

# THE POSITIVE INFLUENCES OF CODE-SWITCHING ON SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING OF TESL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AT A PRIVATE UNIVERSITY IN IPOH

Ng Yong Sheng<sup>1\*</sup>, and Amanpreet Gurdarshan Singh<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Social Sciences, Quest International University, Perak, Malaysia

\*Corresponding author: [yongsheng.ng@qiu.edu.my](mailto:yongsheng.ng@qiu.edu.my)

---

**Abstract:** Code-switching, the practice of alternating between two or more languages within a conversation or discourse, has long been recognized as a valuable tool for English as a second language (ESL) learners to acquire a second language. However, its utilization is often met with contradicting views due to its perceived negative influences. Hence, this study aimed to investigate the positive influences of code-switching towards the second language learning of Teaching English as a second language (TESL) students at a private university in Ipoh. Through qualitative research, consisting of interviews with seven students enrolled in TESL programs for two to three years. The data showed that the participants acknowledged several benefits, including enhanced understanding of a second language, motivated learners to learn a second language, motivated learners to speak English with others, and improved engagement and focus during lessons. The results are hoped to address the concerns of the potential negative influences of code-switching on English as a Second Language (ESL) learning and serve as a foundational resource for educators to make informed decisions about integrating code-switching as a teaching and learning strategy in ESL classrooms.

**Keyword:** Code-switching, First language, Second language, Positive influences, TESL

---

## INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, studying English is compulsory as it is widely employed in various daily activities such as commerce, education, and management. As a result of globalization, the significance of the English language, dub the "global trade language," become apparent. However, learners in Malaysia still need help with learning English as a second language (ESL) (Karnine et al., 2022). According to the Malaysian Examination Council (2018, as cited in Razak & Shah, 2020), in the November 2018 session of the Malaysian University English Test (MUET), analogous to the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), a mere 25.54% of participants achieved a band score of at least 4, signifying their competence in the language. This data reflects that the learners in Malaysia need higher proficiency levels in English. Thus, several strategies are embraced to improve second language learning; notably, code-switching is paramount among them. Code-switching refers to the alternative of two languages in which the speaker completely switches to another language for a word, phrase, or sentence before reversing to the first language (Gallagher, 2020).

According to Temesgen and Hailu (2022), code-switching is still contentious when teaching English in the classroom. The controversy centers on the plight of whether or not first language should be utilized in EFL classrooms. Therefore, some studies were conducted to measure the influences of code-switching on learners' second language learning. In the research conducted by Yana and Nugraha (2019), code-switching can motivate students to speak English with their peers and help them express themselves clearly. In addition, according to the research conducted by Razak and Shah (2020), the students believe that code-switching can assist them in learning English. Besides, a study by Raki and Sulaiman (2021) show that most teachers preferred code-switching when teaching English. It can reduce learners' fear, increase their engagement to participate in class activities, and improve their responsiveness in ESL classrooms.

While code-switching can offer certain benefits for the learners to learn a second language, it is also associated with several negative influences. For instance, a study conducted by Memory (2018) has suggested that excessive code-switching may impede learners' speaking skills of second language. Although code-switching is helpful in the understanding of the literacy task, its use may impact learners' long-term language development. Overreliance on code-switching will affect the development of English language competencies among the students, especially in relation to the speaking and listening aspects of language. The findings support the prior study done by Liu and Wei (2022), which argue that code-switching tends not to function as a facilitative tool but, contrarily, seems to be detrimental to communicative competence, especially for speaking skills, as it allows learners to revert back into their first language when stuck. In addition, a study conducted by Razak and Shah (2020) states that the excessive use of code-switching may cause learners to over-rely on their first language when learning a second language. This habitual fallback to L1 risks reducing the immersive experience vital for language acquisition and thus reducing their language components, including sentence structure and vocabulary (Anisah & Nasrullah, 2023). Consequently, overuse in code-switching becomes of less help to the holistic development of ESL learners and more a nuisance.

To address concerns regarding the potential negative influences of code-switching on English as a Second Language learning (ESL) learning, it is necessary to investigate the influences of code-switching on ESL learners. Existing research has primarily focused on the influences of code-switching on primary and secondary school students, as well as a broader category of undergraduates, with limited representation from Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) programs. Thus, this study aimed to explore the positive influences of code-switching towards the second language (L2) learning of undergraduate TESL students at a private university in Ipoh. The objective was to fill the gap in the existing literature by explicitly examining the influences of code-switching on students pursuing TESL programs, providing insights into its implications for effective ESL instruction in higher education settings.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

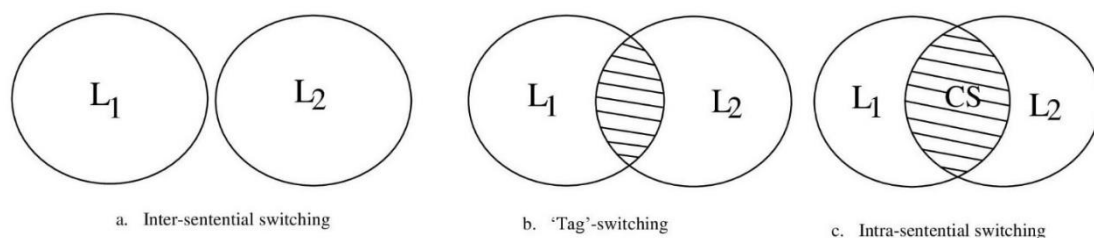


Fig.1 Types of code-switching and the degree of switching in them (S.Poplack, 1980, p.615 as cited by Abdoulaye & Minkailou, 2019).

Figure 2.1 illustrates the three types of code-switching and the degree of switching in them (S. Poplack, 1980, as cited in Abdoulaye & Minkailou, 2019). According to Abdoulaye and Minkailo (2019), inter-sentential switching is switching at sentence or clause boundaries or outside the sentence or the clause level. A greater understanding of the second language was necessary to do inter-sentential switching. In data, this type of code-switching was used frequently in all four classes, for example, to translate or explain something such as grammar, exercises, reading, and others, to name a few. Teachers and students often used code transitions between sentences. In contrast, intra-sentential switching is the type of switching which takes place within a sentence or a clause (Abdoulaye & Minkailou, 2019). It necessitated a thorough understanding of both the first and second languages. According to Poplack (1980), it required much integration and was used only by the most general bilinguals. For example, when an individual spoke in English all the while but when could not find a word in English, he switched to other languages that he was familiar with. Overall, code-switching focused and highlighted the transition from one language to another by a possibly bilingual speaker in the same sentence, intra-sentence, or in different sentences, which is inter-sentence.

While the researcher introduced the three distinctive theories of code-switching as above, the focus of this study was primarily highlighted in terms of inter-sentential and intra-sentential switching. Code-switching, as previously mentioned,

is a prevalent phenomenon in everyday communication, employed by individuals for various purposes. This linguistic practice is also prominent in educational environments, where it serves as no exception. While it could offer numerous advantages and facilitate the learning process for individuals acquiring a second language, it was imperative to acknowledge the associated drawbacks. Consequently, diverse opinions exist regarding the appropriateness of code-switching in educational settings. Hence, this study aimed to investigate the positive influences of code-switching on second language learning of undergraduate TESL students at a private university in Ipoh, which can be served as a valuable resource for teachers in lower and higher education to adjudicate whether code-switching as a teaching and learning strategy should be implemented in ESL classrooms.

## METHODS

The researcher aimed to conduct the research through a qualitative approach. The research data was collected and analysed through semi structured interview methods. As Ruslin et al. (2022) explained, semi-structured interview is a qualitative research method that offers the interviewer the chance to go deeper into certain themes or responses in addition to a pre-planned list of open-ended questions. The research method allowed two-way communication and helped the researchers to get more in-depth information.

For this research, the intended participants comprised seven TESL students from a private tertiary institution in Ipoh. The purpose of choosing TESL students for the research population was because TESL students were uniquely positioned to provide invaluable insights into the phenomenon of code-switching in L2 learning. As both learners and future educators, TESL students could offer a dual perspective on how code-switching directly influenced their understanding and retention of the language. Collectively, their experiences presented a holistic view of the role and influences of code-switching on second language learning.

Furthermore, this research paper collected the research data through a purposive sampling method. The purposive sampling method was one of the qualitative research approaches where the researcher was allowed to select the participants who had met the requirements of the study (Thomas, 2022).

## FINDINGS

To carry out the data for this research, seven TESL students participated in a one-on-one interview session with the researcher. Their interviews were recorded, transcribed, and tabulated according to the title. The interview questions have been documented in the appendix for reference.

### 4.1 Positive influences of code-switching on second language learning of TESL undergraduate TESL students

#### 4.1.1 Code-switching enhances understanding of second language

Code-switching plays a crucial role in enhancing the comprehension of a second language by offering both contextual and linguistic support. It serves as a bridge, enabling learners to grasp intricate concepts, cultural nuances, and context-specific phrases more effectively. In response to the interview question, "How has code-switching helped you understand the second language better?" all participants agreed with the positive influences of code-switching, as stated below,

*Student A: Yes, although my command of both my first and second language are equal in terms of understanding it when learning.*

*Student B: Code-switching has been beneficial in clarifying complex concepts, making it easier for me to grasp the meaning in English.*

*Student C: Understanding is facilitated by using words in sentences. For example, saying "I can tahan, I can tahan" helps convey the meaning.*

*Student D: Code-switching helps understand words that can't be easily explained, providing insights from a language perspective.*

*Student E: Code-switching is useful for explaining culturally related things or when a word is missing in the second language.*

*Student F: Code-switching is better for terminology and words that are hard to describe in the second language, making it easier for the other party to understand.*

*Student G: Code-switching provides explanations for unfamiliar words; for instance, explaining English terms in BM for better understanding.*

Participants agreed that code-switching greatly aids in grasping the nuances of the second language, especially in situations involving complex concepts, cultural contexts, and the meanings of certain English words. This method is valuable for fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the language.

#### **4.2.2 Code-Switching as a motivational factor in learning English**

Code-switching emerges as a powerful motivational tool for language learners, enriching their engagement with the English language by fostering relatability, enjoyment, and a positive attitude toward learning. Participants consistently underscore the pivotal role of code-switching in infusing excitement and a sense of connection with the language. In response to the interview question, “How has code-switching motivated you to learn English?” most participants resoundingly agreed that code-switching is a motivational tool in the learning process, as stated below,

*Student A: Code-switching is helpful, especially in times when you forget some things in another language.*

*Student B: Code-switching has made English more relatable and enjoyable.*

*Student C: The way that you can code switch is not just because it's simple, but at the same time, fun and interesting.*

*Student D: When it comes to learning new languages, code switching is interesting because when we code switch right, there are some words that can't really 100% be explained by the targeted language as well as our own first language. It has the same meaning, but the message it conveys is a little bit different. So, in a way, code switching does help, but at the same time, it doesn't really help much. So, for me, that is interesting.*

However, amidst the predominantly positive sentiments, there is a dissenting voice. Student F expressed a nuanced perspective, noting,

*Student F: Okay, so by using code switching, I realized that it is okay, but it is true that I cannot speak English good.*

Although Student F acknowledged that code-switching motivated him to learn English, he also recognized that his English proficiency might not be very strong. As a result, he suggested that reducing the use of code-switching could be beneficial in improving English proficiency.

Besides, student E and student G presented a contrasting viewpoint. Though not delving into detailed explanations, student E explained that code switching does not motivate him to learn English, but it makes his learning experience easier. On the other hand, student G highlighted that, the role of code-switching is limited to aiding in understanding the second language rather than serving as a motivation tool, as mentioned by them,

*Student E: I don't think it motivated me, but it has made me, it made my learning experience easier.*

*Student G: It does not motivate me to learn English because I'm very accustomed to doing things in English. I only code switch when I need to explain.*

#### **4.2.3 Code-Switching as a motivational factor in speaking English with others**

Code-switching serves as a motivator for speaking English, influencing the frequency and confidence of language use. It provides a familiar and comfortable context for communication, encouraging learners to engage more actively in English conversations. In response to the question “How has code-switching motivated you to speak English with others?”, five out of seven participants agree that code-switching motivates them to speak English with others. They commonly agreed that code-switching motivates them to speak English by providing a comfortable context for communication, enhancing confidence, and facilitating meaningful connections with others, as stated below,

*Student A: In a way, I guess because not many will actually want to converse in English the whole way.*

*Student B: Code-switching has boosted my confidence in speaking English, as it provides a familiar context for communication.*

*Student C: Yes, maybe once you learn that kind of language, you want to show the interest and show the passion in your language.*

*Student D: The amount of words that exist in my second language is not as much as the amount of words in my first language. Sometimes I get to explain more when I switch to my first language.*

*Student F: I think code switching encourages me to connect with others because I think code switching reflects my background, which I think my friends also could understand my background.*

However, a minority expresses a neutral stance, not attributing their motivation to code-switching. They conveyed a shared sentiment that they were already proficient and accustomed to speaking in English, rendering them less reliant on code-switching. Consequently, they expressed that code-switching did not serve as an encouragement for them to engage in English conversations, noting,

*Student E: I find it not that much. Because once I have learned some of the basics in English language, I would tend to stick to it.*

*Student G: I speak English all the time. If it's motivation, I don't think it is for code switching, it is more for other factors.*

#### **4.2.4 Enjoyment and focus during lessons with code-switching**

Code-switching in the classroom context is perceived by students as a valuable tool that enhances both engagement and enjoyment. When employed judiciously, it captures students' attention by introducing familiar or intriguing elements, fostering a positive and immersive learning environment. In response to the question, "Do you feel that you will enjoy and focus during the lesson when the lecturer code-switches? Why?" all participants unanimously agreed that they did indeed enjoy and focus during lessons when the lecturer utilized code-switching, as stated below,

*Student A: Maybe because this is gauging the students' attention and when you get something familiar to you or just an interesting phrase or word, you focus more and enjoy the lesson.*

*Student B: Yes, I enjoy lessons where the teacher code-switches as it enhances my understanding and keeps me engaged.*

*Student C: I guess it depends on how the lecturer actually code switch the language. If they rely a bit too much on code switching, then it will be a bit of an issue.*

*Student D: I will enjoy it because I will feel at home. I enjoy it to a certain extent, but I don't want to overly depend on the code switching itself because it will hinder to our. Well, our leveling up to advance our proficiency.*

*Student E: I feel when the lecturer code switch and when done correctly, it makes the classroom less boring and makes it a little bit more interesting, seeing how two different languages can be translated or switch to each other, switch between each other.*

*Student F: I think yes, I can still enjoy and I can still focus. And sometimes it helps when they code switch because we can understand better.*

*Student G: Yeah, I'm not particularly bothered with that, just only here for the content, content, that's all. I'd rather have them code switch certain key terms for them to explain, rather than they can't explain at all.*

Participants collectively affirmed that code-switching contributes to heightened enjoyment and focus during lessons. Nevertheless, a subset of participants underscores that the efficacy of code-switching as a valuable tool to capture attention and maintain a positive classroom atmosphere is contingent on its correct implementation and the lecturer's discretion in frequency.

Based on the participants' responses, they perceived code-switching as a helpful tool for them to learn a second language rather than a barrier. The analysis of the positive influences of code switching towards second language learning of undergraduate TESL students, substantiates the theoretical perspectives discussed in literature review. The types of code switching, introduced by Poplack (1980) and Abdoulaye & Minkailou (2019) which are inter-sentential switching and intra-sentential switching serve as foundational concepts in understanding how TESL students utilize code-switching to navigate their multilingual landscape. Based on the data, the positive influences of code switching, such as enhanced understanding and motivation to learn a second language, mirror the communicative functions these theoretical models propose. Specifically, inter-sentential switching facilitates contextual clarity, enabling students to frame their understanding within a familiar linguistic context, thereby supporting the comprehension of complex concepts. The findings are in line with the research done by Memory (2018), which stated that the main function of utilizing inter-sentential switching was to provide clarification or confirmation of an explanation or a complex topic, to avoid misunderstanding in terms of capturing the intent of the English.

Additionally, based on the responses by the participants, the main reason of why they used code switching to learn a second language was it can enhance their understanding of a second language, as all participants showed positive responses towards the interview question “How has code-switching helped you understand the second language better?”. The findings are in line with the research conducted by Elias (2022), which stated that the students unanimously agree that the main function of code-switching was to enhance understanding of a second language.

Besides, intra-sentential switching, demanding a higher degree of bilingual and multilingual proficiency, allows for nuanced expression and conceptual linking within sentences, deepening learners’ engagement with the language. Based on the findings, there are two main reasons why the participants agreed that code-switching motivated them to learn a second language and spoke it with others. Firstly, code switching can enhance communication and reliability. Participants mentioned that code-switching makes English more relatable, enjoyable, and provides a familiar context for communication. It boosts confidence in speaking English and encourages connection with others by reflecting their background. The findings are consistent with findings from the research conducted by Tati (2021), which found that code-switching fostered a supportive atmosphere that encouraged students to actively participate in language usage and exchange by enabling smooth transitions between languages, especially within and between sentences. In addition, code-switching can enhance expressiveness and nuance by enabling the participants to convey subtle meanings and nuances that may not be fully expressed in either their first or second language alone. It is parallel to the research done by Sulaiman et al. (2022), which showed that code-switching encouraged ESL learners to use English to express themselves clearly in their second language, allowing them to successfully convey their thoughts and ideas with others, especially those who speak similar first language. These practical applications of code-switching in the classroom setting underscore the dynamic interplay between theoretical constructs and real-world language use, highlighting the multifaceted role of code-switching in language acquisition and classroom interaction.

## CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the influences of code-switching on second language learning among undergraduate TESL students in a private university in Ipoh. It underlines the dual nature of this phenomenon, a pedagogical asset that, when judiciously applied, can significantly boost comprehension, motivation, and enjoyment in the language learning process. The findings not only confirm the nuanced applicability of code-switching in educational settings but also challenge educators to improve their approaches to make the bilingual or multilingual education model more effective. The research thus contributes valuable insights into the optimization of bilingual and multilingual education frameworks as it negotiates the delicate balance between facilitation and reliance. Furthermore, this research proposes a different perspective to be investigated by future research through the expansion of different educational levels, different programs, and a larger population scale to understand the influences of code-switching on a second language fully. In conclusion, the study advances students’ and educators’ understanding of linguistic strategies in language learning, advocating for a conscious and informed application of code-switching to foster an enriching learning environment for ESL learners.

As for future research, the researchers should expand the scope of inquiry into code-switching’s influences by including students from diverse academic programs besides TESL. This approach will provide a broader understanding of code-switching’s impact across different fields of study. Furthermore, other than the students’ perspectives, interviews with TESL lecturers also need to be conducted in order to see the matter from a teacher’s perspective. Code-switching within the classroom may have some pedagogical benefits and challenges, which the lecturers can share with a code-switching experience. The specialized knowledge of teaching English as a second language can certainly help the instructors get insights into how code-switching influences language acquisition, class environment, and students’ confidence while using English. In addition, the future research can focus on extending the inquiry to broader universities in addition to the university currently being explored. Deepening the understanding of the influences of code-switching on second language learning of undergraduate TESL learners by comparing different educational settings.

## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors of this manuscript report there are no competing interests to declare.

## ORCID

Ng Yong Sheng ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-9261-2555>

Amanpreet Kaur Gurdarshan Singh ID: **XXXXXXXXXX**

## REFERENCES

- Abdoulaye, I., & Minkailou, M. (2019). Understanding the nature of code-switching and code-mixing of Songhay speakers of French. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: G Linguistics & Education*, 19(2), 1-14.
- Anisah, N., & Nasrullah, N. (2023). Code-Switching in English as a Second Language (ESL) Classroom Settings: A Strategy or a Problem?. *Asatiza: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 4(3), 137-155.
- Norzaidi, A. I., Sabri, M. I. I. M., Singh, C. K. S., Ramanlingam, S., & Maniam, M. (2022). ESL learners' perceptions of code-switching in the English language classroom. *International Journal of Asian Social Science*, 12(5), 158-168.
- Gallagher, F. (2020). Considered in context: EFL teachers' views on the classroom as a bilingual space and codeswitching in shared-L1 and in multilingual contexts. *System*, 91, 102262.
- Karnine, S. M. B. B. V. V., Preece, A. S. D., Ahmad, I. B. S., & Muhammad, S. S. B. (2022, September). A Study on Difficulties Encountered and Perception by English as Second Language (ESL) Learners in Malaysian University Examination Test (MUET). In *Proceedings* (Vol. 82, No. 1, p. 53). MDPI.
- Liu, H., & Wei, R. (2022). Chinese university students' attitudes toward Chinese-English classroom code-switching. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 45(2), 254-273.
- Malacapay, M. C. (2019). Differentiated Instruction in Relation to Pupils' Learning Style. *International Journal of Instruction*, 12(4), 625-638.
- Memory, N. D., Nkengbeza, D., & Liswaniso, C. M. (2018). The effects of code switching on English language teaching and learning at two schools in Sibbinda Circuit. *International Journal of English Language Teaching*, 6(5), 56-68.
- Poplack, S. (1980). Sometimes i'll start a sentence in spanish y termino en espanol: toward a typology of code-switching1.
- Raki, D. A., & Sulaima, N. A. (2021). Code-Switching Practice in English Language Classrooms among Malaysian Teachers. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 11(8), 534-549.
- Razak, S. A., & Shah, P. M. (2020). The Students' Beliefs on using Code-Switching in the ESL Classrooms. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 10(2), 166-178.
- Ruslin, R., Mashuri, S., Rasak, M. S. A., Alhabsyi, F., & Syam, H. (2022). Semi-structured Interview: A methodological reflection on the development of a qualitative research instrument in educational studies. *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSR-JRME)*, 12(1), 22-29.
- Sulaiman, N. A., Raki, D. A., & Shaid, N. A. N. (2022). Learners' Reactions toward Their Teachers' use of Code-Switching in ESL Classroom. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*. 12(6), 1130 – 1141.
- Tati, J., Doring, L., & Narasuman, S. (2020). Analysis of types of code switching among community college students in Sabah Malaysia. *Journal Of Social Science Advanced Research*, 1(2), 97-109.
- Temesgen, A., & Hailu, E. (2022). Teachers' codeswitching in EFL classrooms: Functions and motivations. *Cogent Education*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186x.2022.2124039>
- Thomas, F. B. (2022). The role of purposive sampling technique as a tool for informal choices in a social Sciences in research methods. *Just Agriculture*, 2(5), 1-8.

Yana, Y., & Nugraha, I. F. (2019). Students' perception on the use of code-switching in English classroom. *PROJECT (Professional Journal of English Education)*, 2(2), 67-74.