



ISSN : 3048-4537(Online)

3049-2327(Print)

IIFS Impact Factor-6.125

Vol.-3; Issue-3 (July-Sept.) 2026

Page No.- 25-31

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DOI : 10.71037/gyanvidha.v3i3.05

<https://journal.gyanvidha.com>

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Code-Switching in English Language Classrooms : A Sociolinguistic Study of Vocabulary Learning, Learner Confidence and Teacher Attitudes

Abstract : This paper focuses on the teaching of English in multilingual environments, analyzing some of the socio-linguistic aspects of code-switching. It discusses the interdependence of teaching and learning vocab, learner confidence and teacher perception. It is based on a qualitative scoping synthesis of 19 peer-reviewed studies published between 2018 and 2024, including Indian classrooms and similar multilingual English language teaching (ELT) environments. The data suggest that well-planned switching between English and a language of the learners' familiarity can help define the meaning of words, improve recall, lessen anxiety about making mistakes, and enhance participation in the classroom. These improvements are most evident when learners have less than adequate English language skills and when classroom tasks are cognitively more challenging. Code-switching is not effective by design. Unplanned and excessive switching can, in fact, increase reliance on the code and decrease students' purposeful use of English. Teacher perception is equally polarized. While many teachers see the value in switching, English-only policies, learner assessments, social prestige, and a lack of professional development act as barriers. Instead of an English-only classroom, the authors advocate for an English-rich classroom. Purposeful code-switching can facilitate the return to productive English.

Keywords : code-switching; translanguaging; vocabulary learning; learner confidence; teacher attitudes; English language teaching; multilingual classrooms

2. Introduction : English classrooms do not have the same level of linguistic consistency. The diverse varieties and forms of English and languages accessed and used by learners and the types of English social and learning support they may need characterizes the English classroom. Many of them use different languages in an English classroom or learning environment to explain, ask

questions, make comparisons, tell jokes, and for other relating and socializing purposes. Code-switching is used to describe this phenomenon. Translanguaging, the use of multiple languages to make linguistic communication, is a more generalized term (Kim and Weng, 2022).

This is a significant issue in the Indian educational setting. English has the potential to be the dominant language of an academic setting or the workplace; however, classroom communication will most likely be multilingual. An instructor may use English to deliver instructions to the class, but may use other languages to explain challenging concepts. This may make instruction more accessible to class; however, it is counterproductive to the belief systems that may be held by various educational institutions that English is taught best when other languages are not used. A study conducted by Anderson and Lightfoot (2021) on 169 educators who worked in the primary, secondary, and adult educational segments in India, suggested that the use of other languages was mainly for explanation, comparison, translation, and classroom management, whereas translanguaging by learners was hardly ever practiced. Studies conducted later on eight other Indian educators found that to prepare learners for English-centric written exams, these educators adopted a flexible approach and prioritized learning over rigid separation of languages (Anderson, 2024).

The main consideration is not whether code-switching is good or bad. The focus should be on purpose, timing, quantity, learner level, and power structure in the classroom. This paper seeks to answer three questions. What is the impact of code-switching on vocabulary acquisition? How does it affect learners' confidence and active involvement? What influences teachers' perceptions and behaviors? It is contended that when selective code-switching is purposeful, of short duration, and preceded by substantial English output, it can aid in the learning process. Furthermore, it is contended that code-switching is a sociolinguistic choice. It involves the expression of one's identity, the granting of one's authority and inclusion, and the provision of inequitable access to the more socially and culturally accepted varieties of English.

3. Review of Literature : Current research considers the first language as more than an impediment to English learning. Rather, the consideration of multilingualism has evolved to view it as an asset in the learning environment. However, there is a need to differentiate between code-switching and translanguaging. While the former is said to occur when a speaker switches between two or more language systems, the latter is said to occur when a speaker engages in the meaning-making process using their linguistic repertoire and semiotic resources in a maximally flexible manner. In a classroom setting, this can involve the use of gestures, peer interactions in L1, and many other resourceful practices that aid the learning of English and the teaching of complex subject matter (Kim and Weng, 2022; Huang and Chalmers, 2023).

There is a strong emphasis on the role of the first language in the learning of vocabulary. For example, reading code-switched texts was shown to aid vocabulary learning, especially in tests that involved recalling vocabulary (Ong and Zhang, 2018). In addition, planned translanguaging tasks were shown to be more effective for vocabulary learning in a highly integrated English for Academic Purposes program than a strictly English-only framework (Galante, 2020a). Thus, vocabulary tasks that provide support in the learners' first language can facilitate the learning of English by allowing learners to contextualize English vocabulary in a relational framework.

Confidence and participation have both been positively correlated with multilingualism. Foreign language anxiety has been associated with silence, avoidance, and poor retention. Dryden, Tankosić, and Dovchin found that translanguaging with adult migrant learners created safe spaces and promoted self-expression (Dryden et al, 2021). Tai found that multilingualism created safe spaces which promoted participation with marginalised groups within English language science and maths lessons (Tai, 2022). Li and Qu found that translanguaging promoted

exploratory talk and evaluative discourse and did not limit English discourse (Li and Qu, 2024).

There are mixed reports on teacher attitudes. It has been shown that teachers switch languages for explanation, classroom control, and social fix ups (Temesgen and Hailu, 2022; Ataş and Sağın-Şimşek, 2021). Orfan found that 189 Afghan teachers used L1 for challenging grammar, vocabulary, and teaching complex ideas to low proficiency learners (Orfan, 2023). Just because teachers have a positive outlook towards multilingualism, it does not mean that they will implement it. Teachers have been reported to have a fear of being disapproved by the institution, fostering a reliance on the students, and creating a negative impact on the students' language skills (Galante, 2020a; Almayez, 2022). Studies conducted in India have shown that teachers also have a multilingual mindset and believe that they have to teach in accordance with the practices of a multilingual society (Kumar et al, 2021). While the findings are positive, the overall evidence is still patchy. Huang and Chalmers have said that many positive intervention studies have been poorly executed (Huang and Chalmers, 2023). More studies on the integration of multilingual practices in various Indian classrooms are needed.

4. Research Methodology : This paper applied a qualitative scoping review. It also did not gather new data from students or teachers. Its aim was to identify existing trends in the literature and to avoid reporting fictitious findings from the field. The evidence set was made up of 19 studies published from 2018 to 2024. It contains peer-reviewed journal articles, systematic reviews, classroom case studies, surveys, quasi-experimental research, and one research-based book chapter.

The research was conducted by examining ERIC records, journal articles and book chapters, and searching for available DOIs. The search terms were “code-switching,” “translanguaging,” “English classroom,” “vocabulary,” “confidence,” and “anxiety,” accompanied by “teacher attitudes,” and “India.” A study was included if it analyzed a multilingual classroom of English and any of the other related fields (EFL, ESL) and addressed one of the three focal areas. Opinion articles, unverifiable reports, and studies that were not related to classroom learning were excluded. Studies conducted in India were emphasized, while studies from other countries were referenced for comparison in the absence of local evidence.

When analyzing the data, I used the following codes: context, participants, research method, language practice, reported outcomes, teacher stance, and limitations. The resulting codes were then grouped into five categories: lexical scaffolding, confidence and anxiety, participation, teacher beliefs, and institutional constraints. Only the quantitative findings that were clearly defined in the original studies were included in the analysis. No effect sizes were combined, as the studies were dissimilar and used different outcomes. The resulting analysis contains a synthesis of the themes rather than a formal research synthesis. It highlights the overlapping theories. However, it cannot account for the effects of one teaching strategy as it relates to the wide diversity of the Indian population (i.e. across regions, languages, different kinds of schools, and teaching different levels of language proficiency). This was done in the interest of keeping the review focused and reproducible.

5. Code-Switching: Vocabulary and Confidence in ELT : Learning vocabulary goes beyond learning the meaning of words. A learner must first be able to notice the word, learn what it means, integrate the word into their knowledge, be able to remember the word, and finally, be able to use it correctly in context. All of these steps can be aided with selective code-switching. It is likely that a brief explanation in the word's language will ensure that the word is understood. Meaning, grammar, and appropriate use in context can be explained using cross-language comparison. Ideas that learners may be unable to express in English can be activated with discussion in the learners' native language.

There are studies that back this. Ong and Zhang studied a group of 154 learners, all of

whom were learning a number of unfamiliar English words through word texts in their native language. The code-switched context made the target vocabulary noticeable and learners made meaning inferences. Vocabulary gains were observed in a delayed vocabulary test a week after (Ong and Zhang, 2018). Galante observed vocabulary activity in a multilingual context, word comparison, and cross-language word association in a multilingual context, all of which promoted multilingual vocabulary beyond a monolingual context (Galante, 2020b). It is also important to note that these studies don't advocate for a substitution of English with translation. The focus is on the connections that are made between languages. Understanding and recall of vocabulary can indeed be promoted with strategic connections across languages.

Code-switching may also help to develop learner confidence. Students may lack the lexical resources to articulate their understanding of concepts in English. By proposing a familiar language for planning, the distinction between understanding of a concept and language is lessened. The learner can then scaffold the plan in English. Translanguaging, according to Dryden, Tankosić, and Dovchin, mitigated language learners' anxiety, feelings of isolation, and fear (Dryden et al, 2021). Li and Qu also noted that exploratory talk and higher order thinking within the English language was maintained in the presence of a multilingual environment (Li and Qu, 2024).

This type of a framework is endorsed in the Indian classroom. Flexible language practices of expert teachers promoted participation, but also scaffolding learners to the English language requirements of the assessment (Anderson, 2024). There is a danger that learners may become reliant on translation. For this reason, code-switching must be concise and direct. The first point must be in English, then the other language may be used for the difficult translation, but the learners must be directed to English through the practice of spoken or written English and lexical activities.

6. Teacher Attitudes on Code-Switching Dynamics : Teacher attitudes are not solely attributable to personal preferences. Attitudes are shaped by training, assessment and examination requirements, learner levels, and school and parental expectations and policies. It is safe to say that English teachers are likely to employ code-switching while simultaneously considering it as an undesirable practice. This contradiction is important as it illustrates that classroom practice and public ideology do not always coincide.

The gap described is represented in The Indian Survey by Anderson and Lightfoot. Of 169 respondents, most reported using other languages now and then, particularly for explanation and comparison. English-medium organizations were less accepting. The rural, semi-urban, and urban contexts were reportedly different as well. More experienced teachers also reportedly held more accepting views (Anderson and Lightfoot, 2021). A smaller study from Delhi-NCR (2021) that included 20 teachers, also found code-switching for explanation, question translation, confirmation, comprehension checks, and solidarity, although the general view was negative. It appears that where there is a lack of understanding, teachers are forced to go beyond the English instruction.

The divide between attitude and practice is found in the data from other countries as well. In Saudi Arabia, for example, of the 101 university teachers (English), c. 70% reported that the use of the mother tongue was justified, translanguaging was central to the process of learning the language, and in general, language teaching would promote the learners' self-confidence. However, the overall mean for reported use was low at 2.57 for a 5-point scale. The use of the mother tongue was justified only for learners with a low level of English, where the mean was 3.39 (Almayez, 2022). English was the only language of instruction, and there was no common language among the learners. In Orfan (2023) teachers of Afghanistan faced similar problems.

When teachers are educated about code-switching, it can be more beneficial to use their

discretion about when to switch languages. It is more about providing teachers the tools to identify when other languages are beneficial and using them in appropriate ways to return to English as the language of instruction. Translanguaging is indicative of context-dependent practices, not poor teaching, in Barahona's model (Barahona, 2020). Yüzlü and Dikilitaş also argue that, rather than serving as a last-resort strategy, purposefully extending translanguaging integrates within skill-building (Yüzlü and Dikilitaş, 2022). What teachers require is a principled set of options, rather than a constraint or a 'free for all.' This discernment is an aspect of professionalism.

7. Data Analysis and Results : Thematic analysis revealed four principal findings. The first finding was the learning of new vocabulary and the clarification of concepts. Code-switching has been shown to have a positive effect on vocabulary development. In the absence of a contextual translation, students tend to compare the two languages, resulting in more positive vocabulary results. Ong and Zhang studied 78 students in the experimental group and 76 students in the control group and reported that the code-switching group outperformed both groups in vocabulary recall during both the immediate and delayed tests. Galante reported that the code-switching/translanguaging group of 129 students achieved a greater vocabulary score than the group that engaged in translanguaging activities. Additionally, bilingual studies showed that teachers code-switched in order to explain new vocabulary, difficult concepts, rules of grammar, and comprehension challenges (Orfan, 2023; Temesgen and Hailu, 2023).

The second finding was the facilitation of classroom participation. The introduction of an L1 into the classroom reduced student anxiety and provided L1 speakers the courage to verbalize their thoughts (Dryden et al., 2021; Tai, 2022). Li and Qu showed that translanguaging groups produced 25,319 words in comparison to 12,794 words produced in the English-oriented groups, and scored better in English, resulting in more in-depth discussions and a greater level of cognitive engagement.

The third finding was that due to participant reports, attitudes to code-switching remained ambiguous. Within the study of 169 Indian teachers, it was reported that code-switching in the classroom occurred, but it was not encouraged (Anderson and Lightfoot, 2021). However, among eight expert teachers in the study, code-switching was a priority for engagement (Anderson, 2024). There were similar findings in the Saudi and Canadian studies, where code-switching was positively regarded, but was limited (Almayez, 2022; Galante, 2020a).

Finally, the success of these practices was due to deliberate planning. These practices included bilingual reading, vocabulary juxtaposition, peer explanation, and temporary clarification, followed by a response in English. Huang and Chalmers discovered that only five out of the ten translanguaging interventions reviewed were in favor of translanguaging. The other four interventions were positive, but the studies were critically biased (Huang and Chalmers, 2023). As a result, controlled scaffolding and code-switching are complementary, though general proclamations are unfounded.

8. Discussion : These results demonstrate that code-switching operates at cognitive and social levels. At the cognitive level, code-switching helps learners connect new English language structures and vocabulary. At the social level, understanding a learner's first language helps the learning community understand that language does not make the learner less intelligent. This helps to alleviate the concern that learners will perceive their incomplete English as a sign of their lack of intelligence. This understanding is helpful to redistribute the opportunities to speak. Those learners that prefer to be silent in a classroom that speaks only English may choose to help perform the task or provide input when the task is translated to a language they prefer.

This is especially important in the Indian classroom, where a single teacher may not be able to understand all of the students' native languages. Pedagogical translanguaging makes it possible

to not understand all the students' languages. Students may perform paraphrasing, make language comparisons in small groups, talk to a peer, or collaborate on a written task to help them formulate their response in English. The same applies to the Strategies for Learning framework. This is a flexible framework that encourages the use of the learners' first language and supports cognitive independence of the individual learners rather than the strict use of a single language in the educational process (Mahapatra and Anderson, 2023).

The English language remains the main focus and objective of learning, and students are encouraged to speak, write, and collaborate instead of maintaining silence. There are constraints regarding the existing evidence. There are variations in contexts, ages, languages, and outcome measures. Often, the confidence in the evidence is more from interviews or participation than from longitudinal evidence. Many studies are based on small samples. The quality of interventions is inconsistent. Thus, Indian studies should address the following issues: comparison of planned versus unplanned switching, rural versus urban sites, retention of vocabulary beyond one week, measurement of confidence with validated scales and classroom participation, and observation of actual teaching behaviour.

9. Conclusion : Code-switching shouldn't be mischaracterized in either direction in English language classrooms as either a failure of English or a panacea to multilingualism. Its worth is ultimately contextual. The reviewed literature suggests that constructed short phases of English interspersed with a familiar language can reduce anxiety and promote interaction as well as clarifying and linking vocabulary. The proposed advantages are especially relevant to learners with low levels of English and to tasks that require high levels of cognition. The attitude of teachers is the most important of all the factors that determine the successful application of any educational theory. Many teachers recognize that multilingualism is important, but they must work in an environment that promotes English only. Some are concerned that it will lead to loss of control or dependency. These concerns are justified in constant code-switching without any control. However, it is important to remove multilingualism from the classroom. Evidence from expert teaching shows that it is possible to promote participation and achieve positive results in the English language.

In India, where multilingualism is the norm, English language classrooms should be English language rich. Teachers should be able to introduce a concept in English and intersperse the instruction with a language of their choice to remove barriers, with the expectation that learners will return to English to complete a task. Educational institutions should promote this approach by providing teachers with flexible teaching/learning materials and curricula that acknowledge and support the linguistic rich environment.

Future research should investigate Indian multi-site studies that utilize larger sample sizes, classroom observation, delayed vocabulary assessments, and direct measures for confidence and willingness to communicate. Future research should also investigate the participants who may be included and/or excluded by each language choice. Code-switching is most justifiable when it increases accessibility and does not reduce the final learning demand. When used in that way, it is a disciplined bridge to English and not an avoidance of English.

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