



Students' Perspectives on Lecturers' Code-Switching in Efl Classes and its Impact on Students' Speaking Skills

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate students' perceptions of lecturers' code-switching practices in EFL classrooms and their impact on students' speaking skills. Specifically, the study focuses on how code-switching supports speaking development, influences students' confidence, and affects their attention span during the learning process. This research employed a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews as the main data collection technique. The participants were fifth-semester students of the English Education Department at Al-Qolam University. The interview data were collected in both Indonesian and English to allow participants to express their views naturally. The data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and key themes related to code-switching and speaking skills. The findings reveal that most students perceive code-switching as a beneficial pedagogical strategy. Code-switching helps students understand learning materials more clearly, increases confidence to speak English, and creates a more supportive classroom atmosphere. Although code-switching does not directly improve speaking fluency, it indirectly supports speaking development by enhancing comprehension and reducing anxiety. However, the findings also indicate that excessive use of code-switching may lead to students' dependency on translation, potentially limiting their exposure to English. Additionally, code-switching was found to help maintain students' attention span, particularly when dealing with complex materials or task instructions. Based on these findings, this study recommends that lecturers use code-switching strategically and proportionally in EFL classrooms. Code-switching should function as pedagogical support rather than a substitute for English instruction, especially in speaking-focused courses. Future research is suggested to explore lecturers' perspectives and classroom observations to gain a more comprehensive understanding of code-switching practices in EFL contexts..

Keywords: Code-switching, EFL classroom, Speaking skills, Students' perceptions, attention span

Journal Homepage

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INTRODUCTION

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts such as Indonesia, English is primarily positioned as an academic subject rather than a language used for daily communication. Consequently, many university students experience considerable difficulties in developing productive language skills, particularly speaking. Speaking is widely regarded as one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners because it requires not only grammatical and lexical knowledge but also confidence, fluency, and the ability to process language spontaneously in real time. Limited exposure to English, insufficient vocabulary mastery, and fear of making mistakes often hinder students' willingness to speak

during classroom interaction.

To address these challenges, lecturers employ various instructional strategies to facilitate classroom communication and ensure effective learning. One commonly observed strategy in multilingual EFL classrooms is code-switching, which refers to the alternation between two or more languages within a single interaction. In Indonesian EFL settings, code-switching typically involves the use of English alongside Indonesian to clarify meaning, explain complex concepts, and manage classroom interaction. Rather than being viewed merely as linguistic interference, code-switching has increasingly been recognized as a pedagogical resource in bilingual and multilingual learning environments.

Within this context, a number of previous studies have examined the role and functions of code-switching in EFL classrooms. One of the earlier influential studies on code-switching in Indonesian EFL classrooms was conducted by Waris (2012), who examined the functions of teachers' code-switching during classroom interaction. The study revealed that teachers frequently switched languages to explain difficult materials, emphasize key points, and maintain classroom control. Waris argued that code-switching serves practical instructional purposes and reflects teachers' sensitivity to students' linguistic needs rather than a lack of English proficiency.

Focusing on lecturers' perspectives, Ansar (2017) investigated the reasons for code-switching in tertiary-level EFL classrooms. The findings indicated that lecturers consciously use code-switching to adjust their teaching to students' proficiency levels and to ensure comprehension of lesson content. According to Ansar, code-switching helps bridge the gap between instructional goals and students' actual language abilities. However, this study mainly explored lecturers' intentions and did not specifically address students' learning experiences or speaking development.

From the learners' perspective, Nurhamidah (2018) explored students' attitudes toward teachers' use of the first language in English classrooms. The study reported that students generally responded positively to limited use of the first language because it helped them understand explanations and reduced learning anxiety. Nevertheless, the study also cautioned that excessive use of the first language might reduce students' exposure to English. While offering valuable insights into students' perceptions, the study did not focus on the impact of code-switching on speaking skills in higher education contexts.

Similarly, Puspawati (2018) examined code-switching practices in Indonesian EFL classrooms and found that code-switching supported classroom interaction and encouraged student participation. The study highlighted that code-switching enabled students to remain engaged in discussions when they lacked sufficient vocabulary in English. However, the emphasis of this study was placed on interactional patterns rather than on specific language skills such as speaking proficiency.

More recent research in Southeast Asian contexts has continued to emphasize the pedagogical value of code-switching. Kenan Lee (2024) reported that strategic use of code-switching could lower students' affective barriers and increase their willingness to participate in speaking activities. The study suggested that when lecturers employ code-switching selectively, students feel less pressured and more confident to speak. Despite these findings, limited attention has been given to how students perceive the balance between beneficial and excessive code-switching in speaking-focused courses.

In addition to code-switching practices, speaking skill development remains a central concern in EFL learning. Speaking reflects learners' ability to use English for meaningful communication, particularly in academic contexts. In settings where students have limited opportunities to practice English outside the classroom, instructional strategies that reduce anxiety and enhance comprehension become particularly important. Previous studies

suggest that code-switching, when used appropriately, can support speaking development by helping students understand lesson content, organize ideas, and build confidence before engaging in oral communication.

These issues can also be understood through the perspective of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), which emphasizes communicative effectiveness rather than native-like accuracy. From an ELF viewpoint, multilingual practices such as code-switching are seen as natural and functional resources that facilitate communication in linguistically diverse contexts. This perspective supports the view that strategic use of the first language can enhance learning without undermining the role of English as the target language.

Despite the growing body of research on code-switching in EFL classrooms, several gaps remain. Many previous studies have focused either on lecturers' perspectives or on general classroom interaction, while fewer studies have examined students' perceptions of how code-switching affects their speaking skills. Moreover, research that simultaneously explores speaking development and students' attention span is still limited, particularly in Islamic or pesantren-based higher education institutions.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to explore students' perceptions of lecturers' code-switching in EFL classrooms and its impact on students' speaking skills and attention span. The qualitative approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of students' experiences and perspectives regarding code-switching practices in speaking classes. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing the participants to express their views freely while still addressing the research objectives.

The participants of this study consisted of five fifth-semester students from the English Education Department. The participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their relevance to the research objectives. All participants had completed speaking courses, were actively involved in EFL classroom activities, and had direct experience with lecturers' code-switching during the learning process. In addition, the participants represented different levels of speaking ability, ranging from low to high, in order to capture diverse perspectives and ensure rich qualitative data.

The interview data were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis following the stages proposed by Braun and Clarke. First, the researcher familiarized herself with the data by reading the interview transcripts repeatedly. Second, initial codes were generated by identifying meaningful words, phrases, and statements related to students' perceptions, speaking skills, and attention span. Third, similar codes were grouped into broader themes that reflected patterns across the data. Finally, the identified themes were reviewed and interpreted to answer the research questions concerning students' perceptions of lecturers' code-switching, its indirect impact on students' speaking skills, and its influence on students' attention span.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study based on semi-structured interviews with fifth-semester students of the English Education Department at Al-Qolam University. The findings highlight students' perceptions of lecturers' code-switching practices in EFL classrooms, particularly in relation to speaking skills, speaking development, and students' attention span during learning activities. To enhance the credibility of the findings, selected excerpts from students' responses are included to represent common perspectives.

Benefits of Code-Switching for Students' Speaking Skills

The findings indicate that most students perceive code-switching as beneficial in supporting their speaking skills. Students reported that lecturers' use of Indonesian helps them understand lesson content more clearly, especially when explanations delivered fully in English become difficult to follow. Clear comprehension was viewed as an essential prerequisite for students before engaging in speaking activities. One student explained that code-switching helps them immediately understand the intended meaning when they feel confused: "Sometimes when I don't really understand the explanation, code-switching helps me realize what the lecturer actually means."

This improved understanding encourages students to feel more prepared and confident to participate in speaking activities. Students also emphasized that the use of Indonesian is acceptable as long as it is not excessive. Limited code-switching was perceived as supportive rather than disruptive, as students still expected sufficient exposure to English during the lesson.

In addition, students perceived that code-switching creates a more relaxed classroom atmosphere. Reduced anxiety and fear of making mistakes encouraged students to speak more actively during discussions and speaking practices. Furthermore, code-switching was also reported to support vocabulary learning. When lecturers explain new vocabulary through brief code-switching, students find it easier to remember and later use the words in speaking activities.

Impact of Code-Switching on Speaking Development

Regarding its impact on speaking development, students acknowledged both positive and negative effects of code-switching. On the positive side, students believed that code-switching indirectly supports speaking development by increasing confidence and readiness to speak. One participant stated that understanding the material first makes them more confident to speak English: "It doesn't directly make me fluent, but when I understand the material, I feel more confident to speak."

However, students also expressed concern that excessive code-switching may lead to dependency on translation. Some students reported that frequent use of Indonesian could reduce their effort to understand English independently. This suggests that the effectiveness of code-switching depends largely on how strategically it is applied. Overall, students agreed that balanced use of code-switching functions as linguistic support rather than a replacement for English use in speaking-oriented classrooms.

Students' Attention Span during Code-Switching-Based Instruction

The findings also show that code-switching influences students' attention span during learning. Most students reported that code-switching does not distract them; instead, it helps them maintain focus, particularly during complex explanations. When difficult content is clarified through limited code-switching, students are less likely to lose concentration.

Students also identified specific situations in which code-switching is most effective, such as explaining difficult materials, giving task instructions, and introducing unfamiliar terms. These practices help students remain engaged and attentive throughout the lesson.

Students Who Benefit Most from Code-Switching

Finally, the findings reveal that students with intermediate to lower levels of English proficiency benefit the most from lecturers' code-switching practices. These students often struggle to follow lessons conducted entirely in English. Code-switching helps them understand key points and participate in speaking activities without feeling left behind.

Overall, the results demonstrate that strategic use of code-switching supports students' speaking skills, enhances confidence, maintains attention, and promotes inclusive participation in

EFL classrooms. These findings provide a foundation for further discussion in relation to existing theories and previous studies.

DISCUSSION

This section discusses the results of the study by interpreting students' perspectives on lecturers' code-switching practices in relation to existing theories and previous studies. Rather than restating the results, this discussion focuses on explaining why and how code-switching influences students' speaking skills, confidence, attention span, and overall classroom participation in the EFL context.

Code-Switching as Comprehension-Based Support for Speaking

One of the most prominent findings of this study is that students perceive lecturers' code-switching as a form of instructional support that facilitates comprehension, which in turn influences their willingness to speak English. The interview data indicate that students often experience difficulty understanding explanations delivered entirely in English, particularly when complex materials or important points are discussed. In such situations, brief code-switching helps students grasp the intended meaning more quickly and clearly.

This finding supports the view that comprehension is a prerequisite for speaking development. When students understand the content, they feel more prepared to express their ideas orally. This aligns with Waris's (2012) argument that code-switching serves a clarifying function in EFL classrooms and reflects teachers' responsiveness to students' linguistic needs. Rather than replacing English instruction, code-switching in this context functions as scaffolding that supports students before they engage in speaking activities.

Importantly, students in this study did not perceive code-switching as directly improving speaking fluency. Instead, they emphasized its indirect role in creating the conditions necessary for speaking, such as understanding the material and reducing confusion. This finding reinforces the idea that speaking development is influenced not only by linguistic input but also by cognitive readiness and clarity of instruction.

The Role of Code-Switching in Reducing Speaking Anxiety and Building Confidence

Another significant aspect highlighted in the findings is the role of code-switching in reducing students' anxiety and increasing their confidence to speak English. Many participants reported that fear of making mistakes often prevents them from participating actively in speaking activities. Lecturers' use of limited code-switching creates a more relaxed and supportive classroom atmosphere, which encourages students to take risks in speaking.

This finding is consistent with previous studies that emphasize the affective dimension of language learning. Nurhamidah (2018) and Zuraida (2020) argue that anxiety and lack of confidence are major barriers to speaking in EFL contexts. By allowing strategic use of the first language, lecturers can lower students' affective filter and foster a psychologically safe environment for oral communication.

From this perspective, code-switching can be understood as affective scaffolding. It does not eliminate the need for English exposure, but it helps students manage emotional barriers that hinder speaking performance. This interpretation supports Ansar's (2017) view that code-switching is a conscious pedagogical choice rather than a sign of instructional weakness.

Balanced Use of Code-Switching and the Risk of Dependency

While students generally viewed code-switching positively, the findings also reveal their awareness of its potential drawbacks. Several participants expressed concern that excessive use of Indonesian may lead to dependency on translation and reduce students' effort to process English independently. This suggests that students recognize the importance of English exposure for improving speaking skills and do not expect lecturers to rely heavily on code-switching.

This finding supports theoretical cautions regarding overuse of the first language in EFL classrooms. Zulfikar (2019) and Zuraida (2020) emphasize that while code-switching can support learning, excessive reliance on it may limit opportunities for meaningful English use. The students' perspectives in this study reflect a preference for balance, where code-switching is used only when necessary and English remains the dominant medium of instruction.

Therefore, the effectiveness of code-switching appears to depend largely on its proportional and strategic use. When applied selectively, code-switching functions as temporary support; when overused, it risks becoming a substitute for English exposure. This nuanced perception highlights students' critical awareness of their own learning needs.

Code-Switching, Attention Span, and Classroom Engagement

The findings also indicate that code-switching contributes to maintaining students' attention span during learning activities. Students reported that code-switching helps them stay focused, particularly during difficult explanations or when lecturers provide task instructions. Rather than distracting students, brief clarification in Indonesian prevents confusion that might otherwise lead to disengagement.

This finding suggests that attention span in EFL classrooms is closely related to comprehension. When students struggle to understand key points, they are more likely to lose focus. Code-switching helps prevent this by ensuring that essential information is understood. This supports Puspawati's (2018) claim that code-switching facilitates classroom interaction and sustains student engagement.

However, students emphasized that code-switching should be used at specific moments, such as explaining complex materials, introducing new vocabulary, or clarifying assignments. This indicates that students value purposeful language choices that enhance learning efficiency rather than continuous language alternation

Students Who Benefit Most from Lecturers' Code-Switching

The findings further reveal that students with intermediate to lower levels of English proficiency benefit the most from lecturers' code-switching practices. These students often face greater difficulty following lessons conducted entirely in English and are more vulnerable to anxiety and disengagement. Code-switching helps them keep pace with the lesson and participate more confidently in speaking activities.

This result aligns with Syaifullah's (2024) argument that code-switching is particularly helpful for learners who are still developing foundational language skills. At the same time, it suggests that lecturers should gradually reduce code-switching as students' proficiency and confidence increase, allowing learners to become more independent speakers.

Theoretical Implications within an ELF Perspective

From an English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) perspective, the findings of this study support the view that multilingual practices are a natural and legitimate part of communication in diverse educational contexts. As Seidlhofer (2011) and Kirkpatrick (2010) argue, effective communication does not require strict adherence to native-speaker norms. Instead, intelligibility and mutual understanding are prioritized.

In this context, lecturers' code-switching can be interpreted as an ELF-oriented practice that reflects the multilingual reality of Indonesian EFL classrooms. Rather than hindering speaking development, flexible language use supports students' communicative competence by enabling them to negotiate meaning and participate actively in interaction.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated students' perspectives on lecturers' use of code-switching in EFL classrooms at Al-Qolam University, with a particular focus on its impact on students' speaking skills. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with fifth-semester students of the English Education Department. The findings provide valuable insights into how code-switching is perceived and experienced by students in a higher education EFL context.

The results indicate that most students view lecturers' code-switching positively, especially in terms of supporting comprehension, reducing anxiety, and increasing confidence to speak English. Code-switching was found to play an indirect but significant role in speaking development by helping students understand learning materials more clearly before engaging in oral communication. In addition, code-switching contributed to vocabulary development and helped students maintain attention during learning activities, particularly when dealing with complex or unfamiliar content.

However, the study also revealed students' awareness of potential drawbacks associated with excessive code-switching. Some participants expressed concern that overuse of the first language may lead to dependency on translation and reduce opportunities to practice speaking English independently. This finding highlights the importance of balanced and strategic use of code-switching in speaking-focused EFL classrooms.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings largely support existing theories that conceptualize code-switching as a functional and strategic communicative practice in bilingual and multilingual settings (Grosjean, 1982; Waris, 2012; Ansar, 2017). At the same time, the study reinforces theoretical cautions regarding overuse, suggesting that code-switching should function as scaffolding rather than a substitute for English use.

In conclusion, this study suggests that code-switching, when applied appropriately, can be a valuable pedagogical tool for supporting students' speaking skills, sustaining attention, and fostering a positive learning environment in EFL classrooms. The findings encourage EFL lecturers to adopt flexible and context-sensitive language practices that respond to students' needs while still promoting meaningful exposure to English.

Future research is recommended to explore the long-term effects of code-switching on speaking fluency and accuracy, as well as to investigate lecturers' perspectives and classroom practices across different educational contexts. By expanding the scope of investigation, future studies can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of code-switching in EFL speaking instruction.

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