Employing Code-Switching the English Language Teaching at a Higher Learning Institution

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the employment of code-switching as a pedagogical tool in the English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms at higher learning institution. Code-switching, the practice of alternating between two or more languages within a single discourse, has long been a topic of debate in educational settings. This study seeks to explore the methodology and implications of emlpoying code-switching into ELT classrooms to enhance language learning outcomes and foster a more inclusive learning environment. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. Qualitative methods involve classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with ELT educators. Quantitative data is gathered through pre-intervention and post-intervention language assessments to measure language proficiency improvements. A sample of ELT classrooms at a prominent higher learning institution is selected for this study. The intervention involves controlled and purposeful instances of code-switching, strategically incorporated into lesson plans. Data is analyzed using thematic analysis for qualitative data and statistical analysis for quantitative data. The findings of this study have several pedagogical implications. First, the strategic use of code-switching can serve as a bridge between students' native languages and target language promoting a smoother learning process. It acknowledges students' linguistic diversity and validates their prior language knowledge. Second, code-switching can enhance comprehension and engagement, particularly for complex concepts. It can clarify meanings, reinforce content, and reduce language barriers, thereby improving overall learning outcomes. Third, code-switching encourages a supportive and inclusive classroom environment, where students feel comfortable expressing themselves. This contributes to a positive affective filter, leading to increased motivation and participation. However, the study also accentuates potential challenges. Overuse of code-switching might hinder students' active engagement with the target language. Educators must strike a balance to ensure that code-switching does not replace genuine language practice. Moreover, cultural sensitivities and language preferences must be considered to avoid marginalization or confusion among students. In conclusion, this study sheds light on the pedagogical benefits of employing code-switching in ELT classrooms at a higher learning institution. By strategically employing code-switching, educators can harness its advantages to facilitate language learning, create an inclusive atmosphere, and improve overall teaching effectiveness.

Keywords: Code-switching, functions, ELT classrooms, language choices, teacher's perspective.

INTRODUCTION

Code-switching is a sociolinguistic phenomenon that has garnered substantial attention from scholars in the past two decades. It involves the integration of two or more languages in day-to-day interactions among individuals. Given its prevalence across various scenarios, this study specifically centers on the language education realm, particularly within the context of English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Over time, Malaysia has achieved impressive strides in economic development and establishing trade relationships with neighbouring nations and global partners. Malaysia has garnered considerable interest from international investors who view the nation as a fertile ground for business opportunities. This has led to a surge in foreign enterprises, predominantly those reliant on English for communication, choosing to invest in the country. Consequently, there has been a substantial upswing in the requirement for proficient professionals who possess a strong command of the English language within Malaysia's job market. These circumstances elucidate the heightened emphasis that Malaysians place on English learning in contemporary times.

In contemporary times, English has gained immense popularity in Malaysia, manifesting its prevalence across various corners of the nation, including street conversations, market interactions, teenagers' informal discussions, as well as within English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms. As a consequence, the phenomenon of code-switching, particularly the selection between Malay and English for communication based on contextual factors, has emerged in these settings. This

phenomenon is particularly noticeable in ELT classrooms in Malaysia, where the interplay between English and Malay languages is evident in the dialogues of both educators and students. Despite this conspicuous occurrence, limited scholarly investigations have been undertaken to comprehensively examine this occurrence and its implications on English education and instruction in Malaysia.

Hence, the primary objective of this study is to furnish valuable insights, particularly for educators at Higher Learning Institutions (HLI) in Malaysia, pertaining to the roles that code-switching assumes within ELT and the judicious selection of language within the Malaysian classroom milieu. These multifaceted topics carry significant importance and warrant careful consideration.

Consequently, this study endeavours to address the following two questions:

1. What are the distinct functions served by code-switching within the realm of English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms?

2. Under what circumstances is code-switching employed in the context of English Language Teaching (ELT) for Malaysian students?

A proficient resolution of these inquiries holds the potential to accentuate the advantageous outcomes associated with the integration of the native language (L1) in the process of English learning. Additionally, it illuminates the effective utilization of the mother tongue by language educators, particularly those in Malaysia, during their pedagogical endeavours.

This study consists of six sections. Section 1 briefly introduces the current English-using situation in Malaysia and the existence of code-switching in Malaysian ELT classrooms. Section 2 discusses code-switching in general and presents relevant information about some studies conducted on code-switching functions in ELT classrooms and the situations in which code-switching appears in the learning and teaching of English. Section 3 gives detailed information about participants and methods of data collection. Section 4 presents the data analysis and interpretation. Section 5 discusses findings grounded in the data presented in the previous chapter. Section 6, also the last chapter, explicitly answers the research questions, gives some suggestions for language practitioners, and makes future research recommendations.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW ON CODE-SWITCHING
A. Code-switching and some related terms
I. Code and code choice

A code is essentially a means of communication established by members of a specific community for the purpose of interacting with one another. It encompasses various systems, including languages or language variations that facilitate real-life communication between two or more individuals (Wardhaugh, 2002). The term "code" is favoured by sociolinguists due to its impartial nature and its ability to avoid evoking emotional responses from individuals.

Since code can encompass various forms of communication adopted by people, there typically exists a multitude of codes accessible to each individual in the real world. This holds true for everyone, regardless of whether they belong to a monolingual or bi/multilingual community, and requires them to select the most suitable code for interacting with others. For instance, those who are monolingual can opt for either a formal or informal version of their language to convey distinct social nuances to their conversation partners. In communities where

individuals speak more than one language, the selection process may involve choosing from a range of languages, and the act of transitioning between codes or blending them can also manifest within social contexts. As a result, the field of sociolinguistics has introduced the term "code choice" to elucidate the decision-making involved in utilizing a specific code within a given situation, drawing from an individual's linguistic repertoire.

II. Code-switching and Code-mixing

As aforementioned, every individual possesses distinct preferences for communication codes when engaging with others. In communities with multiple languages, these preferences exhibit even greater diversity due to individuals having exposure to a broader array of languages. Consequently, they possess a range of options for utilizing their linguistic capabilities. Various terminologies have been employed to depict these preferences, encompassing terms like code-switching, code-mixing, code-alternation, language-mixing, and code-shifting. While differing scholarly viewpoints exist concerning the application of these terminologies, the focus in this analysis will be exclusively directed towards exploring the usage of the terms code-switching (CS) and code-mixing (CM).

According to Bokamba (1988), code-switching serves as an overarching term encompassing both code-switching and code-mixing. When individuals possess multiple linguistic codes, they have the option to choose a specific code for communication. Additionally, they can opt to transition between codes within a brief statement or even a portion of a sentence. This transition results in the formation of a novel code referred to as code-switching, as described by Wardhaugh (2002).

However, based on the perspectives of those who draw a line between CS and CM, code-switching involves the incorporation or blending of words, phrases, and sentences from two distinct language codes within the same spoken discourse and even crossing sentence divisions (Bokamba, 1988, as cited in Kachru (1978, 1982) and Sridhar (1980)). On the other hand, code-mixing entails the integration or combination of different linguistic components such as affixes, words, phrases, and clauses from two separate grammatical systems or subsystems within a single sentence and the same speech context (Bokamba, 1988). In simpler terms, CS is the phenomenon that arises when the two codes are employed during a single conversation or between sentences, while CM exclusively occurs within a single sentence (particularly within clauses and sentence boundaries). Unlike CS, CM involves grammatical considerations and is regulated by two constraints: the constraint related to free morphemes and the constraint related to equivalence (Jacobson, 1997, as cited in R. Jacobson).

Sociolinguists explain that two common forms of code-switching exist: intra-sentential CS, which involves changing code within a sentence, and inter-sentential CS, which involves changing code at sentence boundaries. It is evident that inter-sentential CS represents code-switching in a broad sense, while intra-sentential CS bears resemblance to the concept of code-mixing. However, an alternative classification of code-switching is presented by Blom and Gumperz (1972). They propose two categories: situational CS and metaphorical CS. Situational CS pertains to code changes based on context, whereas metaphorical CS involves code changes intended to convey social status, power dynamics, relational distance, or specific emotions towards someone.

B. Code-switching in English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms

I. The functions of code-switching in ELT classrooms

Code-switching is a frequently observed occurrence that takes place daily in the realm of teaching foreign languages. Within this particular scenario, students have the option of selecting between two codes for the purpose of alternating: their native language and the target language they are in the process of learning. Prior to delving into the functions of code-switching in classrooms focused on English Language Teaching (ELT), it would be prudent to briefly examine the utilization of code-switching within a context where bilingualism or multilingualism is prevalent – an environment that mirrors its real-world application.

In his 2005 article titled "The functions of code-switching in ELT classrooms," Oclay discusses two key purposes behind the use of code-switching by bilingual individuals. Firstly, code-switching serves the function of self-expression, where speakers engaging in implied code-switching manipulate, influence, or define situations according to their preferences. This allows them to convey subtle meanings and personal intentions, as noted by Oclay (2005) and cited by Trudgill (2000). In essence, individuals from bilingual or multilingual backgrounds utilize code-switching as a means to convey specific intended meanings during communication with others. The second function of code-switching is to foster group relationships and solidarity among members within bilingual communities, as highlighted by Oclay (2005). In simpler terms, individuals in such societies often switch between languages as a way to indicate their ethnic identity and establish a sense of unity with the person they are addressing, as pointed out by Holmes (1992).

Once the comprehension of code-switching's roles within its familiar context is attained, the exploration of its application within English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms becomes pertinent, particularly when viewed through the lens of educators. It is important to acknowledge that a language classroom functions as a social entity as well. Consequently, there are likely to be certain shared aspects in the functions between these two contexts. Additionally, it is worth noting that language educators might not always be conscious of their oscillation between languages while instructing. To put it differently, this behaviour is occasionally unconscious and lacks a deliberate purpose. Within this analysis, the central focus will be on three primary functions that can enhance students' learning experiences. These functions encompass topic switching, affective expression, and the repetitive element, as outlined by Oclay (2005), as cited in the work of Mattson and Burenhult (1999).

Topic shift involves educators adjusting their language based on specific situations. For instance, when introducing new vocabulary, educators might switch to their students' native language to explain a particular word during the teaching process. This utilization of the students' native language aids in the clear comprehension of complex words. As a result, incorporating code-switching positively impacts the instruction of the English language.

Speaking about affective functions, code-switching can serve as a method for the educator to convey emotions and sentiments to students. Educators can establish a comfortable learning environment for learners by incorporating elements like sharing jokes, singing songs, or occasionally conversing with them in their mother tongue, thereby nurturing strong rapport.

Through this approach, educators can gain deeper insights into their students and acquire effective strategies to support their academic progress.

The final role of code-switching in the classroom context is the repetitive function. In this scenario, the educator initially presents instructions in English and subsequently employs the native language to elucidate the meanings. This function proves beneficial, particularly for students who might be struggling. Nonetheless, an excessive use of this repetition within the classroom might lead students to inadvertently disregard the English instructions, as the translation option consistently remains available to them.

II. The existence of code-switching in different contexts of ESL classrooms

Due to the presence of both the learners' native language and the target language in the English Language Teaching (ELT) classroom is a crucial occurrence, it is imperative to analyze the instances and aspects in which code-switching might take place. Based on Anthony J. Liddicoat's work in 2007, this study will take into consideration four dimensions: learning focus, modes of communication, degree of creativity, and participants.

Learning focus pertains to the educational objectives that instructors aim for in students' language learning. In instances where the goal is to enhance students' communicative skills, it is advisable to restrict code-switching. This limitation enables students to naturally practice and acquire the language. Conversely, when the emphasis is on grammar or new vocabulary, educators can employ code-switching to enrich students' comprehension and render the lesson more conducive to code-switching. Additionally, students can be permitted to utilize their native language in learning, particularly when grappling with intricate scenarios where expressing themselves in the target language might be challenging.

Modes of communication necessitate the utilization of writing, reading, speaking, and listening abilities. The utilization of the target language to the fullest extent is recommended, as the processes of reading and writing offer students an occasion to enhance their comprehensive skills. Nevertheless, instances where texts are excessively intricate, demanding students to grasp them thoroughly and contemplate the context deeply, might warrant the use of the native language. This applies to both educators and students, allowing them to articulate their concepts and analyses effectively. Similar circumstances arise in the domain of speaking and listening, particularly when engaging with intricate subjects.

The third aspect pertains to the level of inventiveness. Here, the potential for code-switching is proposed as an option, rather than a necessary technique for students in this sphere. Students can exercise their creativity to formulate questions and convey their notions using uncomplicated language, even in the face of intricate matters. Hence, resorting to their native language is unnecessary within these contexts.

The fourth dimension refers to the participants themselves. It is crucial for language educators to have a clear understanding of their students when it comes to teaching. Regardless of their educational level, students might find it necessary to utilize their native language to effectively engage in the learning process. Additionally, educators also find it necessary to employ the native language to elucidate novel concepts or to provide guidance during students' discussions on intricate topics. Consequently, the practice of educators switching between languages, known as code-switching, becomes relevant in such

scenarios. This facilitates the explanation of challenging ideas that students might struggle to grasp in the target language, thereby motivating them in their academic pursuits.

In the context of Malaysian classrooms, a study has been conducted regarding the attitudes of Malaysian university educators toward using Malay in English Language Teaching (ELT). This study emphasizes that the deliberate code-switching between these two languages occurs in specific situations and holds great value in the realm of teaching and learning English. This is particularly evident in explaining grammatical elements, clarifying complex terms and abstract concepts, assessing comprehension, and providing feedback to students.

METHODOLOGY

This section introduces the investigative approaches utilized in this study. As such, it covers the primary aspects which include participants, surveys, interviews, and the procedures for collecting data.

A. Participants

A group of ten Malaysian English educators (comprising seven females and three males) from a single Higher Learning Institution have been extended an invitation to partake in this study endeavour. Among the ten educators chosen, five hold Master's degrees in TESOL and Applied Linguistics, and they are engaged in teaching both English-major and non-major students at Universiti Sains Malaysia. Conversely, the remaining five educators possess bachelor's degrees. Their ages fall within the range of 28 to 33 years, while their teaching experience spans from 2 to 6 years. Upon the acceptance of these ten educators as respondents for the designated questionnaires in this study, only five educators who possess additional qualifications in TESOL and Applied Linguistics are being invited to participate in the interview phase.

B. Questionnaire

The purpose of the questionnaire is to gather responses from the aforementioned educators regarding their employment of code-switching in teaching. Its objective is to investigate both the presence and purpose of code-switching in classrooms focusing on English Language Teaching (ELT). Comprising two sections, the questionnaire initially delves into participants' personal backgrounds, while the second segment delves into their viewpoints concerning code-switching, as well as its application within ELT classrooms.

C. Interview

An English-language short interview was carried out individually with each of the five educators. The duration of each interview ranged from 10 to 15 minutes, during which a set of specific questions were posed:

1. Is it advisable for Malaysian educators to incorporate Malay in English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms? Could you elaborate on the reasons for advocating this approach or otherwise?
2. Is the decision to switch languages a deliberate choice made by educators, or does it occur spontaneously?
3. Within the context of English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms, what objectives are achieved by employing code-switching as a teaching technique?
4. Could you identify the circumstances in which Malaysian educators are inclined to shift between languages during their instructional sessions?

5. What underlying factors compel educators to employ language-switching in the aforementioned scenarios?

In addition to the core inquiries, the interview format also encompassed examples and supplementary queries. These prompts were thoughtfully incorporated into the interview to stimulate comprehensive and detailed responses from the participants.

D. Procedures

The data collection procedures for this study are outlined in the two subsequent steps:

Initially, ten sets of questionnaires are disseminated to the educators employed at the aforementioned chosen university. Subsequently, all ten questionnaires are collected from the educators and returned to the researcher.

Upon questionnaire completion, five educators who possess additional qualifications in TESOL and Applied Linguistics are chosen for individual interviews. Permission is granted by each teacher for the conduction of these five separate interviews. Throughout these interviews, participants are allowed to refer to written notes.

Following data acquisition, the ensuing section focuses on the comprehensive analysis of the collected data.

DATA ANALYSIS

This segment delves into the data derived from surveys and interviews to scrutinize the purposes of code-switching and detect its occurrence within English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms in Malaysia.

Upon initial review, the entire pool of participants, totaling 100%, expressed the belief that code-switching constitutes a favorable phenomenon within the realm of English language instruction in classrooms, capable of proving highly advantageous in specific scenarios. Every participant had encountered instances of code-switching in their teaching experiences, with the majority regarding it as a fundamental strategy within their teaching approaches. It is also observed that the educators' use of code-switching is not always performed intentionally (100%). This finding has confirmed the point made in the literature review that educators sometimes do not realize the existence of code-switching in their language using. It can simply be regarded as a natural behaviour of language educators without serving any functions.

Concerning the instances of code-switching occurrence within English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms in Malaysia, the predominant scenarios include "ensuring comprehension" (100%), "engaging in student conversations" (100%), "clarifying novel grammatical elements" (80%), and "providing guidance for activities/task directives" (80%). Additionally, the act of "elaborating on unfamiliar vocabulary" (60%) is prevalent among Malaysian educators aiming to allocate more instructional time for extensive practice in alternative skills.

Regarding the rationales behind incorporating code-switching in language instruction, the results suggest that the predominant factors selected by participants were: ensuring complete comprehension for students (100%); conveying emotions and cultivating positive student relationships (100%); and facilitating enhanced lesson comprehension for students (80%). These motivations align notably with the functions of code-switching identified in prior literature reviews focusing on English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms.

It is important to observe that the information derived from five

interviews serves as additional support for the findings obtained from the questionnaires. The upcoming section, namely the Discussion, will delve into further elaboration of the insights gained from these interviews.

DISCUSSION

A. Functions of code-switching in ELT classrooms

The data presentation demonstrates that code-switching among Malaysian educators serves multiple purposes, such as elucidating vocabulary and grammar, verifying comprehension, and engaging in informal communication with students within classrooms. In reality, educators frequently shift languages when elucidating or confirming the significance of unfamiliar words, fresh grammar constructs, and instructions. This phenomenon underscores that, particularly when clarifying intricate concepts, educators commonly resort to Malay to guarantee their students' comprehension of the subject matter. Additionally, the perspectives of the five educators indicate that employing Malay can be viewed as a productive strategy for simplifying lessons to cater to the specific aptitude of each class level.

In casual conversations or informal discussions, it becomes evident that Malay is the preferred language for communication among educators and students in Malaysia. To elucidate this phenomenon, students often find greater amusement in a joke or amusing anecdote when presented in Malay rather than English. Through the alteration of language, educators can establish a learning environment within the classroom that is more relaxed and devoid of unnecessary stress. Additionally, this linguistic shift offers educators an opportunity to convey their emotions through enjoyable activities, thereby fostering stronger relationships with their students. This utilization of code-switching serves to enhance students' learning experiences and cultivate a heightened interest in their academic pursuits.

B. The existence of code-switching in ELT classrooms

The presentation of the data clearly indicates that code-switching has a definite role within English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms. Additionally, instances where the native language is frequently employed encompass situations such as "checking comprehension," "engaging in conversation with students," "clarifying new grammar concepts," "explaining activities or tasks," and "defining unfamiliar words." This outcome can be rationalized as follows: excluding conversations with students, educators' incorporation of the native language in other activities is aimed at temporarily removing communication barriers and directing students' focus towards the targeted knowledge. This approach ensures students' comprehension of the subject matter. Regarding conversations with students, educators' decision to use the native language can be attributed to their desire to foster a close rapport with the learners. Moreover, individuals naturally tend to employ their mother tongue when conversing with those who share the same language. On the whole, when employed thoughtfully in alignment with the context of each specific class, code-switching could be recognized as an effective tool that educators can readily employ within ELT classrooms.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Over the past few years, English has gained extensive traction within classrooms across Higher Learning Institutions (HIEs) in Malaysia. However, the utilization of Malay for instructing English remains prevalent, contributing to the limited communicative proficiency of Malaysian students in the language. This situation persists due to a lack of awareness among Malaysian educators regarding the significance of each language within English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms. The ongoing debate revolves around determining the appropriate language to use in various scenarios. In light of these challenges, this study aspires to address these issues and offer a modest contribution to enhancing the quality of English Language Teaching in Malaysia.

In summary, the primary aim of this study is to address the subsequent pair of research inquiries:

1. What is the purpose behind the utilization of code-switching within the context of English language teaching (ELT) classes?

2. Under what circumstances does the practice of code-switching manifest in the instruction of English to Malaysian students?

The outcomes derived from this investigation not only confirm the significant role of the native language (L1) in instructing a second language (L2), but also underscore the deliberate application of code-switching within ELT classrooms. In other words, the act of educators shifting between languages "ought to stem from an intentional choice rather than a spontaneous utterance during teaching" (Irujo, 2004).

In relation to the purposes of code-switching within English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms as discussed in the initial question, the results indicated that code-switching functions as a highly effective instrument for transmitting essential lesson information to students, guaranteeing their comprehension, and fostering positive teacher-student relationships and unity. Additionally, when code-switching is employed suitably, it has the potential to establish a conducive learning atmosphere and can be employed as a valuable tactic for upholding seamless classroom interaction and communication.

Concerning the second research question, the data uncovered that the utilization of code-switching could manifest in all aspects of language instruction, given that it yields favourable outcomes in education, specifically in enhancing students' comprehension. Overall, the presence of code-switching within English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms is inevitable and should be embraced as a constructive and imperative occurrence in the realm of language instruction and acquisition. As a result, contingent on the students' proficiency levels and the specific class context, the deliberate incorporation of code-switching should be prioritized over its unconscious use. It should constitute an integral component of instructional techniques aimed at effectively conveying indispensable lesson information to students, thus enabling them to adeptly accomplish their learning objectives.

In order to comprehensively understand the role of code-switching in English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms among Malaysian students, it is advised that future research endeavours encompass additional experimental investigations into both the favourable and adverse consequences of code-switching. These studies would serve to assess the genuine impact of code-switching on ELT within the Malaysian context. Moreover, a valuable avenue of inquiry would involve examining code-switching as a potentially optimal strategy for language education. Additionally, exploring methods to effectively manage and employ code-switching by educators and learners across diverse ELT classroom scenarios would contribute significantly to this line of research.

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