



Students' Code-Switching between Selayar Language and English in English Classroom Activities

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Abstract

This study investigates the students' code-switching between Selayar language and English during English classroom activities. The research aims to identify the types of code-switching used by students and explore the factors influencing its use in the English classroom. This study employs a qualitative research approach with a descriptive design. The participants are students of a junior secondary school in Selayar, selected purposively. Data are collected through classroom observations, audio recordings of classroom interactions, and interviews. The data are analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and categories of code-switching practices. The findings show that students frequently use inter-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching during classroom interactions. Code-switching occurs due to several factors, including limited English proficiency, the influence of the first language, the need for clarification, and social interaction among peers. Code-switching also helps students maintain interaction during classroom activities, especially when they experience difficulty expressing ideas in English. The study concludes that code-switching plays an important role in facilitating students' understanding and participation in English classroom activities. This study suggests that teachers should manage code-switching strategically in the English classroom.

Keywords: Code-Switching, Selayar Language, English Classroom, Bilingual Students.



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INTRODUCTION

English language teaching at the junior secondary school level in Indonesia takes place in linguistically diverse environments where students are exposed to multiple languages in their daily lives. In many regions, local languages remain the primary means of communication within

families and communities, while Indonesian serves as the national and instructional language in formal education (Suciati & Umay, 2025). English, meanwhile, is positioned as a foreign language that is mainly encountered in classroom settings (Zein, et., al. 2020). In the Selayar Islands, particularly in Palembang, students commonly use Selayar language as their first language. This local language plays a significant role in shaping students' identities, interactional styles, and patterns of communication. When learning English at school, students do not abandon their linguistic background; instead, they draw on their existing linguistic resources, including Selayar language, to support communication and learning processes.

In English classroom activities at MTs Yapis Palembang, students frequently engage in code-switching between Selayar language and English, especially during peer interaction, group discussions, and task-based activities. Code-switching often occurs when students encounter difficulties expressing ideas in English, when they seek clarification from peers, or when they attempt to maintain the flow of interaction. For junior high school students, whose English proficiency is still developing, code-switching can function as a strategic and facilitative practice rather than an obstacle to language learning. From a sociolinguistic perspective, students' code-switching reflects the dynamic interaction between local linguistic identity and the institutional demands of English language learning (Zein et al., 2020). Code-switching should not be viewed merely as a lack of competence in English, but as a communicative strategy that enables students to participate actively in classroom activities. Despite the growing body of research on code-switching in bilingual and multilingual classrooms, limited studies have specifically examined the use of code-switching between Selayar language and English in junior secondary school contexts. This indicates a clear research gap, particularly in understanding how local linguistic resources are utilized in English language learning within this setting. Therefore, this study seeks to address the following research questions: (1) What types of code-switching are used by students in the English classroom? and (2) What factors influence students' use of code-switching during classroom interactions?

This study is grounded in sociolinguistic theories of bilingualism, multilingualism, and classroom discourse. In multilingual communities, speakers commonly draw on more than one language as part of their communicative repertoire. One prominent phenomenon in such contexts is code-switching, defined as the alternation between two or more languages within a single interaction or communicative event (Ahmad, et., al. 2023). Early sociolinguistic research emphasizes that code-switching is a systematic and meaningful practice rather than random language mixing. Bilingual speakers switch languages to achieve specific communicative purposes, such as clarifying meaning, signaling group membership, or adapting to social contexts (Mustafayeva, et., al. 2025). This perspective challenges deficit views of bilingual language use and positions code-switching as a legitimate communicative strategy. In educational settings, particularly in second and foreign language classrooms, code-switching has been widely documented among learners. Research in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms indicates

that students frequently use their first language to support comprehension and interaction when their proficiency in the target language is limited (Zein et al., 2020). Code-switching enables learners to negotiate meaning, explain unfamiliar vocabulary, and manage classroom tasks more effectively.

Several studies have identified multiple functions of code-switching in classroom interaction. Cognitively, code-switching facilitates understanding of complex concepts and supports vocabulary acquisition. Interactionally, it helps manage turn-taking, peer collaboration, and classroom organization. Affective functions are also evident, as the use of a familiar language can reduce learners' anxiety and increase confidence, particularly among younger students (Ulum, 2025). In the context of junior secondary education, learners are still developing both linguistic competence and academic skills. As a result, code-switching often becomes a natural resource that allows students to remain engaged in classroom activities. Rather than inhibiting English learning, strategic code-switching can serve as a scaffold that bridges existing linguistic knowledge and new language input. Within the Indonesian educational context, English classrooms are inherently multilingual, typically involving English, Indonesian, and local languages. Studies on classroom discourse in Indonesia demonstrate that local languages continue to play a significant role in shaping interaction patterns, especially in regions where local languages are actively used in daily life (Zein et al., 2020). Students often rely on local languages during peer interaction, even when English is the instructional target. Research on Indonesian EFL classrooms suggests that the presence of local languages does not necessarily hinder English acquisition. On the contrary, code-switching can support learning by enabling students to draw on familiar linguistic resources. This view aligns with contemporary perspectives on multilingual education, which emphasize the flexible use of learners' full linguistic repertoires (Margana, et., al. 2026).

Despite increasing attention to code-switching in Indonesian classrooms, most existing studies focus on urban schools or major local languages (Zein et al., 2020). Research examining less-documented local languages and peripheral educational contexts remains limited. Furthermore, studies that specifically investigate code-switching practices among junior high school students in madrasah settings are still scarce. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by examining students' code-switching between Selayar language and English in English classroom activities at MTs Yapis Palembang. By focusing on a junior secondary madrasah in a Selayar-speaking community, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how local linguistic resources are utilized in English learning and how sociolinguistic realities shape classroom interaction in multilingual educational contexts.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a descriptive case study design. A qualitative approach is chosen because the study focuses on exploring students' natural language use, particularly code-switching between Selayar language and English during classroom activities. Code-switching is a social and contextual phenomenon that cannot be fully captured through numerical data. Therefore, qualitative research allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of how and why students switch languages in real classroom situations.

The descriptive case study design is applied because the research examines a specific case within a bounded system, namely an English classroom in a junior secondary school in Selayar. This design enables the researcher to investigate the phenomenon of code-switching in its real-life context and to provide a detailed description of students' language practices during English learning activities.

The research is conducted at a junior secondary school located in Selayar Regency, South Sulawesi. The school is selected purposively because Selayar language is actively used by students in daily communication, both inside and outside the classroom. In addition, English is taught as a foreign language at the school, which creates a multilingual learning environment where code-switching frequently occurs.

The participants of this study are students who actively participate in English classroom activities. Purposive sampling is used to select participants based on several criteria:

1. The students use Selayar language as their first language or dominant language.
2. The students are enrolled in English classes during the time of the study.
3. The students frequently engage in oral classroom interactions, such as asking questions, answering teachers' questions, or participating in group discussions.

The number of participants is limited to ensure in-depth observation and analysis of language use, which is consistent with qualitative research principles emphasizing depth rather than breadth.

Data Collection Techniques

To obtain rich and credible data, this study employs multiple data collection techniques, including classroom observations, audio recordings, and semi-structured interviews. The use of multiple techniques enables data triangulation and enhances the trustworthiness of the findings.

Classroom Observations

Classroom observations are conducted to capture authentic instances of students' code-switching during English learning activities. The researcher observes several English lessons to identify how students use Selayar language and English in different classroom situations, such as teacher–student interaction, student–student interaction, and group work activities. During the observation, the researcher takes detailed field notes focusing on the context of interaction, the

participants involved, and the communicative functions of code-switching. The observations help the researcher understand when and why code-switching occurs naturally in the classroom.

Audio Recordings

Audio recordings are used to document classroom interactions accurately. The recordings allow the researcher to capture students' utterances in detail, including instances of inter-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching. With the consent of the teacher and students, classroom discussions and selected learning activities are recorded. The recorded data are later transcribed verbatim to facilitate systematic analysis. Audio recordings help ensure the reliability of the data and reduce the risk of missing important linguistic features during live observation.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are conducted to explore students' perspectives on their use of code-switching in English classroom activities. The interviews focus on students' reasons for switching languages, their feelings about using Selayar language and English, and their perceived challenges in learning English. The semi-structured format allows the researcher to ask guiding questions while also providing flexibility to follow up on emerging themes. Interviews are conducted in a language comfortable for the participants, either Selayar language or Indonesian, to encourage honest and detailed responses.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis follows qualitative thematic analysis procedures. First, all audio recordings are transcribed verbatim. The researcher then reads the transcripts, observation notes, and interview data repeatedly to become familiar with the data. Next, the data are coded to identify instances and types of code-switching, including inter-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching. The coded data are then categorized into themes related to the functions and factors influencing students' code-switching, such as linguistic limitations, classroom interaction, peer influence, and the need for clarification. Finally, the themes are interpreted to answer the research questions. Data from different sources are compared to ensure consistency and credibility through triangulation.

Trustworthiness and Data Validation

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, this study applies several validation techniques. Member checking is conducted by confirming the findings and interpretations with selected participants to ensure accuracy. Peer debriefing is also employed, where the researcher discusses the data and analysis with colleagues or supervisors to obtain critical feedback and minimize bias. In addition, triangulation is strengthened by comparing data obtained from observations, audio recordings, and interviews. These techniques enhance the credibility, dependability, and overall rigor of the study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that students frequently use code-switching between Selayar language and English during English classroom activities. Code-switching occurs in

various forms of classroom interaction, including teacher–student communication, peer discussions, and group work. The most common types of code-switching identified are inter-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching. Inter-sentential code-switching appears when students switch languages between sentences, particularly when responding to teachers' questions or explaining ideas. Intra-sentential code-switching occurs when students mix Selayar language and English within a single sentence, often by inserting Selayar words or phrases into English utterances.

The data also indicate that students use code-switching for several communicative purposes. Students frequently switch to Selayar language to clarify meaning, ask for explanations, or ensure that their peers understand the lesson. Code-switching also helps students maintain interaction during classroom activities, especially when they experience difficulty expressing ideas in English. In addition, the use of Selayar language among peers creates a familiar and comfortable learning environment, which encourages students to participate actively in classroom discussions. Several factors influence students' code-switching practices. Limited English proficiency is a major factor, as students often lack sufficient vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. Peer interaction and classroom atmosphere also affect language choice, as students feel more confident using Selayar language when interacting with classmates. Furthermore, the teacher's tolerance of first language use contributes to the frequent occurrence of code-switching in the classroom.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that code-switching between Selayar language and English is a natural and contextually driven phenomenon in English classroom activities, particularly in an EFL setting. The frequent occurrence of inter-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching supports Poplack's (1980) classification and indicates that students strategically draw on their first language to compensate for limited proficiency in the target language. However, rather than merely confirming existing typologies, these findings suggest that such switching is not only a linguistic response to deficiency but also a dynamic communicative resource shaped by classroom interactional demands.

The functions of code-switching identified in this study resonate with prior research emphasizing its role in facilitating comprehension and interaction. Nevertheless, this study extends these perspectives by showing that code-switching in a Selayar-speaking context operates not only as a cognitive support but also as a locally grounded communicative norm. By switching to Selayar language, students clarify meaning, negotiate understanding, and sustain participation; however, this also reflects how local linguistic practices remain deeply embedded in formal educational settings. This finding aligns with translanguaging perspectives that view multilingual speakers as flexibly mobilizing their full linguistic repertoires, while also challenging more traditional views that strictly separate languages in classroom use.

Furthermore, the social function of code-switching observed in this study highlights the role of language in expressing cultural identity and peer solidarity. In contrast to studies conducted in more urban or linguistically dominant contexts, where national or global languages may take precedence, this study shows that a local language such as Selayar retains strong interactional value even within English instruction. This suggests that language choice is not solely determined by pedagogical goals but also by students' sociocultural affiliations and identities. Such findings contribute to broader sociolinguistic debates by reinforcing the idea that classroom discourse cannot be fully understood without considering local linguistic ecologies.

However, while code-switching offers clear pedagogical and social benefits, its role remains contested in language education. Some scholars argue that excessive reliance on the first language may limit exposure to the target language and slow acquisition. The findings of this study partially support this concern, as frequent switching may reduce opportunities for sustained English use, yet they also challenge it by demonstrating that strategic code-switching enables continued participation rather than disengagement. This indicates that the issue is not the presence of code-switching itself, but how it is managed within instructional practice.

Therefore, in the Selayar context, a balanced and context-sensitive approach is necessary. Teachers should not prohibit code-switching outright but should guide its use in ways that support learning objectives while gradually increasing students' engagement with English. This study thus contributes to ongoing scholarly discussions by highlighting the need to move beyond binary views of "L1 versus L2 use" toward more flexible, multilingual-oriented pedagogies that recognize the value of local languages in EFL classroom.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study concludes that students' code-switching between Selayar language and English is a common and natural practice in English classroom activities. The findings show that students frequently alternate between the two languages in various forms of interaction, including teacher–student communication and peer discussions. The dominant types of code-switching identified are inter-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching, which mainly occur when students experience difficulty expressing ideas fully in English. This indicates that students rely on their first language as a communicative strategy to support their participation in English learning.

The study also highlights that code-switching serves several important functions in the classroom. It helps students clarify meaning, maintain interaction, and express social closeness with peers. By switching to Selayar language, students are able to reduce misunderstandings and remain actively engaged in classroom activities. In addition, the use of the local language creates a supportive learning environment that encourages students to participate without fear of making mistakes in English.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that students' code-switching practices are influenced by multiple factors, including limited English proficiency, classroom atmosphere, peer interaction, and teacher language use. These factors demonstrate that code-switching is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but also a social and pedagogical one shaped by the classroom context. Therefore, viewing code-switching solely as a weakness in English learning does not fully capture its role in the learning process.

Based on these findings, this study suggests that teachers should manage code-switching strategically in the English classroom. Allowing limited and purposeful use of the first language can support students' understanding and confidence, especially in contexts where English exposure is limited. At the same time, teachers should gradually encourage increased use of English to enhance students' language development. A balanced approach to language use can help students benefit from code-switching while still promoting English proficiency.

Finally, this study contributes to the existing literature on code-switching by highlighting the role of a local language, namely Selayar language, in an EFL classroom context. Future research may explore code-switching practices in different educational levels, involve teachers' perspectives, or employ mixed-method approaches to gain a broader understanding of code-switching in language learning. Such studies can further inform effective language teaching practices in multilingual and multicultural classrooms.

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