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## **Code Switching in the Teaching of English as a Second Language to Secondary School Students**

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Abstract

It is widely acknowledged that the use of two or more languages in the same conversation or utterance occurs in many bilingual or multilingual communities. The term used to define such occurrences is code switching. Linguists around the world (Gardner-Chloros, 1997; Wardhaugh, 1998; Holmes, 2001; Ayeomoni, 2006) regard code switching as a common and non-isolated phenomenon. In Malaysia, code switching is not an exception as the diversity of languages spoken by the various races of people contributes to the linguistic practice. Previous studies (Kow, 2003; Then & Ting, 2009) show that code switching occurs in formal classroom settings. Relating code switching to present practices in the Malaysian school system, this study investigates the attitudes of teachers and the types and functions of code switching employed by English language teachers in secondary schools. It also reports on how code switching affects the delivery of the English language curriculum. A total of 42 English language teachers were selected as respondents for this study. Respondents were required to complete a survey questionnaire by indicating their attitude, usage and opinion of code switching in the classroom. The findings indicate that the majority of teachers have positive attitudes towards code switching. They only code switch in times of need. Teachers also believe that code switching has a role to play in facilitating second language learning.

**Keywords: code switching; ESL; classroom; Labuan; Malaysia.**

## **Introduction**

In Malaya's journey towards independence, English was made compulsory in all schools (Foo & Richards, 2004). Vernacular schools (Malay, Chinese and Tamil medium schools) were exempted due to insufficient numbers of English language teachers. The importance of the language was salient as it was proclaimed the official language of the country for ten years after independence, from 1957 to 1967. Bahasa Malaysia was the national language. With the introduction of the Language Act of 1967, the status of English was removed. Nonetheless, Asmah (1982) claims that English was still extensively used by the government and other institutions nationwide. Asmah also states that every official document and report had to have an English version while the master copy was in Bahasa Malaysia.

After independence, various efforts were made to establish a national system of education. While promoting Bahasa Malaysia as the national language, the role and importance of English was not diminished. Ambigaphathy (2004) explains that the Education Review Committee of 1956 intended to create a multicultural education system that enables support for other languages such as English.

Since then, the English language has continued to be used, be it in government, private or commercial institutions. Today, English is an international language and the official second language in Malaysia. The *Sukatan Pelajaran* (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia,

2003) spells out that English is a language taught in all schools in Malaysia. It is a compulsory subject at various levels of education, from primary to tertiary. Students start learning English formally as a second language from Primary One onwards. Nesamalar, Saratha and Teh (1995) claim that a second language is not a native language of a country. It is used for certain purposes and by certain people nationwide. In Malaysian towns, English is commonly used in commerce and daily conversations. Therefore, it is the right choice as a second language. In rural areas, however, English can be a foreign language because of the limited exposure to the language and the scarce environmental support it enjoys.

With the advancement of science and the rise of information and communication technology, English is also used to teach Science and Mathematics. The policy of teaching Science and Mathematics in English, however, will end by the year 2013 for both primary and secondary schools. Bahasa Malaysia will be used for this purpose in full beginning 2016. Sixth form and matriculation studies are exempted. It is noted that the mastery of English has been regarded as of high importance. Unfortunately, though English is learned formally from Primary One, some students still find it challenging at secondary level. Teachers of English face a challenge in teaching these students for they still have not achieved a strong foundation in the language. Hence, there is a tendency for teachers to switch between two languages, English and the students' first language, Bahasa Malaysia, while teaching. Cook (2001) suggests that a second language class

should be fully conducted in the target language. There is a need to give focus to the target language instead of mixing two distinct languages in a discourse.

Willis (1996), however, suggests that using the mother tongue has an important and positive effect. By allowing the use of the mother tongue, more opportunities are generated for the use of the target language. Ovando, Collier and Combs (2003) also claim that academic skills and literacy development are transferred from the first to the second language. Nonetheless, language purists still find unreasonable switches a threat to the integrity of the standard language used.

For the purpose of this study, mother tongue and first language refer to Bahasa Malaysia alone. According to Nesamalar, *et al.* (1995), mother tongue refers to the native language of a child's parents. If the mother tongue is used at home by the child from young, it may well be the child's first language. The first language, on the other hand, is the language one is most comfortable with when communicating with others. Nesamalar *et al.* believe that the first language may not necessarily be the mother tongue. In Malaysia, a second language acquired may be regarded as the first language although not acquired first.

### *Code switching*

The use of two languages in the same discourse is referred to as code-switching

(Marasigan, 1983). Ayeomoni (2006) claims that many scholars have attempted to define the term “code switching” and each understands the concept from different points of view. In earlier studies, Bokamba (1989) suggests that “code switching is the mixing of words, phrases and sentences from two distinct grammatical (sub) systems across sentence boundaries within a speech event” (p. 279). Code mixing on the other hand, is “the embedding of various linguistic units such as affixes (bound morphemes), words (unbound morphemes), phrases and clauses from two grammatical (sub) systems within the same utterance and speech event” (p. 279). Numan and Carter (2001) define code switching as “a phenomenon of switching from one language to another in the same discourse” (p. 275). In a more recent publication, Unanumo (2008) regards code switching as the use of more than one language in a conversation.

Appel and Musyken (1987) suggest that code switching can be categorised as intrasentential or intersentential. Intrasentential is a switch of languages which occurs in the middle of a sentence. This type of switching is often called ‘code mixing’. An example of a Malaysian intrasentential switch is “My youngest sister *ambil* Biology”. “Ambil” means “take” in the Malay language. The sentence should be “My youngest sister takes (studies) Biology”. A Malay word is embedded in an English sentence. Intersentential, on the other hand, is a switch of language which occurs between sentences. An example of intersentential would be “I quit all my jobs already. Christie *tak beritahu?*”. “Tak beritahu” means “did not tell”. The sentence should read “Christie did

not tell you?” The second sentence uses the Malay language while the former is in English.

Poplack (1980, as cited in Hamers and Blanc, 1989) introduces extrasentential switches which include tags and fillers. These would also include an exclamation a parenthetical statement or particle from another language. An example of a local extrasentential switch is “Nothing *lah*”. “Lah” is a particle widely used by Malaysians in their colloquial speech. McArthur (1998) describes the multi-purpose “lah” as a token especially of informal intimacy and solidarity. Such a particle also exists in the Singaporean variety of English. Wee (2003) explains that it is typically found in clause-final position. It is monosyllabic and used for discourse pragmatic functions.

The term “code switching” in this study adopts Clyne’s definition (Clyne, 2000) as the alternate use of two languages either within a sentence or between sentences. “Intrasentential” in this study refers to switches within a sentence while “intersentential” refers to switches between sentences. “Extrasentential” refer to tags and fillers which do not exist in the lexicon of the base language used.

### *Code switching in the classroom*

Code switching may occur during the teaching and learning process in the classroom to ensure that students understand instructions and content. Willis (1996, p. 49) also claims that some teachers only allow the mother tongue to be spoken if:

- a. A student has a question to ask the teacher that they cannot explain in English
- b. The teacher asks the class how they would say a word or phrase in their language
- c. The teacher needs to explain something quickly
- d. The students are comparing the target-language with mother-tongue use
- e. The students are doing tasks involving translation or summary of a target language text

Cook (2001) explains that teachers may use the first language in order to explain activities so that the activities would be beneficial to the learners. The use of the learners' first language would allow negotiation and better understanding of the required task. Cook (2001), however, also opposes the use of the first language in the learning of a second language to a certain extent. Cook claims that individuals can acquire their first language without any basic language knowledge for them to rely on. Therefore, when it comes to learning the target language, the process should be similar. Cook also believes that students should keep their first and second language as two separate entities. Users of the second language should be able to use it independently and to think in it eventually.

Studies have been conducted to investigate the purpose and function of code switching around the world. Strupeck (2006) conducted a case study on code switching and found that Hmong students used English most of the time. Students used their first language approximately 25% and the highest number of code switching was recorded for goofing around and for off task questions. She suggests that students be allowed to use their first language, not 100% of the time however, for it creates an opportunity for knowledge enhancement and promotion of confidence and cultural and social identity.

In Taiwan, Tien and Liu (2006) claim that code switching in Taiwan's EFL classroom is inevitable. Learners of the language by and large do not participate actively in English communication within their multilingual setting. Learning the target language poses a challenge because the language is not in practical use after academic hours. Hence, the teaching and learning process cannot but resort to switching between languages.

Tien and Liu (2006) conducted an ethnographic observation study in two EFL classes in Taiwan. The study analysed the languages used in the mentioned setting to find out the hidden message behind the occurrence of code switching. Four main functions of code switching are reported, for instructional procedures, equivalent comprehension, cognition assurance and socializing effects. It was concluded that code switching facilitated EFL teaching and learning. Code switching was given considerable recognition for its



effectiveness. Teachers, nonetheless, are advised to adopt the technique with caution in each individual context so that improvement can be monitored.

Yunisrina (2009) conducted a pragmatics analysis of a teacher's code switching in a bilingual classroom. It was noted that most frequently, code-switching took the form of loanwords inserted into speech for emphasis, economy of speech, and as a substitute when no equivalent existed in the L1. Code-switching was less frequently triggered by the need to attain emphasis or efficiency and to gain attention from the students, which was fulfilled by the pragmatic functions of proper name, hesitation, quotation, and transfer of subconscious markers. The findings also indicated that the language instructor most often code-switched for the purpose of accuracy, especially to explain general concepts used in the field of industrial ergonomics, and for facility of expression.

In Malaysia, several linguists (Soo, 1987; Kow, 2003; Hafriza Burhanudeen, 2003) place much interest in finding out the functions of code switching. However, few efforts have been invested in finding out the functions of code switching among practicing teachers in the English classroom and how the practice affects the curriculum. The contribution of code-switching in the learning of a second language is still largely unresearched.

A preliminary study on the use of Bahasa Malaysia and the English language in secondary classrooms was recently conducted. Mahanita and Then (2007) who report that

pre-service English teachers in Malaysia use Bahasa Malaysia in the classroom. Then and Ting (2009) also concluded that both the languages are still being alternately used by English and Science teachers in Malaysia. This phenomenon has raised eyebrows as English language has been implemented as the language of instruction for both the subjects in schools. The researchers suggest that teachers employ two languages in their teaching to facilitate students' comprehension of the content area.

A recent publication by Badrul and Kamaruzaman (2009) revealed that nearly three quarters or 74.7% of the respondents indicated that their teachers code switch to check understanding. Code switching was also used to explain the meaning of new words, elaborate matters pertaining to classroom management, make students feel comfortable and to explain the differences between Malay and English grammar. The study concluded that the low proficiency learners had a positive perception towards teacher code switching. The learners supported future code switching in English language classrooms. It was also mentioned that teacher's code switching is significantly associated with learners' affective support and with learners' learning success.

The debate on whether or not to practice code switching in the English language classroom has not yet come to a rest. Educators and concerned parties should have at least an understanding of the functions of code switching so as to have a fair perception

of its underlying reasons. The understanding would heighten the awareness of its use in the formal classroom context and thus lead to better instruction.

*Research questions*

1. What do teachers think about code switching in the English classroom?
2. Do English teachers code switch in the English classroom?
3. What types of code switching occur in the classroom?
4. How frequently do teachers code switch?
5. What is the function of code switching?
6. How does code switching affect the delivery of the ESL curriculum?

*Research objectives*

- (i) To investigate the attitudes of teachers towards code switching
- (ii) To identify the types of code switching
- (iii) To identify the functions of code switching in instruction
- (iv) To identify the frequency of code switching in instruction
- (v) To report on the effects of code switching in the delivery of the English curriculum

*Limitations of the study*

This study was conducted in the Federal Territory of Labuan in East Malaysia and was limited to English language secondary school teachers in the state. As such, the findings may not be generalizable to the whole population of teachers nationwide.

### **Research design**

This study is based on a descriptive analysis of data. It used a set of survey questionnaires to collect data about teachers' attitudes towards and practice of code switching in the English language classroom.

#### *Sampling*

The government of Malaysia, through the implementation of the National Education Blueprint 2006-2010, intends to strengthen national schools so that they become the schools of choice. National schools, therefore, need to be equipped with good facilities and trained teachers. This study heeds the call to assist and further improve one of the six main thrusts of the blueprint. For this reason, teachers from national schools were chosen.

Respondents in this study were teachers. Teachers in government-run schools in Malaysia are also known as “pegawai” (officer). Referring to *Bab A. 1-4 Peraturan-peraturan Pegawai Awam* (Penilaian Tahap Kecekapan, 2007), “pegawai” refers to all categories of in-service officers appointed by the commission on a permanent, temporary or contract basis. These teachers teach in fully-aided government schools with the status of “Sekolah

Menengah Kebangsaan” (SMK). Only English teachers were selected because this study was designed to investigate the practice of code switching among English teachers. SMK schools were selected because such educational institutions are national daily schools, operated and fully supported by the government of Malaysia. They are the driving force towards the success of the mentioned blueprint.

There are only five SMK schools in the Federal Territory of Labuan. The geographical setting of the island allows accessibility to these schools. Hence, all five schools were included. As this study employs census sampling, all forty six English language teachers were involved. Forty two sets of questionnaires were completed and returned and are used for this study.

### *Instrumentation*

This study used a survey questionnaire to collect data. The questionnaire used in this study is a combination of a self-rating scale questionnaire used by several researchers who have attempted to explore the underlying reasons for bilingual code switching. The questionnaires used by Gaudart (2003), Schweers (1999), Lee (2005) and Christine (2009) were adopted and adapted to suit the purpose of this research.

The format of the survey questionnaire is a combination and adaptation of Gaudart (2003) and Schweers (1999). Gaudart (2003) used a self-rating scale to find out the degree of

respondents' use of code switching (Malay and English) among bilingual student teachers. Schweers' (1999) questionnaire was used to study the use of Spanish in the ESL/EFL classroom.

The items for the types of code switching were taken from Lee (2005) while the functions of code switching were from Christine (2007). As there has yet to be any study found to investigate the effects of code switching towards the delivery of the English curriculum in Malaysia, items used to obtain data pertaining to it were self-developed.

In this study, the combination of questionnaire items were adopted and adapted to meet the Malaysian pedagogical context. They were used to study the alternate use of the first language (Bahasa Malaysia) and English (second language).

The survey questionnaire included the use of a Likert scale, in which 5 choices were given for each item. Chua (2006) claims that a Likert scale allows respondents to make choices. The third choice stands as a "not sure" option, allowing the respondent to state a neutral opinion between the two extremes.

#### *Data collection procedures*

Upon receiving permission to conduct this research from the Educational Planning and Research Division (Bahagian Perancangan dan Penyelidikan Pendidikan, Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia) and the Education Department (Jabatan Pelajaran W. P. Labuan), a

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pilot project was carried out at five primary schools. Thereafter, the research was conducted at five selected national secondary schools (Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan) in Wilayah Persekutuan Labuan.

The researcher approached the principals of the secondary schools concerned to inform them about this study. In case of the absence of the principal in school, either the Head of the Language Department or Head of the English Language Panel was directly consulted. A letter of permission addressed to the principal was enclosed with the sets of questionnaires distributed.

Survey questionnaires were given to the Head of the English Panel of each school to be distributed to all English language teachers. A letter accompanying the questionnaires informed potential respondents about the purpose of the study. The Head concerned was entrusted to distribute the questionnaires to all English language teachers. Respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire which consisted of seven questions. In the questionnaire, they were asked to indicate their attitude, practice of and beliefs in relation to code switching in the English language classrooms. A seven-day period was given for completion and the completed questionnaires were returned through the same panel head.

#### *Data analysis procedures*

Descriptive analysis was used on the data using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) programme. Frequencies, percentages and mean values and standard deviations were computed to capture teachers' responses, covering attitudes towards the use of code switching, the types and functions of code switching and the effect of code switching on the delivery of the English language curriculum in school.

## Research findings

### *Teachers' attitudes towards code switching*

The results of the survey showed that a majority of teachers had positive attitudes towards code switching in the English classroom. As Table 1.0 illustrates, 85.7% (n = 36) of the 42 teacher respondents agreed that code switching should be used in the English classroom. The figure shows that only six out of the 42 respondents were against code switching when English language teaching is concerned.

Table 1.0

### *Teachers' attitudes towards code switching*

Should code switching be used in the English classroom?				
	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard deviation
Yes	36	85.70	1.14	.354
No	6	14.30		



Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard deviation
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Table 1.1 shows that 88.1% (n = 37) of teachers think that code switching helps students learn the English language. Only five teachers think it does not help learning. However, as to what extent it should be used, Table 1.2 shows 42.9% (n = 18) chose 'sometimes' while 47.6% (n = 20) prefer it to be only when necessary.

Table 1.1

*Does code switching help learning?*

Do you think code switching in your English classroom helps students learn English?

	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard deviation
Yes	37	88.10	1.12	.328
No	5	11.90		

Table 1.2

*Frequency of code switching*

How often do you think code switching should be used in the English classroom?

	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard deviation
Never	0	0.00	4.57	1.45
Almost never	0	0.00		

	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard deviation
Sometimes	18	42.90		
Frequently	2	4.80		
Fairly frequently	2	4.80		
Only when necessary	20	47.60		

*Do English teachers code switch in the English classroom?*

Table 1.3 shows that code switching is used during the teaching and learning process. Six respondents (14.3%) (n = 6) rarely code switch. A great majority (71.4%) of the teachers acknowledged that they code switch sometimes when teaching English in the classroom.

Table 1.3

*The use of code switching*

Do you code switch when you are teaching English in the classroom?

	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard deviation
Never	0	0.00	3.05	.661
Rarely	6	14.3		
Sometimes	30	71.4		
A lot of the time	4	9.5		
Always	2	4.8		

*What types of code switching occur in the classroom? How frequent do teachers code switch?*

Table 1.4 shows the types of code switching that teachers use in the English classroom and the frequency of the practice. Consistent with the respondents' claim that they sometimes code switch in the English classroom as demonstrated in Table 1.3, respondents also indicated an almost similar frequency of their practice of the three types of code switching. 69% (n = 29) used intersentential code switching sometimes while 59.5% (n = 25) code switched sometimes at intrasentential level. There is an equal frequency of 'never' and 'sometimes' for extrasentential code switching at 33.3% (n = 14) respectively.

Table 1.4

*The types and frequency of code switching*

What are the types of code switching you use? How often do you code switch?

Types	Answers	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
Intersentential	Never	1	2.40	2.90	.726

Types	Answers	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
	Rarely	8	19.00	2.79	.813
	Sometimes	29	69.00		
	A lot of the time	2	4.80		
	Always	2	4.80		
		3	7.10		
Intrasentential	Never	9	21.40	2.07	.947
	Rarely	25	59.50		
	Sometimes	4	9.50		
	A lot of the time	1	2.40		
	Always	14	33.30		
Extrasentential	Never	13	31.00	2.07	.947
	Rarely	14	33.30		
	Sometimes	0	0.00		
	A lot of the time	1	2.40		
	Always				

*What is the function of code switching?*

The results in Table 1.5 suggest that teachers code switch for a variety of functions. Again, more respondents responded ‘sometimes’ for all of the functions listed, consistent with the results presented earlier in Table 1.2 that they only code switch sometimes in the English language classroom.

Items which received ‘sometimes’ at a 50% majority and beyond include giving feedback, explaining new words, discussing assignments, tests and quizzes and explaining administrative information. Other items obtained a spread of indicators.

Two teacher respondents added their comments and clarification in the space provided for this research question. Among those who made specifications for the function of their code switch, some claimed that weak students could not cope with the full use of English. Code switching was used to retell stories especially in the literature component. Teachers also said that they code switch to save time, nailing the important point and avoiding beating round the bush. In short, the written responses basically show that teachers code switch for reiteration of points, to accommodate students' level of proficiency and to save time.

Table 1.5

*The functions and frequency of code switching*

What is the function of your code switch? How often do you do it?					
Function	Answers	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
Giving instruction	Never	5	11.90	2.79	1.025
	Rarely	10	23.80		
	Sometimes	18	42.90		
	A lot of the time	7	16.70		
	Always	2	4.80		
Giving feedback	Never	3	7.1	2.83	.853
	Rarely	8	21.4		
	Sometimes	23	54.8		
	A lot of the time	6	14.3		
	Always	1	2.4		

Function	Answers	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
Checking comprehension	Never	6	14.30	2.67	.928
	Rarely	9	21.40		
	Sometimes	20	47.60		
	A lot of the time	7	16.70		
	Always	0	0.00		
Explaining new words	Never	0	0.00	3.36	.692
	Rarely	3	7.10		
	Sometimes	23	54.80		
	A lot of the time	14	33.30		
	Always	2	4.80		
Explaining grammar	Never	2	4.80	3.10	.878
	Rarely	7	16.70		
	Sometimes	19	45.20		
	A lot of the time	13	31.00		
	Always	1	2.40		
Helping students feel more confident and comfortable	Never	3	7.10	3.12	.106
	Rarely	9	21.40		
	Sometimes	13	31.00		
	A lot of the time	14	33.30		
	Always	3	7.10		
Explaining differences between first and second language	Never	2	4.80	3.10	.944
	Rarely	7	16.70		
	Sometimes	20	47.60		
	A lot of the time	9	21.40		
	Always	3	7.10		
Discussing assignments, tests and quizzes	Never	3	7.10	3.05	.909
	Rarely	5	11.90		
	Sometimes	23	54.80		
	A lot of the time	9	21.40		

Function	Answers	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
		2	4.80		
Explaining administrative information	Never	5	11.90	2.86	.100
	Rarely	7	16.70		
	Sometimes	21	50.00		
	A lot of the time	7	16.70		
	Always	2	4.80		

*How does code switching affect the delivery of ESL curriculum?*

A majority of the respondents agreed that code switching does not negatively affect the delivery of the English language curriculum in school. 54.8% (n = 23) think that code switching promotes bilingualism in the classroom scene. The teachers also believed that code switching actually facilitates learning and is a strategy in the teaching and learning process. 69% (n = 29) agreed that code switching helps students relate their first and second language. 73.8% (n = 31) also agreed that code switching helps students clear doubts and uncertainties on subject matter.

One respondent explained his/her beliefs on the use of code switching in instruction by filling in the space provided in the survey questionnaire. The respondent claimed that code switching makes the process of teaching slightly easier for the teacher.

Table 1.6

*The beliefs on the use of code switching in instruction*

## The beliefs on the use of code switching in instruction

Beliefs	Answers	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
Code switching promotes bilingualism amongst students	Strongly disagree	2	4.80	3.40	.885
	Disagree	4	9.50		
	Neutral	12	28.60		
	Agree	23	54.80		
	Strongly agree	1	2.40		
Code switching facilitates second language learning	Strongly disagree	0	0.00	3.69	.780
	Disagree	5	11.90		
	Neutral	6	14.30		
	Agree	28	66.70		
	Strongly agree	3	7.10		
Code switching is a strategy for the teaching and learning process	Strongly disagree	1	2.40	3.62	.987
	Disagree	6	14.30		
	Neutral	7	16.70		
	Agree	22	52.40		
	Strongly agree	6	14.30		
Code switching helps students relate their first (L1) and second (L2) language	Strongly disagree	0	0.00	3.86	.718
	Disagree	3	7.10		
	Neutral	5	11.90		
	Agree	29	69.00		
	Strongly agree	5	11.90		
Code switching helps students clear doubts and uncertainties on subject matter	Strongly disagree	0	0.00	4.00	.584
	Disagree	1	2.40		
	Neutral	4	9.50		
	Agree	31	73.80		



Beliefs	Answers	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
	Strongly agree	6	14.30		

Table 1.7 shows the result of the study which investigated teachers' beliefs relating to students' development upon using code switching in instruction and delivery of the curriculum. 54.5% (n = 23) agreed that by adopting code switching, students are able to follow lesson better than if only English is used to teach the language. They were, however, rather sceptical that code switching would allow students to speak better English. An accumulated percentage of 59.5% showed respondents indicated strong disagreement to neutral for this item. Nonetheless, 71.4% (n = 30) agreed and 4.8% (n = 2) strongly agreed that code switching allows students to make an effort to speak English with the teacher. A slight majority also indicated that students make an effort to speak English with their peers.

Respondents believe that students are able to differentiate between their first and second language in speaking and writing even though code switching is practiced in the English classroom. An accumulative of percentages for 'agree' and 'strongly agree' for speaking and writing is 71.5% and 69% respectively. Besides that, code switching is capable of making students feel comfortable and secure in learning a language. 78.6% (n = 33) agreed to this and 11.9% (n = 5) stated 'strongly agree'.

Two teacher respondents also responded in writing to this section by elaborating on their students' development in the space provided. Among the responses received, some said that students are easily annoyed if teachers use English fully in the classroom. The use of code switching also depends on the students' level of proficiency. For most of the time, the use of code switching is almost unnecessary for the good classes.

Table 1.7

*Students' development upon using code switching in instruction and delivery of the curriculum*

Beliefs	Answers	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
Students are able to follow lessons better than if only English is spoken	Strongly disagree	1	2.40	3.43	.914
	Disagree	7	16.70		
	Neutral	9	21.40		
	Agree	23	54.80		
	Strongly agree	2	4.80		
Students are able to speak better English	Strongly disagree	2	4.80	3.24	.850
	Disagree	4	9.50		
	Neutral	19	45.20		
	Agree	16	38.10		
	Strongly agree	1	2.40		
Students are able to make an effort to speak in English with the teacher	Strongly disagree	2	4.80	3.62	.909
	Disagree	4	9.50		
	Neutral	4	9.50		
	Agree	30	71.40		
	Strongly agree	2	4.80		

Beliefs	Answers	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
Students are able to make an effort to speak in English with the peers	Strongly disagree	2	4.80	3.31	.897
	Disagree	5	11.90		
	Neutral	14	33.30		
	Agree	20	47.60		
	Strongly agree	1	2.40		
Students are able to differentiate between the use of first (L1) and second language (L2) in speaking	Strongly disagree	1	2.40	3.64	.791
	Disagree	3	7.10		
	Neutral	8	19.00		
	Agree	28	66.70		
	Strongly agree	2	4.80		
Students are able to Differentiate between the use of first (L1) and second language (L2) in writing	Strongly disagree	2	2.40	3.60	.912
	Disagree	3	7.10		
	Neutral	8	19.00		
	Agree	26	61.90		
	Strongly agree	3	7.10		
Students are able to feel comfortable and secure (non-threatening) in learning a language	Strongly disagree	0	0.00	4.02	4.68
	Disagree	0	0.00		
	Neutral	4	9.50		
	Agree	33	78.60		
	Strongly agree	5	11.90		

## **Discussion**

The majority of the teachers indicated that code switching should be used in the English classroom (85.7%). 88.1% of them believed that code switching would help students learn the target language. 47.6% of them said that although it should be used and that it helps learning, code switching is to be used only when necessary. Recognizing that these three items measure teachers' attitudes towards code switching, it can be concluded that secondary school teachers have a positive attitude towards code switching. They do code switch in times of need or when necessary.

Comparing this research study with the one conducted by Schweers (1999) on the use of Spanish in English classes at a higher learning institution, respondents who were teachers gave a 100% 'yes' to the use of Spanish in the classroom. Second language teachers in Spain were favourable towards and had a high regard towards the role of the students' mother tongue in the teaching and learning of the target language. Schweers (1999) also investigated how often teachers think Spanish should be used in the English classroom. 50% responded 'sometimes' and the remaining 50% indicated it should be used 'to aid comprehension'. Although the study did not explicitly specify the inclusion of code switching, it does serve as an eye opener that bilingualism has its' role to play in teaching, as suggested by educational practitioners.

In relation to the local setting, Gaudart (2003) says that attitudes towards bilingualism in Malaysia have been consistently positive. Bilingualism is considered a part of the diverse cultures of Malaysia. In an everyday conversation, code switching is extensively done by bilinguals. Code switching occurs frequently among speakers who can perfectly understand each other in either of the codes used. Code switching may be practiced by many but the attitudes towards such a practice can vary from one place to another. Asmah (2004) claims that code switching is a characteristic feature of Malaysia's sociolinguistic profile. Malaysians are said to be able to change from one language to another with great ease and facility.

The positive attitude towards code switching among Malaysians as mentioned by Asmah (2004) can now be extended to the teaching profession. Teachers feel that they should use code switching in the language classroom and that the practice does help learning. The attitudes of teachers is extremely important because they reflect upon the language being used in the classroom scene. Vizconde (2006) believes that teachers' attitudes play a role in the rise and fall, maintenance and restoration of a language. It is also believed that their attitudes heavily influence students. Teachers who view code switching as a threat may not use it and this may result in monolingual teaching only.

*Do English teachers code switch in the English classroom?*

The high frequency of “sometimes” (71.4%) shows that teachers felt it necessary to limit the use of code switching and for specific purposes only. It should not be extensively done for English is the language being learnt in the classroom. Therefore, the use of the target language should be maximised.

This finding reflects two studies mentioned by local researchers. Then and Ting (2009) claim that code switching is employed at various levels, from kindergarten to university level. In 2007, nine pre-service English language teachers in Malaysia were observed. It was found that they code switched during the teaching and learning process for revoicing, calling for attention and most importantly to facilitate understanding and building of vocabulary knowledge. This researchers’ preliminary study of teacher code switching in secondary schools in Malaysia also shows that teachers do code switch in the language classroom for reiteration and comprehension. Both findings indicate that code switching is adopted by classroom practitioners and its usage is purposeful.

*What types of code switching occur in the classroom? and how frequently do teachers code switch?*

The third and fourth research questions investigated if teachers do code switch in the language classroom, what type of code switching is practiced and how often they do it. Items were based on the work of Poplack (1980, as cited in Hamers and Blanc, 1989).

Poplack (1980, as cited in Hamers and Blanc, 1989) propose that code switching can be categorised into three types – intersentential, intrasentential and extrasentential. The former demands more from the speaker's competence while the intrasentential demands reflected a great degree of bilinguality. Extrasentential code switching, the third kind of code switching, which requires minimal competence in the second language, refers to tags and fillers. In Malaysia, extrasentential code switching includes particles such as 'lah', 'bah', 'kan' and 'kot'. These particles are adopted from the Malay language and do not exist in the English lexicon.

In this study, most of the teachers stated that they used all three types of code switching listed in the survey questionnaire. The results, however, show that code switching was not always practiced, with 'rarely' and 'sometimes' being responded to more frequently compared to other options. The intersentential level of code switching received 69% for 'sometimes' while intrasentential received 59.5%. There was an equal split of the percentage for the extrasentential level with each 'never' and 'sometimes' being recorded at 33.3%.

The findings again revealed that code switching is employed by practising teachers. Although teachers may have wished to retain a maximum use of the target language in the English classroom, the use of code switching could not be avoided in real practice.

*What is the function of code switching?*

The results suggest that teachers' responses vary in regard to the situations when code switching was adopted to serve the various functions in the English language classroom. It was observed that teachers more often responded 'sometimes' for all of the functions, indicating that there was no one clear answer to specifically prescribe the best situation to code switch.

In addition to their consistent responses towards the occasional switch between languages, it was noted that "Helping students feel comfortable and confident" was the only function with a slight majority of respondents (33.3%) acknowledging "a lot of the time". Code switching between the mother tongue and second language is regarded as helping students feel comfortable while learning. Earlier research done (Shamash, 1990, Collins, 2001) confirms that using the L1 contributes to reducing the affective barriers of second language learning. The use of the L1 minimises students' language anxiety and eventually uplifts the affective environment for study. It is believed that the use of the L1 helps when it is regarded as a meaning-making tool and a means of communication of ideas instead of as an end in itself.

It is acknowledged that Malaysians are second language speakers of English and some students in the interior may even consider it as a foreign language due to their lack of exposure to it. Having to learn a language which is not comparable to their current linguistic repertoire and having to meet the expectations and demands for proper language use in the classroom, students do feel challenged in such a setting. Therefore,



code switching is used to ease the tension. Collins (2001) reports that learners face frustration over unsuccessful attempts in completing their language tasks. They are not able to meet the expectations set for them because of their level of proficiency. Learners tend to feel that they are not learning English as quickly as they initially hoped. Hence the L1 is used as an affective strategy to make them feel comfortable and secure. They are given support by peers in the form of translation and grammar explanations in addition to language learning tips.

Citing an Indonesian context for comparison, Christine (2007) points out that the use of the mother tongue in the EFL classroom reduces tension and helps students feel more relaxed. This reflects a similar study conducted in Taiwan. Tien and Liu (2006) claim code switching has socializing effects. In order obtain students' recognition and to maintain interest, code switching is used to win the students' hearts.

In this study the teacher respondents also put forward several more points in writing that code switching had to be used to allow weaker students better comprehend the text being used and to aid learning. Teachers claimed that these students are not be able to understand what the teacher tries to explain thus making it necessary for them to use code switching, either at word or sentence level, to clarify ideas and important messages.

Another reason mentioned was to save time and to avoid beating around the bush. Explaining the meaning of a word, a phrase or a sentence may require definition, a synonym, word parts and correct use of anecdotes. This could take up the teacher's time and is not worth the time to go into such a detail. Hence, using code switching could be the fastest and easiest option available.

*How does code switching affect the delivery of the ESL curriculum?*

*(a) Beliefs on the use of code switching in instruction*

Teachers agreed that code switching does promote bilingualism and it facilitates second language learning. Code switching was also seen as a strategy for the teaching and learning process. On top of that, teachers believed that code switching helped students relate their first language (L1) to their second language (L2). The use of code switching in instruction helped students clear doubts and uncertainties over a subject matter.

Code switching supplements speech and allows opportunities for continuity of oral expression. It is seen as a verbal mechanism for conversation, allowing the speaker to perform a sociolinguistic function. Besides that, switching can occur when individuals wish to express solidarity and identity.

Relating code switching to classroom practice, Cook (1991) suggests that it can be integrated into second language teaching activities. Cook claims that the Institute of Linguistics used the learners' first language in the Languages for International Communication examination. Code switching acts as a foundation in the development of second language learners so that they can stand between both languages and use either one whenever appropriate to the situation. Extending Cook's claim on code switching to this study may contribute to the justifications for the case of bilingualism.

Notably, almost three quarters (73.8%) of the teachers in this study agreed, with an additional of 14.3% strongly agreeing, that code switching helps students clear doubts and uncertainties on the subject matter. This probably refers to situations where the teacher compensates for students' deficiencies in the second language. Instead of prolonging descriptions and explanations in the target language which may not necessarily ensure comprehension, teachers find code switching more practical and helpful. Christine (2007) claims that using the learners' mother tongue proves worthwhile in helping students understand better. In her study, students seemed to grasp the essence of the grammatical questions presented, followed by responses due to increased comprehensibility and reduction of students' language anxiety.

Another point to consider is students' personalities. Students who are extrovert may be daring and participate more actively in the classroom. Introvert students, on the other hand, may tend to shy away. Shimizu (2006) found that Japanese students are reserved. They prefer to withhold their questions. They often continue with the lesson without resolving their doubts. This eventually results in slower progression in the learning of the second language. By allowing the use of the L1, students become bold enough to take risks and to speak out without embarrassment.

*(b) Students' development upon using code switching in instruction and delivery of the curriculum*

Research question 6(b) deals with students' development upon teachers' use of code switching in instruction and the delivery of the curriculum. The findings of this study reveal that the majority of teachers agree that code switching plays a positive role in promoting language learning. Most teachers were optimistic that code switching in reality contributes towards the development of the teaching and learning process of a second language. The teachers agreed that code switching is capable of developing the target language to a greater extent especially in promoting speaking.

This part of the study shows that a large majority of the teachers (78.6%) believed that if they code switch, students are able to feel comfortable and secure in learning a language. 11.9% indicated strong agreement for the notion with none disagreeing. This again

reflects the need for a conducive environment for learning. Meyer (2008) points out that the primary role of the L1 in the language classroom is to lower the affective filter. It is believed that the classroom can be an intimidating place. Even adults may feel intimidated especially when they are in a new environment. It would take some time for them to mingle with new friends and to get comfortable with the procedures adopted and the instructional approaches used. If L1 is exclusively used, confusion may arise and learners' anxiety levels may rise and affect the learning situation.

Citing the fifth hypothesis of Krashen's Monitor Model, Meyer (2008) explains that learners or acquirers of a language would possibly block or filter the L2 if they are tense, bored and annoyed. They will not learn the target language successfully. This is because confused and distracted students normally become upset, frustrated and resentful towards the environment which does not support them positively. Learning is hence discouraged.

This study also included students' development in speaking, a language skill worth looking at since speaking, as claimed by Fauziah and Nita (2002), is Malaysian learners' weakest skill. Speaking demands fluency and appropriate use of grammar and sentence structure. If they have self confidence and feel comfortable in using the language for conversation, students may put in an increased effort in trying. As discussed earlier, code switching helps learners feel comfortable. 71.4% of the teachers agreed that students

make an effort to speak in English with the teacher while 47.6% believe they make an effort to speak in English with their peers.

Therefore, it makes sense that when code switching is used, learners become more courageous to try as their anxiety to meet the expectation of speaking fluently and accurately decreases. However, certain parties may raise issues of improper language use and the effect on mutual intelligibility in social conversation. Perhaps, it is more fruitful for those who criticise to see it as an effort to learn English than to proceed with passive learning. This, however, should not be an excuse for teachers to increase their use of code switching. They should gradually decrease the use of code switching and promote the use of the target language.

### **Implications and suggestions**

The study shows that code switching is widely accepted by teachers in the teaching and learning of English language in secondary schools in the state of Labuan. This study also presents a perspective on teachers' professional judgements in learning situations. Teachers do use code switching in the classroom as they believe it helps students learn the target language. The findings indicate that code switching is necessary when the situation requires the use of mother tongue or the first language in the classroom.

Therefore, it is essential to better understand when and why second language teachers use the first language or mother tongue in the teaching and learning process. Although there

is no absolute consensus that teachers should use the target language only in the classroom, there seems to be a general view that it should be maximised as much as possible. This is because the main purpose of teaching English is to enable learners to learn and acquire the language. Future research may be required to look into to what extent code switching is to be adopted. Practising educators may find it advantageous to consider the effectiveness of code switching in terms of quality and quantity.

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