EXAMINING CODE SWITCHING PREFERENCE BY LEARNERS IN ESL CLASSROOMS AT ISLAMIC PRIVATE UNIVERSITY

Nur Sakinah Haris[1]
Nur Azimah Mohamed Jamburi[2]
Roszalina Abdul Rahim[3]
Shuhada Mustafa Hilmi[4]
Farah Syuhada Roslan[5]

[1]Faculty of Language and Foundation Studies, Universiti Islam Pahang Sultan Ahmad Shah (UnIPSAS), Malaysia, (E-mail: nsakinahh320@gmail.com)
[2]Faculty of Language and Foundation Studies, Universiti Islam Pahang Sultan Ahmad Shah (UnIPSAS), Malaysia, (E-mail: nurazimah@unipsas.edu.my)
[3]Faculty of Language and Foundation Studies, Universiti Islam Pahang Sultan Ahmad Shah (UnIPSAS), Malaysia, (E-mail: roszalina@unipsas.edu.my)
[4]Faculty of Language and Foundation Studies, Universiti Islam Pahang Sultan Ahmad Shah (UnIPSAS), Malaysia, (E-mail: shuhada@unipsas.edu.my)
[5]Faculty of Language and Foundation Studies, Universiti Islam Pahang Sultan Ahmad Shah (UnIPSAS), Malaysia, (E-mail: farahsyuhada@unipsas.edu.my)

_____

Abstract*: This study investigates code-switching preference by learners in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms at Sultan Ahmad Shah Pahang Islamic University. The use of code-switching in ESL classrooms is worldwide and affecting learners in English as a Second Language (ESL). Utilising a mixed-method approach, it explores preferences for code-switching in ESL settings. Quantitative data were gathered through surveys of students in private university. The results reveal that code-switching is preferable since it aids comprehension and promotes learning comfortability, contributing to a more supportive learning environment. The study concludes with recommendations for ESL instructors on strategically incorporating code-switching to maximize learning outcomes and student comfort.*

Keywords: *Code-Switching, ESL, Islamic Private University, Student Perspectives, Instructor Strategies*

_____

Introduction

In the past, it was common practice to discourage using students' original languages (L1) in ESL classrooms and promote Monolingualism. This has resulted in several downsides, as shown by Robert & Brown (2004) in Mapping out Unequal Englishes in English-medium Classrooms. According to the authors, the social dynamics of teaching and learning are badly impacted by a teacher's approach that promotes self-censorship and language policing (Robert & Brown, 2004). This shows that a rigid monolingual approach can hinder the development of a welcoming and inclusive learning environment by stifling students' natural communication. This is consistent with the findings of Nawaz et al., (2023) who observed that learning English is challenging for Pakistani pupils. Their difficulties are made worse by policies that favour teaching English as a mono language and by the individual's disparities in their motivation, level of anxiety, and sense of self-worth.

Therefore, in multilingual educational settings, particularly in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms, code-switching has emerged as a common linguistic practice that serves both pedagogical and communicative functions. Code-switching, defined as the alternation between two or more languages within a conversation or discourse, is frequently employed by both instructors and students to facilitate understanding and enhance classroom engagement. Changing between two or more languages during a conversation or expression is code-switching in linguistics (Cunningham, 2020). Among ESL students, code-switching is a typical occurrence.

Literature Review

Three points will be discussed in the literature review.

Pedagogical Benefits of Code-Switching

In many ESL classes, students' preferences for teacher code-switching might vary depending on several variables, including motivation, anxiety, and confidence (Nawaz et al., 2023). The proficiency level in the student's target language is also essential. Highly motivated students who want to challenge themselves and improve their language skills may prefer an immersed method with less code-switching. Less motivated students might benefit from more code-switching to make learning easier. This aligns with the study that students' involvement and favourable attitudes towards the teacher's code-switching rose as their English proficiency declined. In contrast to students with greater competence levels, opinions towards the teacher code-switching were thus more favourable among students whose L2 proficiency was lower.

Cultural and Linguistic Factors Influencing Preferences

Another factor contributing to the student's preference for the instructor to code-switch is that students may have different cultural expectations about code-switching (Alshayban & Alghammas, 2020). Code-switching may be more common in some cultures as a teaching approach. According to the study done by Alshayban & Alghammas (2020) an equal number of teachers responded to the question of how culture affects L1 usage in the classroom, with 10 of them believing that a student's culture has an impact on L1 use and the other ten disagreeing. The replies from the teachers who thought that culture affected the usage of the L1 in the classroom revealed that students from cultures where making mistakes is more acceptable would be more likely to use the L2 freely. Some students, especially in language classes, prefer to utilise their mother tongue entirely or in conjunction with their first and second languages to aid in their learning and comprehension of the lesson due to linguistic incompetence or a lack

of language skills (Ahmad Kamal & Ramly, 2022). Therefore, students' confidence in speaking English will be enhanced by employing this strategy.

To add, student preferences might vary greatly, and it is vital to consider them since students needing guidance in translation and assistance in expressing feelings contribute to the practice of code-switching in ESL classrooms (Mohd Noor et al., 2022). Given that UnIPSAS is a private college, students come from varied backgrounds. Most of them came from Maahad Tahfiz or other Islamic institutions that focus on something other than English, so they have low proficiency in the English language. Some believe that because of their classes and the Islamic programs they enrolled in, they do not need to be fluent in English (Suliman et al., 2021). According to research by Karakaya and Dikilitaş (2020), students had positive perceptions of teachers' code-switching. They found it helpful because they recognised its many advantages, including enhancing students' knowledge during lessons and providing practical support by promoting engagement and boosting students' enthusiasm for learning L2. This supports the idea stated by Sert (2001) that code-switching can be used to foster a positive linguistic environment in the classroom.
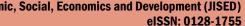
Challenges and Limitations
Code-switching is a typical occurrence among ESL students. In many ESL classes, students' preferences for teacher code-switching might vary depending on several variables, including motivation, anxiety, and confidence (Nawaz et al., 2023). The proficiency level in the student's target language is also essential. Highly motivated students who want to challenge themselves and improve their language skills may prefer an immersed method with less code-switching. Less motivated students might benefit from more code-switching to make learning easier (May & Aziz, 2020). This aligns with the study that students' involvement and favourable attitudes towards the teacher's code-switching rose as their English proficiency declined (Ferguson, 2003). In contrast to students with greater competence levels, opinions towards the teacher code-switching were thus more favourable among students whose L2 proficiency was lower.

Therefore. this study explores code-switching practices in ESL classrooms at a private university, focusing on the learner perspectives. The objective is to know the learners' preference of code-switching is Islamic private university.

Methodology
This study adopted a quantitative research approach, utilizing structured questionnaires to gather data. A convenience sampling method was employed, allowing the researcher to select participants based on availability and accessibility rather than a random or systematic approach. The sample comprised 30 ESL students from Faculty of Language and Foundation Studies at UnIPSAS, specifically chosen to represent the study's target population due to the use of English language in their classes are more noticeable. The decision to include only 30 ESL students in the study was influenced by several factors which are; a smaller sample size allows for more manageable data collection and analysis. With 30 participants, the researcher can conduct a thorough analysis and draw meaningful conclusions without being overwhelmed by the data volume.

The questionnaire, adapted from El Fiki (1999), was administered to assess students' preferences for code-switching practices in ESL classrooms. Collected survey data were then organized, coded, and analysed to provide insights into the research questions.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: In your opinion, is it appropriate for instructors to code-switch language in an English class?

Answers	Percentages (%)
Yes	27
No	0
More English, Less BM	50
Less English, more BM	0
It depends on the topics	23

The data collected above indicates that 50% of respondents prefer using more English and less Bahasa Melayu (BM) in class, highlighting a strong preference for English as the primary medium of instruction. 27% say code-switching is appropriate, indicating some support for mixing languages, while 23% say it depends on the topic. This suggests that while English should generally dominate, some students see the value of switching languages based on the complexity of certain topics. Notably, no respondents support using less English and more BM or reject code-switching outright. These findings support the theory that code-switching serves as a facilitator to comprehend complex concepts (Nawaz et al., 2023).

Table 2: Do you think code-switching language can help in learning English?

Answers	Percentages (%)
Yes	73
No	0
It depends on the topics	27

Next, Table 2 shows that 73% of respondents believe code-switching depends on the topic, indicating that students consider it a context-specific tool. They find code-switching particularly useful when a concept is difficult to understand in English alone. Consistently, 27% support code-switching regardless of the topic, suggesting that a subset of students view code-switching as generally beneficial for understanding. This highlights the necessity for instructors to evaluate when code-switching can facilitate comprehension (Krashen, 2007).

Table 3: In your opinion, which of the following is the best way for an instructor to explain a topic so that students will understand it better?

Answers	Percentages (%)
Using simple English only	27
Using both Bahasa Melayu and English	73
Using Bahasa Melayu only	0

In addition, Table 3 reveals that 73% of respondents believe that code-switching aids in learning English, indicating a preference for explanations in Bahasa Melayu, especially for complex concepts or when struggling with English. Meanwhile, 27% consider the benefit topic-dependent, emphasizing the need for flexibility in determining when code-switching is appropriate. Table 3 further highlights that 73% of students prefer bilingual explanations, underscoring the effectiveness of using both BM and English for better understanding. Only 27% prefer explanations in simple English, and none favour BM-only explanations. Both of these findings underscore that while students prefer English for instruction, many recognise that

code-switching can scaffold their learning process and that students feel more comfortable when instructors use both languages to explain topics, especially for clarifying difficult concepts which aligns with Krashen (2007)

Table 4: If your lecturer explains something that you do not understand, you want him or her to:

Answers	Percentages (%)
Repeat the explanation with an example	50
Explain again in English but in a different way	20
Explain in both Bahasa Melayu and English	30
Explain in Bahasa Melayu only	0

Moving on to Table 4, the data reveals diverse preferences for clarification strategies. Half of the students (50%) find examples most helpful, suggesting the importance of practical application in understanding concepts. 30% prefer bilingual explanations, consistent with the previous questions' results on code-switching. The remaining 20% prefer a different English explanation, indicating a subset of students who are comfortable with English-only instruction but benefit from varied explanatory approaches which align with the concept of code-switching being used to assist in learning new concepts (Algazo, 2023).

Table 5: In your opinion, do you prefer for the instructors to code-switch when teaching in an English class?

Answers	Percentages (%)
Yes	50
No	7
It depends on the topics	43

According to Table 5, 50% of respondents prefer code-switching, and 43.33% think its use should be topic-dependent, while only 6.67% are against it. This indicates that students generally see value in code-switching, but its effectiveness may vary based on the subject matter. The preference for topic-dependent code-switching suggests students believe they learn better when instructors adapt their language use based on material complexity (Adriosh & Razı, 2019).

To summarise, the study found half of the respondents prefer using more English and less Bahasa Melayu (BM) in class, while 27% support code-switching and 23% say it depends on the topic. This indicates a preference for context-based language switching to aid comprehension (Nawaz et al., 2023).

Seventy-three percent of students view code-switching as context-dependent, and useful for difficult concepts, while 27% consistently support it, highlighting the need for strategic use in teaching (Krashen, 2007). Furthermore, 73% believe code-switching helps in learning English, with many students prefer bilingual explanations for complex topics (Krashen, 2007).
Preferences for clarification strategies varied, with 50% finding examples most helpful, 30% preferring bilingual explanations, and 20% favouring varied English-only approaches. This suggests a mix of methods aids understanding (Algazo, 2023). Opinions on code- switching frequency and effectiveness showed that 70% support frequent L1 switches, while 60% oppose

limiting L1 use. Most students value code-switching for clarity, but there's a preference for English immersion with occasional switching (Majid, 2020).

Conclusion

The study highlights a strong preference among students from Islamic private universities for a flexible and context-driven approach to code-switching in the classroom. While most students favor an English-dominant learning environment, they acknowledge the strategic use of Bahasa Melayu (BM) or code-switching to aid comprehension, particularly when addressing challenging material. Code-switching is seen as a responsive tool rather than a constant practice, used to clarify difficult concepts and facilitate learning. Students' preferences for specific strategies—such as providing examples, bilingual explanations, and English-only methods—underscore the need for varied instructional approaches to accommodate diverse learning needs. In global ESL pedagogy, selective code-switching can be an effective way to enhance understanding. This approach suggests that instructors worldwide could strategically use students' native languages to clarify complex concepts while maintaining an emphasis on English immersion. Achieving a balance between immersion in English and occasional native-language support exemplifies a practical and adaptable strategy for multilingual classrooms globally.

Overall, the findings suggest that selective code-switching can enhance clarity and support an immersive language-learning environment. Instructors are encouraged to adopt a balanced approach, using code-switching judiciously to aid comprehension without undermining English language immersion (Adriosh & Razı, 2019). However, excessive use of code-switching may pose a risk to the development of full English proficiency, highlighting the need for further investigation into this potential drawback. Future research could explore questions such as: *Does the frequency of code-switching impact students' long-term English language development?* or *Are there significant differences in the effectiveness of code-switching based on students' English proficiency levels (e.g., beginner, intermediate, advanced)?*

References

Adriosh, M., & Razı, Ö. (2019). Teacher's code-switching in EFL undergraduate classrooms in Libya: Functions and perceptions. *SAGE Open, 9*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019846214

Ahmad Kamal, M. A., & Ramly, B. (2022). The effects of code-switching in English language classrooms during online distance learning and its effects on executive function performance. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development, 11*(3), 1563–1583. https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarped/v11-i3/14788

Algazo, M. (2023). Functions of L1 use in L2 classes: Jordanian EFL teachers' perspectives. *World Journal of English Language, 13*(1), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v13n1p1

Alshayban, A., & Alghammas, A. (2020). Allowing or refusing the use of a student's mother tongue in an English learning classroom: An explorative study. *TESOL International Journal, 15*(4), 7–36.

Cunningham, U. (2020). *Growing up with two languages*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003018544

De la Fuente, M. J., & Goldenberg, C. (2022). Understanding the role of the first language (L1) in instructed second language acquisition (ISLA): Effects of using a principled approach to L1 in the beginner foreign language classroom. *Language Teaching Research*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168820921882

Huang, W., Lyu, D., & Lin, J. (2020). *Seeking Gender Difference in Code-switching by Investigating Mandarin-English Child Bilingual in Singapore*. https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints202009.0393.v1

Hussein, R. F., Saed, H. A., & Haider, A. S. (2020). Teachers and students code-switching: The inevitable evil in EFL classrooms. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, *19*(2), 60–78. https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.19.2.5

Karakaya, M., & Dikilitaş, K. (2020). Perceptions of students and teachers towards the use of code-switching in EFL classrooms. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 16*(1), 1–14.

Krashen, S. D. (2007). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition* (Rev. ed.). Pergamon.

Majid, S. (2020). English to Malay and back again: An analysis of lecturers' code-switching in English classrooms. *Institute of Education*. https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/89400/

Mohd Noor, N., Mujahideen, A., Yusoff, H., Akmar, N., Nasir, M., & Yaacob, N. H. (2022). Attitude of students of Islamic studies programme towards teachers who code-switch in classroom setting. *Journal of Islamic Studies and Educational Development, 7*(4), 252–261. https://doi.org/10.55573/JISED.074725

Narayan, R. (2019). Code-switching as a linguistic resource in the fijian esl classrooms: Bane or boon? *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *10*(3), 427–436. https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1003.04

Nawaz, N., Atta, A., & Naseem, N. (2023). The impact of code-switching in affective support and learners' success in Pakistani ESL classrooms. *Journal of Education and Social Sciences, 8*(2), 120–135.

Robert, B., & Brown, E. B. (2004). Mapping out unequal Englishes in English-medium classrooms. *Journal of Education, 1*(1), 1–14.

Sert, O. (2001). The functions of code-switching in ELT classrooms. *TESOL Journal, 10*(2), 1–12.