses 2 categories of data analysis, namely analyzing Sociolinguistic Interactions (SI) and analyzing the function of code-switching performed by teachers. According to Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz. (2008), Sociolinguistic Interaction analysis was carried out to analyze the discourse of the teacher's conversation in the classroom, aiming to find out what the teacher intend to convey. The main focus in Gumperz's (1982, 2008) theoretical framework is not only to gather meaning from an interaction but also to make predictions about what will be conveyed in an interaction (Tannen, 1992). The second category analyzed in this study is class code-switching (Ferguson, 2003, 2009). According to Ferguson's

research (2003, 2009) there are several code-switching functions carried out by a teacher: (1) Code-switching serves to convey knowledge and learning objectives contained in the curriculum; (2) Code-switching helps manage the classroom by representing the steps of activities, regulating student behavior, and motivating students. (3) Code-switching serves to make the classroom atmosphere more humane. The functions of code-switching based on Ferguson's theory also resonate with Halliday's (1994) work on the functional view of language which makes Lin (2013) mention that code-switching is a communicative resource. Therefore, Ferguson's theory of code-switching is applied in this study to analyze the functions of code-switching performed by teachers during the teaching and learning process in the classroom.

Bilingual Education in Indonesia

Indonesia has one national language, namely Indonesian. Bilingual education in Indonesia was used when regional languages such as Javanese, Sundanese, Malay and Batak began to be taught as subjects in schools. However, as the popularity of English increased, the teaching of local (regional) languages in several schools in Indonesia was replaced by English. In 2003, there was a movement to establish a bilingual program or RSBI (Sample International Standard School) at the school level. However, this program was discontinued in January 2013 because it was considered as discriminatory by not providing equal opportunities for all Indonesian students (Hamied, 2012; Margana, 2013). Therefore, in response to this, the government opened an international program proposed in the Higher Education Policy No. 12 (UU 2012, the Republic of Indonesia). Where this program is carried out to encourage universities to equip their students with good English language skills.

There are some obstacles in learning English in Indonesia. First, the teacher has not fully used English. As a result, the students lack sufficient experience in speaking English. Second, students still often use their everyday language during English lesson which resulting the ineffectiveness in the learning process (Budiharto & Rokhmawati, 2025). These make some teachers still use code-switching to achieve the effectiveness of the English teaching (Putri, 2020; Simatupang et al., 2024). In the end, the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process in English depends on the skills of the teachers (Setati et al., 2002). The focus of this research is on how the code-switching process is carried out by teachers during the teaching and learning of English in the classroom. It seeks to answer the question: *Why do English teachers use code-switching in the teaching and learning process?* The aim is to identify and analyze the functions of code-switching employed by teachers.

2. Methodology

This study aims to see how & why English teachers use code-switching in the teaching and learning process in the classroom. The focus is viewed from the pedagogical & sociocultural function based on code-switching by the teacher. This study also used an ethnographic approach to find out the function of code-switching

in EFL classroom. Participants for the sample in this study were English teachers in Vocational schools in Pekanbaru.

Data Collection

Code-Switching data were obtained from 3 (three schools), using classroom observations, audio recordings, and to develop the data analysis; interviews with teachers were conducted to get an idea of the code-switching that used. The code-switching text used by teacher in classroom was analyzed using the perspective of Interactional Sociolinguistics (IS) and the function of code-switching. Code-switching used by teachers in the classroom serves to support students in understanding new words in English. Code-switching conducted by the teacher does not only refer to pedagogical focus, but also relates to the management of behavior and interactions with students in an interpersonal and affective manner. This study includes classroom observation by taking notes and audio recordings followed by Semi-Structured Interviews.

Data Analysis

Class data analysis was performed by first reviewing all audio recordings to select the session with the most code-switching. In addition, from the data obtained, two things were analyzed, namely analyzing sociolinguistic interactions (SI) and analyzing the code-switching function that was seen when the teachers did code-switching. From several theories, it is said that examples of code-switching functions that are often encountered are as follows: (a) Code-switching functions as a strategy that is deliberately carried out by the teacher to help students understand the knowledge and teaching and learning process; (b) Code-switching is used for good communication to students. In addition, several things were also found that code-switching was used with functions such as: Increasing students' understanding of the material being studied and Increasing mastery of languages that students do not know. From the examples found, these are then classified into code-switching functions.

3. Results and Discussion

In several studies, code-switching which is often carried out by a teacher has 4 functions. This function is also strengthened by Ferguson's (2003, 2009) research. The four code-switching functions are:

- 1) Knowledge construction: covers the pedagogical content of the lesson, helps conceptual deepening, the most important technical terms of the English language and a general description of the topic being studied.
 - 2) Class Management: explaining the themes in the lesson content to managing student behavior during class such as making the classroom atmosphere more conducive.
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- 3) Interpersonal relations: including indexing and negotiating different sociocultural identities and humanizing the classroom climate, for example through appreciation and relationship building.
- 4) Personal or affective meaning: includes personal experiences, feelings, and the teacher's socio-cultural function, for example saving face and self-esteem by adding reasons for using Indonesian.

From the analysis of the data in this study, it can be seen that 3 functions of code-switching are also used by teachers who teach English lessons while the last 1 function of the use of code-switching from this study is not found. The following is an example to illustrate the four code-switching functions obtained from analyzing the collected data.

Code-Switching to Construct Student Knowledge

Teachers usually switch from English to Indonesian to ensure that students will understand their explanations more easily, bridging the knowledge gap as effectively and efficiently as possible. The following example of one-word code-switching directly connects new concepts (external capital) to students' local knowledge fund (Moll, 1992).

Extract 1

T1: "I'm not so bad, thank you. Alright now we study about application letter, what's application letter? (*apa yang dimaksud dengan surat lamaran?*) And anyone know about that?"

T1: "*Jadi disini kalian dituntut untuk bisa menganalisis struktur dari application letter dan bisa menentukan apa unsur dari kebahasaan application letter? (surat lamarannya) nah disini ini kalian bias lihat ada dua pictures (gambar) yang berbeda yang pertama yaitu sebelah ini apa?*"

The Indonesian statement "*Apa yang dimaksud dengan surat lamaran?*" was used by the teacher not only to reinforce the English question "What's application letter?" for students, but also to ensure that they understood what they would learn. The teacher (T1) stated that:

"I use the phrase '*apa yang dimaksud dengan surat lamaran?*' ('what is application letter?') intends to reinforce the question to students 'what's application letter?'" (T1, Stimulate Record)

The teacher (T1) also stated that:

"I purposely use this sentence to ensure that students understand what they have learned about the application letter so that students can interact well with the material provided." (T1, Stimulate Record). In this case, the teacher deliberately used Indonesian (L1) to ensure cognitive engagement of the students (Heugh, 2015). This finding aligns with Ferguson's (2003, 2009) theory of the functions of code-switching, particularly its role in knowledge construction, by deepening students' understanding of the main topic of the lesson through the use of their L1.

By using code-switching to shift from English to Indonesian in the classroom, the English teacher integrates the two languages into a cohesive communicative unit, helping the students understand the meaning of the learning topic and providing them with clues about the information that may be conveyed later (Gumperz, 1982, 2008; Ferguson, 2003, 2009).

Extract 2

T2: “Okay, today we are going to talk about opinions and thoughts. This is chapter two. *Kompetensi dasar 3.2 yaitu menerapkan fungsi social, struktur teks, dan unsur kebahasaan teks interaksi lisan dan tulisan yang melibatkan tindakan memberi meminta informasi terkait pendapat dan pikiran. Dan kompetensi 4.2 menyusun teks interaksi pendek dan sederhana lisan dan tulisan yang terkait dengan pendapat dan pikiran. Jadi adapun tujuan pembelajaran kita pada bab ini, yang pertama yaitu siswa memahami struktur teks dan unsur kebahasaan pernyataan pendapat dan pikiran. Yang kedua, siswa bisa menyatakan pendapat dan pikirannya baik secara lisan maupun tulisan.* Okay. Now I want to ask you. What is in your mind if we talk about opinion? *Apa yang ada dalam pikirannya jika kita bicara tentang opini?*”

The teacher (T2) also stated that:

“I purposely explain basic competencies using Indonesian in the sentence ‘*Kompetensi dasar 3.2 yaitu menerapkan fungsi social, struktur teks, dan unsur kebahasaan teks interaksi lisan dan tulisan yang melibatkan tindakan memberi meminta informasi terkait pendapat dan pikiran. Dan kompetensi 4.2 menyusun teks interaksi pendek dan sederhana lisan dan tulisan yang terkait dengan pendapat dan pikiran. Jadi adapun tujuan pembelajaran kita pada bab ini, yang pertama yaitu siswa memahami struktur teks dan unsur kebahasaan pernyataan pendapat dan pikiran. Yang kedua, siswa bisa menyatakan pendapat dan pikirannya baik secara lisan maupun tulisan.* Okay’. I do this, in order to make the students understand more about the competencies that must be achieved in this material.” (T2, Stimulate Record)

Based on Extract 2 and the recording, the teacher deliberately used Indonesian to explain the learning competencies that students must achieve. In constructing the students’ knowledge, the teacher must first ensure that the objectives of the learning topic are understood, employing available strategies. In this case, in order to ensure the students’ understanding, the teacher explained the learning competencies by using code-switching, for it still aligns with the pedagogical function of code-switching that has been highlighted in Ferguson’s (2003, 2009) theory.

Extract 3

T3: “*Kalian tahu apa itu greeting card?*”

T3: “Greeting card is a card that is used to congratulate someone of special occasion *Nah greeting card adalah sebuah kartu yang bertujuan untuk menyapa atau memberikan selamat kepada seseorang pada momen spesialnya. Contohnya seperti wisuda, ulang tahun, pernikahan seperti itu. Nah selanjutnya purpose. Pas kapan kita membuat greeting card? Pasti ada tujuannya. Tujuannya ada 3. Yang pertama*

adalah to congratulate someone untuk mengucapkan selamat kepada seseorang. Yang kedua adalah to express our hopes or whises yaitu untuk... menuliskan keinginan dan harapan. Lalu yang terakhir adalah to express a sympathy. Untuk mengexpresikan simpati, sikap simpati kita kepada seseorang. Oke selanjutnya itu structure atau struktur dari teks greeting itu. Nah dia ada 3 aspek ... 3 aspek yaitu ini ... ini.. sama ini..." (The teacher was explaining while underlining the main points on the whiteboard)

The teacher (T3) also stated that:

"I deliberately asked about the meaning of "Greeting Card" and explained the definition and purpose of "Greeting Card" using Indonesian, in order to make the students can more easily understand what the definition and purpose of the greeting card is." (T3, Stimulate Record). Based on Extract 3, the teacher deliberately used Indonesian in explaining the subject matter, namely "Greeting Card" to the students to make it easier to understand the material. Given how seldom English is used in Indonesian communities, some students might face some difficulties in understanding English vocabulary or phrases in a certain learning topic even if they might be considered as "easy to be understood" in global communities (Daud et al., 2025; Ocktavia, et al., 2025). Therefore, by considering this possibility, the teacher (T3) used one of code-switching functions to ensure the information about the "Greeting Card" material was delivered properly to the students. Code-switching not only strengthens students' knowledge of the learning topic but also improves their understanding of foreign vocabulary and phrases by allowing them to compare these with their L1 knowledge (Ferguson, 2003; Martin, 2005).

Teacher Code-Switching for Class Management

Teacher code-switching for classroom management from English or Indonesian, depending on the intended effect by the teacher. It most often occurs when the teacher gives assignments, signaled a shift in topics or activities, or disciplines student behavior. Marking a shift or what Goffman (1981) calls as a "foothold" refers to a change in alignment or attitude and a change in the frame of events. Both English and Indonesian are used to signify shifts. However, the data for switching to English were found to be more extensive and varied, which may indicate a teacher's preference for using English for that purpose.

Extract 4

T3: "What is in your mind if we talk about expressing opinion? *Apa yang ada dalam pikirannya jika kita bicara tentang ekspresi opini?*"

S1: "Opinion is about point of view Mam."

T3: "Yea, opinion is about point of view. What else?"

S2: "Mam, expressing idea."

T3: "Expressing idea, right! What else?"

S3: "Opinion itu adalah pendapat Mam."

T3: "Ya, pendapat. What is definition? *Definisi dari opini?* This is the definition of opinion. *Nandara, tolong baca apa definisinya*"

T3: “Okay. Next, there are some examples of opinion. The first is, example of personal point of view. Fina, please read it! In my opinion, *coba, bisa?* Oktaviani?”

The teacher (T3) also stated that:

“I spoke in English to ask about the material on “Expression of Opinion” in class. I switch to Indonesian to make sure the students understand the material that I’ve been questioned to them. Students then answered in English and Indonesian. By using this code-switching, I see that students understand the questions I give because they answer well, both in English and Indonesian.” (T3, Stimulate Record). Based on Extract 4, the teacher (T3) deliberately switched from using English to Indonesian in order to encourage students to engage in the discussion process. This phenomenon aligns with Ferguson’s (2003) theory, which suggests that L2 teachers sometimes use code-switching during to manage the class by shifting from the target language (L2) to the mother tongue (L1) that students are more familiar with, in order to motivate and encourage them to participate in the learning process in the classroom.

Code-Switching Against Personal Relationships

Usually, the teacher uses code-switching for interpersonal relationships in the classroom such as using humor, lightening the mood to reduce students’ anxiety, and also giving appreciation to students. These shows support for the relationship between teachers and students to build a conducive classroom, and also to show appreciation for students. In this paper, due to space limitations, examples will be given only to compliment and be funny.

Extract 5

T3: Ya, good! Next, andre faldo? Oh absent. Bayu Eka Saputra *baca*

T3: Ya, good! And then, M. Hafidz Alfathonah, please read it!

T3: Okay, good! Nandara *coba ulangi*

T3: Ya, very good! *Yang mana ekspresi agreeing nya?*

T3: Ya, good! And then where is the reason? *Mana reasonnya?*

T3: Okay, very good nandara! Ada pendapat lain?? Okay, kinase?

The teacher (T3) also stated that:

“I deliberately give appreciation, like saying ‘good’, ‘very good’ then followed by Indonesian ‘*coba ulangi*’ to emphasize praise and appreciation to students that their answers are correct and reaffirmed by repeating. By this, students understand more and I can invite my students to be more interactive in their work. discussion about the English lesson being studied” (T3, Stimulate Record). Based on Extract 5, the teacher (T3) deliberately shifted from English to Indonesian after praising them. Based on the recording, the teacher did that in order to give appreciation to the students for their correct answers. This finding aligns with the Ferguson’s (2003, 2009) research where code-switching is capable to be used to improve interpersonal relationship with the students. At the same time, the teacher used the statement “...*coba ulangi*. ” (“Please repeat what you just said”) to invite the students to repeat

what they just said in order to deepen their understanding and encourage more activity during the learning process.

Code-Switching for Personal and Affective Meaning

In the data obtained, code-switching functions that refer to personal and affective meanings are not found. In other words, the teachers do not use code-switching to describe personal and affective meanings such as saving face when forgetting something related to the context of the lesson being taught or change the learning because of personal problems and experiences before the teaching and learning process takes place.

4. Conclusion

This research set out to examine how and why English teachers in vocational schools in Pekanbaru employ code-switching in their classroom practices, as well as to identify the pedagogical and sociocultural functions embedded in those switches. The findings show that teachers use code-switching strategically to construct student knowledge, clarify lesson content, and bridge linguistic gaps that emerge during English instruction. Code-switching also supports class management by helping teachers organize activities, regulate behavior, and maintain the flow of interaction. Additionally, teachers use it to build interpersonal relationships, create a supportive classroom atmosphere, and encourage students' participation. These functions collectively indicate that code-switching is not merely a linguistic choice but a communicative resource that enhances understanding, engagement, and effectiveness in the learning process. Interestingly, the study did not find code-switching used for personal or affective purposes, suggesting that teachers focus more on instructional and relational goals. Overall, the research successfully answers its objective by demonstrating that code-switching contributes significantly to achieving pedagogical aims in multilingual classroom contexts. Future studies may explore students' long-term language development within classrooms where code-switching is systematically integrated.

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