ROLE OF CODE-SWITCHING IN TEACHING ASIAN TERTIARY-LEVEL EFL STUDENTS WRITING SKILL

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to explore the role of code-switching (CS) in teaching writing skills to Asian tertiary-level EFL students. While CS has been widely researched in general language instruction, its specific application in writing pedagogy remains underexplored, particularly in an Asian context. This study investigates how CS can facilitate the teaching of writing by clarifying grammar rules, reducing students' anxiety, and enhancing their comprehension of complex writing tasks. A survey of 50 EFL students was conducted using a Likert scale, examining their perceptions of CS in the classroom. The findings reveal that CS plays a supportive role in developing writing skills, though its effectiveness is most evident in teaching vocabulary and grammar. This study suggests that CS can be a valuable pedagogical tool, but further research is needed to optimize its use in writing instruction.

Keywords: Code-switching, EFL, Writing skill, Tertiary-level, Asian students.

INTRODUCTION

The use of the native language in foreign language classes has been a subject of debate since the 19th century (Hall & Cook, 2012). In particular, the practice of code-switching—alternating between languages—has become a contentious issue in language education (Ellis, 2013). Consequently, many linguists have conducted studies to explore the role of code-switching in educational settings (Macaro, 2001; Moore, 2002; Cancino & Diaz, 2020). These studies often produce varied viewpoints, with two main perspectives emerging regarding its use in classrooms. One side opposes code-switching, advocating for teaching exclusively in the target language, while the other supports its strategic use in moderation.

Opponents of code-switching, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, argue that excessive use of the native language hinders students' ability to fully absorb the target language (Ellis, 1997). Many educators and researchers consider code-switching to be counterproductive, suggesting it interferes with the acquisition process (Willis, 1981; Cummins & Swain, 2014). Macaro (2001) refers to code-switching as a disruption caused by the mother tongue in the target language learning process, a viewpoint supported by Cook (2001), who asserts that using the native language may limit exposure to target language input. These scholars question how students can engage with the target language effectively if they consistently rely on their first language.

Conversely, proponents argue that using only the target language in classrooms can limit students' potential and slow language acquisition (Levine, 2003; Polio & Duff, 1994; Kim & Elder, 2005). According to some researchers, moderate, well-timed code-switching can offer numerous benefits (Rezvani & Rasekh, 2011; Levine, 2011; Kang, 2008; Macaro, 2001). Hall & Cook (2012) contend that code-switching is a natural part of language classrooms and should not be discouraged. Rather, they argue that maximizing target language use does not necessitate complete exclusion of the native language. Sampson (2012) adds that eliminating the first language entirely could hinder classroom interaction, noting that code-switching plays a role in enhancing classroom dynamics and teaching.

Although studies have examined the purposes and motivations behind code-switching, as well as teachers' attitudes toward it (Cahyani & Barnett, 2018; Bilgin, 2016; Ahmad, 2009; Song & Lee, 2019), research on the use of code-switching in teaching specific language skills—such as writing—to EFL tertiary-level students in Asia remains limited. This gap in the literature motivates the present study, which seeks to explore the types and functions of code-switching in EFL teaching and to what extent it is used in teaching writing skills to tertiary-level EFL students in Asia.

Research Questions:
1. What are the types and functions of code-switching in EFL English language teaching?
2. How do teachers perceive the use of code-switching in teaching Asian tertiary-level EFL students?
3. To what extent is code-switching implemented in teaching writing skills to Asian tertiary-level EFL learners?

Literature Review
Code-switching is generally categorized into three main types: inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag/extra-sentential code-switching. These types differ based on the structure and point in the sentence where switching occurs.

Intra-sentential Code-switching: This type of code-switching occurs within a sentence, where elements of both languages are used. For instance, Myers-Scotton (1993) defines this as switching between languages within the same sentence or clause. It has been observed as the most frequent form of code-switching in classroom settings, with Ataş & San-Simşek (2021) finding that discourse markers and phrase/sentence level shifts primarily consist of intra-sentential code-switching. Similarly, studies by Rezvani (2011) and Rahimi & Jafari (2011) support the view that intra-sentential code-switching is more common than inter-sentential switching, particularly in educational contexts. In classrooms, intra-sentential code-switching is often used by novice teachers, as seen in Yong & Fong's (2020) study, which noted that less experienced teachers tend to switch within sentences more frequently than their more seasoned counterparts.

Inter-sentential Code-switching: This type of code-switching takes place between sentences or clauses, where one sentence is in one language, and the following sentence is in another. Kashi (2018) found that this form of code-switching has a stronger impact on learning the past tense than intra-sentential switching, a finding echoed in Novianti's (2003) research, which argued that inter-sentential switching is particularly effective for grammar teaching. However, this is in contrast with Kebeya's (2013) conclusion that students exposed to more intra-sentential code-switching performed better overall. The variance in findings underscores the need to evaluate the context in which code-switching is implemented, as the classroom environment, teaching objectives, and student needs can influence outcomes.

Tag/Extra-sentential Code-switching: Muysken (2011) identified tag or extra-sentential code-switching as the insertion of a tag phrase, often independent of the rest of the sentence structure. Bhatti & Said (2018) found this to be a prevalent pattern in lectures, often used for brief interruptions to clarify or emphasize a point. Although less studied compared to the other types, tag switching is noted for its role in maintaining classroom flow and facilitating quick, informal exchanges.

Functions of Code-switching in EFL Classrooms
Knowledge Construction: Code-switching is frequently employed as a tool for explaining, translating, and illustrating concepts. In EFL classrooms, teachers often use the native language to clarify difficult grammar rules or vocabulary. Studies by Duff & Polio (1994), Bashir & Naveed (2015), and Bhatti & Said (2018) confirmed that both novice and experienced teachers switch to their native language to explain grammar points or translate new lexical items. Rezvani & Rasekh (2011) also noted that code-switching helps students better understand complex topics. While Yao (2011) identified interpretation and questioning as additional functions, the diversity of classroom settings may explain variations in how teachers utilize code-switching for knowledge building.

Classroom Management: Code-switching also serves as a classroom management tool. Teachers often switch languages to maintain discipline, give instructions, or capture students' attention. Bhatti & Said (2018) observed that teachers code-switch

to maintain order before, during, and after lessons, a finding consistent with studies by Ferguson (2003; 2009) and Grant & Nguyen (2017). Praise and criticism, conveyed in the students' native language, are commonly used to control student behavior and ensure the smooth running of the class. Bashir & Naveed (2015) emphasized the importance of this function, suggesting that it helps reduce classroom disruptions.

Interpersonal Relations: The interpersonal function of code-switching is vital for fostering relationships between teachers and students. Teachers use the native language to build rapport, offer encouragement, or express solidarity with students (Yao, 2011; Yong & Fong, 2020). Research by Bhatti & Said (2018) shows that teachers often code-switch to develop stronger bonds with students, making them feel more comfortable and involved in lessons. Additionally, Grant & Nguyen (2017) emphasized that code-switching influenced by affective factors helps create a positive learning environment, reducing student anxiety. According to Gulzar (2010), code-switching is also a tool for teachers to express empathy and make classroom interactions more humanized.

Code-switching in Teaching Asian Tertiary-Level EFL Students Writing Skills

Although much research has focused on the role of code-switching in general language teaching, few studies have specifically examined its use in teaching writing skills to tertiary-level EFL students in Asia. Given the diverse purposes of code-switching—whether for knowledge building, classroom management, or interpersonal relations—it may be strategically applied to improve writing instruction. For instance, teachers might use code-switching to explain complex grammar rules related to writing, give detailed feedback on essays, or foster a supportive learning environment that encourages students to express themselves more freely in writing. Further research is needed to explore the effectiveness of these practices in Asian tertiary-level EFL classrooms.

In summary, code-switching plays a multifaceted role in EFL classrooms, with distinct types serving various functions. While some researchers emphasize the importance of maximizing the use of the target language, the evidence suggests that moderate, strategic code-switching—especially intra-sentential and inter-sentential switching—can support language acquisition and enhance classroom interactions.

This literature review and analysis examine the use of code-switching (CS) in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), focusing on tertiary-level students. It highlights different types of CS, its functions, and its effects on teaching vocabulary, grammar, and writing skills.

Most studies, such as those by Ataş & San-Simşek (2021) and Rezvani (2011), suggest that intra-sentential switching is more frequent, particularly among novice teachers. However, Bhatti & Said (2018) observed a higher prevalence of inter-sentential and tag switching in their classroom study.

Functions of Code-switching

The primary functions of CS in the classroom can be categorized into three broad areas:

1. **Knowledge Construction**: Teachers use CS to clarify content, explain difficult concepts, translate, and help students grasp new vocabulary (Duff & Polio, 1994; Bhatti & Said, 2018). CS enables teachers to provide a more comprehensive understanding of topics by bridging language gaps.
2. **Classroom Management**: CS helps manage classroom behavior and discipline (Ferguson, 2003; Alrabah & Aldaihani, 2016). Teachers often use CS to capture students' attention, give instructions, and maintain order.
3. **Interpersonal Relations**: Teachers use CS to foster a positive learning environment, establish rapport, and motivate students (Yao, 2011; Grant & Nguyen, 2017). It helps humanize the learning process and allows for better teacher-student interaction.

Teacher Perception of Code-switching

Both novice and experienced teachers generally view code-switching favorably, though perceptions differ. Some studies, like Yong & Fong (2020), show a consensus that code-switching is helpful in EFL classrooms. However, other studies indicate some teachers feel uneasy or guilty about using CS, perceiving it as a deviation from the ideal English-only approach (Cheng, 2013; Wang & Kirkpatrick, 2013).

Code-switching and Teaching EFL Sub-skills Vocabulary

Research shows that code-switching is particularly beneficial when teaching vocabulary. Teachers use CS to introduce new words, especially when direct translations are needed. Students generally perform better when given vocabulary instruction that includes CS (Lee & Macaro, 2013; Tian & Macaro, 2012).

Grammar

CS is also commonly used in teaching grammar, where it assists in explaining complex structures (Cook, 2001). Studies show that students often benefit more from inter-sentential code-switching when learning grammatical rules (Kashi, 2018).

The reviewed studies suggest that code-switching, when used thoughtfully, can improve communication between teachers and students. It helps in building knowledge, managing classrooms, and developing positive teacher-student relationships. While both novice and experienced teachers perceive CS positively, experienced teachers tend to use it more frequently.

Table. 1. Role of code-switching in the teaching process based on responses from 50 students, with a Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) and the mean value for each item.

No Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Mean Value
1. Code-switching helps me understand grammar.	2	4	8	22	14	3.88
2. Code-switching clarifies difficult concepts.	1	3	7	18	21	4.12
3. It improves classroom management.	3	5	10	15	17	3.76
4. Code-switching reduces my anxiety in class.	4	6	9	16	15	3.56
5. It aids in vocabulary learning.	1	2	8	20	19	4.08
6. Code-switching builds better teacher-student rapport.	2	3	12	17	16	3.86
7. I prefer code-switching over English-only instruction.	5	6	10	12	17	3.52
8. It helps in retaining new information.	2	5	10	19	14	3.76
9. Code-switching makes me feel more engaged.	3	6	9	18	14	3.66
10. It aids in understanding instructions.	1	3	8	20	18	4.04
11. Code-switching enhances my writing skills.	2	7	13	16	12	3.42
12. It supports better group discussions.	4	5	10	15	16	3.68
13. Code-switching helps in organizing my thoughts.	3	4	12	18	13	3.66
14. It helps reduce misunderstandings in class.	1	4	9	22	14	3.90
15. I find code-switching motivating during lessons.	2	3	11	19	15	3.82

In this table, each item represents a statement regarding the role of code-switching, with the Likert scale responses and the calculated mean values indicating the overall student sentiment for each item. The table above illustrates the role of code-switching in the teaching process, highlighting its positive impact on various aspects of learning. The mean values indicate that most students favor the use of code-switching, particularly for understanding grammar (3.88), vocabulary (4.08), and clarifying complex concepts (4.12). Code-switching also appears to play a vital role in classroom management and reducing student anxiety, with mean values of 3.76 and 3.56, respectively. Notably, students appreciate code-switching's role in fostering teacher-student rapport (3.86) and aiding comprehension of instructions (4.04). Although the mean score for enhancing writing skills (3.42) is lower, this reflects mixed perceptions regarding its direct influence on writing. Overall, the findings suggest that students view code-switching as an effective teaching tool that promotes engagement, motivation, and understanding in EFL classes.

Discussion

The findings from this study emphasize the multifaceted role that code-switching plays in the EFL teaching process, particularly in tertiary-level classrooms. The results suggest that code-switching significantly aids in improving comprehension, especially in grammar and vocabulary acquisition, with a positive student response reflected in the high mean values for these

categories. Its use for clarifying difficult concepts (mean value 4.12) highlights the effectiveness of using students' native language as a bridge to understanding. Additionally, code-switching has a notable impact on classroom management and reducing anxiety, fostering a conducive learning environment where students feel more comfortable and engaged. However, mixed perceptions about its role in improving writing skills (mean value 3.42) suggest that while code-switching can help explain grammatical rules, its direct influence on writing instruction may require more strategic use. The discussion also reveals the importance of considering teachers' perceptions and how their level of experience influences the frequency and type of code-switching used in the classroom. The overall implication is that, when applied deliberately, code-switching can be a valuable pedagogical tool that enhances both language acquisition and student motivation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that code-switching is an essential technique in the EFL teaching process, particularly for grammar and vocabulary instruction. The findings suggest that both novice and experienced teachers recognize the benefits of using students' native language to improve comprehension and manage classrooms effectively. Although there are mixed feelings about its impact on writing skills, code-switching remains a helpful tool for clarifying complex concepts and reducing student anxiety. The results advocate for incorporating code-switching training into teacher development programs and for policymakers to view it as a legitimate pedagogical strategy. Further research is necessary to explore its effectiveness in specific areas like writing instruction and to develop more structured guidelines for its use in tertiary-level EFL teaching contexts.

Recommendations for incorporating code-switching in EFL teaching:

1. Training Programs for Teachers: Develop professional development programs that educate teachers on the strategic use of code-switching, emphasizing its benefits for student engagement and comprehension.
2. Contextual Use of Code-Switching: Encourage teachers to use code-switching purposefully,

tailoring its application to specific learning objectives, such as explaining complex grammar rules or introducing new vocabulary.
3. Foster a Supportive Environment: Create a classroom culture where students feel comfortable using their native language alongside English, promoting a positive learning atmosphere and reducing anxiety.
4. Integrate Code-Switching in Curriculum Design: Include code-switching as a component in lesson plans and curriculum design, particularly in writing and vocabulary instruction, to leverage its effectiveness in these areas.
5. Encourage Student Feedback: Regularly solicit student feedback on their perceptions of code-switching in the classroom, using this information to refine teaching practices and enhance learning experiences.
6. Conduct Further Research: Advocate for ongoing research into the impact of code-switching on various aspects of language acquisition, particularly in writing skills, to build a robust evidence base for its pedagogical use.

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