

## CODE-SWITCHING AS A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL: A CASE STUDY IN A TECHNOLOGICAL INSTITUTION

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**ABSTRACT:** Code-switching, switching between two or more languages, plays a significant role in language classrooms. This case study investigates its role within an English language classroom in a Sri Lankan government higher educational institution specializing in engineering technology. It focuses on the impact of code-switching on student comprehension, participation, and classroom dynamics referring to interaction, communication flow and engagement between students and teachers during lessons. In order to explore how code-switching functions in this context, a semi-structured interview with an English language teaching practitioner was conducted. The analysis draws on established sociolinguistic theories and emphasizes code-switching as a pedagogical tool that promotes inclusivity by bridging linguistic and cultural gaps in language classrooms. Findings reveal that code-switching facilitates better comprehension of complex academic content, encourages greater student participation, and positively influences classroom dynamics by enhancing engagement and interaction. In addition to that, it contributes to the sustainability of education by recognizing and incorporating students' linguistic identities into the teaching-learning process. However, in order to ensure effective prolonged language acquisition, it is crucial to maintain a balance between the first language use and the development of target language proficiency. By promoting an inclusive and culturally responsive language learning environment, this study underscores the potential of code-switching to support ethical dimensions of educational sustainability. The integration of these approaches highlights the necessity for innovative teaching methods that accommodate linguistic diversity, in alignment with broader goals of sustainability in education. The study advances current discussions on how to create equitable, linguistically sensitive classrooms that empower students from diverse linguistic backgrounds while fostering effective English language learning. It also suggests how these findings may apply beyond engineering education to broader educational contexts.

*Keywords:* code-switching, English Language Teaching, pedagogy, sociolinguistics, sustainability in education

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The global upsurge of multilingual education reflects the increasing requirement to accommodate the needs of students from diverse linguistic backgrounds in formal educational settings, particularly in English language teaching (ELT). In Sri Lanka, where the English language is commonly used as the language in higher education, language barriers might hinder students' comprehension of complex academic content, specifically in specialized fields such as engineering. Code-switching; alternating or switching between languages functions as a feasible solution to these challenges. It enables students to draw on their first languages to facilitate comprehension in English language learning (Gumperz, 1982; Myers-Scotton, 1993).

Code-switching functions as an effective pedagogical tool that promotes inclusivity and cognitive development. This is accomplished by overcoming disparities and bridging the gaps in language proficiency in ELT. The aim of this study is to examine the role of code-switching in a higher education institute of engineering in Sri Lanka, where the English language is used as the medium of instruction. However, the students frequently switch to Sinhala or Tamil when confronted with complex academic concepts making code-switching a common practice to aid understanding. The main objective of this study is to evaluate how code-switching fosters comprehension and participation and classroom dynamics—defined as interaction, communication flow, and engagement between students and teachers in a multilingual educational context. Additionally, the study addresses ethical and cultural aspects of educational sustainability by investigating how code-switching promotes equity and inclusivity in classroom settings in ELT (Baynham, 2018; Li, 2018).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative methodology. A semi-structured interview was conducted with an experienced ELT practitioner from a government higher education institute of engineering. The practitioner, with over five years of experience in multilingual educational settings, was selected for their comprehensive understanding of the role of code-switching in language teaching. The interview was designed to collect data on the role of code-switching in classroom interactions. Attention was given to causes, frequency and the impact of code-switching on students' comprehension and engagement in the classroom.

The interview questions were designed to elicit in-depth responses on several key topics, including the factors that trigger code-switching, the frequency of its occurrence, and its impact on students' comprehension and participation within the classroom. Additionally, the questions explored the influence of code-switching on classroom dynamics, focusing on how it aids in communication flow and interaction between students and teachers and the pedagogical benefits and limitations of employing code-switching as a teaching method and strategies for effectively managing code-switching to foster language acquisition.

Two key sociolinguistics frameworks; Gumperz's Interactional Sociolinguistics and Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model were incorporated in order to analyze the data. Gumperz' (1982) theory posits code-switching serves as a contextualization cue, facilitating students in managing complex discourse. Moreover, Myers-Scotton (1993) claims that code-switching functions as a tool for negotiating social identity and group membership in multilingual contexts. Albirini (2011) further asserts that code-switching plays an important role in managing sociocultural identities in educational settings, particularly in ELT.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Triggers for Code-Switching

The interview data uncovered several key factors that trigger code-switching in the classroom context. The most common trigger was the complexity of the academic content, notably in technical subjects, where specialized terminology is often difficult to comprehend in English. The data revealed that the students often resorted to their first language to clarify complex concepts with their peers. Moreover, students frequently switched to their first language in order to better articulate their thoughts during conversations that involve emotionally sensitive or culturally specific topics. These findings support and align with Gumperz's Interactional Sociolinguistics, which proposes that code-switching assists in managing complex discourse by signaling shifts in topics (Gumperz, 1982; Baynham, 2018). Albirini (2011) also highlights that code-switching enables students to negotiate their social and cultural identities more effectively in educational contexts.

### 3.2 Frequency of Code-Switching

The interview data disclosed that code-switching frequently occurred, especially during interactive activities such as group tasks. According to the ELT practitioner, students usually initiate discussions in English but would switch to their first language; Sinhala or Tamil upon encountering difficulties. This consistent switching between languages facilitated collaboration allowing students to explain complex ideas or share culturally relevant examples by using their first languages. This finding supports Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model, which posits code-switching functions as a strategic tool for maintaining group cohesion and negotiating social identities in multilingual contexts, especially those focused on English language learning (Myers-Scotton, 1993).

### 3.3 Impact on Comprehension and Participation and Classroom Dynamics

Classroom dynamics, in this context, refers to how students interact, communicate, and engage during lessons. Code-switching allows for smoother communication flow, encourages peer collaboration, and fosters a more inclusive atmosphere, particularly beneficial for students less

confident in the target language. Students with lower proficiency in the target language benefit from the ability to switch to their first language, as it allows them to clarify complex academic concepts. This further promotes engagement in classroom discussions. However, the practitioner asserts that frequent use of code-switching may hinder prolonged language acquisition, as it reduces students' exposure to the target language. This finding underscores the potential drawbacks of relying on code-switching and the importance of a balanced approach that facilitates comprehension while promoting sustained language development.

### **3.4 Code-Switching and Educational Sustainability**

By fostering inclusivity and acknowledging linguistic and cultural identities of the students, code-switching facilitates sustainability in education. Allowing students to switch between languages helps educators foster inclusive learning environments that support linguistic diversity and ensure equal access to education for all students. This approach aligns with the ethical dimensions of educational sustainability, by preventing the marginalization of students from diverse linguistic backgrounds (Li, 2018). In addition, code-switching promotes culturally responsive pedagogy by acknowledging students' first languages as assets rather than hindrances to academic success in ELT.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

This study illustrates that code-switching functions as an important pedagogical tool in multilingual educational settings, especially where students encounter significant language barriers in English language learning. By allowing students the flexibility to incorporate their first language as required, the ELT practitioners can enhance comprehension, promote active participation and create more inclusive learning environments. Nonetheless, this study underscores the importance of regulating code-switching to reduce over-reliance on first languages, which may hinder prolonged language acquisition. The findings of this study suggest that code-switching contributes significantly to educational sustainability, particularly by embracing linguistic diversity. The incorporation of innovative pedagogical approaches that integrate code-switching will be vital, as educational institutions strive to accommodate diverse linguistic needs of students. This will ensure that all students, regardless of their linguistic backgrounds, have equal access to quality education. Future research should explore the prolonged effects of code-switching on language acquisition and academic performance.

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