EFFECTIVENESS OF USING CODE-SWITCHING AND THE PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS IN PRACTICING CODE-SWITCHING IN ENGLISH CLASSROOMS IN SMK USJ 23, SELANGOR

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Abstract

This research was conducted to find out the effectiveness of using code-switching and the perceptions of teachers in practicing code-switching in SMK USJ 23, Subang, Selangor. The primary objective of this study was to provide an insight and description on the perspectives of English teachers on their usage of code-switching in English classrooms in SMK USJ 23, Subang, Selangor. The study was also carried out to inspect the perceptions of the teachers on the effectiveness of the use of code-switching in the English classrooms. The participants in this research consisted of 10 actively teaching teachers of SMK USJ 23. This research was qualitative and quantitative in nature. The findings were collected using questionnaires and interviews. The findings showed that the application of the code-switching method in the English classroom was acceptable and widely practiced among the teachers. The code-switching method also improved students' participation and interest in learning the English language. This research is vital in improving the approach on teaching English as a second language in Malaysians classroom, focusing on the code-switching method.

Keywords: *Code-switching, Effectives of method, Perception of teachers, Teaching English as a Second Language.*

Abstrak

Kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengetahui keberkesanan penggunaan pertukaran kod dan persepsi guru dalam mempraktikkan penukaran kod di SMK USJ 23, Subang, Selangor. Objektif utama kajian ini adalah untuk memberi gambaran dan penerangan tentang perspektif guru Bahasa Inggeris terhadap penggunaan penukaran kod dalam bilik darjah Bahasa Inggeris di SMK USJ 23, Subang, Selangor. Kajian ini juga dijalankan untuk meninjau persepsi guru terhadap keberkesanan penggunaan penukaran kod dalam bilik darjah Bahasa Inggeris. Peserta kajian ini terdiri daripada 10 orang guru aktif mengajar SMK USJ 23. Penyelidikan ini berbentuk kualitatif dan

kuantitatif. Dapatan dikumpul menggunakan soal selidik dan temu bual. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa penggunaan kaedah penukaran kod dalam bilik darjah Bahasa Inggeris boleh diterima dan diamalkan secara meluas dalam kalangan guru. Kaedah penukaran kod juga meningkatkan penyertaan dan minat pelajar dalam mempelajari bahasa Inggeris. Penyelidikan ini penting dalam menambah baik pendekatan pengajaran bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua dalam bilik darjah rakyat Malaysia, dengan memfokuskan kepada kaedah pertukaran kod.

Kata kunci: *Pertukaran kod, Keberkesanan kaedah, Persepsi guru, Mengajar Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Kedua.*

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is one of the countries which has a multicultural and multiracial society. Hence, with its diverse social and cultural backgrounds, there are a lot of different practices among the societies based on their religions, cultures, beliefs as well as their languages. Those languages include Malay, English, Mandarin, Tamil and even distinct code used by indigenous people that had been widely used in everyday social interaction among those races. As a result of such a diverse country, Malaysians develop a very significant proficiency in either two or more languages, which allows them to alternate between their languages freely in their daily communication and conversation. Therefore, it is rather a common practice to mix languages that different races use when there are two or more people of different races conversing.

To exclude or include the native language of the students in the classroom has been a controversial debate which has been debated for a long period of time (Brown, 2000). This study intends to investigate the teachers' perspectives of the usage of code-switching and the effectiveness of such method when it is used in English secondary schools classrooms in Subang, Selangor.

CODE-SWITCHING

According to Carol Myers-Scotton and William Ury (1977, p.5), code-switching is known as the "use of two or more linguistic varieties in the same conversation or interaction." The use of code-switching had been used widely among educators – teachers and even lecturers – in our education system, even when teaching English subject themselves, in order to present their ideas better. However, the conflict lies when some teachers believed that it is morally and ethically wrong to teach the students using other languages than using solely on the target language, which in this case is the English language. Even though it is ethically wrong to be using other languages to teach another language, the method of code-switching could be helpful to the students to understand the language better. This feeling of guilt can be attributed to the requirements of the Malaysian Education Curriculum which advocates the use of the target language and discourages the use of the learner's L1 in formal classroom settings (Joanna Tiffany Selamat, 2014, p. 6). But even so, the practice of code-switching is still a popular method of teaching English language among the educators.

Thus, this argument of teaching a second language using code-switching is still an on-going debate among them. Either to exclude or include the students' native language in the classroom has been a controversial debate which has been debated for a long period of time (Brown, 2000). This study intends to investigate the teachers' perspectives of the usage of code-switching and the effectiveness of such method when it is used in English classrooms of a secondary school.

Although code-switching has been a regular phenomenon among Malaysians, especially the teachers, there are debates over the usage of code-switching in classrooms in an effort to help the students learn better as well as to improve the students' proficiency level in the target language. This is because; some Malaysians believed that the target language would not be improved if the students are not taught using proper and grammatically correct target language. In another study, it was stated that "while both instructors and students agreed that code-switching can promote better understanding, however, students with better English proficiency felt that such communicative behaviour can be off-putting as it does not help in improving their linguistic competence in English" (Kamisah Ariffin & Misyana Susanti, 2011, p.221). Most scholars may believe that the only way in improving the students' proficiency level is by using the target language solely rather than mixing two or more languages together. English-speaking instructors who teach ESL frequently avoid utilising the language exclusively in the classroom as a result from taking into account the students with limited English proficiency (Wong & Yoong, 2019). However, according to Sert (2005), the use of code-switching might have a long-term negative effect to the users of code-switching in learning the target language as it may lead to loss of fluency in the target language.

However, everything has its own pros and cons, so does this debate. "Among a number of professionals in the field of second language acquisition, there appears to be an increasing conviction that the first language (L1) has a necessary and facilitating role in the second and foreign language (L2) classroom" (Schweers, 1999, p.6). But some believe that the students would not progress if the students do not understand the language and the rules of it in the first place. Thus, the usage of the target language would not be as effective if the students could not understand the speakers intended message because of the grammatically wrong use of the target language. According to Skiba (1997, para. 4), "Where monolingual speakers can communicate these attitudes by means of variation in the level of formality in their speech, bilingual speakers can convey the same by code switching"

TEACHERS' VIEW OF CODE-SWITCHING

According to the research study by Joanna Tiffany Selamat (2014), it was stated that both teachers and students used the code switching method in their classroom in order to do a lot of different functions. The implementation of the Malay words in using Malaysian English has been subconscious markers by Malaysians who speak using Malaysian English (Yunisrina Qismullah Yusuf, 2006). This also includes the teachers as they teach in classes. A number of researchers and educators believed that the practice of code-switching could negatively impact the students' learning as well as hinder the students form developing their target language.

Meanwhile, others said that the usage of code switching is part of learning process of a new language or the use of the language grammars (Olmo-Castillo, 2014). The confusion of such perception for the teachers and educators may influence the students' performances in class, thus the need for this research.

Most Malaysians who view code-switching in a positive light, often make use of their vast linguistic repertoire in communicating with each other as well as to use them as a compensation to the language that they have yet to fully master. This is proven when Engku Hariza Engku Ibrahim, Mohamed Ismail Ahamad Shah & Najwa Tgk. Armia (2013) found that their respondents showed positive attitudes toward code-switching through their questionnaires. In the past years, teachers and lecturers have been using Malay, Chinese and Tamil as well as English, back and forth, in teaching English language in different school settings, but many teachers said that the use of first language (L1) or native language in English classrooms as a part of methodology in teaching is unacceptable. "This is because although they can reformulate the concepts in the students' mother tongue, students need to receive and produce the content in English as it is the language that they will be assessed with." (Kamisah Ariffin & Misyana Susanti Husin, 2011, p.227)

In different environments, the results may differ in a way that code-switching might be acceptable to be used in teaching the target language. Students' level of proficiency of the target language plays a major factor in whether or not the teacher should be using code-switching between two or more languages, if necessary. 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 Melayu, while teaching (Lee, 2010). So, would a teacher follow the ethics of the teaching code and let them fail or do they break the ethics and see the students thrive?

Specifically in the school where the research is done, their academic reputation is not as exceptional as other prestigious schools. Since the school is a grade B school, it could be concluded that the students have problems in achieving good grades academically which also include the English subject in the school. It also includes the students from the first and second classes of the appointed school. Thus, the application of code-switching technique could be quite significant in their everyday learning and teaching process in order to make them understand the lesson better. Since the abolishment of *Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Sains dan Matematik Dalam Bahasa Inggeris* (PPSMI), English plays a smaller role in today's education, since the Science and Mathematics subjects are no longer taught in English. Thus, the students may have even shorter time in using the English language.

IMPACT OF CODE-SWITCHING

"Even though the scientific regard for bilingualism has thus evolved considerably during the last decades, their effect on educators' and policy makers' attitudes and folk theories of bi- or multilingualism has often been modest to absent" (Berthele, 2011, p. 2). Past researchers had been doing a lot of research that focused on the perceptions as well as opinions (Lee, 2010, Joanna Tiffany Selamat, 2014, Badrul Hisham and Kamaruzaman Jusoff, 2009 & Jingxia, 2010) but not necessarily discussing on the effectiveness of the practice of code-switching itself on the students' performances.

Although the research done by Badrul Hisham and Kamaruzaman Jusoff (2009) did look upon the learners' learning success, they were focusing upon the students' participation and affective support. It did not necessarily look upon the students' results. The criticism against the implementation of the learners' first language as it was found that the code switching had been considered as part of teaching method proves the necessity of conducting such a study becomes more evident (Cook, 2001).

The effectiveness of the usage of code switching among teachers in English classrooms in Malaysia had been debated for quite some time. This study could help future English educators in deciding whether the code-switching method could be conducted as one of the methods that would help to improve the students' English language proficiency. For the society or any other organization, this study could be used as a platform to do more research on code-switching. If using code-switching in teaching English for students is beneficial to help the students in their performance in English subject, this method could be recommended to the higher authorities to be implemented, probably in primary and secondary learning institutions for the improvement of performance in English among all level students.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 2.1: Cummin's Language Interdependence Iceberg Model
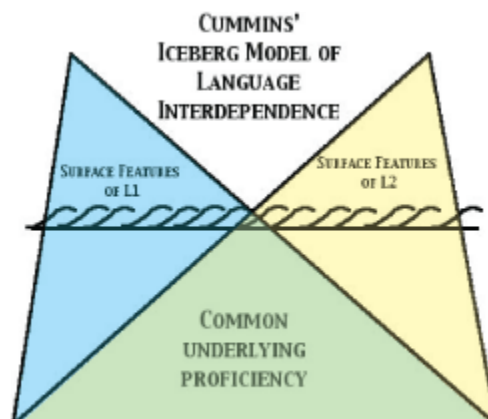
The Cummins' Language Interdependence Iceberg Model can be used as a theoretical framework to understand code switching in an ESL classroom.

The model proposes that language proficiency and competence are composed of two parts: surface features (the observable aspects of language, such as vocabulary and grammar) and deeper cognitive processes (the underlying knowledge and skills that support language use).

In the context of code switching, the model suggests that students' surface language features may switch between their first language and the second language, but the deeper cognitive processes remain constant. This means that code switching can be seen as a way for students to transfer their underlying knowledge and skills from one language to the other.

This perspective can inform teaching practices by encouraging teachers to view code switching as a natural and potentially positive aspect of bilingual language development, rather than a problem to be eliminated. Teachers can use code switching to support language learning by capitalizing on students' prior knowledge and encouraging them to transfer their skills and knowledge across languages.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Mastering the English language has been a major factor in deciding whether the students would have a better chance in getting a job or even furthering their studies in the tertiary level institutions nationwide. However, students also need to master other languages, such as the Malay language as well as other languages that they may learn as their third language in secondary schools that will expose them to a multilingual ability. This leads to the development of a large linguistic repertoire, allowing them to code-switch between the languages freely for communicative purposes among other reasons. In order for them to be able to grasp the language, the students must first understand the contents and rules of the language before being able to use them daily.

In second language learning, code switching is often seen as both a positive and negative phenomenon. On one hand, it can facilitate the development of proficiency in the target language, by allowing learners to transfer the knowledge and skills they have in their first language to their second language. On the other hand, code switching can also lead to interference, resulting in the overgeneralization of first language grammar or pronunciation to the second language.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of code switching in second language learning depends on various factors, such as the individual's motivation and language proficiency, the context of the interaction, and the goals of the language learner. Some language educators may encourage code switching as a tool for language development, while others may discourage it in favor of focusing on the target language exclusively. Thus, this research hopes to shed a light on the on going debate of whether the use of code-switching in classroom would be beneficial or rather a hindrance in mastering the language among students in learning second language.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research objectives of the study are:
1. To identify teacher's perception of teachers of using the code-switching techniques in the English classrooms.
2. To investigate the perception of the teachers on the effectiveness of using code-switching in improving the overall students' performance in the English subject.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study attempted to answer the following questions;-
1. What is the teachers' perception of the application of code-switching in teaching English language in the secondary school?
2. What are the perceptions of the teachers on the effectiveness of using code switching in improving the students' English results?

METHODOLOGY

Sample
The sample for this study was 10 English teachers who were currently teaching in the selected secondary school in USJ, Selangor using convinience sampling. The teachers were teaching English subject to secondary classes in the public secondary schools. The teachers chosen had the qualification in teaching English, such as having B. Ed TESL certificate. Teachers without any TESL qualification such as those with Mathematics qualification who were teaching English because of the lack of English teachers in the school, were not chosen as the respondents. From the 10 total respondents, 4 teachers were randomly selected to further investigate through interview sessions as part of the qualitative approach on this research.

Instrument
This study used questionnaire and open-ended questions, as well as interviews in order to get the data. The main aim of the study was to know the teachers' perspectives on the usage of code switching. Since this research study utilized questionnaire and interviews, it therefore involved objective measurement and statistical analysis of numeric data of the respondents. The reason why the researcher chose to do the research qualitatively was to get in-depth perception from the respondents. Since the respondents number was small, the researcher could precisely and accurately analyze the responses from the respondents.

The questionnaires were distributed to respondents directly after getting the approval of the school to conduct the research. The questionnaires were collected immediately or some were collected a few days after to give some time for the teachers to answer. The questionnaires consisted of questions that would answer the research questions. A total of four respondents were then randomly chosen to be further interviewed once they have answered the questionnaires.

This research intended to investigate the perspective of teachers in using code-switching in English classroom. In order to do so, each of the participants was given a set of questionnaires to be answered.

The questionnaire was adapted from a few research studies that had similar topics to this research to enhance validity and reliability. The questionnaire consisted of closed ended – Likert scale and Open-ended questions.

The first part of the questionnaire was on personal information and the second part of the questionnaire consisted of series of questions which are divided into several parts. Each question is closely related to the research questions in order to get the precise and required data. Among the number of respondents, four of them were selected to be interviewed. The respondents were interviewed using the set of questions similar to the questions in the questionnaire.

Procedure
After getting the approval from the schools, the teachers who were the respondents were given questionnaires. The respondents were given each of the questionnaires to each of the respondents personally or through the representative of the school. That consists of questions related to the topic and the research questions in this study. Before the respondents answered the questionnaire, the researcher reminded them to answer the questionnaire truthfully and should not to be influenced by other people's opinions. In case the respondents were busy and needed more time to answer the questions, the researcher gave them a week to complete answering the questions. The data were kept confidential and not exposed to anyone.

Four of the respondents agreed to be interviewed after they had answered the questionnaire. The researcher asked for their permission and agreement before interviewing them. The data from the interview were also kept confidential.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overall, this research found out that the incorporation of the Malay language inside the English classroom could facilitate the students in understanding lessons better. However, the incorporation of the Malay language is higher when the teacher is dealing with students who have low command of the target language. Nevertheless, code-switching is implemented throughout their lessons in order to maintain the class' discipline and cooperation towards the lessons. It could be said that the code-switching method does increase the students' participation in class and does help the students' comprehension towards a certain lesson.

From the findings, it could be concluded that the teachers were very much aware of the usage of code-switching in the English classroom as most of them had been using this method to teach the targeted language. 90% of the respondents were currently using this method to assist with their delivery of the lessons. Code-switching was commonly used among the teachers because of the students' level of proficiency in the English language is very low. It was discovered that low proficiency learners will use the L1 to a greater extent, compared to students with better L2 abilities (Svendsen, 2014). The usage of code-switching would somehow help the students with lower proficiency in the target language feel more comfortable learning the language.

The second question of the open-ended section of the questionnaire asked the respondents if using code switching is against the etiquette of an English teacher. 70% of the teachers agreed that teaching using English as well as Malay language is acceptable in the English classroom and viewed it as a method in helping the students to understand better on a certain lesson. However, 30% of the respondents did reject the idea of using code switching in the classroom. These respondents believed that the code-switching method could be implemented when the teachers encounter such students with low proficiency level of the target language. Therefore, it can be concluded that code-switching could act as a complimentary method in teaching the English language in order to ensure that the lesson is fully understood by the students. The findings addressed the research question 1.

Some researchers and educators see code switching as a factor that negatively impacts the students' learning and may hinder the development of the target language while others may see it as a stage within the process of learning a new language or a sophisticated use and understanding of the language grammars (Olmo-Castillo, 2014). However, 6 of the respondents (60%) disagreed that learning in English with the incorporation of the Malay language do not demolish neither the English language nor the Malay language among the students. In fact, the usage of the Malay language promotes communication and interaction between the students in classes. This was proven when 50% of the respondents agreed to the second statement of the questionnaire (Part D), that students actively participate in classes whenever the code switching method is applied. The same number of respondents also agreed that the students interact more. This statement is further proved when all of the interviewees agreed that using Malay in English class does encourage the participation in class especially during the discussion as to voice out their opinions and ideas when asked during the interview session. In this respect, it could be said that code-switching is a supporting element in terms of communicating for information and social interaction purposes, as it is used as a tool for transference of meaning (Bensen, 2013). By using L1, they could reduce their inhibitions or affective blocks, which would encourage them to use English in class in more confident ways than would otherwise be possible in a solely EFL environment (Alvarez, 2014). Thus, code switching did help in promoting the students' participation and improved the students' abilities to interact and engage the English lessons better. These findings addressed research question 2.

When the respondents in the interview were asked 'In what area of the English language is this method most helpful when it comes to learning the English language? (Grammar, Comprehension, Vocabulary, etc)', most of them answered that the code-switching method is applied in teaching comprehension and vocabulary. A research study done by Ramachandran and Rahim (2004), showed that the translation method through using L1 was more effective than the non-translation method in enhancing ESL learners' vocabulary learning ability, thus, improving elementary ESL learner's ability to recall the meaning of the word learnt. It is also mentioned that the teacher used code switching in order to give a better instruction to the students or else they would not understand what they would have to do in the classroom.

As for explaining specific tasks and exercises to the students, the main argument is efficiency in which leads to more effective learning, according to Cook (2001). Following the instruction in target language, the teacher code switches to native language in order to clarify meaning, and in this way stresses importance on the foreign language content for efficient comprehension (Sert, 2005).

In the researcher's opinion, the usage of the code-switching method depended on the level of proficiency of the students and there are downsides to using this method. As the teachers allow the code-switching method to be used in class, the students would not learn on their own will but would wait for the teachers to translate for them because they know that the teacher will eventually give in. As such, the findings from this research are similar to the previous research. In the research done previously, it was found that if teachers code-switch frequently, the students too will use their L1 rather than the TL more frequently, compared to when the teacher solely used the TL (Svendsen, 2014).

CONCLUSION

From this research and its findings, we could see how the teachers used the code-switching method and its effect on the students' interest towards the lesson – solely based on the teachers' observation themselves. Educators could benefit and understand how it could be incorporated in their own teaching and learning process. However, code-switching could be applied in the teaching and learning process as to help the students achieve meaningful lessons with cautions as not to overuse the method.

The code-switching method is a debatable approach when it comes to teaching English. The National language is widely used among the teachers in Malaysia, whether consciously or unconsciously. The code-switching method serves a lot of purposes and that is why teachers apply this method in the classroom. Let it be just to communicate with the students or trying to deliver a better understanding towards a certain lesson, the code-switching method could improve the students' achievement in English and academic achievement as a whole. Exposure to code-switching at the early stages of learning enables learners to gain a better head start towards effective and successful learning and gradually become proficient speakers of English language (Modupeola, 2013).

Based on the results shown from this research, the government could consider this method as acceptable in teaching English especially among the students who have low proficiency in the target language. However, if it to be implemented in schools, there are limits as to how the code-switching method should be applied. The Ministry of Education (MOE) should review this method as one of the approaches that could be taken when the students do not obtain a satisfactory score and as such considered to be low proficient. The MOE could revise this method to help the teachers in understanding why and how to incorporate this method in teaching English or any foreign languages. Teachers need to accept this technique with an open mind and help the students to improve their overall academic achievement through better comprehension towards the language itself as well as to balance the usage of this method as to not let the students be too comfotable in their first language which could be over-reliance on the first language.

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