

Investigating Teachers' Reasons for Employing Code-Switching in EFL Classrooms at MA Al Urwatul Wutsqaa

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ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

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Code-switching is a common feature of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms in which teachers and students share a first language and learners have different levels of English proficiency. This study investigated teachers' pedagogical and non-pedagogical reasons for employing code-switching in EFL classrooms at MA Al Urwatul Wutsqaa, Benteng, Sidenreng Rappang. A descriptive qualitative design was used with two English teachers selected through purposive sampling. Data were obtained through classroom observation, an observation sheet, audio recording, and semi-structured interviews. Observation data were classified using Poplack's typology of inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag switching, while interview data were analyzed thematically to identify pedagogical and non-pedagogical reasons based on Hoffman's framework. The findings show that both teachers used all three forms of code-switching across explanation, instruction, feedback, classroom management, comprehension checking, and informal interaction. Pedagogically, switching to Indonesian helped clarify difficult concepts, introduce unfamiliar vocabulary, explain grammar, give clear directions, check understanding, accommodate differences in proficiency, and sustain students' participation. Non-pedagogically, it helped teachers build rapport, create a relaxed classroom atmosphere, reduce anxiety, and make interaction more natural. Both teachers nevertheless emphasized that English should remain the principal language of instruction. The study concludes that code-switching is most useful when it is purposeful, limited to situations in which additional support is needed, and balanced with sufficient English exposure.

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INTRODUCTION

In multilingual EFL classrooms, code-switching is often part of ordinary instructional interaction rather than an exceptional event. Teachers may move between English and Indonesian when they need to keep communication flowing, clarify an explanation, give directions, or respond to students who cannot yet follow an English-only message. Myers-Scotton (1993) describes code-switching as the alternation of linguistic codes in interaction, while Cook (2001) argues that the learners' first language can contribute positively to foreign-language teaching when it is used deliberately and in a measured way. In the Indonesian context, where English is learned as a foreign language and exposure outside school may be limited, the strategic use of Indonesian can therefore function as a bridge between what students already know and the English input presented in class.

The pedagogical value of this practice is particularly visible when students have mixed levels of English proficiency. Macaro (2005) explains that switching to the first language can act as a learning and communication strategy, especially when learners need support in processing unfamiliar material. Ferguson (2009) similarly notes that classroom code-switching can facilitate access to the curriculum, support classroom management, and strengthen teacher-student relations. These functions suggest that a teacher's decision to switch languages may be closely related to immediate instructional needs: a difficult word may require translation, a complicated grammatical point may need a simpler explanation, or an instruction may need to be repeated so that all students know what to do.

However, not every switch is made for an explicitly instructional purpose. Classroom communication also contains humor, encouragement, spontaneous comments, emotional responses, discipline, and informal conversation. Sert (2005) observes that code-switching may emerge from interactional and social needs as well as from teaching objectives. Lin (2013) further emphasizes that language choice in the classroom reflects the social positioning of teachers and students and the relationships they construct through talk. In this sense, switching to Indonesian may make a joke understandable, soften a command, reduce distance between teacher and students, or create a more relaxed atmosphere even when no lesson content is being explained.

This distinction between pedagogical and non-pedagogical reasons is important because the same linguistic form can serve different classroom purposes. A teacher may switch to Indonesian to explain a new vocabulary item, which directly supports learning, or may switch during a casual exchange to make communication more natural and friendly. If research focuses only on the structural type of switching, it may describe where a switch occurs without explaining why the teacher chose to make it. Conversely, if research considers only broad classroom functions, it may overlook how those functions are realized through different forms of alternation between English and Indonesian.

Previous studies have shown that teachers frequently use code-switching to simplify explanations, manage interaction, and support participation. Murtiningsih, Munawaroh, and Malik (2021) reported that pedagogical needs and students' limited English proficiency strongly influenced teachers' switching practices. Munawaroh, Hartono, and Sakhiyya (2022) found that code-switching supported corrective feedback, comprehension checking, and smoother classroom communication. Puspawati (2018) likewise identified explanation, instruction, and positive teacher-student relationships as important functions. More recent Indonesian EFL research also presents code-switching as a pedagogical resource that can support comprehension and classroom interaction (Husni & Arianto, 2023).

Despite this body of work, the underlying reasons that teachers themselves give for switching languages remain an important area of inquiry. The present study addresses that issue by combining classroom observation with semi-structured interviews. Observation provides evidence of how code-switching actually appears during lessons, while interviews enable teachers to explain the reasoning behind their choices. The study also distinguishes pedagogical from non-pedagogical considerations so that the instructional and interpersonal dimensions of language choice can be examined together.

The study was conducted at MA Al Urwatul Wutsqaa in Benteng, Sidenreng Rappang, where English teachers work with learners whose proficiency is not uniform. Two English teachers were observed and interviewed. Students were present as part of the natural classroom setting, but they were not research participants and no personal student data were collected. The research focused specifically on teachers' reasons for alternating between English and Indonesian during EFL instruction.

Accordingly, this study aims to investigate two questions: what pedagogical reasons lead teachers to employ code-switching in EFL classrooms, and what non-pedagogical reasons influence their decisions to switch languages during instruction. By identifying both dimensions, the study seeks to provide a clearer account of code-switching as a deliberate classroom practice and to offer practical guidance on how it can support learning without reducing students' necessary exposure to English.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Code-Switching as a Classroom Language Practice

Code-switching can be understood as the use of more than one language within the same interaction. In multilingual settings, this does not necessarily signal linguistic weakness. Rather, bilingual speakers draw on available linguistic resources to accomplish communicative goals. Myers-Scotton (1993) emphasizes the social motivations that can shape switching, while Zabrodska and Verschik (2015) describe multilingual language use as a flexible practice in which speakers connect resources from different parts of their repertoires. In classrooms, this flexibility allows teachers to adjust language to the demands of explanation, interaction, and relationship building.

The EFL classroom is a distinctive environment because the target language is simultaneously the object of learning and a medium of instruction. Teachers therefore have to balance two goals: maximizing exposure to English and ensuring that students understand what is being taught. Cook (2001) argues that excluding the first language entirely is not always necessary or productive, particularly when it can be used strategically to support comprehension. This view is consistent with Macaro's (2005) description of code-switching as a learning and communication strategy that can help teachers manage moments when English-only communication is insufficient.

The value of code-switching is thus highly dependent on purpose and proportion. When switching is used to remove a specific comprehension barrier and then instruction returns to English, it can support the learning process without replacing target-language exposure. If switching becomes automatic and extensive, however, learners may receive fewer opportunities to process and use English. For this reason, the present study treats teachers' reasons as central to understanding whether code-switching is being used strategically.

Types of Code-Switching

Poplack (1980) distinguishes three widely used structural types of code-switching. Inter-sentential switching occurs across sentence or clause boundaries, so that one segment is produced in one language and the next segment in another. In classroom interaction, a teacher may give an English command and then repeat or clarify it in Indonesian. This type is particularly useful when the teacher wants to preserve a complete English message but ensure that its meaning is accessible to students.

Intra-sentential switching occurs within a single sentence when elements from two languages appear in the same syntactic unit. This form is common in bilingual classroom talk because a teacher can maintain the general flow of one language while inserting a familiar term or phrase from another. For example, the observed teachers produced mixed utterances such as "Tolong kumpul your book di meja" and "Open your dictionary kalau ada kata yang sulit." Such examples show how Indonesian and English can be combined to make instructions or lexical support immediately understandable.

Tag switching involves the insertion of a short tag or discourse marker from one language into an utterance mainly produced in another. The observation data included expressions such as “You understand, kan?” and “Minggu lalu ada tugas, right?” Because tags are relatively independent from the grammar of the main sentence, they can be used flexibly to check comprehension, seek confirmation, attract attention, or create conversational closeness. These three forms provide the structural framework used in the present study to classify observed switching.

Pedagogical and Non-Pedagogical Reasons

The central analytical distinction in this study concerns why teachers switch languages. Pedagogical reasons are those directly connected with instructional objectives and students’ learning. They include clarifying difficult concepts, translating unfamiliar vocabulary, explaining grammar, giving instructions, checking understanding, providing feedback, and adjusting explanations to different proficiency levels. Ferguson (2009) and Macaro (2005) both highlight the instructional value of the first language when it helps learners gain access to lesson content or complete classroom tasks accurately.

Non-pedagogical reasons arise from the social and interpersonal dimensions of classroom life. A teacher may switch languages to joke, express emotion, reduce formality, create solidarity, or manage a spontaneous situation. Sert (2005) and Lin (2013) show that classroom language is shaped not only by curricular aims but also by the relationships and interactional roles of participants. In this study, these interpersonal reasons are treated as analytically distinct from direct instructional support even though they may indirectly improve learning by increasing comfort and participation.

Hoffman’s (1991) framework provides a useful basis for examining these motivations because it recognizes that bilingual speakers switch codes for both communicative and social reasons. Applied to EFL teaching, this perspective makes it possible to interpret a switch not simply as an alternation of language form but as a choice shaped by the teacher’s goal at a particular moment. The same teacher may therefore use Indonesian to explain a difficult word in one turn and to create a friendly atmosphere in another.

Previous Studies and Research Gap

A number of studies support the view that classroom code-switching is purposeful. Ataş and Şimşek (2021) examined discourse and educational functions of switching and showed that both teachers and students use language alternation to organize communication and learning. Murtiningsih et al. (2021) found that Indonesian EFL teachers switched codes to simplify explanations, maintain interaction, and encourage participation. Munawaroh et al. (2022) similarly showed that code-switching can support instruction and interaction across learning settings.

Puspawati (2018) reported that teachers used switching to explain difficult content, give clearer instructions, and build positive relationships with learners. Husni and Arianto (2023) also emphasized the pedagogical implications of teachers’ code-switching practices in Indonesian EFL classrooms. These studies demonstrate that switching is associated with both instructional effectiveness and interpersonal communication. At the same time, they reinforce the need to examine the teacher’s own reasoning because similar observable functions may be motivated by different judgments about students, the task, or the classroom atmosphere.

The present study contributes a more focused account by combining Poplack’s structural classification with a thematic analysis of pedagogical and non-pedagogical reasons. Rather than asking only what types of code-switching occur, it connects observed classroom language with teachers’ explanations of why they made those choices. This combination is intended to provide a more comprehensive picture of code-switching at MA Al Urwatul Wutsqaa and to clarify the conditions under which teachers consider Indonesian an appropriate support for English instruction.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design. Qualitative description is appropriate when a study aims to present a clear account of a phenomenon as it occurs in its natural setting rather than to test a statistical relationship. Sandelowski (2000) characterizes qualitative description as a direct and accessible representation of participants' experiences, while Creswell (2014) emphasizes the value of qualitative inquiry for exploring meanings, behaviors, and interpretations. In the present research, this design allowed the researcher to document teachers' actual language choices and to investigate the reasons they attached to those choices.

The descriptive orientation was also consistent with the purpose of identifying recurring patterns in classroom code-switching without manipulating instruction. Nassaji (2015) notes that descriptive qualitative research is useful for producing rich, context-sensitive accounts of language-teaching phenomena. The study therefore focused on how code-switching appeared in real lessons and how the participating teachers explained its pedagogical and interpersonal significance.

Participants and Research Context

The research was conducted at MA Al Urwatul Wutsqaa, Benteng, Sidenreng Rappang. The participants were two English teachers selected purposively because they were actively involved in multilingual classroom practice, regularly used both English and Indonesian during teaching, and were willing to participate. Purposive selection was appropriate because the study required participants who could provide direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2002). Students present during the observed lessons were part of the natural classroom context only and were not treated as research participants.

Data Collection

Data were collected through classroom observation and semi-structured interviews, supported by an observation sheet and audio recording. Observation was used to document naturally occurring instances of code-switching during greetings, lesson explanations, instructions, questions, comprehension checks, feedback, classroom management, and lesson closing. An observation sheet helped the researcher record each relevant teacher utterance, the type of switching, and the classroom context in a systematic manner. Audio recording supported the accuracy of later transcription and reduced the risk of missing short switches that occurred during fast classroom interaction.

After the classroom observations, each teacher participated in a semi-structured interview. The interviews explored the teachers' perceptions of code-switching, the circumstances in which they used Indonesian, the relationship between switching and students' English proficiency, the perceived effects on understanding and participation, and the role of switching in informal interaction. Semi-structured questioning allowed the researcher to maintain a common focus while giving each teacher space to explain personal judgments and classroom experiences in detail (Creswell, 2014).

Data Analysis

Analysis proceeded in two connected strands. First, the observation data were classified according to Poplack's (1980) three types: inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag switching. Representative utterances were grouped according to classroom context so that patterns in explanation, instruction, feedback, discipline, comprehension checking, and interaction could be identified. Second, the interview transcripts were coded thematically. Coding focused on the reasons teachers explicitly gave for switching and organized these reasons into pedagogical and non-pedagogical categories consistent with Hoffman's (1991) framework.

The analytical process involved condensing relevant observation and interview data, displaying the information in organized categories, and comparing the two sources before drawing conclusions. Observation was used to establish what teachers actually did, whereas interview data were used to explain the intentions and judgments behind those practices. The comparison of the two data sources strengthened the interpretation because a stated reason could be considered alongside concrete examples from classroom interaction. The final themes were retained only when they were supported by recurring evidence in the teachers' explanations and by the observed instructional context.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Observed Forms of Code-Switching

Classroom observations showed that both teachers employed inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag switching during the teaching and learning process. Switching occurred throughout the lessons rather than at a single instructional stage. It appeared in greetings, transitions, explanations, directions, comprehension checks, feedback, discipline, encouragement, and closing activities. This distribution indicates that bilingual language choice was integrated into ordinary classroom management and instruction.

Inter-sentential switching was evident when a complete English expression was followed by an Indonesian clarification or vice versa. Informant 1, for example, used "Don't make a noise, jangan ribut" while managing classroom discipline and "Let's continue the lesson. Kita lanjut materinya" during a transition. Informant 2 similarly used "Good job, bagus sekali" for positive feedback and "Okey sampai jumpa, see you" when closing the lesson. In these cases, the switch allowed the teacher to preserve an English expression while making the intended message immediately clear or socially natural.

Intra-sentential switching was also common. Examples included "Sometimes ketika saya memberikan tugas," "Di catat please write," and "Open your dictionary kalau ada kata yang sulit" from Informant 1, as well as "Okey, karena ini our second meeting," "Tolong kumpul your book di meja," and "Hari ini kita akan belajar recount text" from Informant 2. These utterances illustrate how teachers combined lexical or phrasal elements from English and Indonesian within a single sentence to maintain communicative flow. Tag switching appeared in brief checks such as "You understand, kan?" and "Minggu lalu ada tugas, right?" These forms align with Poplack's (1980) typology and show that the teachers had a flexible bilingual repertoire for different interactional demands.

The structural variety is significant because it shows that code-switching was not limited to translation after a complete English explanation. Teachers also inserted familiar words, short phrases, and confirmation tags into ongoing talk. This flexibility enabled them to respond quickly to students' reactions without interrupting the lesson for a lengthy explanation. The observation findings therefore provide a concrete basis for interpreting the teachers' stated reasons in the interviews.

Pedagogical Reasons for Employing Code-Switching

The strongest theme in both interviews was the use of code-switching to support comprehension. Both teachers described English as a foreign language for their students and stated that some learners had difficulty following explanations delivered entirely in English. Informant 1 attempted to maximize English but shifted to Indonesian when students did not understand. Informant 2 expressed the same principle, explaining that Indonesian was used whenever necessary to clarify meaning. In both cases, switching was described as a support for English instruction rather than a replacement for it.

A second pedagogical reason concerned differences in student proficiency. Informant 1 explained that more Indonesian was used at the beginning of the academic year, especially with new Grade X students whose ability levels were not yet familiar to the teacher. As the teacher became more aware of students' proficiency, the proportion of English increased. This finding shows that code-switching was adjusted responsively rather than applied according to a fixed rule. The teacher's language choice

depended on an ongoing judgment of what students could understand at a particular point in their learning.

Both teachers also used code-switching to clarify difficult concepts and introduce unfamiliar vocabulary. Informant 2 gave a concrete example involving the word “important.” When some students did not understand the English explanation, the teacher switched to Indonesian and provided a simple clarification; the students then understood the meaning and were able to use the word in the lesson. This example illustrates the cognitive-support function discussed by Macaro (2005): the first language can reduce a temporary comprehension barrier so that learners can continue engaging with the target-language task.

Clear classroom instructions represented another major pedagogical reason. The observations contained mixed-language directives such as “Tolong kumpul your book di meja” and “Di catat please write.” In the interviews, Informant 2 explicitly stated that switching was used when students had difficulty understanding directions, grammar explanations, new vocabulary, or feedback. The goal was to ensure that students knew what they were expected to do. This finding is consistent with Ferguson’s (2009) view that code-switching can support access to the curriculum and classroom organization, and with Puspawati’s (2018) finding that teachers switch to give clearer instructions.

Comprehension checking and feedback were closely related themes. Teachers reported that they judged the effectiveness of a switch from students’ responses. Before clarification in Indonesian, some students appeared confused, silent, or hesitant. After the switch, they were more likely to answer questions, participate in discussion, and complete tasks correctly. Informant 1 similarly noted that students’ ability to follow the explanation and respond to questions provided evidence that the additional Indonesian explanation had helped. Thus, code-switching served not only to transmit meaning but also to enable teachers to monitor whether learning was progressing.

The teachers also associated strategic switching with attention, confidence, and participation. Informant 2 believed that students became more interested and motivated after a difficult English explanation was made accessible in Indonesian. The important point is that these outcomes were described as consequences of restored understanding rather than as reasons to abandon English. When students understood the task, they were more able to re-enter the classroom interaction. This supports the findings of Murtiningsih et al. (2021) and Munawaroh et al. (2022), who link code-switching with participation, comprehension checking, and smoother interaction.

Taken together, the pedagogical findings show that the teachers’ language choices were guided by a principle of instructional accessibility. They switched when students needed support with concepts, vocabulary, grammar, directions, or comprehension, and they adjusted the amount of Indonesian according to perceived proficiency. These reasons fit Hoffman’s (1991) broader account of purposeful switching and demonstrate that code-switching can function as a responsive teaching strategy when it is tied to a specific learning need.

Non-Pedagogical Reasons for Employing Code-Switching

The interviews also revealed reasons that were not directly related to explaining lesson content. Both teachers used Indonesian during informal interaction to create a relaxed classroom atmosphere and establish closer relationships with students. Informant 1 explained that jokes or casual comments delivered only in English were sometimes difficult for students to understand, so Indonesian made the interaction feel more natural and friendly. The teacher believed that this greater familiarity encouraged students to interact more willingly.

Informant 2 similarly described code-switching as useful during casual conversation because it reduced students’ anxiety and strengthened teacher-student communication. Using Indonesian in these moments helped students feel comfortable enough to speak, ask questions, and respond without excessive fear of making mistakes. This interpersonal function is consistent with Sert’s (2005)

observation that classroom switching can arise from social and emotional needs and with Lin's (2013) emphasis on the role of language choice in constructing classroom relationships.

Although rapport and reduced anxiety are categorized here as non-pedagogical reasons because they are not direct explanations of content, they can still influence the learning environment. A student who feels less anxious may be more willing to participate, and a teacher who has established rapport may find it easier to invite questions or correct misunderstandings. The findings therefore show that pedagogical and interpersonal motives are analytically distinct but practically connected. Code-switching can simultaneously make communication more human and create conditions that support engagement.

This result is also consistent with Puspawati (2018), who identified positive teacher-student relationships among the functions of classroom code-switching, and with the broader findings of Ataş and Şimşek (2021), who show that switching has discourse and educational functions. The present study adds specificity by showing that the participating teachers themselves associated Indonesian with friendliness, comfort, and reduced anxiety rather than treating those outcomes as incidental side effects.

Balancing Indonesian Support with English Exposure

A particularly important finding was that both teachers placed limits on the use of Indonesian. Informant 1 stated that English should be maximized because regular exposure can build motivation and confidence, while Indonesian should remain available when it is genuinely needed. Informant 2 made a similar point, arguing that switching should be used wisely so that students continue to practice English as much as possible. This shared position suggests that the teachers did not view code-switching as an alternative language policy; they viewed it as a temporary scaffold within English-medium instruction.

This balance addresses a central tension in EFL pedagogy. If English is used without regard to comprehension, students may disengage because they cannot follow the lesson. If Indonesian is used too readily, students may become dependent on translation and receive insufficient opportunity to process English. Cook (2001) and Macaro (2005) both provide theoretical support for selective first-language use rather than rigid exclusion or unrestricted switching. The teachers' practices at MA Al Urwatul Wutsqaa reflect this middle position: English remains the default, while Indonesian is introduced when it performs a clear communicative or interpersonal function.

The findings also suggest that appropriate code-switching requires teacher awareness. A purposeful switch should respond to evidence such as confusion, unfamiliar vocabulary, an instruction that has not been understood, or a need to reduce tension in interaction. After the immediate need has been addressed, the lesson can return to English. This sequence turns code-switching into scaffolding rather than substitution. It also encourages teachers to evaluate their own language use instead of allowing switching to become an unconscious habit.

Relationship with Previous Research and Study Contribution

Overall, the results support previous Indonesian and international studies while adding a clearer motivational distinction. Murtiningsih et al. (2021) reported that teachers switch to simplify explanations and encourage participation; Munawaroh et al. (2022) highlighted feedback and comprehension checking; Puspawati (2018) identified explanation, instruction, and relationship building; and Husni and Arianto (2023) emphasized the pedagogical implications of teachers' classroom switching. The present findings reproduce these broad functions in the specific context of MA Al Urwatul Wutsqaa.

The contribution of this study lies in connecting those observable functions with teachers' articulated reasons. Classroom observation showed the forms and contexts of switching, whereas interviews showed that the same behavior was grounded in judgments about proficiency, comprehension, task clarity, attention, rapport, and anxiety. The combined analysis therefore moves

beyond a simple inventory of switching types. It explains how structural forms identified by Poplack (1980) are used in response to pedagogical and non-pedagogical considerations described through Hoffman's (1991) framework.

The findings should nevertheless be interpreted within the limits of the research design. Only two teachers at one school participated, and the study did not measure students' learning outcomes quantitatively. Statements about improved confidence or understanding reflect teacher perceptions supported by observed classroom responses rather than experimental evidence of effect. Future research could include student perspectives, compare different proficiency groups, examine changes across several teaching units, or investigate whether strategically limited code-switching is associated with measurable gains in comprehension and English use.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the pedagogical and non-pedagogical reasons for employing code-switching in EFL classrooms at MA Al Urwatul Wutsqaa. Classroom observation showed that both teachers used inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag switching across a range of classroom situations, including explanation, instruction, feedback, comprehension checking, discipline, encouragement, and informal interaction. The interview findings demonstrated that these switches were generally intentional and responsive to the needs of the lesson and the social atmosphere of the classroom.

Pedagogically, code-switching was used to facilitate comprehension, explain difficult concepts and grammar, introduce unfamiliar vocabulary, provide clear directions, check understanding, adjust instruction to different proficiency levels, and maintain participation. Non-pedagogically, it was used to build rapport, create a relaxed environment, reduce anxiety, and make informal communication more natural. Both teachers emphasized that Indonesian should function as a supporting language while English remains the principal medium of instruction. The findings therefore suggest that code-switching is most effective when teachers use it selectively, for a clear purpose, and return to English after the immediate communicative or learning need has been addressed. Schools can support this practice through professional discussion and teacher development focused on balanced classroom language use, while future studies may include more participants and student perspectives or examine the relationship between code-switching and learning outcomes.

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