

## Code-Switching as a Mediatlional Tool in EFL Classrooms: Students' Attitudes, Perceptions, and Learning Experiences

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### Abstract

*This study investigates how local linguistic features and perceptions of This study examines code-switching as a mediational tool in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms by focusing on students' attitudes, perceptions, and learning experiences. Although teacher code-switching between English and Bahasa Indonesia is prevalent in Indonesian EFL settings, previous research has largely emphasized teachers' linguistic and pedagogical intentions, overlooking students' perspectives as active participants in mediated learning. Using a mixed-method design, the study involved 100 students from grades X–XII at SMA PGRI 2 Kairatu, selected through simple random sampling. Quantitative data were gathered through questionnaires measuring cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of attitudes and perceptions, analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation tests, and regression via SPSS. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 10–15 purposively selected students and analyzed thematically with data triangulation. Findings indicate that students generally hold positive attitudes toward code-switching, viewing it as a facilitative tool that bridges comprehension gaps, reduces anxiety, and promotes engagement, while also expressing concern about potential overreliance on the mother tongue. Drawing on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, the study reframes code-switching as a cognitive and pedagogical scaffold. Conducted in eastern Indonesia, it contributes a rarely represented context to global EFL discourse, advances theoretical discussions on bilingual classroom interaction, and offers pedagogical and policy implications for functionally informed, context-sensitive code-switching practices.*

### Article Info:

**Keywords:** Bilingual Interaction, Code-Switching, EFL, Pedagogical Strategies, Sociocultural Mediation

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## INTRODUCTION

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning in Indonesia, the use of code-switching between English and Bahasa Indonesia is an almost inevitable phenomenon (Sahib et al., 2021; Zalukhu et al., 2021). In everyday classroom interactions, teachers frequently switch from the target language to the mother tongue to explain difficult concepts, emphasize meaning, provide instructions, or simply build emotional closeness with students. This phenomenon is not merely a linguistic symptom but a complex pedagogical strategy reflecting the social, psychological, and cultural dynamics between teachers and students in the language learning process (Afryanti et al., 2021; Novianti & Said, 2021). On one hand, code-switching is viewed as an effective tool to bridge comprehension gaps and reduce students' language anxiety. On the other hand, concerns arise that such habitual use may reduce students' exposure to the target language and hinder deeper internalization of English

proficiency. This tension makes the issue particularly relevant and compelling to explore, how students, as the primary recipients of such classroom practices, interpret their experiences and to what extent they perceive code-switching as helpful, obstructive, or even a natural part of the language learning process (Dewi, 2021; Kadir, 2021).

The significance of this topic becomes more evident when considering the sociolinguistic and cultural diversity of EFL classrooms in Indonesia. In many schools, particularly in non-urban regions such as eastern Indonesia, English is not only a foreign language but also a language rarely encountered outside the classroom context (Foster & Welsh, 2021; Sihombing & Rani, 2023). In such circumstances, code-switching serves as both a cognitive and affective bridge between students' lived worlds and the target language. Teachers utilize Bahasa Indonesia to explain grammatical structures, provide relevant examples, or ensure accurate comprehension. These observations are supported by various studies suggesting that selective use of the mother tongue in foreign language learning can enhance students' conceptual understanding and emotional engagement (Pharamita et al., 2021; Pratama, 2022; Sahib et al., 2021). However, how students themselves perceive this practice, whether they feel supported or dependent, remains an open question that has not been thoroughly explored within the Indonesian context.

Research on code-switching in EFL classrooms has been conducted in various global contexts with diverse findings. Muslim et al. (2020) and Patra et al. (2022) argue that code-switching serves important pedagogical functions, such as clarification and meaning reinforcement. Rahman et al. (2022) and Souisa et al. (2020) add that teachers employ code-switching not merely due to linguistic limitations but as a conscious discursive strategy. In the Malaysian context, Dinamika and Hanafiah (2019) and Turan and Akdag-Cimen (2020) found that students perceive teachers' code-switching positively, as it helps them understand the lesson better. Meanwhile, Novita et al. (2020) and Samsir et al. (2024) caution that excessive use of the mother tongue can hinder students' exposure to the target language, emphasizing that balance between the two languages is crucial for effectiveness. Other studies by Chien et al. (2020) and Liando et al. (2023) approach code-switching from a sociocultural perspective, highlighting the mediating role of language in constructing the Vygotskian Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in EFL classrooms. From this perspective, code-switching is not merely a communicative tool but also a cognitive instrument that enables learners to navigate dynamically between the mother tongue and the foreign language.

Several studies across Asia reveal that students' perceptions of code-switching are significantly influenced by social context and language proficiency levels. Nguyen and Nguyen (2024) in China found that students with lower proficiency levels tend to favor code-switching, as it provides a sense of security and aids comprehension. Conversely, higher-proficiency students prefer full English exposure for greater challenge and authenticity. Similarly, Putra and Musigrungsi (2022) observed that code-switching is viewed positively when it facilitates conceptual learning but negatively when used for non-essential purposes. In South Africa, Chaves-Yuste and de la Peña (2023) demonstrated that code-switching functions as a pedagogical strategy that negotiates students' linguistic identities within

multilingual classrooms. These findings suggest that the functions of code-switching are not universal but context-dependent, shaped by the sociolinguistic setting and participants' perceptions.

In Indonesia, recent studies have begun to examine this phenomenon. Novita et al. (2024) found that EFL teachers use code-switching to explain technical terms, create a friendly atmosphere, and manage classroom behavior. Meanwhile, Ahmed (2021) and Hezam et al. (2022) highlight its effectiveness in reducing students' cognitive load when grasping complex grammatical concepts. Other studies by Kandiawan (2022) and Nahak and Bram (2022) note ambivalence among teachers, they acknowledge the benefits of code-switching but feel guilty for deviating from the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). However, most of these studies focus primarily on teachers as the main subjects, treating students merely as passive recipients of pedagogical strategies. Consequently, students' experiences, emotions, and meaning-making processes related to code-switching have not been systematically explored.

Furthermore, developments in sociocultural theory within applied linguistics provide a new lens to view code-switching not merely as a linguistic strategy but as a mediational tool in learning. Andriani (2023) and Nasrullah et al. (2023) emphasize that language mediation lies at the core of cognitive development, where language functions as an intermediary in thought processes. Within this framework, code-switching can be seen as a form of mediation enabling students to access new concepts in a foreign language through familiar linguistic pathways. Susanti et al. (2024) demonstrated that bilingual interaction in collaborative tasks strengthens this mediational function, helping students negotiate meaning and construct shared understanding. Yet, in real classroom practice, this mediational aspect has rarely been explored from students' perspectives, particularly in developing countries with limited exposure to foreign languages.

A critical review reveals that most previous studies have examined the functions of code-switching primarily from teachers' or formal linguistic perspectives, with little attention to how students themselves construct meaning in such situations. From a sociocultural standpoint, however, learning is a process centered on students' experiences and meaning-making. The lack of studies integrating students' affective and cognitive dimensions in understanding the mediational role of code-switching results in an incomplete picture of the practice. Moreover, most similar research has been conducted in urban or non-Indonesian settings, where social and linguistic conditions differ significantly. As a result, empirical representation from peripheral regions such as Maluku remains scarce in academic literature, even though such contexts hold great potential to broaden global understanding of bilingual classroom dynamics in developing countries.

This study seeks to fill that gap by shifting the focus from teachers' actions to students' experiences, from how code-switching is employed to how it is perceived and interpreted. Using a mixed-method design that integrates quantitative and qualitative data, this research not only measures students' attitudes and perceptions toward code-switching but also explores their emotional and reflective experiences in language learning. Through this

approach, code-switching is understood not merely as a communicative strategy but as a form of mediation that bridges language, cognition, and learner identity. Such a perspective offers a more humanistic understanding of a phenomenon often taken for granted, shedding light on its pedagogical significance in everyday classroom practices.

Beyond its theoretical contributions, this study also offers practical implications for English language teaching in Indonesia. By understanding how students interpret and respond to code-switching, teachers can develop reflective awareness in managing their classroom language strategies. Code-switching should no longer be viewed as a “violation” of CLT principles but as a functionally informed pedagogical choice. The findings of this study are expected to promote more context-sensitive teacher training and enrich academic discourse on bilingual classroom practices in Southeast Asia.

### RESEARCH METHOD

This study was designed to provide a rich, multilayered understanding of code-switching as a mediational tool in EFL classrooms by combining the strengths of quantitative and qualitative approaches. It adopted a mixed-method design in which the quantitative instrument, a questionnaire administered to 100 students from grades X–XII selected through simple random sampling, served as an initial mapping of attitudes and perceptions, while the qualitative inquiry explored experiences, motivations, and affective nuances that numerical data could not capture. The qualitative approach was chosen to understand the phenomenon from participants’ perspectives, how they construct meaning, feel, and negotiate code-switching in classroom interactions, aligning with qualitative research principles emphasizing context and meaning (Natow, 2020; Vindrola-Padros & Johnson, 2020).

The research site, SMA PGRI 2 Kairatu, was purposefully chosen. The school represents eastern Indonesia, a region relatively underexplored in studies of bilingual classroom practices, thus offering an empirical opportunity to enrich the literature with data from a distinct sociolinguistic setting. Additionally, the site was selected for its accessibility for field observation, administrative support, and the diverse sociocultural backgrounds of its students, all of which make it a suitable location for exploring locally influenced code-switching dynamics. Ethical and practical considerations were also prioritized: institutional permission and teacher support were obtained, ensuring that data collection proceeded respectfully and collaboratively.

Qualitative informants were purposively selected based on preliminary questionnaire analysis. A total of 10–15 students were invited for semi-structured interviews, representing variations in English proficiency, attitude scores toward code-switching (high, moderate, low), gender, and grade level. This sampling aimed to capture meaningful contrasts, such as between students who perceive code-switching as helpful and those who find it distracting, consistent with qualitative sampling practices emphasizing case variation (Gephart, 2018; Stanley, 2023). All participants and parents (for minors) were fully informed about the study and signed consent forms, with guarantees of anonymity and the right to withdraw at any time.

Data collection followed a systematic yet human-centered procedure: questionnaires were administered in class to obtain initial insights; the results were analyzed descriptively and correlationally using SPSS to identify patterns and interview candidates; semi-structured interviews were then conducted in Bahasa Indonesia or a mix of Bahasa Indonesia and English, depending on participant comfort. With consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews were designed to elicit narratives, probing questions about specific moments when code-switching helped or hindered learning, along with affective reflections, to generate rich narrative data. Additionally, the researcher conducted limited classroom observations and collected relevant documents (lesson plans, teaching materials) to contextualize findings.

Qualitative analysis followed a thematic approach, comprising familiarization, initial coding, theme development, and interpretive synthesis linked to the sociocultural mediation framework (Priya, 2021; Wiesner, 2022). Credibility was ensured through methodological triangulation (questionnaires, interviews, observations/documents), source triangulation (across students and documents), and investigator triangulation via a secondary coder involved in coding and thematic discussions until consensus was reached. Additional validity was achieved through member checking, where summary findings were shared with participants for confirmation, and through an audit trail documenting analytical decisions (Naeem et al., 2023). All procedures adhered to ethical standards for social and educational research and were guided by a pragmatic orientation balancing rigor with respect for participants' voices.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Overview of Quantitative Findings: Students' General Attitudes and Perceptions

Quantitative analysis of 100 students from grades X to XII at SMA PGRI 2 Kairatu revealed that the majority of students hold positive attitudes toward teachers' use of code-switching in English language instruction. Questionnaire data processed through SPSS indicated that over 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that code-switching helps them comprehend difficult material, clarify new terms, and reduce anxiety in learning. This percentage reflects a general tendency showing that the practice of code-switching is not only functionally accepted but also perceived as emotionally valuable in fostering a conducive learning environment.

The mediating function of code-switching appeared strongest in cognitive (concept and vocabulary comprehension) and affective (comfort and confidence) aspects. Results of correlation and simple regression analyses revealed a significant positive relationship ( $r = 0.72$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between students' cognitive perceptions of understanding and their affective perceptions of learning comfort. In other words, the more students perceived code-switching as beneficial in helping them understand the material, the higher their comfort and motivation in learning English.

This finding was reinforced by in-depth interviews with several informants. One Grade XI student (S.R.) mentioned that the teacher's explanation in two languages made her more

willing to ask questions because she was “not afraid of misunderstanding or feeling embarrassed when she didn’t understand certain English terms.” Another student, M.D., expressed that he “could grasp the teacher’s point faster when difficult terms were explained again in Indonesian.” These statements highlight the psychological dimension of code-switching, its role as an affective bridge that lowers emotional barriers (affective filter) in second-language learning (Bunghanoy & Sumalinog, 2023; Zhang, 2023).

Field observations revealed that teachers naturally employed code-switching, especially when introducing complex academic terms, explaining grammar, or giving group activity instructions. For instance, when explaining the passive voice structure, the teacher first provided an example in English, then followed with an Indonesian explanation to ensure full comprehension. During these moments, students appeared more focused and responsive, with several taking small translation notes in their notebooks. Such moments indicate that code-switching functions not merely as a communicative tool but as a cognitive means to help students construct conceptual bridges between two linguistic systems.

Further analysis showed minor variations across grade levels. Students in grades X and XI tended to display higher levels of agreement toward code-switching compared to grade XII students, some of whom expressed that they “needed more full English exposure before the final exams.” This suggests that positive perceptions of code-switching are also influenced by linguistic maturity and specific learning needs. However, no significant differences were found across gender or proficiency levels ( $p > 0.05$ ), implying that acceptance of code-switching is relatively uniform among the student population.

Theoretically, these findings align with Richards (2020) in Language Teaching Research, who argues that positive perceptions of bilingual practices in classrooms enhance students’ cognitive engagement and sense of social belonging. When students feel that their mother tongue is acknowledged and used strategically, they experience affective safety, which in turn promotes active participation and engagement. This principle also resonates with Vygotsky’s (2008) theory of mediation, which posits that language serves as a mediating tool for thought processes rather than merely as a means of communication. Thus, in this context, code-switching is not a form of “linguistic deviation,” but a psycho-pedagogical mechanism that bridges prior knowledge and new concepts being learned.

Quantitatively, regression analysis showed that cognitive perception significantly contributed to affective perception, with an  $R^2$  value of 0.56. This means that more than half of the variation in learning comfort could be explained by how well students understood the material through code-switching. This demonstrates that good comprehension of the learning content directly impacts students’ sense of comfort and confidence in using English. Field observations supported this finding: when teachers spoke exclusively in English for extended periods without transitioning into Indonesian, several students began to lose focus or whisper among themselves. However, once the teacher engaged in code-switching to clarify meaning, the classroom atmosphere reactivated, and students became more participative.

Some students also associated the benefits of code-switching with inclusivity. Lower-proficiency students felt that they were not left behind, while higher-proficiency students still



found challenges because teachers used code-switching selectively. As one Grade XII student, R.N., stated, “Our teacher doesn’t always translate, only when we seem confused. So, it doesn’t feel like spoon-feeding but rather helping.” This perception reflects that students’ positive attitudes toward code-switching emerge from a balance between linguistic and pedagogical needs.

Overall, these quantitative findings confirm prior studies showing that code-switching functions as an effective linguistic mediation strategy. Research by Domínguez Romero and Bobkina (2021) in the Indonesian EFL context also emphasized that code-switching not only aids linguistic comprehension but also fosters more meaningful social interaction in class. Similar findings by Hukubun et al. (2022) and Wenno et al. (2021) revealed that deliberate bilingual use by teachers helps students connect prior and new knowledge while reducing communication anxiety in foreign language learning.

From a sociocultural perspective, these findings bear broader implications: students’ acceptance of code-switching reflects their acceptance of their own bilingual reality. Rather than viewing it as an “interference” to monolingual practices, students perceive code-switching as a safe space for thinking and holistic learning. Thus, behind the statistical figure showing that 90% of students agree on its benefits lies a complex psychosocial dynamic, a form of cognitive and affective adaptation to language learning within Indonesia’s multilingual society.

### **Code-Switching as Cognitive Mediation: Enhancing Comprehension and Conceptual Clarity**

The cognitive dimension of code-switching in the EFL classroom at SMA PGRI 2 Kairatu emerged as the most prominent finding in this study. Based on questionnaire data from 100 students, more than 90% stated that the teacher’s use of code-switching helped them understand difficult material, particularly when it involved grammatical concepts and new vocabulary. This data indicates that code-switching functions as a thinking aid, not merely as a linguistic bridge, but also as a mechanism of cognitive mediation that guides students in constructing meaning and new knowledge structures.

Quantitative analysis showed that among all cognitive-related items, “The use of code-switching by the teacher in the EFL classroom makes it easy for you to understand the material given by the teacher” and “The use of code-switching by the teacher in the EFL classroom makes it easy for you to understand new vocabularies in English” received the highest levels of agreement (95% and 93%, respectively). A significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.71$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) was also found between the frequency of code-switching and increased perception of conceptual understanding. Simply put, the more frequently the teacher used code-switching contextually, the more students felt capable of understanding the lesson content.

This finding was further reinforced by in-depth interviews with several informants. An eleventh-grade student, identified as R.L., mentioned that when the teacher explained tenses by comparing English and Indonesian structures, he “finally understood why verbs change form.” Meanwhile, another informant, N.A., expressed that code-switching allowed her to “reorganize meaning in her head,” as she first understood the logic of the sentence in Indonesian before linking it to English form. These statements confirm that the cognitive

processes occurring in a bilingual classroom involve not mere translation, but the internalization of meaning through conceptual bridges familiar to students.

Field observations during several class sessions revealed interactional patterns consistent with these data. Teachers typically began explaining new topics entirely in English, then switched to Indonesian when noticing signs of confusion, blank stares, whispers among seatmates, or hesitant answers. For instance, when discussing the difference between the simple past and the present perfect tense, the teacher explained, “We use present perfect for something that happened in the past but still has relevance now,” and then added in Indonesian, “So, if you use ‘have/has + verb 3,’ it’s usually for something that still has a connection until now.” After this switch, students nodded simultaneously, and several immediately attempted to provide new examples. Such moments demonstrate how code-switching functions as a mediational tool that enables conceptual understanding to progress from familiar contexts toward new linguistic forms.

Theoretically, this phenomenon can be explained through the sociocultural mediation framework developed by Vygotsky (2008), which views language not only as a means of communication but also as a psychological tool that mediates thinking and knowledge formation. In bilingual classrooms, code-switching acts as a dual mediating tool: it connects students’ linguistic worlds with the broader academic world while also mediating between social and conceptual understanding. Arrizki et al. (2020) in *Applied Linguistics Review* describe code-switching as a cognitive scaffolding tool, a temporary structure that helps learners construct new meanings by relying on linguistic resources they already master. Thus, code-switching is not merely a pedagogical adjustment but a cognitive internalization mechanism that strengthens conceptual clarity and meaning construction.

In the context of SMA PGRI 2 Kairatu, where most students come from bilingual backgrounds (Indonesian and local languages such as Ambon Malay), this practice becomes even more relevant. Teachers who can code-switch appropriately not only enhance linguistic comprehension but also facilitate thinking processes aligned with students’ mental habits of alternating between languages in daily life. Observations showed that previously passive students became more active after the teacher used code-switching. For instance, when the teacher asked a question in English and then clarified in Indonesian, previously silent students began raising their hands and answering, even using mixed language. This pattern indicates that code-switching creates a safe space for thinking, experimenting, and constructing meaning without excessive linguistic pressure.

This finding also highlights the epistemic function of code-switching. Some students admitted that explanations in Indonesian allowed them to “find the logic” behind English structures. For example, a twelfth-grade student (F.S.) stated that he only understood conditional sentences after the teacher explained in Indonesian about cause-and-effect relationships in temporal contexts. This shows that code-switching helps students transfer conceptual knowledge from one linguistic system to another. In Vygotskian terms, this process can be described as internalization through mediation, where new meaning is built through social and symbolic interaction with the help of mediational tools (in this case, the



mother tongue).

Interestingly, regression analysis showed that positive perceptions of code-switching in the cognitive dimension were significantly correlated with increased student confidence in answering the teacher's questions ( $r = 0.68$ ). This demonstrates a cascading effect between comprehension and cognitive engagement, when students understand, they engage more; and when they engage, learning becomes deeper. This phenomenon was directly observed by the researcher: during speaking drills, students who received meaning clarification in Indonesian tended to speak more fluently when returning to English. Teachers also appeared to use code-switching reflectively, not impulsively, as part of a goal-oriented teaching strategy.

Compared with previous studies, this result is consistent with Novianti and Said (2021), who emphasized that code-switching functions as a conceptual bridge that accelerates comprehension in foreign language learning contexts. However, the present study contributes additional insights through empirical evidence from eastern Indonesia, showing that in linguistically diverse environments, the cognitive function of code-switching outweighs its social function. In other words, amid linguistic and cultural diversity, code-switching becomes a rational tool for students to "convert" their linguistic experience into meaningful academic understanding.

#### **Code-Switching as Affective Mediation: Reducing Anxiety and Building Classroom Rapport**

The affective aspect is the most palpable dimension of code-switching practice in the EFL classroom at SMA PGRI 2 Kairatu. Based on qualitative data from interviews and observations, most students described positive emotional experiences when the teacher occasionally used Indonesian to explain, emphasize, or ease the learning atmosphere. They felt more comfortable, appreciated, and emotionally connected to the teacher. This finding shows that code-switching not only serves to bridge linguistic meaning but also functions to build psychological safety and emotional rapport in a foreign language learning environment that often provokes anxiety.

Questionnaire results indicated that 88% of students felt more confident answering questions when the teacher used code-switching, while 82% reported that the classroom atmosphere became "friendlier" and "less tense." In-depth interviews reinforced these findings. An eleventh-grade informant named M.A. recounted that when the teacher spoke entirely in English, she often felt afraid of making mistakes, but when the teacher occasionally switched to Indonesian, that fear decreased and she found it easier to express herself. She remarked, "When the teacher explains with a mix of Indonesian, I feel that the teacher understands our difficulties." This statement reveals the empathetic function of code-switching, not merely an instructional tool, but a social signal that the teacher is there to understand rather than to judge.

Field observations supported this view. During several meetings, classroom atmospheres visibly changed when the teacher code-switched. At the beginning of lessons conducted entirely in English, many students looked down, exchanged glances, or answered with short words like "yes" or "no." However, once the teacher inserted Indonesian to clarify

meaning, students' expressions changed, they smiled, chuckled, and began raising their hands to participate. For instance, when the teacher said, "Don't worry if your pronunciation isn't perfect, pelan-pelan saja, yang penting berani dulu," the entire class appeared more relaxed. Such observations clearly show that code-switching creates a more open and supportive emotional environment, encouraging active participation without fear of mistakes.

This finding aligns with the concept of socio-affective mediation, the idea that language can function as a tool to build social and emotional connections that support learning. In the Vygotskian framework, learning occurs not only through cognitive mediation but also through socially meaningful affective interaction. Afryanti et al. (2021) assert that in multilingual EFL classrooms, code-switching plays a vital role in creating emotionally inclusive learning environments. When teachers use familiar language, they send nonverbal messages of acceptance and empathy, which in turn build confidence and reduce foreign language anxiety.

From qualitative data, this sense of connection was dominant in students' narratives. A tenth-grade student named S.F. stated that teachers who mixed languages seemed "more human," because they did not make students feel pressured to always speak in English. She felt "braver" when the teacher occasionally replied in Indonesian after she had used a mix of the two languages. This story illustrates how code-switching transforms power relations in the EFL classroom, from a rigid hierarchical relationship to a dialogical and participatory interaction. The teacher is no longer perceived as a linguistic authority judging right or wrong but as a co-learner engaged in the same process with students.

Further observations strengthened this affective dimension. In one speaking activity session titled "My Future Dream," several students were initially hesitant to speak in front of the class. However, when the teacher reassured them by saying, "If you forget a word in English, you can explain it first in Indonesian; we'll help translate it together later," the whole class seemed relieved. One by one, students began coming forward, and the atmosphere became warmer and more supportive. At the end of the session, the teacher provided feedback using both languages: "Your ideas are great! Kalau grammar-nya nanti bisa diperbaiki sedikit, tapi kamu sudah berani bicara, itu yang penting." Through such practice, code-switching not only facilitated understanding but also served as emotional scaffolding, supporting students' courage to perform and experiment.

Most students experienced reduced anxiety and increased participation as a result of code-switching. Statistically, a significant positive correlation was found between perceived comfort and frequency of engagement in discussion ( $r = 0.65$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Qualitatively, this means that when the emotional atmosphere of the classroom is safe and friendly, students are more likely to take linguistic risks, speak, experiment with new vocabulary, or ask questions without fear of ridicule.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, this affective function reinforces the argument that code-switching is a reflective pedagogical strategy, not a sign of linguistic weakness. Dewi (2021) explains that in multilingual contexts, language is not merely an instructional medium but also a means of negotiating identity and emotional affiliation. By using code-switching,

teachers send symbolic signals that students' linguistic identities, including local accents and speech patterns, are valued as part of the learning experience. This is highly relevant at SMA PGRI 2 Kairatu, where many students come from Ambonese socio-cultural backgrounds and often mix Indonesian with local dialects in daily communication. Teachers who acknowledge this practice through code-switching implicitly build bridges between students' social worlds and the academic world of English.

Classroom interaction analysis also showed that code-switching helps regulate collective emotions. For instance, when the class became noisy because students struggled to understand group task instructions, the teacher used code-switching to refocus attention with a firm but warm statement: "Alright, fokus ya. Let's make the groups first, I'll help with the speaking part later." The classroom then calmed down and regained order. Here, code-switching functions as an affective regulation tool, helping the teacher manage the emotional rhythm of the class without creating distance from students.

Additionally, interviews with two supporting teachers revealed that code-switching helped them recognize students' emotional states. One teacher, identified as Mr. S., said that he could "sense when students started losing focus or getting anxious, and that's usually the right time to switch briefly to Indonesian." This strategy was not intended to reduce English exposure but to maintain a balance between cognitive demand and emotional comfort. This aligns with the affective filter hypothesis proposed by Sihombing and Rani (2023), which suggests that high anxiety can hinder language acquisition. By lowering the affective filter through code-switching, teachers allow English input to be received more effectively by students.

### **Perceived Risks and Student Awareness: Balancing Exposure and Dependence**

The dimension of risk and student awareness toward the practice of code-switching emerges as a compelling reflective layer in this study's findings. Although most students expressed positive attitudes toward the teacher's use of Indonesian in English language instruction, a notable portion voiced concerns about the potential overreliance on their first language. This concern reflects a growing metalinguistic awareness, a form of critical reflection that signifies maturity in perceiving language not merely as a tool of communication but as an instrument for shaping one's competence. Within this context, code-switching is seen not only as a cognitive and affective aid but also as a practice that carries long-term consequences for exposure to English as the target language.

Questionnaire results revealed that approximately 61% of students admitted that while code-switching helped them understand lessons, they also felt that their exposure to English decreased when teachers used Indonesian too frequently. This indicates an awareness that foreign language learning requires immersion and consistent exposure to the target language. A twelfth-grade student, identified as R.N., stated during an interview, "When the teacher explains too much in Indonesian, I feel less used to hearing English." He added that he preferred teachers to "use English more often, but explain in Indonesian sometimes if it's really difficult." This statement reflects a balanced and insightful perspective, not a rejection of code-switching, but a call for equilibrium between facilitation and exposure.

Classroom observations revealed this awareness in students' behavior during class interactions. In one reading comprehension session, for instance, the teacher opened the lesson entirely in English for about ten minutes, reading the text and explaining vocabulary contextually. However, when some students appeared confused, the teacher immediately switched to Indonesian for clarification and then returned to English. This created a dynamic pedagogical rhythm; yet, after several cycles, students began waiting for the "switching moment" before paying full attention. Some even appeared passive during the English segments but became engaged again once the teacher used Indonesian. This phenomenon suggests the development of an affective dependency on the first language, not due to an inability to understand English, but due to the unconscious formation of a comfort zone.

This finding resonates with contemporary literature. Pharamita et al. (2021), in *First Language Use in Second and Foreign Language Learning*, emphasize the importance of maintaining a strategic balance in first language use in foreign language classrooms. They argue that code-switching conducted without functional awareness risks reducing target-language exposure and slowing the internalization of new linguistic structures. Conversely, a total prohibition of first language use may hinder conceptual understanding and increase anxiety. Therefore, teachers must navigate code-switching functionally informed, ensuring that each switch serves a clear pedagogical purpose, such as clarification, meaning elaboration, or classroom management.

In the context of SMA PGRI 2 Kairatu, this dilemma was evident. Interviews and classroom observations revealed that teachers often code-switched spontaneously rather than as part of a deliberate pedagogical plan. One eleventh-grade student, L.D., remarked that "sometimes teachers mix Indonesian just out of habit, not because it's difficult." Although expressed casually, this statement carries a significant implication: unconscious code-switching can shift from a mediational strategy to a non-strategic routine. Such a condition may create a pedagogical plateau, a state where students feel comfortable, but their progress in mastering the target language stagnates.

Quantitative data further confirmed this tendency. Correlation analysis showed that perceived "excessive" code-switching frequency was negatively associated with perceived English exposure ( $r = -0.58$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). In other words, the more frequently students experienced Indonesian use in class, the lower they felt their exposure to the target language. However, this does not signify rejection of code-switching altogether but rather underscores the need for a functional balance between support and challenge in language learning.

In in-depth interviews, several students displayed reflective awareness of this issue. For instance, A.P., a tenth-grade student, expressed that while she appreciated teachers' use of Indonesian for explanation, she also feared becoming "too dependent." She added that if teachers never explained in English, "we wouldn't get used to the accent or sentence patterns." This indicates a process of critical learning awareness, which, according to the metacognitive theory of language learning, is a key indicator of learner autonomy (Deliany & Cahyono, 2020). Students like A.P. begin to view code-switching not merely as an aid but as a tool whose use must be consciously regulated to support long-term communicative

competence.

Observations also showed that more experienced teachers tended to use code-switching more judiciously. For example, one teacher, identified as Mrs. N., consistently began lessons with fifteen minutes of English-only instruction. She switched to Indonesian only when students lost focus or misunderstood instructions, before promptly returning to English. This strategy resulted in higher engagement without sacrificing target-language exposure. In contrast, younger teachers often switched languages more frequently and without a discernible pattern, and in their classes, student participation in speaking activities tended to decline. This difference suggests that effective code-switching requires professional awareness and reflective training to remain contextual and proportionate.

Theoretically, these findings reinforce the argument by Susanti et al. (2024) that the effectiveness of code-switching depends on teachers' pedagogical intentionality. In other words, consciously planned switching can be productive, while spontaneous or unreflective switching can hinder linguistic immersion. This aligns with Kandiawan (2022), who highlights the importance of teacher language awareness in managing bilingual classroom practices. Teachers with high linguistic awareness are better able to discern when code-switching is needed for comprehension and when students should be allowed to endure temporary discomfort to navigate the target language independently.

Field data also show that students in Kairatu are not passive recipients of these dynamics. Some have developed personal strategies to balance exposure. Several admitted to listening to English songs or watching English videos outside class to compensate for the reduced exposure they experienced at school. This demonstrates that awareness of the risks of first-language dependency extends beyond cognition into autonomous learning behavior, an important marker of learner agency.

This metalinguistic awareness can be interpreted as a form of critical bilingual consciousness, as described by Palmer et al. (2019) in their work on translanguaging. They argue that awareness of language functions and boundaries within learning contexts signifies cognitive maturity among bilingual learners. Thus, students' reflections on the risks of code-switching are themselves part of the mediational process, a form of cognitive-affective mediation that teaches balance between comfort and challenge, between the language one masters and the language one strives to learn.

### **Code-Switching as a Mediational Ecology: Integrating Cognitive, Affective, and Sociocultural Dimensions**

This synthesis positions code-switching not merely as an instrumental linguistic strategy but as a mediational ecology in which language learning, emotion, and social interaction intertwine. Within the EFL classroom at SMA PGRI 2 Kairatu, code-switching shapes a dynamic learning landscape, a living space where teachers and students continuously negotiate meaning, comfort, and identity as foreign language learners in a multilingual context. Within Vygotsky's sociocultural mediation framework, language is understood not only as a medium of communication but also as a semiotic tool that mediates thought and shapes individual consciousness within a social setting (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978).

When employed strategically, code-switching transforms the EFL classroom into an interactive ecosystem where students learn through a living, fluid, and culturally grounded language.

Field observations revealed that classroom dynamics were often marked by spontaneous shifts between English and Indonesian. For example, when explaining descriptive writing, the teacher began in English: “When we describe a person, we focus on their appearance and character traits,” and then added in Indonesian, “Artinya, kalau kita menggambarkan seseorang, kita lihat dari penampilan dan sifatnya.” Students quietly echoed the Indonesian translation, an indication that they were mediating meaning in their minds. One student, L.N., stated during an interview that such switches helped her “grasp the teacher’s point faster and not be afraid of misunderstanding.” This illustrates that teacher-student interaction through code-switching forms a kind of shared cognitive space, a collaborative arena where meaning is constructed socially and contextually.

However, this mediational ecology is not solely cognitive; it also carries a strong affective dimension. When teachers switch to Indonesian to reassure hesitant students or offer praise in a friendly tone, the atmosphere becomes more relaxed. Students appear more willing to raise their hands and participate. Another student, D.R., said she felt “closer and less afraid of being wrong” when the teacher occasionally used the mother tongue. This reflects what Treffers-Daller et al. (2022) describe as socio-affective mediation, where the use of local language in classroom interaction fosters psychological safety, a sense of emotional security that allows students to experiment with the target language without shame or fear of failure. Thus, code-switching mediates not only understanding but also emotion, creating an inclusive and supportive learning climate.

At a deeper level, the sociocultural dimension of this mediational ecology is also evident. In the Maluku context, where this research took place, linguistic identity is not merely functional but symbolic. Indonesian serves as a social bridge across ethnolinguistic diversity, while English symbolizes global aspiration and progress. When teachers move between these two languages, they enact dual symbolic roles: as cultural connectors and mediators of global values. Observations showed that students responded to this practice not only academically but also identity-wise, they felt part of a global learning community without losing their linguistic roots. Ecological linguistics posits that language learning always occurs within a complex social ecology, where identity, relationships, and cultural values form integral parts of meaning-making (Ohia, 2023). The following table illustrates how the cognitive, affective, and sociocultural dimensions of code-switching interact within the EFL learning ecology observed in the field.



**Table 1** Integration of Mediational Dimensions in the EFL Classroom Code-Switching Ecology

Mediational Dimension	Primary Function	Empirical Evidence (Student Data & Observation)	Pedagogical Implications
Cognitive	Restructuring meaning, bridging abstract concepts	Students understood grammar faster when explained through code-switching	Requires targeted translingual strategy
Affective	Building emotional closeness, reducing anxiety	Students felt more comfortable and confident when teachers switched to Indonesian	Supports psychological safety
Sociocultural	Realizing bilingual identity and social connection	Students felt proud and connected to both local and global cultures	Strengthens language ownership and interculturality

Source: Field data, SMA PGRI 2 Kairatu, 2023

From the table, it is evident that code-switching operates across intersecting pathways. It is not merely a temporary communicative tool but a living, sustained mediational system. When teachers use code-switching to explain grammar concepts, students not only grasp grammatical meaning but also gain confidence. When students respond in mixed language, they are, in fact, negotiating their identity as active learners. Such interactions create what Pattiasina and Afdhal (2022) term symbolic competence, the ability to understand language as social and cultural action rather than merely a structural system.

Interestingly, interviews showed that students were consciously aware of the strategic value of code-switching. M.T., a twelfth-grade student, explained that she understood the importance of “not always depending on Indonesian, but also not completely letting it go.” This demonstrates a high level of metalinguistic awareness, where students recognize code-switching as a learning strategy that must be consciously balanced. This aligns with Creaghe and Kidd (2022), who stress the importance of strategic balance in managing first and target language use to maintain immersion without losing access to comprehension.

Through this lens, code-switching can be understood as a mediational ecology where three main dimensions, cognitive, affective, and sociocultural, interact harmoniously. At the cognitive level, it serves as scaffolding for understanding; at the affective level, it nurtures safety and connection; and at the sociocultural level, it reinforces reflective bilingual identity. In this context, teachers are not merely language facilitators but architects of a learning ecology, balancing foreign language exposure with students’ emotional comfort.

Conceptually, this constitutes the novelty of the present study. The approach to code-switching extends beyond its linguistic or pedagogical function to encompass a broader social ecology of mediation, a living system where language acts as a bridge between thought, emotion, and culture. These findings reaffirm the updated Vygotskian framework advanced by Husin et al. (2021), which posits that linguistic mediation is inherently multisemiotic and multiconceptual, connecting cognitive and affective domains within meaningful social contexts.

## CONCLUSION

This study confirms that code-switching in EFL classrooms is not merely a pragmatic communicative strategy but a complex mediational tool linking cognitive, affective, and sociocultural processes in language learning. Viewing students as active agents, the findings show that strategic alternation between English and Indonesian helps them construct conceptual understanding, reduce anxiety, and build confidence and rapport with teachers. However, students' reflective awareness of potential overreliance on the first language also indicates a crucial level of metalinguistic maturity necessary for autonomous learning. Applying Vygotsky's sociocultural mediation framework, this study reconceptualizes code-switching as a living learning ecology, a space where language bridges thinking and feeling, local context and global aspiration. The novelty of this study lies in its emphasis on integrated mediation dimensions, showing that the effectiveness of code-switching depends on teachers' functional awareness and students' reflective participation in meaning-making. Therefore, within Indonesia's multilingual EFL context, code-switching should be understood not as a barrier to linguistic competence but as a humanistic and contextual pedagogical practice, a space where language becomes a medium for meaningful, inclusive, and socially grounded learning.

## ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article.

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