



## CODE-SWITCHING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: TYPES, REASONS, AND CLASSROOM IMPACT

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Accepted :  
11 May 2026

Published :  
11 May 2026

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### ABSTRACT

Code-switching remains common in English Language Teaching (ELT), particularly in multilingual classrooms where students have limited exposure to English outside school. In Indonesian vocational schools, teachers frequently alternate between English and Indonesian to facilitate communication and comprehension. This study investigated the types of code-switching used in classroom interaction, the reasons for language alternation, and its impact on students' learning. A qualitative descriptive case study design was employed. Data were collected through classroom observations and interviews with one English teacher and students from two vocational classes at SMK YPIP Talang Ubi. The findings revealed three types of code-switching: inter-sentential switching, intra-sentential switching, and tag switching, with intra-sentential switching being the most dominant. The teacher used code-switching to explain difficult material, clarify meaning, manage classroom activities, check comprehension, and create a supportive learning environment. Students reported that code-switching helped them understand lessons more easily, participate more confidently, and reduce anxiety during English learning. These findings suggest that code-switching can function as an effective pedagogical strategy in EFL classrooms when used purposefully and strategically without reducing meaningful exposure to English.

**Keywords:** *code-switching, English language teaching, classroom interaction, teacher talk, EFL classroom*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Language occupies a fundamental position in classroom interaction as it serves as the primary medium through which knowledge is conveyed, negotiated, and interpreted. Within educational environments, language functions not only as a tool for transmitting information but also as a mechanism that shapes social interaction, classroom dynamics, and students' engagement in learning processes (George Yule, 2020; Holmes & Wilson, 2022; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021). In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), this role becomes increasingly

significant because learners are required to comprehend and communicate through a language that is not commonly used in their daily lives.

In multilingual countries such as Indonesia, classroom communication is inevitably influenced by the coexistence of multiple languages. Students frequently alternate among Indonesian, local languages, and English depending on communicative purposes, contextual demands, and their level of linguistic confidence. Such practices reflect the realities of bilingual and multilingual interaction, where speakers employ diverse linguistic resources to

**Vol 9, No 1 (2026): ESTEEM**

facilitate effective communication (Vallejo, 2018). Consequently, language alternation naturally emerges as part of classroom discourse.

One prominent form of language alternation is code-switching, defined as the use of two or more languages within a single interaction. Aviah et al. (2019) categorizes code-switching into three major forms: inter-sentential switching, intra-sentential switching, and tag switching. From a sociolinguistic perspective, code-switching should not be viewed as arbitrary language mixing, but rather as a systematic and meaningful communicative practice shaped by contextual, social, and pedagogical considerations (Abdurrahman, 2021; Arhire, 2023; Astri & Fian, 2020).

Within ELT classrooms, code-switching has been widely debated as both a pedagogical resource and a potential limitation. On one hand, it enables teachers to explain complex vocabulary, grammatical structures, and classroom instructions more effectively, particularly when students encounter difficulties understanding full English input (Askhatova A, 2020; Jin, 2023). On the other hand, excessive reliance on students' first language may reduce opportunities for meaningful exposure to English and hinder the development of fluency and communicative confidence (Alharbi, 2023; Pokrivcakova, 2019). Therefore, the central issue is not merely the occurrence of code-switching, but the pedagogical functions and purposes it serves within classroom interaction.

Previous studies conducted in Indonesian ELT settings indicate that code-switching frequently supports classroom communication and facilitates students' comprehension. Teachers commonly employ code-switching to clarify meaning, minimize learners' anxiety, and encourage participation among students who are reluctant to respond in English (Apriani, 2017; Anggraini, 2021; Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2021; Siregar, 2020). Similar findings have also emerged in vocational school contexts, where students often require greater linguistic support to understand English instruction effectively (Pramesti, 2023; Setiawan, 2021). Nevertheless, research focusing specifically on vocational

classrooms in semi-urban areas remains limited. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the types of code-switching employed during classroom interaction, the teacher's reasons for using code-switching, and its impact on students' learning experiences.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Code-switching is widely recognized as a common feature of bilingual and multilingual interaction. It appears when speakers alternate between languages to express meaning more effectively, respond to context, or manage communication in ways that a single language cannot always achieve on its own. In classroom discourse, this practice often emerges not because speakers are careless, but because they are making deliberate communicative choices that help interaction continue smoothly.

From a pedagogical point of view, code-switching can function as a teaching resource. In bilingual education, the first language is not always treated as interference; under certain conditions, it can support access to new knowledge and help learners connect unfamiliar material with what they already know (Xu & Ou, 2024). In language classrooms, teachers may switch languages when they need to clarify meaning, explain abstract concepts, or help students follow task instructions more confidently (De Wilde et al., 2020).

Research on classroom discourse has shown that code-switching serves several recurring functions. It may be used for clarification, emphasis, comprehension checking, rapport building, or managing classroom procedures (Angelina & Handayani, 2025). Charolina and Zulaeha (2019) further show that teachers' code-switching often combines pedagogical and sociocultural purposes. It does not only help students understand the lesson, but also positions the classroom as a more inclusive space where learners feel linguistically acknowledged.

At the same time, this practice must be used carefully. Some scholars argue that

**Vol 9, No 1 (2026): ESTEEM**

excessive use of the first language can weaken target-language exposure and reduce students' willingness to stay in English during classroom interaction (Pohan & Kusumawardany, 2023). This means that code-switching is most useful when it functions as support, not replacement. The teacher still needs to maintain English as the main target of learning while using Indonesian strategically to prevent misunderstanding and disengagement.

In affective terms, code-switching can also reduce students' tension. Learners who feel anxious in English-only classrooms may become more willing to participate when the teacher occasionally switches to a more familiar language. This view is consistent with the role of comprehensible input and emotional safety in language learning (Krashen, 2019). It also connects to the sociocultural view of learning, where teacher support and scaffolding help students move gradually toward more independent performance (John-Steiner & Mahn, 2020). In this sense, code-switching can be seen as a temporary scaffold that supports understanding, confidence, and participation.

**3. METHODS**

This study used a qualitative descriptive case study design. A qualitative approach was chosen because the research focused on naturally occurring classroom interaction and on the meanings attached to language choice by the participants themselves. This kind of design is appropriate when the researcher aims to describe a phenomenon in depth rather than measure it statistically (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023; Moleong, 2016).

The study was conducted at SMK YPIP Talang Ubi, located on Jalan Cemara No. 02 Talang Ubi, Penukal Abab Lematang Ilir, South Sumatra. The participants involved one English teacher and students from two vocational classes. This setting was selected because the classroom represented a multilingual EFL environment in which English, Indonesian, and local language resources naturally interacted during teaching and learning. The school context was therefore relevant to the purpose of investigating how

code-switching functioned in actual classroom practice.

The main data were collected through classroom observation and interviews. Observation was used to identify how code-switching appeared during English lessons, while interviews were conducted to explore the teacher's reasons for switching languages and students' perceptions of its classroom impact. In qualitative research, observation and interview data are especially valuable because they allow the researcher to see both what participants do and how they interpret their own actions (Patton, 2002).

The classroom interaction was recorded, transcribed, and then examined using Poplack's (1980) typology of inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag switching. After that, the data were reduced, organized, interpreted, and linked to the research focus. The analysis followed the general qualitative steps of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 2019).

To strengthen the trustworthiness of the study, triangulation was applied by comparing findings from different data sources and methods. Observation findings were checked against interview responses so that the interpretation was not based on one source alone. This step is important in qualitative research because credibility grows stronger when the same pattern appears across more than one form of evidence (Noble & Heale, 2019).

**4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION****Results**

The data show that code-switching was a regular part of classroom interaction in the observed English lessons at SMK YPIP Talang Ubi. Across the two classes, three forms of code-switching appeared, namely inter-sentential switching, intra-sentential switching, and tag switching. This finding confirms Poplack's (1980) classification and shows that the teacher and students used more than one switching pattern depending on what they were trying to express.

**Vol 9, No 1 (2026): ESTEEM**

Inter-sentential switching appeared when the speaker completed an utterance in one language and continued in another. For instance, the teacher said, “How are you today? Semangat nggak?” and “Today we’re going to learn Offering and Suggestion, tapi santai aja.” In these cases, the move from English to Indonesian happened across sentence boundaries or after a complete clause. This type of switching helped the teacher maintain English as the lesson language while still making the interaction more immediate and accessible.

Intra-sentential switching appeared more frequently. This form occurred when English and Indonesian were mixed within the same sentence, such as in “*Don’t worry, kita pelan-pelan kok*” “*Use English as much as you can, campur boleh*”, and “*I think boleh Miss, tapi kalau buat belajar*”. These utterances show how classroom talk moved fluidly across languages inside a single structure. This pattern suggests that language alternation in the classroom was not awkward or accidental, but embedded in everyday communication.

Tag switching also appeared, although less frequently. It could be seen in short insertions such as “*ya*”, “*kan*”, or “*okay*” that were attached to utterances in another language. These short tags did not carry the core lesson content, but they helped soften tone, build rapport, and maintain conversational naturalness.

Among the three types, intra-sentential switching was the most dominant. This dominance indicates that mixed utterances within the same sentence felt most natural for both teacher and students during classroom interaction. Rather than separating English and Indonesian into rigid blocks, participants combined them flexibly to keep the lesson moving.

The interview findings also reveal several reasons why the teacher used code-switching. First, it helped explain difficult material, especially when the lesson involved unfamiliar expressions, grammar points, or abstract concepts. Second, it was used to reinforce English expressions by pairing English examples with Indonesian explanations. Third, it supported

classroom management, since instructions were easier to follow when key information was stated in a familiar language. Fourth, it helped create a more relaxed and supportive atmosphere in which students were less afraid to make mistakes.

From the students’ perspective, code-switching had a positive impact on learning. Most students reported that they understood the lesson better when difficult points were explained again in Indonesian. They also felt more confident to ask questions, respond to the teacher, and take part in classroom interaction. In other words, code-switching did not simply function as translation, but as a bridge that made the lesson more accessible and less intimidating.

**Discussion**

The findings indicate that code-switching at SMK YPIP Talang Ubi functioned as a natural and meaningful part of classroom communication. The presence of inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag switching supports Poplack’s (1980) typology and shows that classroom discourse in this EFL setting was multilingual in practice, even though English remained the target language. This result is also in line with the view that bilingual communication is often flexible, patterned, and shaped by communicative need rather than by random mixing (Bullock & Toribio, 2009; Muysken, 2000; MacSwan, 2000).

The dominance of intra-sentential switching suggests that mixed utterances within the same sentence were the most efficient and natural way for the teacher and students to negotiate meaning. This pattern may indicate that participants were not simply moving back and forth between two separate codes, but were drawing on both languages as classroom resources in real time. Similar classroom tendencies have been observed by Cahyani et al. (2018), Jingxia (2010), and Lin (2013), who argue that code-switching often supports lesson flow and makes bilingual classroom discourse more functional.

The teacher’s reasons for using code-switching also reflect clear pedagogical

**Vol 9, No 1 (2026): ESTEEM**

considerations. Switching to Indonesian when explaining difficult points allowed the teacher to prevent misunderstanding and maintain students' attention. This supports earlier arguments that the first language can serve as an instructional aid rather than an obstacle when it is used selectively to clarify concepts and guide learning (Cook, 2001; Ferguson, 2003; Sert, 2005). In this study, code-switching was not used as a replacement for English, but as a tool to make English input more comprehensible.

Another important finding concerns affective support. Students at SMK YPIP Talang Ubi reported that code-switching made them feel more confident and less anxious during English lessons. This is a significant point because emotional comfort often affects how willing learners are to respond, ask questions, and take risks in language learning.

The finding supports Krashen's (1985) view that lower anxiety can support language acquisition, and it also aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) notion of scaffolding, where teacher support helps students move toward stronger independent performance.

However, the findings also imply that balance remains necessary. While code-switching supported comprehension and participation, excessive dependence on Indonesian could reduce students' exposure to English. This concern matches the caution raised by Macaro (2009) and Turnbull and Arnett (2002), who emphasize that teachers should not let first-language support replace meaningful contact with the target language. Therefore, the value of code-switching lies in strategic use. It is most beneficial when it helps students access the lesson while English remains central to classroom learning.

Overall, the findings show that code-switching in this vocational school context was not a sign of weak teaching or weak learning. Instead, it functioned as a practical pedagogical strategy that supported comprehension, classroom interaction, and student confidence. In classrooms where learners still need support to follow English input, selective code-switching appears to help the lesson become more

inclusive, responsive, and effective.

**5. CONCLUSION**

This study found that code-switching was a consistent and meaningful part of English classroom interaction in the observed vocational school. Three types of code-switching appeared in the data, namely inter-sentential switching, intra-sentential switching, and tag switching. Among them, intra-sentential switching was the most dominant, which shows that the teacher and students most often blended English and Indonesian within the same utterance during classroom communication.

The study also found that the teacher used code-switching for clear pedagogical reasons. It was used to explain difficult material, reinforce English expressions, manage classroom activities, check understanding, and create a more supportive atmosphere. From the students' perspective, this practice made the lesson easier to follow, increased confidence, and encouraged participation.

In short, code-switching in this context functioned as a bridge rather than a barrier. It helped students stay involved in English learning without feeling lost or intimidated. Even so, the findings also suggest that balance remains important. Code-switching is most useful when it is used strategically to support comprehension and interaction while English remains visible as the main target of learning.

**6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The writer would like to express sincere gratitude to the participating teacher, the students, and the school community for their support during the study. Appreciation is also extended to the academic supervisors and all parties who contributed to the completion of this research.

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**Vol 9, No 1 (2026): ESTEEM**

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**Vol 9, No 1 (2026): ESTEEM**

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