Code-Switching Practices in English Language Classrooms: A Classroom Discourse Analysis and Its Pedagogical Implications for EFL Learning

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Abstract

This study investigates code-switching practices in an Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom through a qualitative classroom discourse analysis. Drawing on audio- and video-recorded classroom interaction, the study examines how teachers and students employ code-switching, the pedagogical functions it serves, and its implications for effective EFL teaching. The findings reveal that code-switching is systematic and predominantly teacher-initiated, occurring most frequently during instructional clarification, classroom management, and affective support. Student-initiated code-switching, although less frequent, functions primarily as an interactional repair strategy to maintain participation and negotiate meaning. Importantly, strategically timed code-switching mediates key learning processes, including comprehension facilitation, engagement regulation, and participation expansion. The study contributes empirical discourse-based evidence to ongoing debates on L1 use in EFL classrooms, challenging deficit-oriented perspectives and highlighting code-switching as a context-sensitive pedagogical resource. Implications are discussed for EFL pedagogy and teacher education in multilingual instructional settings.

Keywords: *code-switching; EFL classroom; classroom discourse analysis; pedagogical functions; multilingual pedagogy*

Introduction

EFL classrooms in Indonesia constitute multilingual ecologies where Indonesian and local languages coexist with English as the target language. Classroom interaction frequently involves systematic code-switching to negotiate meaning, manage participation, and sustain instructional flow. Research evidence indicates that code-switching serves clear pedagogical and discourse-related functions, such as signalling topic shifts, clarifying meaning, organizing classroom procedures, and fostering interpersonal rapport (Ataş & Sağın-Şimşek, 2021). In line with the multilingual turn, translanguaging perspectives view learners' linguistic repertoires as pedagogical resources that expand interactional space and support collaborative reasoning without diminishing English output (Li & Qu, 2024; Wang, 2022). Nevertheless, "target-language-only" ideologies remain contested within classroom language policies (Orfan, 2023; Smagul, 2024).

Code-switching is a common and meaningful practice in bilingual or multilingual EFL classrooms. It refers to alternating between English and learners' first language(s) within the same interaction. Research shows it is not random or a sign of weak ability, but a systematic strategy shaped by teaching goals, classroom interaction, and sociocultural context (Ataş & Sağın-Şimşek, 2021). Structurally, it includes inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag-switching, which help researchers identify patterns across lesson stages and speaker roles (Smagul, 2024). Unlike code-mixing, which tends to involve lexical blending, code-switching is usually purposeful and functional (Temesgen, 2022). In Indonesia and similar contexts, it supports comprehension, lesson flow, and cognitive load management (Orfan, 2023).

Multiple-language use in EFL classrooms can be explained through sociocultural and interactionist SLA theories. Sociocultural theory (Vygotsky) views learning as socially mediated, with language as a key tool; thus, code-switching can mediate meaning, support cognitive regulation, and increase participation (Wang, 2022). L1 use may scaffold learning within the zone of proximal development, helping learners understand concepts and complete tasks without weakening English development (Li & Qu, 2024). Interactionist perspectives stress negotiation of meaning and feedback; here, code-switching can repair communication breakdowns and maintain interaction (Ataş & Sağın-Şimşek, 2021). Evidence suggests that banning L1 may reduce interaction in low-proficiency classes, while controlled code-switching sustains engagement (Smagul, 2024).

Classroom discourse analysis is a useful method for studying how interaction shapes teaching and learning in EFL classrooms. It assumes that learning happens through talk, and meanings emerge from interaction patterns rather than isolated forms. Core features include turn-taking, repair, IRF sequences, and participation frameworks (Walsh, 2011). Recent studies use this approach to examine code-switching as a sequential classroom practice linked to specific pedagogical moments, such as explaining, eliciting responses, or managing the class (Ataş & Sağın-Şimşek, 2021). Audio/video evidence shows teachers often switch to L1 to clarify

instructions or emphasize points, while students switch to ask for help or signal problems (Temesgen, 2022). Code-switching can also widen participation, especially for lower-proficiency learners (Wang, 2022).

Recent research increasingly views code-switching as a pedagogical resource with multiple functions in EFL classrooms. One major function is classroom management, as teachers use the L1 to give instructions, manage transitions, and handle discipline more efficiently, reducing ambiguity and saving instructional time (Smagul, 2024). Code-switching is also widely used to clarify meaning, especially in grammar and vocabulary instruction, helping learners understand abstract concepts and reducing cognitive load (Ataş & Sağın-Şimşek, 2021). Beyond instructional purposes, code-switching serves affective functions by building rapport, expressing empathy, and lowering learner anxiety, which can encourage participation and risk-taking in English use (Temesgen, 2022).

Although code-switching has been widely acknowledged in EFL pedagogy, two gaps remain prominent. First, there is still limited *classroom-based discourse research* that documents how code-switching unfolds sequentially in naturally occurring interaction and how specific switches function within classroom discourse routines (Ataş & Sağın-Şimşek, 2021). (Many studies rely heavily on self-report, which may not capture the fine-grained interactional work done by language alternation during instruction and learning.

Second, empirical evidence remains uneven regarding how observable code-switching practices connect to pedagogical outcomes. While translanguaging studies suggest potential benefits for interaction quality and cognitive engagement (Li & Qu, 2024) (ScienceDirect) and for targeted learning domains (e.g., translation-mediated writing development) (Zhang et al., 2023), (Frontiers) the field still needs more classroom-linked accounts that connect *functions of switching* to *instructional consequences* (e.g., comprehension support, participation structuring, affective regulation, or opportunity-to-learn).

Research Questions
1. How do teachers and students employ code-switching during classroom interaction?
2. What pedagogical functions does code-switching serve in EFL instruction?
3. What are the implications of these practices for effective EFL teaching?

This study aims to examine how code-switching is used in English language classrooms and to identify its pedagogical functions in EFL learning. Building on recent scholarship that highlights the methodological need for robust classroom evidence in multilingual pedagogy research (Liao et al., 2025), (ScienceDirect) the study positions classroom discourse as the primary site for understanding how teachers and students employ bilingual resources to accomplish instructional work.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative classroom discourse analysis design to investigate code-switching practices in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom and their pedagogical implications. A qualitative approach was selected because the research aims to examine naturally occurring classroom interaction, focusing on how language alternation is enacted, interpreted, and utilized within instructional discourse rather than measuring predefined variables quantitatively (Gosen, 2024; Walsh & Li, 2021). Such an approach is particularly appropriate for capturing the complexity of multilingual classroom practices as they unfold moment by moment in authentic instructional settings.

Classroom discourse analysis is well suited to exploring pedagogical phenomena embedded in interaction, as it enables fine-grained examination of turn-taking, sequence organization, repair, and meaning negotiation processes. Within this framework, learning is conceptualized as an interactionally accomplished process that emerges through participation in classroom talk (Wang, 2022). Consistent with interactionist and sociocultural traditions in applied linguistics, this design positions code-switching as a situated pedagogical resource that supports instructional work, rather than as an isolated or deficient linguistic behavior (Ataş & Sağın-Şimşek, 2021; Li & Qu, 2024).

Participants

The study was conducted in at the fifth semester students of English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of Cokroaminoto Palopo University. Students share a common first language (Bahasa Indonesia). This class was selected because it reflects a typical multilingual EFL environment in which code-switching is pedagogically relevant and interactionally salient.

Participants included one lecturer and 21 students enrolled in Interpretation class subject. The lecturer held a doctorate degree in English education and had 30 years of teaching experience. Students represented mixed proficiency levels, ranging from lower-intermediate to intermediate, which created a pedagogical environment where language alternation was likely to occur for instructional and interactional purposes

All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and ethical approval and informed consent were obtained prior to data collection. To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for both the teacher and students in all transcripts and reporting.

Data Collection and Instruments

The primary data consisted of audio and video recordings of classroom interaction, collected over four instructional sessions (approximately 90 minutes per session). Video recording was used to capture not only verbal interaction but also relevant non-verbal cues (e.g., gestures, gaze, turn allocation) that supported discourse interpretation.

Additional data sources included:

- Classroom observation field notes, documenting lesson structure, instructional focus, and contextual factors influencing interaction.

- Stimulated recall interviews with the teacher (optional but recommended), conducted after selected lessons to clarify pedagogical intentions behind language choices and code-switching episodes.

All classroom recordings were transcribed verbatim following simplified discourse transcription conventions, with particular attention to language alternation between English and Bahasa Indonesia. Instances of code-switching were marked clearly to facilitate systematic coding and analysis

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a multi-stage discourse-analytic process, integrating structural, interactional, and functional perspectives.

First, transcripts were segmented into interactional turns and instructional episodes (e.g., explanation, task instruction, feedback). Second, all instances of code-switching were identified and coded according to:

1. Type of code-switching (inter-sentential, intra-sentential, tag-switching),
2. Initiator (teacher-initiated or student-initiated),
3. Pedagogical function, using a predefined coding scheme encompassing instructional, classroom management, and affective–interpersonal functions.

Third, the analysis examined the sequential environment of each code-switching instance, focusing on what preceded and followed the switch (e.g., learner uptake, repair resolution, task continuation). This step enabled interpretation of how code-switching mediated learning processes such as comprehension facilitation, engagement, and participation.

Finally, patterns across lessons were synthesized to generate pedagogical implications, linking micro-level discourse practices to broader instructional outcomes. Throughout the analysis, interpretations were grounded in transcript evidence rather than frequency counts alone.

Results

Coding Frequency and Function Distribution

This section presents the findings of the study based on classroom discourse analysis of code-switching practices in an Indonesian EFL classroom. The findings are organized according to the three research questions, integrating quantitative distributions (Tables 1–5) with qualitative transcript evidence (Excerpts 1–4) to provide a comprehensive account of how code-switching operates pedagogically in classroom interaction.

Table 1. Overall Frequency of Code-Switching Instances

Type of Code-Switching	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Inter-sentential	78	48.1
Intra-sentential	61	37.7
Tag-switching	23	14.2
Total	162	100

Table 1 presents the overall distribution of code-switching instances identified across the recorded classroom sessions.

Inter-sentential switching emerged as the most frequently occurring type, indicating that language alternation often occurred at clause or sentence boundaries, particularly during instructional and managerial discourse. This pattern supports Analytic Claim 1 and addresses RQ1, showing systematic rather than random code-switching behavior.

Table 2. Distribution of Code-Switching by Speaker Role

Initiator	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Teacher-initiated	112	69.1
Student-initiated	50	30.9
Total	162	100

This table shows the distribution of code-switching instances according to the initiator (teacher vs. students).

Teacher-initiated code-switching accounted for more than two-thirds of all instances, suggesting that language alternation was predominantly employed as a pedagogical strategy rather than a learner deficit. This finding directly addresses RQ1 and substantiates Analytic Claim 1 regarding asymmetrical distribution across speaker roles.

Table 3 Distribution of Pedagogical Functions of Code-Switching

Pedagogical Function	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Instructional clarification (grammar/vocabulary)	63	38.9
Classroom management	41	25.3
Affective and interpersonal support	36	22.2
Comprehension check / repair	22	13.6
Total	162	100

Table 3 summarizes the pedagogical functions served by code-switching, categorized according to the established coding framework.

Instructional clarification emerged as the dominant function, particularly during grammar explanation and task instruction phases. This distribution directly responds to RQ2 and supports Analytic Claims 3 and 4, highlighting the instructional value of code-switching in EFL classrooms.

Table 4 Pedagogical Functions of Code-Switching by Speaker Role

Function	Teacher (n)	Student (n)	Total
Instructional clarification	58	5	63
Classroom management	41	0	41
Affective/interpersonal	29	7	36
Comprehension check / repair	9	13	22
Total	137*	25*	162

This table cross-tabulates pedagogical functions with speaker roles to reveal interactional patterns.

*Some instances involved overlapping functions but were coded based on the dominant pedagogical role.

Teacher-initiated switching dominated instructional and managerial functions, whereas student-initiated switching occurred more frequently in repair and comprehension-related sequences. This finding addresses RQ1 and RQ2 and empirically supports Analytic Claim 2, which positions student code-switching as a participation-maintaining strategy.

Table 5 Code-Switching and Mediated Learning Processes

Mediated Learning Process	Associated Function(s)	Observed Outcome
Comprehension facilitation	Instructional clarification, repair	Improved learner uptake
Engagement regulation	Classroom management, affective support	Increased attention
Participation expansion	Affective support, repair	Extended learner turns
Interactional continuity	Repair, clarification	Reduced breakdowns

This table links pedagogical functions to mediated learning outcomes observed in classroom interaction.

The table illustrates how code-switching mediated key learning processes, linking discourse-level practices to pedagogical outcomes. This directly addresses RQ3 and supports Analytic Claims 5 and 6, emphasizing that the effectiveness of code-switching lies in its strategic deployment.

Distribution and Patterns of Code-Switching Practices (RQ1)

Analysis of the classroom interaction data identified a total of 162 instances of code-switching across four instructional sessions. As shown in Table 1, inter-sentential code-switching was the most frequent type (48.1%), followed by intra-sentential switching (37.7%) and tag-switching (14.2%). This distribution indicates that language alternation predominantly occurred at sentence boundaries, particularly during instructional and managerial discourse, rather than as spontaneous lexical insertions.

Regarding speaker roles, teacher-initiated code-switching accounted for 69.1% of all instances, whereas student-initiated switching represented 30.9% (Table 2). This asymmetrical distribution suggests that code-switching was largely employed as a pedagogical strategy controlled by the teacher, rather than as a compensatory behavior by learners. This pattern was consistently observed across lesson stages, including explanation, task instruction, and classroom management.

Qualitative evidence further illustrates these patterns. In Excerpt 1, the teacher switches to Bahasa Indonesia during a grammar explanation to restate a rule previously introduced in English. The timing of the switch, immediately following a conceptually dense explanation demonstrates deliberate pedagogical intent. In contrast, Excerpt 2 shows student-initiated code-switching occurring in response to a lexical gap during meaning construction, supporting the view that learners use the L1 to maintain participation rather than to disengage from English use.

Together, these findings address RQ1 by demonstrating that both teachers and students employ code-switching systematically, though with distinct interactional roles and purposes.

Pedagogical Functions of Code-Switching (RQ2)

The analysis revealed that code-switching served multiple pedagogical functions, which were categorized into four dominant functional domains: instructional clarification, classroom management, affective/interpersonal support, and comprehension repair. As summarized in Table 3, instructional clarification was the most prevalent function (38.9%), followed by classroom management (25.3%), affective support (22.2%), and repair-related functions (13.6%).

Instructional code-switching was most commonly observed during grammar explanation, vocabulary clarification, and task instruction. Excerpt 1 exemplifies this function, where the teacher's switch to the L1 facilitated learner understanding of a grammatical rule. The students' immediate verbal and non-verbal uptake indicates that the switch successfully mediated comprehension.

Classroom management emerged as the second most frequent function, as illustrated in Excerpt 3. Here, the teacher switched languages to direct attention and manage transitions efficiently. The rapid behavioral response from students suggests that L1 use was effective in regulating classroom activity and maintaining lesson flow.

Affective and interpersonal functions were evident in moments where learners displayed hesitation or uncertainty. In Excerpt 4, the teacher's switch to the L1 served to reassure a student and reduce anxiety, resulting in renewed participation. This finding highlights the emotional dimension of pedagogical discourse and the role of language choice in sustaining learner confidence.

Student-initiated code-switching was most strongly associated with comprehension repair, as shown in Excerpt 2, where the learner used the L1 to bridge a lexical gap. This pattern indicates that students employ code-switching as an interactional resource to negotiate meaning rather than as a retreat from English use.

These findings comprehensively address RQ2, demonstrating that code-switching fulfils identifiable and functionally distinct pedagogical roles within EFL classroom interaction.

Code-Switching and Mediated Learning Processes (RQ3)

Beyond identifying patterns and functions, the analysis examined how code-switching mediated learning-related processes, including comprehension facilitation, engagement regulation, participation expansion, and interactional continuity. Table 5 summarizes the relationship between pedagogical functions and observed learning processes.

Instructional clarification through code-switching was closely associated with improved learner uptake, as evidenced by immediate responses, correct reformulations, or task continuation following L1 use. Classroom management-

related switching contributed to engagement regulation by minimizing off-task behavior and ensuring smooth transitions between activities.

Affective code-switching played a crucial role in expanding participation opportunities, particularly for learners who were hesitant to speak in English. In several instances, reassurance provided in the L1 enabled learners to re-enter interaction and produce extended English turns.

Importantly, the findings indicate that the pedagogical effectiveness of code-switching was contingent on its timing and proportionality. Strategic, momentary switching supported learning processes, whereas excessive or unfocused L1 use was rare and did not characterize the observed classroom practices.

These results directly address RQ3, showing that code-switching, when used judiciously, contributes positively to effective EFL teaching by mediating cognitive, interactional, and affective dimensions of learning.

By integrating quantitative distributions with fine-grained discourse analysis, this study provides empirical evidence that code-switching operates as a pedagogical resource rather than a pedagogical problem in multilingual EFL classrooms.

Discussion

This study examined code-switching practices in an Indonesian EFL classroom through classroom discourse analysis, with particular attention to their distribution, pedagogical functions, and implications for effective teaching. The findings are discussed in relation to the literature reviewed earlier, addressing the three research questions and situating the study within recent developments in EFL, bilingual education, and classroom discourse research.

Code-Switching as a Systematic Pedagogical Practice

The findings demonstrate that code-switching in the observed EFL classroom was systematic, patterned, and predominantly teacher-initiated, rather than sporadic or deficit-driven. This result strongly confirms earlier classroom-based studies which argue that teachers strategically deploy code-switching to mediate instruction and manage classroom interaction (Ataş & Sağın-Şimşek, 2021; Temesgen, 2022). Consistent with the Literature Review, teacher-initiated inter-sentential switching occurred most frequently during explanation, task instruction, and classroom management, reinforcing the view that language alternation is embedded within pedagogical decision-making.

This pattern also aligns with sociocultural perspectives discussed in Section 2.2, which conceptualize teachers as primary mediators of learning. From this standpoint, teacher-controlled code-switching functions as a mediational tool that structures participation and scaffolds learner understanding (Wang, 2022). Unlike studies that rely on self-reported attitudes toward L1 use (e.g., Orfan, 2023; Smagul, 2024), the present study provides interactional evidence showing how code-switching is enacted in real time, thereby addressing a methodological gap identified

in the literature.

Student-Initiated Code-Switching and Interactional Repair

Student-initiated code-switching was less frequent but highly patterned, occurring primarily during moments of lexical difficulty or meaning negotiation. This finding corroborates interactionist SLA research emphasizing repair and negotiation of meaning as central to language development (Ataş & Sağın-Şimşek, 2021). As demonstrated in the findings, students used the L1 not to disengage from English but to maintain their turn and sustain interaction, which supports earlier claims that bilingual resources can preserve communicative flow in EFL classrooms (Kwihangana, 2021).

Importantly, this study extends prior research by showing how student code-switching is sequentially resolved through teacher reformulation or confirmation, allowing learners to re-enter English discourse. This interactional pattern has been underexplored in survey-based studies and highlights the value of discourse analysis in capturing the pedagogical consequences of learner language choice.

Pedagogical Functions of Code-Switching Revisited

In line with the Literature Review, the findings confirmed that code-switching served three dominant pedagogical functions: instructional clarification, classroom management, and affective–interpersonal support. Instructional clarification emerged as the most frequent function, particularly during grammar explanation and conceptually dense instruction. This result aligns with previous research demonstrating that L1 use can reduce cognitive load and facilitate comprehension in EFL classrooms with mixed proficiency levels (Ataş & Sağın-Şimşek, 2021; Smagul, 2024).

Classroom management-related switching was also prominent, supporting earlier claims that the L1 is often perceived as the most efficient medium for regulating behavior and managing transitions (Orfan, 2023). Notably, affective and interpersonal code-switching played a significant role in encouraging learner participation, echoing recent findings on the emotional and identity-related dimensions of teacher language choice (Hopkyns & Dovchin, 2024; Karimpour et al., 2024).

Together, these findings confirm the functional typologies discussed in the Literature Review while providing empirical, discourse-level evidence of how these functions unfold interactionally.

Code-Switching and Mediated Learning Processes

One of the key contributions of this study lies in linking code-switching practices to mediated learning processes, including comprehension facilitation, engagement regulation, and participation expansion. While prior research has suggested such links conceptually (Wang, 2022; Li & Qu, 2024), empirical classroom

evidence connecting specific discourse moves to observable learning outcomes remains limited.

The present findings demonstrate that strategically timed code-switching often resulted in immediate learner uptake, sustained engagement, or extended participation. This supports translanguaging-oriented research that emphasizes the pedagogical potential of multilingual resources when used purposefully (Li & Qu, 2024; Lin & Leung, 2024). At the same time, the findings caution against simplistic endorsements of L1 use, reinforcing arguments that pedagogical effectiveness depends on timing, proportionality, and instructional alignment, rather than on language choice alone (Smagul, 2024).

Addressing the Research Gap

This study responds directly to the research gaps identified in the Literature Review. First, it moves beyond attitudinal and frequency-based accounts by providing fine-grained classroom discourse analysis of code-switching practices. Second, it empirically demonstrates how code-switching functions pedagogically and mediates learning processes, addressing the lack of evidence linking language alternation to instructional outcomes.

By situating code-switching within actual classroom interaction, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of bilingual pedagogy in EFL contexts and challenges monolingual assumptions that continue to influence language policy and teacher education.

Implications for Theory and Research

Theoretically, the findings support sociocultural and interactionist perspectives that view language learning as socially mediated and interactionally accomplished. Methodologically, the study reinforces recent calls for classroom-based, discourse-analytic research in multilingual education (Liao et al., 2025). Empirically, it highlights the need for future research to examine how code-switching practices vary across proficiency levels, instructional modes, and institutional language policies.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine code-switching practices in an Indonesian EFL classroom through classroom discourse analysis, with a focus on how teachers and students employ code-switching, the pedagogical functions it serves, and its implications for effective EFL teaching. Drawing on naturally occurring classroom interaction, the findings demonstrate that code-switching is neither random nor deficit-oriented, but rather a systematic and pedagogically motivated discourse practice embedded within instructional interaction.

The results show that code-switching was predominantly teacher-initiated and strategically deployed during key pedagogical moments, particularly grammar explanation, task instruction, classroom management, and affective support. Student-initiated code-switching, although less frequent, played an important role in maintaining interactional continuity and facilitating meaning negotiation during moments of lexical or conceptual difficulty. These findings confirm and extend prior research by providing fine-grained interactional evidence of how code-switching functions within real classroom discourse.

Importantly, the study demonstrates that code-switching mediated core learning processes, including comprehension facilitation, engagement regulation, and participation expansion. When used proportionally and in alignment with instructional goals, code-switching supported learners' access to content and sustained their involvement in classroom interaction. Taken together, these findings reinforce the argument that code-switching should be understood as a pedagogical resource rather than a pedagogical problem in multilingual EFL contexts. By situating code-switching within authentic classroom interaction, this study contributes to ongoing debates on language use in EFL teaching and underscores the need for evidence-based, context-sensitive pedagogical practices in multilingual classrooms.

Future research may build on this study by examining code-switching practices across different educational levels, proficiency groups, or institutional language policies. Comparative studies involving multiple classrooms or longitudinal designs could provide deeper insights into how code-switching practices evolve over time and influence language development.

Recommendation

Further research may also integrate mixed-method approaches, combining classroom discourse analysis with learner outcome measures or teacher belief studies, to triangulate findings and strengthen pedagogical recommendations. Such work would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of bilingual practices in EFL education.

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