# Exploring Students' Barriers to Code-Switching in English Classroom

*Retno Prastiwi[1], Linda Septiyana[1], Yeni Suprihatin[1], Leny Setiyana[1]*
[1]IAIN Metro
*retnoprastiwi782@gmail.com*[*]

## ABSTRACT

Nowadays, studies on code-switching involving students have received limited focus, despite many research conducted on the university students' code-switching. This study examines the contemporary issue of students' barriers due to excessive dependence on code-switching in the English classroom. This phenomenological study employed a qualitative analysis technique and involved ten students from the English and Arabic departments of a state Islamic institution in East Lampung, Indonesia. The research data were acquired through observations and interviews with the participants. Additionally, the findings of this study indicate that a lot of students consider the social context, including the identity of the interlocutor and the situations code-switching occurs in the English classroom. Furthermore, most of students associated code-switching with the custom prevalent in their environment. This study also revealed that students consciously realize and admit barriers in the learning process. The barriers stem from the students' excessive dependence on code-switching, hindering their ability to engage in tasks necessitating the usage of the target language. This study's findings will offer significant insights for students to help reduce the continuing usage of code-switching by anticipating its future implications, which will assist lecturers in adjusting their approach to code-switching in the English learning process in each department.

## INTRODUCTION

Presently, English has emerged as a significant discipline in higher education, pertinent not only to students in English department but also to those in other fields (Baa, 2018; Betti, 2021; Prabowo KA & Ambarini, 2022; Vrika et al., 2021), such as Arabic. Students frequently have difficulties in comprehending materials delivered in the target language (Bhatti et al., 2018; Muhtarom & Maghfiroh, 2022). Therefore, Jogulu (2024) and Putu et al. (2021) point out that the application of code-switching makes students more actively participate in learning and helps students understand the material presented. Moreover, code-switching facilitates the comprehension of similar sound, promoting vocabulary expansion and grammatical awareness between the source and target language (Flyman-Mattsson & Burenhult, 2009; Jabeen, 2023a; Macaro, 2017). Beside, as revealed by Aljoundi (2016) and Junaidi (2019) that the use of code-switching also has disadvantages in language learning. Excessive code-switching can make students face several obstacles such as; hinder direct understanding of the target language (Lipski,

2019; Shafi et al., 2020) and hinder language learning, as students may rely too heavily on their native language (Anggraini et al., 2023; Jabeen, 2023). Therefore, this study focuses to clarify the process of English language learning and examine the barriers faced by first-semester students from English and non-English departments regarding code-switching.

Numerous prior researches have investigated code-switching. The initial study investigates the benefit of code-switching employed by students pursuing a degree in English (Savase, 2024). The findings of this study reveal that although these practices may impact communication efficiency and cultural expression. The other study examines teachers' perspectives of code-switching (Istifci, 2019). The study indicates that code-switching is hardly employed and finishes with the recommendation to integrate the first language (L1) in language instruction. Similarly, the study examines code-switching through a quantitative methodology (Talal, 2022). This study findings indicate that students generally perceive code-switching favorably, and that teachers' use of code-switching can argument student engagement in classroom activities. Despite numerous papers addressing code-switching among students, a comprehensive examination of the issues encountered by students from English and non-English departments due to their reliance on code-switching has not been undertaken. The current study investigates students' perceptions and utilizes a qualitative study to understanding the phenomena.

Whereas several researches have explored the significance of code-switching in enhancing the learning process, there exists a scarcity of literature concerning the possible impacts of its excessive application. This study seeks to complete the previous researches. Examining the effects of excessive code-switching on EFL students is essential, as it directly influences their competency in the target language. This paper attempts: (1) to find out the implementation of code-switching in English classroom, (2) to investigate the challenges that students' face while using code-switching in English classroom.

This study intends to aid students, English Educators, and researchers. The initial resource is intended for students, offering insight into the function of code-switching in education, so assisting them in modulating its application. The second aspect pertains to English educators, as the study elucidates the challenges encountered by students, so guiding pedagogical practices to foster a more inclusive and successful educational atmosphere. This work enhances the literature on code-switching and language learning, providing a basis for future research about this affects in diverse educational settings and on language acquisitions.

**METHOD**

This study used a qualitative methodology to investigate the challenges faced by students in English and Arabic departments caused by their overdependence on code-switching during the learning process. Besides, this study utilize a case study to developing an in-depth description analysis of a phenomenon (Miles & Huberman, 1994). There are ten participants that selected by using purposive sampling technique. This technique used to select participants who have direct experience and relevance to the topic under study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The analysis of data was conducted with the interactive paradigm proposed by Miles & Huberman (1994), surrounding four essential phases: (1) Collecting data include semi-structured interviews and observation classes from both departments. (2) Reducing data requires the selection of significant information and the identification of patterns of code-switching patterns that impact the learning process. (3) Displaying data in matrices and charts to facilitate the visualization of the correlation among factors affecting code-switching usage. And (4) drawing conclusion were determined by validating findings through discussions with participants to make sure of accuracy and relevance.

This study used triangulation through the combination of several data sources, including interviews, observations, and academic records, to increase the study's validity. Member checking was conducted to confirm that the findings correctly represented the participants' experiences. This study aims to clarify the effects of code-switching on the learning process of students in the English and non-English department.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**
**The Implementation of Code-Switching in English Classroom**
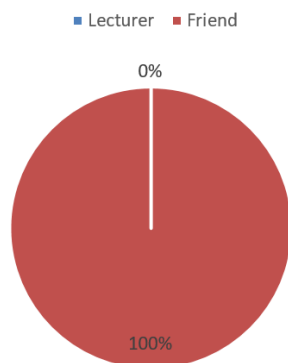
*Social context*



**Figure 1. Social Context of Using Code-Switching in English Classroom**

Students' code-switching in English classroom is frequently affected by their conversational partners. Figure 1 data reveals that students are more likely to code-switching during interactions with friends rather than with lecturers. Participant 1 uttered:

"[…] *I consistently depending on who I am speaking to, when conversing with lecturers, I try to utilize English. Nevertheless, while interacting with my friends, I frequently employ code-switching throughout the learning process*." (Participant 1)

From this statement, it can be interpreted that students use code-switching to adjust to their interlocutors. The students use code-switching with friend and lectures. The use of code-switching more often used with friends because they try to use the target language when talking to lecturers. Additionally, this findings correlates with Lestari's (2018) study, which utilized interview methods and demonstrated that the degree of intimacy between speakers greatly affects linguistic variance. Therefore, in the study, all participants 100% indicated a greater comfort in code-switching, frequently tending to their native language during interactions with friends.
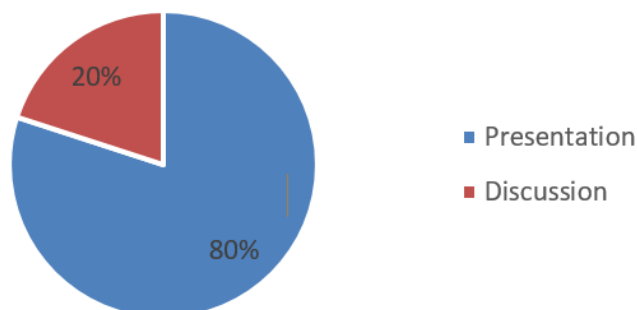
*The Situations*



**Figure 2. The Situation of Using Code-Switching in English Classroom**

Students' use of code-switching is carried out by considering situational context. In the English learning process, students' more often use code-switching when they are in certain situations, such as presentations, discussions, as well as questions and answers to better understand the material being discussed. The study findings show that 20% of students employ this strategy during discussions. This statement is evident from participant 3:

"[…] *when engaging in group discussions or question-and-answer sessions with lecturers, I often use code-switching.*" (Participant 3)

Meanwhile, 80% of students seek code-switching during English classroom presentations. For instance, participant 8 mentioned:

"*Yes, I used code-switching. Especially during presentations, because most of the audience do not understand the material. Perhaps one of the reasons is that we come from an Arabic department…*" (Participant 8)

Similarly, participant 4 from English department added:

"*When presenting assignments, I use code-switching to explain the material in greater detail.*" (Participant 4)

This phenomenon indicates that students often face challenges in understanding and conveying ideas using the target language, particularly when discussing complex topics. This is because students do not know the academic vocabulary conveyed. Consequently, code-switching is employed to overcome these limitations and ensure more transparent communication. These findings align with research conducted by Nahrowi (2022), which revealed that the primary reason for code-switching is to facilitate discussions on specific topics, thereby enhancing participants' comprehension. Moreover, Astuti (2020) states that the use of code-switching is caused by changes in the situation, such as the setting (class, home, work), the type of activity, and the category of speaker. Overall, this study demonstrates that code-switching in English classrooms not only supports students in expressing their ideas based on material comprehension but also their confidence and ensures that all class participants understand the relevant information properly.

**The Barriers that Students' Faced to Code-Switching in English Classroom**
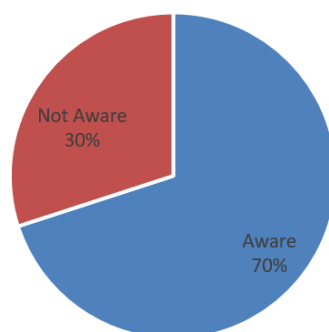
*Awareness*



**Figure 3. Students' Awareness to Code-Switching**

The reason why students use code-switching is that is done consciously and unconsciously. As illustrated in Figure 3 that show 30% of students expressed their unawareness to code switching in the English learning process. The following statement were stated by participant 5:

"[…] *I switch languages unconsciously, usually I do it spontaneously.*" (Participant 5)

In contrast to participant 2, who said that code-switching is used consciously:

"*I am aware of using code-switching. I can control myself, for example when presenting or answering questions from the lecturer, I try not to use code-switching until the situation*

*is urgent.*" (Participant 2)

These two assumptions show that code-switching can be done consciously or spontaneously to Indonesian. The participant used code-switching consciously and tries not to use it until an urgent situation. This study is in line with Astuti (2020), which shows that students are aware of what they convey, namely Indonesian, regional languages, and English. It can be concluded that awareness of language is recorded as having an influence not only on the thought process and learning processes but also on the way language is used to interact with each other socially.

### Environmental factors
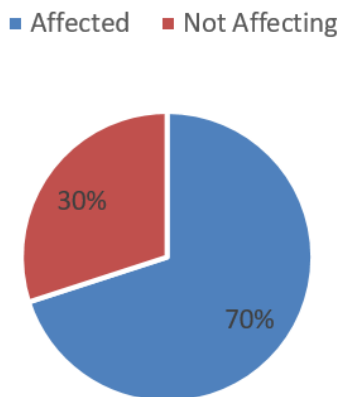


**Figure 4. Students' Environmental Factors of Using Code-Switching**

The surrounding environment affects the use of student code-switching. EFL students have different environmental backgrounds. The environmental background that influences students' speaking habits is also the reason for participants' use of code-switching. The data above shows that 70% of students feel the influence of the surrounding environment on code-switching in current learning activities. As point out by participant 3:

"[…] *I am grateful because the people around me have taught me English since I was a child, so now I can use it even though I often switch languages*". (Participant 3)

In addition, some participants were influenced by the Islamic boarding school environment, which required English and Arabic as their daily language. As participant 8 and participant 4 said:

"*When I was in Islamic boarding school, I used English three days a week and Arabic for days a week*". (Participant 8)

"*In my home environment I use Indonesian and Javanese. But, when I lived in the Islamic boarding school, I learned that I was required to use English and Arabic*". (Participant 4)

These responses indicated that the environment is influenced the student's habit on code-switching they used in English classroom.

Furthermore, there was 30% of the participants did not feel the influence of their environment with the use of code-switching. The participant stated that the environment did not affect her:

"[…] *no, since childhood I only speak Indonesian.*" (Participant 6)

The participant stated that she had only used her mother tongue since she was a child, and

she assumed that it did not affect the code-switching she used in the learning process. Among children, sociolinguistic factors, such as living in a bilingual community, can influence whether a child becomes bilingual (Siswanto et al., 2022). Therefore, the environment greatly influences students' speaking habits.

### Students' barriers to code-switching
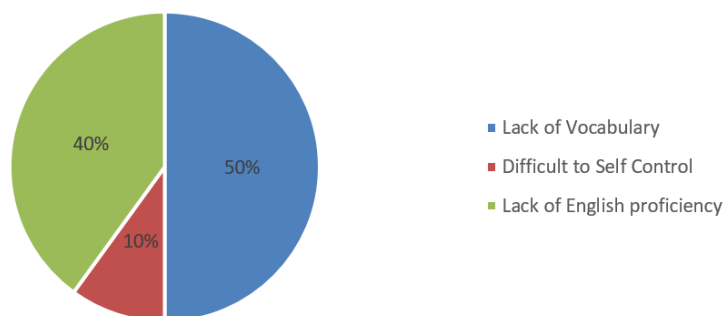


**Figure 5. The Challenges that Students' Faced in English Classroom**

Excessive code-switching can negatively affect students, as shown by the data above. Students who use code-switching excessively often face barriers in learning the target language. One of the main problems encountered is the lack of vocabulary, experienced by 50% of students. According to participant 5 statements:

"*One of the difficulties for me in balancing the use of the target language and speaking skills in class is the lack of vocabulary*". [P5]

This indicates that students struggle to expand their vocabulary due to the infrequency of practicing new words in daily conversations. Moreover, 10% of students also experience difficulty in controlling themselves and not relying on code-switching during the learning process. Participant 8 mentioned:

"*I find it hard to control myself only to use the target language because I tend to switch to Indonesian*". [P8]

This shows that dependence on code-switching can affect the fluency of the target language, as students feel more comfortable using Indonesian in certain situations. Furthermore, 40% of students acknowledge that difficulties in target language proficiency are dominant issue. Participant 6 revealed:

"*If I keep relying on Indonesian, my English will not improve*". [P6]

This response emphasizes the importance of continuous practice to hone target language skills, so students do not become dependent on a more familiar language. Excessive reliance on code-switching can negatively affect students' language proficiency, as this study indicates. This aligns with Kiem & Parcon's (2024) view, which suggests that although students believe code-switching challenges in the classroom may not have significant adverse effects, excessive use hinder them from exploring and applying new vocabulary. Therefore, reducing reliance on code-switching is essential to enhance student's overall language abilities.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the multifaceted dynamics of code-switching among first-semester students in English and Arabic departments at an Indonesian Islamic institution. The findings reveal that students' code-switching practices are shaped by social contexts (e.g., interlocutor identity), situational demands (e.g., presentations or discussions), and environmental influences

(e.g., bilingual upbringing or educational background). While code-switching aids comprehension and participation, excessive reliance on it creates barriers, including limited vocabulary acquisition, reduced self-control in using the target language, and hindered English proficiency development. Notably, students' awareness of their code-switching habits varies, with some consciously moderating its use while others unconsciously default to it. These results underscore the dual role of code-switching: a scaffold for communication yet a potential crutch that stifles linguistic growth. The implications call for pedagogical strategies that balance code-switching as a transitional tool while encouraging immersive target language practice. Educators should design activities that gradually reduce dependency on code-switching, fostering confidence in English-only interactions.

However, this study has limitations. The small sample size (ten participants) and focus on a single Islamic institution limit generalizability. Additionally, the research did not account for variables like students' prior language exposure or sociocultural attitudes toward English. Future studies should expand to diverse educational contexts, include longitudinal designs to track dependency effects, and explore interventions like structured code-switching frameworks or metacognitive training. Investigating how digital tools or peer collaboration can mitigate overreliance on code-switching would also enrich the discourse. Ultimately, addressing these gaps will empower educators to cultivate balanced bilingual competencies, ensuring code-switching serves as a bridge rather than a barrier in language acquisition.

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