

Code-switching and Its Relation to Language Acquisition : A Study of L1 Indonesian and L2 English

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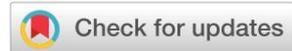
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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of Indonesian–English code-switching in the process of second-language acquisition by synthesizing findings from previous research using a qualitative library method. The analysis shows that code-switching is a prominent linguistic practice in Indonesian educational and social contexts, serving multiple pedagogical, cognitive, and pragmatic functions. The findings reveal that code-switching operates as a cognitive scaffold, helping learners comprehend difficult English input by linking new information to familiar linguistic structures. It also reduces anxiety and increases classroom interaction, enabling students to participate more confidently during English lessons. In addition, frequent exposure to bilingual communication facilitates incidental vocabulary learning and contributes to the development of pragmatic competence, particularly through digital and peer interactions. However, the study also identifies potential drawbacks of excessive switching, including reduced English immersion and the emergence of hybrid morphological forms that may hinder grammatical accuracy. These findings highlight the complex and dual nature of code-switching: it is beneficial when used strategically but may become a barrier when overused. Overall, the study concludes that effective English language pedagogy in Indonesia requires a balanced approach that recognizes the supportive role of L1 while ensuring adequate exposure to English for long-term acquisition.

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KEYWORDS

Code-Switching; Indonesian–English Bilingualism; Second-Language Acquisition; Scaffolding; Classroom Interaction; Vocabulary Development; Pragmatic Competence.

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1. Introduction

Code-switching, broadly defined as the alternating use of two or more linguistic codes within a single communicative event, has become a widespread linguistic behavior in multilingual societies. In Indonesia, where Bahasa Indonesia serves as the national lingua franca and English holds a growing status as the language of global mobility, education, and digital participation, Indonesian–English code-switching has become increasingly visible in both formal and informal communication (Karubaba & Rahman, 2025; Putra et al., 2023; Weda et al., 2022.; Adinda et al., 2025). This bilingual practice appears in classroom discussions, online interactions, social media captions, youth slang, academic settings, and professional environments. The prevalence of such switching reflects not merely a surface-level linguistic trend but a deeper sociolinguistic phenomenon shaped by globalization, technological advancement, and evolving patterns of language use among Indonesian bilinguals (Pratiwi et al., 2026; Rahman & Rahman, 2019; Panggabean et al., 2025; Andini et al., 2026).

As English becomes more integrated into Indonesian daily life—through international entertainment, social networking platforms, digital literacy, and educational requirements—students and young adults frequently mix Indonesian grammatical structures with English lexical items. Utterances such as “*Aku belum submit tugasnya*,” “*Dia lagi coping sama deadline*,” or “*Nanti aku update lagi ya*” demonstrate how English vocabulary is naturally inserted into Indonesian syntactic frames. These bilingual patterns function as communicative shortcuts, identity markers, or expressions of modernity, showing that code-switching emerges not only from linguistic need but also from social and cultural motivations.

Within educational contexts, especially English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, the phenomenon is even more pronounced. Teachers often employ code-switching to scaffold learning, clarify abstract concepts, explain grammar points, or maintain classroom management (Weda et al., 2022; Swandayani et al., 2026; Yaumi et al., 2023). Earlier language teaching ideologies—rooted in strict immersion or monolingual approaches—tended to view code-switching as

a sign of insufficient proficiency or a barrier to effective L2 learning. For instance, early interpretations of Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982) implied that maximizing comprehensible input in the target language required minimizing L1 use. Under this perspective, the presence of Indonesian in English lessons was seen as potentially reducing exposure to English structures.

However, more contemporary linguistic and pedagogical research challenges these assumptions. Sociolinguistic scholarship emphasizes that code-switching is a systematic, rule-governed, meaningful behavior shaped by communicative intent rather than linguistic confusion (Gumperz, 1982; Poplack, 1980). Modern views of bilingualism argue that multilingual speakers rely on their full linguistic repertoire to construct meaning, negotiate identity, and accomplish communicative goals. In this view, code-switching reflects linguistic flexibility, not deficiency. Meanwhile, psycholinguistic perspectives highlight that switching between L1 and L2 can reduce cognitive load, facilitate processing, and support comprehension—especially when learners encounter unfamiliar vocabulary or complex grammatical explanations.

This emerging paradigm is particularly relevant in the Indonesian context. Numerous studies (Amaliah & Haryadi, 2025; Ulfah et al., 2021; Wulandahri et al., 2025) have documented that teachers use Indonesian strategically to supplement English instruction. Such switching helps maintain lesson flow, ensures student understanding, and prevents frustration when learners struggle with L2 input. Teachers' code-switching also serves affective functions: it helps establish rapport, reduces student anxiety, and creates a more comfortable classroom environment, especially for learners with low proficiency. Rather than hindering learning, this bilingual support often strengthens engagement and encourages learners to take risks in producing English output.

Students themselves also participate actively in code-switching, using it to compensate for limited vocabulary, express complex ideas, ask questions, and collaborate with peers. Their switching patterns often mirror broader sociolinguistic norms: English lexical items related to technology, academics, and lifestyle are commonly inserted into Indonesian clauses, reflecting increased exposure to English through digital media. Several studies report that Indonesian youths adopt English expressions not only for lexical convenience but also for pragmatic functions such as expressing humor, sarcasm, emphasis, or emotional nuance (Rustan & Ajiegoena, 2023; Zalukhu et al., 2021). Over time, these bilingual practices contribute to incidental vocabulary acquisition and pragmatic development, showing that code-switching plays a meaningful role beyond the classroom.

At a structural level, scholars have identified consistent patterns in Indonesian–English code-switching. According to Poplack's (1980) typology, all three types—tag switching, intra-sentential switching, and inter-sentential switching—are present in Indonesian bilingual discourse. Indonesian speakers frequently attach English tags such as “*you know*,” “*I mean*,” or “*right?*” to Indonesian sentences. Intra-sentential switching appears when English nouns, adjectives, or verbs are embedded into Indonesian grammatical structures, while inter-sentential switching occurs when speakers alternate full sentences between the two languages. Myers-Scotton's (1993) Matrix Language Frame Model further explains that Indonesian typically functions as the matrix language, providing grammatical structure, while English operates as the embedded language contributing content words. This pattern is evident in teacher–student interactions, student peer conversations, and digital communication contexts.

Although these structural analyses provide valuable insight into the mechanics of Indonesian–English switching, many studies stop short of linking these linguistic patterns to language acquisition outcomes. This gap is significant because code-switching is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but a cognitive and pedagogical resource that may influence learners' mastery of English vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and pragmatic norms. The present study addresses this gap by exploring how code-switching supports English acquisition when used strategically, and how it may hinder learning when overused.

From a cognitive standpoint, research indicates that code-switching provides scaffolding for learners during moments of linguistic difficulty. When students encounter unfamiliar English input, switching to Indonesian helps them access prior knowledge and process information more effectively. This aligns with Vygotsky's theory of mediated learning, which argues that tools such as language play a critical role in shaping cognitive development. By leveraging L1, learners gain a conceptual foundation that enables them to make sense of L2 content. Studies across Indonesian educational settings have shown that learners who receive bilingual support often demonstrate stronger comprehension, greater confidence, and more willingness to participate.

Furthermore, code-switching contributes to metalinguistic awareness, allowing learners to compare linguistic structures and notice differences between Indonesian and English. This contrastive noticing supports syntactic development by making students more aware of English tense systems, morphological inflections, and word order patterns.

As students frequently encounter English lexical items embedded within Indonesian structures, they gradually internalize these words and develop semantic associations that improve vocabulary retention.

Nevertheless, scholarly debates caution against assuming code-switching is universally beneficial. Excessive switching can reduce the amount of English input available to learners, limiting opportunities for immersion. When students rely too heavily on Indonesian during English instruction, they may fail to develop fluency, syntactic competence, or productive control over English structures. Studies such as Sahib et al. (2021) and Asrifan & Syahrir (2021) emphasize that habitual insertion of English words into Indonesian clauses—without practicing full English sentences—can hinder the development of accurate grammatical competence.

Another concern relates to morphological interference. Certain hybrid forms that emerge in Indonesian–English bilingual speech, such as *nge-print*, *nge-check*, and *di-email*, follow Indonesian morphological rules but incorporate English lexical roots. While these constructions may be functional in informal communication, they risk fossilizing into learners' interlanguage, potentially creating misconceptions about English grammar and morphological structure.

Given these complex dynamics, this merged Introduction demonstrates that Indonesian–English code-switching plays a dual and nuanced role in English language acquisition. It can act as a cognitive, affective, and pragmatic resource, yet also poses risks when used without strategic guidance. Understanding these multifaceted functions is crucial for evaluating the pedagogical implications of code-switching in Indonesian EFL contexts.

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative library research design, which is appropriate for investigating code-switching and its relationship to language acquisition through a synthesis of existing scholarly works rather than the collection of new empirical data. The choice of a qualitative approach reflects the descriptive and interpretive nature of the topic, as the study aims to understand patterns, functions, and theoretical implications of Indonesian–English code-switching by drawing upon previously published literature. In this design, the researcher does not interact with participants directly; instead, knowledge is constructed through careful reading, comparison, and interpretation of academic sources relevant to bilingualism, sociolinguistics, and second-language acquisition.

The data for this study consist of **journal articles, theoretical books, conference papers, and research reports** that examine code-switching in Indonesian contexts and its pedagogical or cognitive relationship with English language learning. Sources were selected based on their relevance to several key themes: (1) structural and functional descriptions of code-switching, (2) teacher code-switching practices in EFL classrooms, (3) students' bilingual communication in academic and digital settings, (4) bilingual child language development, and (5) theories of second-language acquisition that help explain how code-switching may support or limit learning processes. This thematic alignment ensures that the literature reviewed directly contributes to answering the research questions and supports the analytical framework used in the discussion.

The procedure of data collection followed several steps. First, the researcher identified major studies on code-switching within Indonesian educational contexts through academic databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and institutional repositories. Next, the selected texts were read closely to identify recurring concepts, patterns, and theoretical arguments. Particular attention was given to studies that explicitly describe the functions of code-switching—such as scaffolding, clarification, classroom management, or affective support—as well as studies that address potential drawbacks like reduced immersion or morphological interference. By focusing on multiple perspectives, the study maintains a balanced interpretation of code-switching's role in English acquisition.

After gathering the relevant literature, the researcher organized the findings into thematic categories to facilitate qualitative analysis. These themes were not predetermined but emerged naturally from the reviewed sources, reflecting the inductive nature of qualitative library research. The thematic synthesis allows the researcher to compare patterns across studies, identify points of convergence and divergence, and connect sociolinguistic observations with theories of second-language acquisition. The method thus provides a comprehensive understanding of how code-switching operates cognitively, pedagogically, and socially within Indonesian bilingual settings.

Overall, this methodology enables the study to present a coherent and well-supported analysis of code-switching without relying on new fieldwork, making it suitable for contexts where the primary aim is to integrate and interpret existing scholarship.

3. Results and Discussion

Code-switching, defined as the alternation between two or more languages within a conversation or discourse, is a common linguistic phenomenon in multilingual societies. In Indonesia, where Indonesian functions as the first language (L1) and English is widely learned as a second language (L2), code-switching frequently occurs in both everyday communication and educational contexts. Based on the analysis of several academic studies, this library research identifies three major findings related to the role of code-switching in language acquisition: the structural characteristics of Indonesian–English code-switching, the pedagogical functions of code-switching in classrooms, and its cognitive and psychological impact on learners.

3.1 Structural Patterns of Indonesian–English Code-switching

One important finding concerns the structural characteristics of code-switching between Indonesian and English. Research conducted by Sahib et al. (2021) analyzed natural speech produced by Indonesian speakers across several metropolitan cities. The study examined various discourse contexts such as seminars, meetings, television dialogues, and informal conversations. The results revealed that nouns were the most frequently switched linguistic elements. These nouns functioned as subjects, objects, or complements within sentences. This finding indicates that Indonesian–English code-switching often occurs at minor syntactic units, such as phrases or individual lexical items rather than entire sentences (Sahib et al., 2021). In other words, speakers tend to switch languages within a clause instead of switching between complete sentences. This type of switching is known as intra-sentential code-switching, which is widely documented in multilingual communication.

The dominance of noun switching may be related to lexical borrowing and vocabulary gaps during communication. When speakers lack an equivalent term in one language or find a more precise expression in another, they often insert a word from the second language. This linguistic behavior demonstrates how bilingual speakers use both languages strategically to convey meaning effectively. Furthermore, the consistency of these patterns across different interaction settings suggests that Indonesian–English code-switching is not random. Instead, it follows systematic syntactic configurations that are shared among speakers in various social contexts (Sahib et al., 2021). These structural patterns reflect how bilingual individuals integrate both languages within their linguistic repertoire. From the perspective of language acquisition, such patterns illustrate that learners do not separate languages completely. Rather, they develop a flexible bilingual system in which languages interact dynamically.

3.2 Pedagogical Functions of Code-switching in Language Learning

Another major finding concerns the pedagogical role of code-switching in educational settings. Several studies highlight that code-switching is widely used by teachers and lecturers as an instructional strategy in English language teaching. For example, Fithriani (2021) found that Indonesian EFL lecturers frequently used three types of code-switching: inter-sentential switching, intra-sentential switching, and tag switching. Among these types, inter-sentential switching was the most common, where lecturers alternated between Indonesian and English across sentence boundaries. The study revealed that lecturers used code-switching for three main pedagogical purposes: enhancing students' comprehension, scaffolding learning, and encouraging student participation. The use of code-switching for comprehension is particularly significant. Teachers often switch to Indonesian when explaining complex grammar or abstract concepts. This practice helps students understand the material more effectively, especially when their proficiency is still developing.

Similarly, Hafid and Margana (2022) emphasize that code-switching supports knowledge construction and curriculum access in multilingual classrooms. In alternating between languages, teachers can present information in a way that is more accessible to students. This strategy enables learners to connect new English knowledge with their existing understanding in Indonesian. Another important pedagogical function involves classroom management. Code-switching is often used to give instructions, maintain discipline, or organize classroom activities. Teachers may prefer Indonesian when they need to ensure that instructions are clearly understood by all students. In addition, code-switching contributes to interpersonal relationships in the classroom. When teachers switch to students' first language, they create a sense of familiarity and solidarity. This interaction fosters a supportive learning environment where students feel more comfortable expressing themselves.

Research by Mulyani et al. (2024) further expands these pedagogical functions by identifying five specific uses of code-switching in EFL classrooms: explaining complex concepts, translating vocabulary, reinforcing information through repetition, checking comprehension, and managing classroom interactions. These functions demonstrate that code-switching serves not only linguistic purposes but also instructional and social functions in language education. However,

Mulyani et al. (2024) also caution that excessive reliance on code-switching may limit students' exposure to English. Therefore, it can be emphasized that teachers need to balance the use of Indonesian and English to ensure sufficient opportunities for immersive language practice.

3.3 Cognitive and Psychological Impact on Learners

Beyond its structural and pedagogical roles, code-switching also influences learners' cognitive processes and psychological experiences during language learning. Mawardi et al. (2024) highlight that code-switching can significantly improve students' understanding of learning materials. Teachers frequently switch languages when providing feedback, clarifying instructions, or summarizing lessons. These strategies help students process information more effectively and prevent misunderstandings. In addition to cognitive benefits, code-switching also contributes to psychological regulation in the classroom. Language switching can create emotional closeness between teachers and students through humor, praise, or empathetic expressions (Mawardi et al., 2024). Such interactions help build relationships that support motivation.

Another important psychological aspect is the reduction of language anxiety. Learning a foreign language can often be intimidating for students, especially when they are required to communicate exclusively in English. According to Amaliah and Haryadi (2025), the strategic use of code-switching can reduce this anxiety by allowing students to rely on their first language when necessary. This practice helps students feel more confident and encourages them to participate more actively in classroom discussions. Code-switching also plays an important role in digital learning environments. Rohmana and Salsabil (2024) found that EFL faculty members intentionally used code-switching in online teaching to enhance clarity and engagement. By alternating between Indonesian and English, instructors were able to explain complex ideas more effectively and maintain students' attention in virtual classrooms.

The digital context introduces additional challenges, such as limited nonverbal communication and reduced interaction. In such situations, code-switching becomes a valuable tool for ensuring that students fully understand the material. Thus, it can be stated that these findings suggest that code-switching supports language acquisition by facilitating comprehension, lowering psychological barriers, and creating a more inclusive learning environment.

3.4 Code-switching and Language Acquisition

The relationship between code-switching and language acquisition can be understood through the concept of bilingual competence. Rather than interfering with language learning, code-switching often reflects a learner's developing ability to manage multiple linguistic systems. In the Indonesian EFL context, learners frequently rely on their first language to understand new concepts in English. Code-switching allows them to connect prior knowledge in Indonesian with newly acquired English vocabulary and structures. This process aligns with sociocultural theories of language learning, which emphasize the role of linguistic mediation in cognitive development. Moreover, code-switching encourages active participation in communication. When students are allowed to use both languages, they are more likely to express ideas, ask questions, and engage in classroom discussions. Such interaction is essential for language development because it provides opportunities for practice and feedback.

Nevertheless, it is important for educators to use code-switching strategically. While the use of L1 can support comprehension and reduce anxiety, excessive dependence on Indonesian may limit students' opportunities to practice English. Therefore, effective language teaching requires a balanced approach that integrates both languages appropriately. Thus, the literature demonstrates that code-switching plays a multifaceted role in language acquisition. Structurally, it reflects systematic linguistic patterns within bilingual speech. Pedagogically, it serves as a valuable instructional strategy that enhances comprehension and classroom interaction. Psychologically, it helps reduce anxiety and foster positive learning environments. Furthermore, in this context, when used strategically, code-switching can support the development of bilingual competence among Indonesian learners of English.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study show that Indonesian–English code-switching occupies a complex and multifaceted role in the process of second-language acquisition. Through qualitative library research, this paper synthesized existing scholarship to demonstrate that code-switching cannot be understood simply as a sign of linguistic deficiency or lack of proficiency. Instead, it functions as an essential communicative and pedagogical resource that supports learners cognitively, affectively, and socially. When used strategically by teachers and naturally by learners, code-switching helps bridge conceptual gaps, facilitates comprehension of difficult English input, and strengthens learners' engagement and

confidence in the classroom. These benefits are particularly relevant in Indonesian EFL contexts, where learners often depend on L1 support to understand abstract grammar rules or unfamiliar vocabulary.

Beyond classroom interaction, code-switching also contributes to long-term development through vocabulary expansion and pragmatic acquisition. The frequent embedding of English lexical items into Indonesian discourse—both in academic settings and digital communication—exposes learners to repeated, meaningful L2 input. This supports incidental vocabulary learning and helps learners internalize English discourse markers, expressions, and pragmatic cues. As such, code-switching becomes an integral part of how Indonesian learners interact with English in their daily lives.

Despite these advantages, the study also acknowledges that excessive or unguided code-switching may hinder deeper stages of language acquisition. Overreliance on Indonesian can reduce meaningful exposure to English, limiting opportunities to practice full sentence structures, develop fluency, and internalize grammatical accuracy. Additionally, the frequent use of hybrid forms such as *nge-print* or *di-email* may lead to morphological fossilization, shaping inaccurate assumptions about English structure.

Overall, this study concludes that code-switching should not be eliminated from English learning environments but should be applied purposefully. Effective language pedagogy in Indonesia requires a balanced approach—one that recognizes L1 as a valuable scaffold while also ensuring that learners receive sufficient, sustained exposure to English to support their long-term linguistic development.

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