

The Functions of Code-Switching in EFL Classroom Interactions among English Education Students at the University of Mataram

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Received : 28 August 2026

Revised : 29 September 2026

Accepted : 29 September 2026

Published: 30 September 2026

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DOI: 10.29303/jeef.v6i3.1142

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Abstract: This qualitative case study examined the code-switching (CS) produced by English Education students during peer interaction in a Public Speaking course at the University of Mataram. Data were collected through observations of two debate sessions involving 25 students and semi-structured interviews with ten purposively selected students, and were analyzed thematically. The types of CS were classified using Poplack's (1980) typology, and their functions were coded using Cook's (2001) categories. Twenty-two instances of CS were identified from approximately 198 recorded utterances. Intra-sentential switching was the most frequent type (11 instances), followed by tag-switching (7) and inter-sentential switching (4). The students' CS served affective (7), interactional (6), pedagogical (6), and classroom management (3) functions. The informants held mixed views: some felt that CS aided comprehension and vocabulary learning, while others felt that it reduced their opportunities to practice speaking fluently. As prospective English teachers, most favored a limited, context-sensitive use of CS rather than strict prohibition or unrestricted use. The study concludes that CS among EFL peers is a natural and functional part of classroom communication that calls for a balanced pedagogical response.

Keywords: Code-Switching, EFL Classroom Interaction, Peer Interaction, Functions of Code-Switching, Qualitative Case Study.

INTRODUCTION

English has become a global lingua franca that connects international communication and supports access to education and professional development. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, students are often expected to use English as the main medium of interaction, based on the assumption that consistent exposure to the target language supports language acquisition (Krashen, 1982). In practice, however, bilingual speakers frequently alternate between their first and second languages during classroom talk, a phenomenon known as code-switching (CS). Poplack (1980) defines CS as the alternation of two languages within a single discourse, sentence, or constituent, while Gumperz (1982) describes it as the juxtaposition of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems within the same speech exchange.

Most previous studies on CS in EFL classrooms have adopted a teacher-centered perspective, examining how teachers switch languages to manage instruction, give feedback, or clarify content (Sert, 2005), while CS produced by students themselves during peer interaction has received comparatively little attention. This gap is important because peer interaction is a key space in which students actively practice the target language. On one hand, a controlled use of the first language may support comprehension and lower learners' anxiety (Cook, 2001); on the other hand, excessive reliance on the first language may reduce learners' exposure to and practice of English (Myers-Scotton, 2006). Without empirical evidence on how CS functions among students themselves, it remains unclear whether student-student CS supports or hinders English learning.

Understanding students' own code-switching is especially important in teacher education. Pre-service English teachers' experiences of language use as learners may shape how they later manage the first language in their own classrooms. In addition, the growing interest in pedagogical translanguaging has renewed the debate about the role of learners' first language in EFL classrooms (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022), which makes it necessary to examine how learners themselves use their linguistic repertoire during interaction. In the Indonesian context, studies of code-switching have mostly focused on teachers' practices and perceptions (Zainil & Arsyad, 2021). Evidence from peer interaction among pre-service teachers can therefore help lecturers decide when the first language should be allowed, limited, or discouraged in speaking courses.

Addressing this gap, the present study examined the code-switching produced by English Education students of the University of Mataram during peer interaction in a Public Speaking course. Specifically, this study aimed to (1) identify the types of code-switching produced by the students, (2) investigate the functions of the code-switching, and (3) examine whether these functions support or hinder the students' English learning. The findings are expected to inform lecturers and pre-service teachers about the purposeful use of the first language in EFL speaking classes.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design (Yin, 2018) to explore code-switching (CS) in student-student EFL classroom interaction. The research was conducted in the Public Speaking course of the English Education Study Program, University of Mataram, a course in which fourth-

semester students were expected to communicate actively in English through group discussions and debate activities. Classroom observation was carried out during two debate sessions involving twenty-five students as speakers, moderators, and audience members, and audio recordings were transcribed for analysis. Ten students were purposively selected as interview participants (Yin, 2018; Guest et al., 2006) and took part in semi-structured interviews of approximately 10–20 minutes exploring their reasons for switching languages, the situations that triggered CS, and their perceptions of its role in learning. Pseudonymous labels (e.g., S1, S2) were used to protect participants' identities.

Data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. All utterances containing CS were identified and transcribed, then classified according to Poplack's (1980) typology of inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag-switching. Each instance was subsequently coded according to Cook's (2001) four functional categories, namely the pedagogical, classroom management, interactional, and affective functions, before the coded data were grouped, reviewed against the original transcripts, and interpreted, together with the interview data, to examine whether the identified functions supported or hindered the students' English learning.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Types of Code-Switching

Across the two observed debate sessions, 22 instances of code-switching were identified out of approximately 198 recorded student utterances, indicating that CS functioned as an occasional rather than a pervasive communicative resource. All three types of CS proposed by Poplack (1980) were found in the data, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of Code-Switching Produced by the Students

Type of Code-Switching	Number of Instances (%)
Intra-sentential switching	11 (50.0)
Tag-switching	7 (31.8)
Inter-sentential switching	4 (18.2)
Total	22 (100)

Intra-sentential switching, in which elements from both languages are combined within a single clause, was the most frequent type (11 instances), for example when an English debate term such as opening opposition was inserted into an otherwise Indonesian clause. Tag-switching, the insertion of a free-standing tag or exclamation such as *guys* or *to be honest* into an Indonesian utterance, was the second most frequent type (7 instances). Inter-sentential switching, in which each clause is grammatically complete in its own language, was the least frequent (4 instances).

Taken together, intra-sentential switching accounted for half of all instances (50.0%), tag-switching for almost a third (31.8%), and inter-sentential switching for less than a fifth (18.2%). In the intra-sentential switches, English words or phrases, such as the debate term opening opposition, were inserted into clauses whose base language was Indonesian. This suggests that the students borrowed the English terminology of the course while keeping Indonesian as the base language when they spoke spontaneously. The tags, such

as *guys* and *to be honest*, were short, free-standing elements that could be added without changing the grammar of the Indonesian utterance, which may explain why they appeared often in fast peer talk. Inter-sentential switches were the least common, possibly because they require the speaker to complete a whole clause in the other language.

Functions of Code-Switching

The students' code-switching was examined using Cook's (2001) four-way functional framework. Because the lecturer consistently used English throughout the observed sessions, virtually all instances of CS were produced by the students themselves during peer interaction. All four functions were identified, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Functions of Code-Switching Produced by the Students

Function of Code-Switching	Number of Instances (%)
Affective function	7 (31.8)
Interactional function	6 (27.3)
Pedagogical function	6 (27.3)
Classroom management function	3 (13.6)
Total	22 (100)

The affective function, used to regulate emotional states such as nervousness or gratitude, was the most frequent (7 instances); several informants admitted switching to Indonesian when they felt anxious about being misunderstood while speaking English. The interactional function, used to sustain the flow of peer conversation, was the second most frequent (6 instances). The pedagogical function, used to clarify debate-related content, occurred also six times, while the classroom management function, used by students to assign roles or coordinate group preparation, was the least frequent (3 instances).

In percentage terms, the affective function accounted for 31.8% of the instances, the interactional and pedagogical functions for 27.3% each, and the classroom management function for 13.6%. The affective switches occurred when the students expressed emotions such as nervousness or gratitude, and the interview data confirmed that some students returned to Indonesian when they worried about being misunderstood. The interactional switches helped the students keep the peer discussion moving, while the pedagogical switches were used to clarify debate-related content for their peers. The low frequency of the classroom management function suggests that the students seldom needed Indonesian to organize the activity, possibly because roles and procedures were largely set by the debate format.

Code-Switching as Support for or Hindrance to English Learning

The interview data revealed mixed perceptions among the informants. Several students felt that code-switching supported their learning, for instance by allowing them to ask peers for English words they had forgotten and thereby acquire new vocabulary, while others felt that relying on Indonesian reduced their opportunity to build speaking fluency. A few informants held both views simultaneously, feeling that CS helped their comprehension of the debate material while

limiting their chance to practice speaking English. As prospective English teachers, most informants suggested that code-switching should be permitted in a limited way, depending on the type of class and students' proficiency level, rather than being completely banned or freely allowed.

The perceived benefits were mainly related to comprehension and vocabulary: asking a peer in Indonesian for a forgotten English word allowed the students to continue the task and, at the same time, learn the word. The perceived drawbacks were related to speaking practice, as some informants felt that the availability of Indonesian reduced the need to find ways of expressing their ideas in English.

Discussion

The dominance of intra-sentential switching over inter-sentential switching is consistent with Poplack's (1980) claim that speakers with relatively balanced bilingual competence tend to merge two grammatical systems within a single clause. Because the observed debate activity was spontaneous and time-pressured, the students' switching more closely resembled what Gumperz (1982) terms conversational code-switching, produced in the flow of interaction, rather than a consciously planned, situational switch. The prominence of English tags such as *guys* further suggests the influence of informal youth discourse circulated through social media on students' spontaneous classroom talk.

Although Cook's (2001) functional framework was originally developed to describe how a lecturer uses the first language to support instruction, the present findings show that all four functions were also performed by students themselves in the complete absence of lecturer-mediated first-language input, indicating that the framework can be meaningfully extended to student-student interaction. Unlike studies of teacher code-switching in Indonesian EFL classrooms, which typically report the pedagogical and affective functions as most frequent (Zainil & Arsyad, 2021), the present study found the affective and interactional functions to be most prominent among students, a pattern consistent with the nature of a competitive, evaluated debate in which sustaining peer talk and managing performance anxiety mattered more than formal instruction.

The mixed perceptions regarding whether CS supports or hinders learning mirror an ongoing theoretical debate: while Cook (2001) argues that a controlled use of the first language can aid comprehension and confidence, Polio and Duff (1994) and Littlewood and Yu (2011) maintain that greater exposure to the target language leads to stronger language gains. Rather than contradicting one another, the informants' mixed views suggest that CS may affect different aspects of learning differently, supporting comprehension while potentially limiting fluency practice, an interpretation broadly compatible with the notion of pedagogical translanguaging as a purposeful use of learners' full linguistic repertoire (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022). Notably, although the informants relied on CS to manage the demands of the debate, most stated an intention to restrict code-switching in their own future classrooms, suggesting an awareness that CS, while useful in the moment, is not necessarily the practice they wish to model for their future students.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the code-switching produced by English Education students during peer interaction in a Public Speaking course. All three types of CS proposed by Poplack (1980) were identified, with intra-sentential switching the most frequent, reflecting both the students' relatively balanced bilingual competence and the spontaneous nature of the debate activity. All four functions proposed by Cook (2001) were also found, with the affective and interactional functions most prominent, a pattern that differs from teacher-focused CS studies and shows that Cook's (2001) framework, though originally developed for teacher talk, extends meaningfully to student-student interaction. Interview data indicated that code-switching both supported and hindered the students' English learning depending on the aspect of learning considered: it appeared to help comprehension and manage anxiety, yet was seen by several informants as reducing opportunities to practice speaking fluency. These findings suggest that code-switching among EFL peers is a natural and functional part of classroom communication that requires a balanced, context-sensitive pedagogical response rather than a strict prohibition or an unrestricted allowance. Because these conclusions rely on students' self-reported perceptions from a single class at one research site, future research combining qualitative and longitudinal or proficiency-based measures across broader and more varied samples is recommended to further clarify the relationship between code-switching and English language development.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank the students and lecturer of the Public Speaking course, English Education Study Program, University of Mataram, for their participation and cooperation during data collection.

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