



RESEARCH ARTICLE



CODE-SWITCHING AS A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL FOR SCAFFOLDING IN ESL CLASSROOMS

Dr. S. Abdul Jabbar

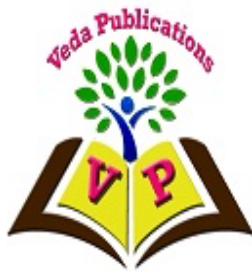
(Assistant Professor, Department of Education and Training, MANUU, Hyderabad.)

Emails: dr.abduljabbar@manuu.edu.in

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2025.12101>

ABSTRACT

Alternating two languages in communication or code-switching, long regarded as a normal feature of bilingualism and multilingualism, has also come to be perceived as a natural linguistic phenomenon, whereas, on the whole, it can be even more useful in ESL classes as a pedagogical activity, useful for scaffolding learners' comprehension and language acquisition. This paper discusses the value of code-switching in ESL classrooms: how it enhances learning for students, makes meaning-making possible during new-content acquisition, and bridges the gap between students' first language, or L1, and their second language, or L2. This study examines how teachers might strategically use code-switching to facilitate ESL learning through a review of literature, classroom observations, and theoretical perspectives on language acquisition. The paper concludes by underlining the advantages and challenges that might occur in using code-switching as a pedagogical tool to implement it appropriately in ESL contexts.



Article history:

Received on : 17-11-2024

Accepted on : 15-12-2025

Available online: 30-01-2025

Keywords : *Role of Code-Switching as a Scaffolding, Advantages of Code-Switching as Scaffolding & Cognitive Development.*



INTRODUCTION

Language acquisition in ESL classrooms is generally fraught, when the students' proficiency of the target language or English is relatively weak. The mismatched result of students' L1 knowledge and their developing skills in E could potentially prevent learners from accessing and fully participating with the instructional content. To bridge this gap, teachers often have to rely on scaffolding techniques—temporary support structures that help the learner progressively develop independence in learning (Wood et al. 1976). One such technique is code-switching, the practice of alternating between two languages. In multilingual classrooms, code-switching can serve as a scaffolding tool providing learners with accessible explanations in L1 while progressively bringing them to higher proficiency in English.

It explores code-switching in ESL classrooms as a pedagogical tool for scaffolding. The paper is focused on how it allows comprehension, enhances the acquisition of language, and facilitates cognitive growth in ESL learners. Moreover, it searches for the theoretical background of code-switching and scaffolding and continues with practical classroom applications, benefits, and challenges.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The word scaffolding is derived from the work of Vygotsky (1978), whose sociocultural theory based its importance on what role is played by social interaction in cognitive development. According to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, learners can move into a higher level of understanding and ability when appropriate support is afforded within their Zone of Proximal Development. Code-switching

in the ESL classroom may be seen as a form of scaffolding, in that teachers or more competent peers provide language and cognitive support for students.

Similarly, the interactionist view of language acquisition parallels the concept of scaffolding of Vygotsky, an approach which considers that language is acquired through the social and interactive process. Similarly, Swain (2000) further emphasizes that language is acquired most effectively when learners use it meaningfully in communication and supported by interaction with more knowledgeable speakers. Code-switching can be an appropriate mediation to enable and facilitate communication inside the ESL classroom while helping students make meaningful links between their L1 and L2.

From a sociolinguistic view, code-switching is itself a natural and malleable facility for use by bilingual speakers (Gumperz, 1982). In ESL, generally, students have different levels of proficiency in their L1 and English, thus making code-switching a useful resource in making learning intelligible. Cummins (2000) has offered the concept of CALP, which emphasizes that a basis in L1 is necessary for effective development of proficiency in L2. Code-switching can make room for access to CALP, where there are instances of getting elucidations or clarifications in L1 and understanding complex academic material.

ROLE OF CODE-SWITCHING AS A SCAFFOLDING FOR ESL STUDENTS:

Code-switching might fulfil a variety of roles as a scaffolding for ESL students as well:



Facilitating Comprehension: In most cases, especially in the case of ESL beginners or intermediate-level students, sometimes translation directly from L1 to L2 can help. Teachers can rephrase the complex English words or concept to use their first language to explain, hence clarifying the same message. For example, when using vocabulary related to academics, a teacher may define it in English and then clarify its meaning using the students' native language so that they fully understand. (Fennema-Bloom, 2017)

Building Connections Between L1 and L2: Code-switching allows teachers to refer students from their L1 to their L2 in drawing analogies between the two languages. In this way, a learner can be accustomed to transfer certain cognitive skills from L1 to L2 and, thus, language acquisition occurs more smoothly (Cummins, 2000).

Reduce Anxiety and Build Confidence: ESL students appear nervous or apprehensive whenever they try to express themselves in the target language, especially outside familiar academic contexts. Code-switching may help reduce this anxiety since it allows learners the space to say what they feel they ought to say in their L1, hence giving them confidence to participate in the classroom while their English develops.

CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS OF CODE-SWITCHING:

Teachers can creatively use code-switching to assist ESL students. Applications include:

Elucidation and Explanation If the teachers feel that the students did not understand a particular meaning or instruction, they can use L1 to clarify any confusion. This lets the student fully understand the

meaning of the instruction, hence being on the right path. For example, a teacher may illustrate Subject-verb agreement by starting by demonstrating it in English and then switch to L1 to give more substance to the explanation. (Magid & Mugaddam, 2013).

For example, code-switching might be used as a tool for simplifying the rules of the grammar or syntax of the Standard English language. Sometimes teachers might use past tense markers in comparing the target's native language on how to use sentences written in the past tense.

Creating Supportive Learning Environment: Code-switching can make students feel comfortable in a classroom because the familiar setting is created. Learners can participate actively, and utilize their L1 together with English for better engagement with learning.

Therefore, code-switching is encouraged in group work in which both students vary in their L1 backgrounds and support each other in both languages and the target language, English. This also encourages not only comprehension but a feeling of belonging as well as peer support in achieving these goals.

In the ESL classroom, the teacher can implement code-switching as a resource in the classroom. This teacher incorporates a balance between the target language and L1 with the students to help clarify a few concepts or ideas for them to better understand. Such an action elicits an inclusive collaborative learning environment based on relating the native language of the students with the target language when illustrating the lesson. The whiteboard marks



underlined important vocabulary words in English next to their counterparts in the L1 of the students.

ADVANTAGES OF CODE-SWITCHING AS SCAFFOLDING:

Improved Understanding and Comprehension: According to Swain and Lapkin, there are cases where employing code-switching in an intentional way will directly allow students to better understand and understand information (2000). When teachers use students' L1, they ensure that students acquire new concepts in English more meaningfully. Therefore, knowledge gained is valued in terms of retention and even its application.

Increased Student Participation: Code-switching can increase student participation in classroom discussions. When students feel that they can express themselves in both languages, they are more likely to engage in the learning process and contribute to conversations (Garcia, 2009).

Cognitive Development: Code-switching promotes cognitive development as it builds ability in both the L1 and L2. This biliterate processing enhances their thinking capability and helps them transfer knowledge between the two languages (Vygotsky, 1978).

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF CODE-SWITCHING IN ESL CLASSROOMS:

Although code-switching has numerous benefits, there are also some challenges accompanied with it:

Over-Reliance on L1: The most critical challenge of too much code-switching will be that the students are over-reliant on their L1, so they cannot immerse themselves in the English language. Teachers need to

make sure not to overdo L1 as a means of providing scaffolding for understanding while allowing students to use the target language.

Classroom Management Issues: In multilingual classrooms, where students speak different native languages, teachers may face difficulties ensuring that code-switching remains effective for all students. For example, a teacher who switches between English and one student's L1 might inadvertently exclude other students who do not share that language. (Temesgen & Hailu, 2022).

Negative Perception: The perception towards code-switching is negative at times because it is considered unprofessional, indicating poor language proficiency. Some teachers or institutions, in fact discourage code-switching and put conditions that the students should adhere strictly to English in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

Code-switching as a pedagogical scaffold in ESL classrooms can be an exceptional support for both teachers and learners. It bridges students' L1 and their target language, aids in understanding, reduces anxiety, and builds confidence in learners' minds. However, it needs to be controlled for use as it should not serve as a crutch for the learner or hinder full immersion into the TL. Teachers have to balance this by switching to code in a way that fosters language acquisition while at the same time nudging the children to probe more deeply in English. In judicious switching, the teacher can make the teaching-learning process more inclusive, responsive, and efficient; hence ultimately facilitating the cognitive and linguistic development of the students, provided they can learn better in the new language



while still keeping their cultural and linguistic identities intact.

REFERENCES

- Bruner, J., Wood, D., & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 17(2), 89-100.
- ABBAR, D. S. A. J. (2018). An illustrations on Principles and key notes of teaching communicative English. *SMART MOVES JOURNAL IJELLH*, 11-11.
- Jabbar, A. (2019). Challenges in Learning English as a Second Language: An Overview. *SMART MOVES JOURNAL IJELLH*, 9-9.
- JABBAR, D. A., & BARKATI, M. G. THE FLIPPED CLASSROOM: PLANNING AND STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS COMMUNICATION. *FUTURE EDUCATION IN TEACHING AND LEARNING*, 23.
- Jabbar, S. A., & Barkati, M. G. (2024). Effect of Intelligence on Learning Language. *Scholarly Research Journal for Humanity Science & English Language*, 12(64), 104–109.
- Jabbar, S. A., & Barkati, M. G. (2024). Unlocking Language Potential: Harnessing Multiple Intelligences for Mastery in English Discourse. *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews* 5(8), 1135–1138.
- Cummins, J. (2000). Language, power, and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire. *Multilingual Matters*.
- Garcia, O. (2009). *Bilingual education in the 21st century: A global perspective*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Gumperz, J. J. (1982). *Discourse strategies*. Cambridge University Press.
- Swain, M. (2000). The output hypothesis and beyond: Mediating acquisition through collaborative dialogue. In J. P. Lantolf ,
- Magid, M., & Mugaddam, A. H. (2013). Code switching as an interactive tool in ESL classrooms. *English Linguistics Research*, 2(2), 31–42.
- Fennema-Bloom, J. R. (2017). Code-scaffolding: A pedagogic code-switching technique for bilingual content instruction. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 190(3).

Temesgen, A., & Hailu, E. (2022). Teachers' codeswitching in EFL classrooms: Functions and motivations. *Teacher Education & Development – English as a Foreign Language*.