Code-Switching in Bilingual Malaysian Polytechnic Settings

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Abstract

In a bilingual Malaysian polytechnic setting, this research investigates the phenomenon of code-switching. Changing between two or more languages when communicating is a common activity in a variety of linguistic circumstances. In Malaysian polytechnics, multiple languages are spoken, hence code-switching is frequently seen in daily interactions. The goal of this study is to learn how polytechnic students perceive the use of code-switching in English language instruction and to determine how frequently it occurs in their speech. The study investigates the impact of code-switching methods on language learners' capacity to learn a second language. This quantitative study used a Google Form link to obtain the questionnaire that served as the instrument. The data shows that students positively view the practice of switching between languages, particularly during verbal presentations, as it aids in improving both communication and language acquisition. The findings also suggest that students actively use code-switching as a method to enhance learning, rather than merely as a solution for not knowing certain words. Additionally, code-switching is found to offer psychological advantages, such as boosting students' comfort and confidence levels during their presentations. The study highlights the effects of language mixing on educational outcomes, offering guidance for teachers and decision-makers. It seeks to refine language education strategies, fostering a more inclusive and effective learning environment in Malaysian polytechnics by exploring the nuances of bilingual communication.

Keywords: - Code-switching, bilingual, Malaysian polytechnic, language learning, students' perceptions

1. Introduction

Code-switching, the use of multiple languages in educational settings, is a common feature in diverse societies worldwide, including bilingual countries like Malaysia. In institutions like polytechnics, where language diversity thrives, individuals frequently switch between languages during communication.

Despite being common in multilingual settings, code-switching has drawn the attention of scholars and language instructors. It's essential to comprehend the patterns, purposes, and effects of code-switching in educational settings to improve language teaching and learning methods. According to Bruss (1986), code-switching is the juxtaposition of two distinct grammatical systems or subsystems in a single speech transaction between interlocutors.

At Malaysian polytechnic institutions, the widespread use of multiple languages, both inside and outside the classroom, presents a unique opportunity to study code-switching and its impact on students' language proficiency. Code-switching is a common practice worldwide, especially when English is the primary language of instruction (Alang & Idris, 2018). Understanding code-switching patterns in multilingual contexts can greatly benefit language education research. This study aims to explore code-switching in bilingual Malaysian polytechnics and its influence on second language learning

as well as contribute to existing knowledge on bilingual language instruction.

By examining the relationship between code-switching and language learning, the study aims to advance bilingual language education in polytechnic settings and promote inclusive language teaching practices as well as enlighten language educators and policymakers about effective methods for enhancing language learning experiences in Malaysian polytechnics.

1.1 Problem Statement

Code-switching, the seamless alternation between languages, is prevalent in Malaysian polytechnics due to their language diversity. It is influenced by communicative competence, but its impact on language learning remains unexplored. This knowledge gap poses a challenge for educators aiming to enhance language learning outcomes in this context (Van et al., 2019).

Code-switching may influence language learners' learning process and their overall language learning experiences, but the extent of its impact and its specific functions within this educational context are yet to be thoroughly investigated (Narasuman et al., 2019). The absence of comprehensive research on code-switching's patterns, functions, and implications in Malaysian polytechnics hinders the development of tailored language education approaches that could cater to the diverse linguistic needs of students.

Furthermore, the coexistence of multiple languages in Malaysian polytechnics may lead to varying degrees of code-switching practices among students, possibly impacting the learning environment's inclusivity and effectiveness. Understanding the intricacies of code-switching and its potential impact on language learning within these polytechnic settings is crucial to ensure that language education programs align with students' linguistic backgrounds and foster a conducive learning environment.

In the bilingual Malaysian polytechnic context, code-switching practices may create challenges for language learning, especially when students face technical issues or time management difficulties. This can cause anxiety and hinder language learning progress. Understanding how code-switching affects language proficiency and its role in facilitating or hindering language learning is essential for evidence-based language education strategies.

1.2 Research Objectives

This study is aimed to achieve the following objectives:
1. Identify the perceptions of polytechnic students on using code-switching in English language classes.
2. Identify the frequency of code-switching among polytechnic students in English language classes.
3. Investigate the impact of code-switching practices on language learning among language learners.

1.3 Research Questions

Considering the gaps in the existing literature, the present study seeks to address the following research questions:
1. What are the perceptions of polytechnic students on using code-switching in English language classes?
2. How frequently do polytechnic students code-switch in English language classes?
3. How do code-switching practices impact language learning among language learners?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Code-Switching

Code-switching is a linguistic phenomenon that occurs when a speaker seamlessly switches between two or more languages within a single conversation or communication act. This ability is commonly observed among individuals who are bilingual or multilingual, meaning they have proficiency in more than one language. Multiple-language speakers can transition between languages during a single communication action (Mahootian, 2006). Hymes (1992) promotes communication competency where speakers are aware of when to speak and when to remain silent as well as what to talk about, when, where, and how. The concept of competence in communication is a crucial aspect of effective language use, especially in bilingual or diverse linguistic settings. It refers to speakers' ability to navigate language choices appropriately based on social, cultural, and contextual factors. Competent communicators possess the knowledge of when to use specific languages or varieties, when to switch between them, and how to adapt their language use according to the audience and the situation.

2.2 Code-Switching in Bilingual Malaysian Polytechnic

The act of switching between a first language and an optional language is known as code-switching in the educational setting. It is regarded as the quickest, easiest, and most effective way to communicate (Celario, 2022). Code-switching in the educational setting refers to the practice of alternating between two or more languages during the process of teaching and learning. It involves the seamless transition from one's first language (L1) to an additional or optional language (L2) and vice versa within the classroom context. Code-switching is prevalent in bilingual educational environments and has been observed in various educational systems worldwide. Code-switching in the educational setting, particularly the polytechnic context, is a valuable and versatile communicative tool. It fosters effective communication, enhances the learning experience, and accommodates linguistic diversity in classrooms. When used thoughtfully, code-switching contributes to a more inclusive, engaging, and enriching educational environment for both educators and students. Code-switching during classroom instruction is a benefit in

helping students to understand the material more so than when solely English is used (Abad, 2010). This highlights that code-switching is beneficial to language learners.

2.3 Code-Switching Effects on Language Learning

English is not only a universal language, but it is also the language of education because it is utilized in almost every type of instruction as well as in national and international exams (Leyaley, 2016). If one wishes to flourish in a knowledge-based economy in this era of industrialization and globalization, learning to speak and write English is crucial. As a result, several topics now need English as the language of instruction. Regular language use was believed to help students develop the necessary competency and fluency. Additionally, using code-switching in a language classroom will be seen as a helpful tool for student interaction and communication, provided that its goal is to effectively convey important information to students (Aljoundi, 2013). Additionally, students are more readily to try when code-switching is used because they are under less pressure to speak English accurately and effectively (Lee, 2010).

Students' second language limitations can be overcome by code-switching (Subon & Tarmim, 2021). Code-switching can play a significant role in helping students overcome limitations in their second language proficiency. When students are learning a second language, they may encounter challenges in understanding and expressing themselves due to their limited linguistic abilities. In such cases, code-switching, the strategic alternation between the second language and the student's first language, can offer valuable benefits in their language learning journey.

Apart from that, students were able to communicate thoughts through code-switching that they were unable to do so in other languages (Subon & Tarmim, 2021). The statement suggests that individuals, typically bilingual or multilingual speakers, can express their thoughts more effectively using code-switching compared to solely relying on other languages. In other words, code-switching allows them to communicate ideas, emotions, and complex concepts in a way that may not be possible when using a single language and this is also supported by Barbu, Gillet & Poncelet (2020) who stated that the ability of interlocutors to exhibit cognitive flexibility directly correlates with the frequency of language change.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive research design that utilizes quantitative research method for data collection and analysis. The primary reason for choosing this design is to accommodate a substantial and diverse sample size, allowing for a broad and representative participation in the study.

3.2 Samples

A total of 121 students voluntarily participated in the study. In particular, the participants included 53 females and 68 males. The participants were Politeknik METrO Kuala Lumpur (PMKL) students enrolled in various Diploma programmes and took the English modules offered at the polytechnic.

3.3 Instrument

This study utilized a questionnaire as its research instrument, adapted from Al-Qaysi (2016). The questionnaire consisted of three sections: Section A collected demographic information such as gender, age, and years of study. Section B comprised of 9 items assessing the respondents' perceptions of code-switching usage in English language classes. Section C includes 6 items focusing on the frequency of code-switching in respondents' speech. All 15 items were in Likert-scale format.

In Section B, participants rated their perceptions on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 - Strongly Disagree, 5 - Strongly Agree), while in Section C, they indicated the frequency of their code-switching on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 - Never, 5 - Always). Before the main study, a pilot study was conducted with 10 respondents from the actual sample. The Cronbach Alpha's score of the pilot study indicated that the instrument demonstrated good reliability. Hence, the research instrument is deemed reliable and valid for use in the main study.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Before gathering the actual data, a pilot study was carried out with a convenience sample of 10 students to assess the questionnaire's feasibility and reliability. Subsequently, the questionnaire was distributed and responses from 121 respondents were collected. Additionally, the Google Form link was utilized to obtain online responses over a two-week duration.

3.5 Data Analysis

Once all the data from the students were gathered, descriptive statistics were conducted using SPSS (version 29). Prior to that, the pilot test was conducted to assess the questionnaire's reliability, and the findings are discussed in the subsequent sections.

4. Result and Discussion

A study on code-switching in bilingual Malaysian polytechnic settings revealed a range of attitudes toward the practice. While some students and faculty viewed code-switching as a practical tool for communication and learning, others expressed reservations about its impact on language proficiency. The mixed opinions highlight how code-switching influences preferred methods of instruction and interaction in these educational environments.

Bruss (1986) reliability analysis was used to examine the survey items. The survey results, based on Cronbach's Alpha, indicated a very high level of internal consistency, suggesting that the items within this scale are very reliable in measuring the concept of English Language Learning.

Table 1. Reliability analysis for code-switching on English language learning

Element	Reliability
Code-switching	0.809
English Language Learning	0.897

Table 2. RQ 1 - What are the perceptions of polytechnic students on using code-switching in English language classes?

Statements	Mean
1. I believe that code-switching enhances my communication skills in oral presentations.	3.7603
I believe code-switching helps me to develop my language skills in oral presentations.	3.7934
3.I believe that using code-switching shows that I am well-educated especially in oral presentations.	3.6860
4. I code-switch because I do not know the word in English (L2)	3.4380
5. I found code-switching helps me to convey new words easily.	3.8926
6.I believe that code-switching makes me feel more comfortable and confident in oral presentations.	3.7521
7.I found that code-switching allows me to express the ideas that I can't express in other language.	3.7273
8.I believe code-switching from the mother tongue (L1) in oral presentations helps me practice the second language that I use.	3.6694
9.I believe code-switching allows me to understand better of the content I am presenting.	3.7769

The study on code-switching in Malaysian polytechnic settings reveals that students generally view it positively, especially in oral presentations. Code-switching, or alternating between languages, is seen as a helpful tool for better communication and language learning. Respondents believe it enhances their ability to convey ideas clearly (M=3.7603) and aids in developing their language skills (M=3.7934).

According to Pallant (2020), the categorization of mean scores can be interpreted and divided into three main parts which are:
a.   1.00 - 2.33 (low mean score)
b.   2.34 - 3.66 (moderate mean score)
c.   3.67 - 5.00 (high mean score)

Interestingly, students don't just code-switch when they're stuck for a word in English; they also see it to make learning new words easier (M=3.8926). This suggests they value code-switching not just as a last resort but as a proactive learning strategy.

However, the study also uncovers some complexities. For example, the lowest mean score (3.4380) indicates that avoiding code-switching because of not knowing an English word isn't the primary reason for its use. This points to a more nuanced understanding of code-switching beyond just filling in language gaps.

Moreover, code-switching seems to have a positive psychological impact, making students feel more comfortable and confident during presentations. Despite these benefits, the study also hints at the challenges and mixed feelings students have about code-switching, such as concerns about how it reflects on their education or its role in effectively expressing complex ideas (Item 7).

Overall, this investigation into code-switching at Malaysian polytechnics suggests that while students see many benefits to this practice, there are also layers of complexity in how it is perceived and used. It is not just about switching languages when necessary; it's a strategic tool for learning, communication, and building confidence, even though it comes with its own set of challenges and considerations.

Table 3. RQ 2 - How frequently do polytechnic students code-switch in English language classes?

Statements	Mean
1. I use code-switching in my daily conversation.	3.6116
2. I code-switch from English (L2) to my mother tongue (L1) in oral presentations to simplify a theory or concept.	3.5372
3. I prefer to use more L1 in oral presentations when I do not know the word in English.	3.5537
4. I use my mother tongue (L1) more in a speech to ensure a smooth presentation.	3.4463
5. I code-switch when I am around my friends.	3.6446
6.I tend to code-switch when I am nervous during oral presentations.	3.5207

The investigation into code-switching practices among bilingual individuals reveals the sophisticated and deliberate way people alternate between languages in everyday life and formal settings. This habit, crucial to bilingual communication, fulfils various practical and psychological needs, as evidenced by the survey's numerical data, highlighted with specific average scores.

In daily conversations, code-switching's commonality is apparent, with an average score demonstrating a strong inclination towards mixing languages in informal interactions (M=3.6116). This figure suggests that bilingual speakers comfortably merge languages in their conversations, indicating a dynamic and adaptable communication style that utilizes their full linguistic abilities.

The use of code-switching in oral presentations, especially to clarify complex ideas, is confirmed and supported by the data (M=3.5372). This practice shows how language can be flexibly used to make messages clearer and more accessible, allowing speakers to adjust their language to the audience's needs.

Moreover, the survey highlights a frequent return to the native language when encountering unknown English

words, as shown by the average score (M=3.5537). This tendency underlines the mother tongue's importance as a fall back to ensure smooth and coherent communication.

The decision to use the native language more in speeches for seamless delivery is also noted in the survey results (M=3.4463). Though this score is somewhat lower, it implies a thoughtful balance between ensuring fluency and meeting the expected standards of language use, showcasing the complex decisions bilingual speakers make in different situations.

In social situations, especially with friends, code-switching is significantly more common, as indicated by a higher average score (M=3.6446). This suggests that code-switching plays a key role in creating an informal and welcoming environment, where switching languages enhances social ties and ease of communication.

Additionally, the survey identifies code-switching as a strategy to manage nervousness during presentations, with a notable average score (M=3.5207). This suggests that shifting to a more comfortable language can reduce stress and build confidence, helping speakers better manage public speaking challenges.

Overall, the survey casts light on code-switching as a sophisticated and intentional aspect of bilingual communication. The specific mean scores illustrate its broad use in various contexts, from making presentations clearer to easing communication in social and stressful situations. Far from being just an interesting linguistic feature, code-switching emerges as a vital communication strategy, enabling bilingual speakers to effectively engage in and enrich their interactions across languages.

Table 4. RQ3 - How does code-switching practices impact language learning among language learners?

Elements	Correlation
Code-switching on English Language Learning	0.739

The correlational analysis revealing a correlation coefficient of 0.739 between code-switching and English Language Learning provides insightful conclusions about the interplay between bilingual practices and language acquisition. This strong positive correlation indicates that there is a substantial relationship where increased engagement in code-switching is associated with enhanced outcomes in learning English as a second language.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study on code-switching in Malaysian polytechnic settings concludes that students generally view code-switching positively, particularly in the context of oral presentations, enhancing both communication and language learning. It highlights code-switching as a strategic tool for learning and communication, with benefits that include increased comfort and confidence in presentations, despite some complexities and challenges.

For future research, it is suggested that the causal relationships between code-switching and language learning outcomes to be explored more deeply.

Longitudinal studies could examine the long-term effects of code-switching on language proficiency. Additionally, experimental designs could investigate specific code-switching practices to identify which are most beneficial for language learning. This would provide more detailed guidance for educators on how to incorporate code-switching into teaching methodologies effectively.

Acknowledgement

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