

## ***The Students' Perception Towards Code-Switching in Sociolinguistics: A Case in English Major in Widyatama***

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### **Abstract:**

This study explores the perceptions and motivations behind code-switching and code-mixing among students in an English Education program. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, the research involved 20 respondents through an open-ended online questionnaire. Findings reveal that students engage in language alternation for reasons such as clarity, habit, social bonding, and academic convenience. Despite insightful outcomes, the study's limitations include a narrow respondent base, single-method data collection, and lack of external variable consideration. The study recommends broader sampling, triangulation of methods, analysis of gender and language background differences, and interdisciplinary theoretical integration to enrich future research

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In multilingual societies, code-switching and code-mixing are prevalent linguistic phenomena that reflect speakers' ability to navigate between languages depending on context and communicative intent. These practices are particularly evident among students studying English as a second or foreign language, who often alternate between their native language and English to meet specific needs in both academic and informal settings.

In the era of globalization and digitalization, multilingualism has become a lived experience for many students, especially in higher education institutions where English is used as a medium of instruction. Among English Education students, code-switching and code-

mixing are not only tools for communication but also mechanisms for identity negotiation, cultural expression, and academic clarity. These linguistic strategies allow students to navigate between local languages and English, reflecting their ability to adapt to varied social and academic contexts.

As social and academic settings become more interconnected through technology and global discourse, the practice of alternating between languages is increasingly normalized. For many Indonesian students, the use of Bahasa Indonesia, Sundanese, and English in fluid combinations reflects both regional linguistic heritage and the demands of academic proficiency in English. The question is no longer whether code-switching and code-mixing should be allowed, but rather how they function in shaping linguistic competence and cognitive development.

Furthermore, the context of Widyatama University—situated in West Java, a multilingual region—offers a unique opportunity to examine how local language ecologies influence students' perceptions of bilingual or even trilingual communication. Students are not only aware of the functional purposes of switching codes but also sensitive to the social impressions such practices generate, such as concerns over linguistic adequacy or judgments from peers and instructors.

This study also acknowledges the increasing role of digital communication in facilitating code-mixing. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and online learning tools blur the lines between formal and informal discourse, where students fluidly move between languages based on the mode of communication. Therefore, exploring students' perceptions of code-switching and code-mixing in both physical and digital learning environments is essential to understanding how they construct meaning, assert identity, and build social belonging in the multilingual academic world.

Janet Holmes (2016) distinguishes *code-switching* as the alternation between languages and *code-mixing* as the blending of linguistic elements from different languages. These strategies are more than just linguistic habits—they reflect both sociocultural identity and linguistic flexibility. Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015) emphasize that code-switching serves a social function, helping individuals negotiate group identity and cohesion, though they also warn against excessive reliance on these practices.

To better understand the dynamics of code-switching and code-mixing among students, this study draws on the updated perspectives of *Translanguaging Theory* proposed by García and Wei (2014) and further developed by Canagarajah (2018). Translanguaging views language use not as a switching between bounded linguistic systems, but as an integrated communicative practice. Students use all of their linguistic resources holistically to make meaning, engage with content, and express identity. This perspective aligns with the observations from the current study, where students blend English, Bahasa Indonesia, and sometimes Sundanese not simply due to vocabulary gaps, but as part of a natural communicative flow rooted in cultural and social identity.

Additionally, the study incorporates the framework of *Networked Multilingualism* (Androutsopoulos, 2015), which highlights the influence of digital environments in shaping language practices. In online spaces, such as group chats or digital classrooms, students actively participate in creating and negotiating meaning across multiple languages. These digital interactions often foster informal learning environments that reinforce multilingual

capabilities. The combination of translanguaging and networked multilingualism allows this study to analyze both the sociocognitive processes and digital affordances that support students' bilingual practices in educational settings.

The motivations for code-switching/mixing can be categorized into several types, including:

- Referential: to express meaning more precisely or efficiently
- Directive: to include or exclude people from a conversation
- Expressive: to convey emotions or emphasize a point
- Phatic: to maintain social relationships (Holmes, 2016)

Cognitive theories also highlight the role of working memory and cognitive load in bilingual language processing (Heredia & Altarriba, 2018). Additionally, identity theory emphasizes how individuals use language alternation to construct and negotiate their social identities (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2017).

The increasing globalization of education and the rise of digital communication have encouraged a more fluid use of language among young learners. These developments raise important questions about the role of code-switching and code-mixing in formal language acquisition, particularly regarding their influence on students' communication styles and overall English proficiency. In the context of English Education students at Widyatama University, this phenomenon is especially relevant, as many students navigate between Bahasa Indonesia, Sundanese, and English in both academic and social interactions.

Thus, this study investigates the perceptions of English Education students regarding their engagement in code-switching and code-mixing. It aims to understand the underlying motivations for using these strategies and to assess their impact on students' communication behaviors and English language development. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. Why do students engage in code-switching and code-mixing?
2. How do these practices impact their communication style and English language proficiency?

By exploring these questions, the study contributes to the broader sociolinguistic discourse on bilingual education and provides insights for educators in designing language instruction that embraces linguistic diversity while promoting proficiency and clarity in communication.

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach with descriptive analysis, using online questionnaires distributed through Google Forms. The instrument consisted of open-ended questions to gather nuanced insights into students' language practices and perceptions. The participants were 20 students from the English Education major at Widyatama University (batch 2022) who had completed a course in Sociolinguistics.

In addition to the distribution of open-ended questionnaires via Google Forms, this study applied a qualitative thematic analysis to interpret the data. Responses were first

transcribed and organized according to recurring linguistic themes such as communication breakdowns, peer bonding, and academic expression. These themes were then coded using an inductive approach, allowing categories to emerge organically from the data rather than being pre-determined. This method ensured that students' perspectives were represented authentically, capturing the depth and diversity of their experiences with code-switching and code-mixing.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, member checking was conducted with a sample of the respondents. Participants were given the opportunity to review the researchers' interpretations of their responses to ensure accuracy and contextual relevance. Additionally, researcher triangulation was applied, wherein multiple members of the research team independently reviewed and interpreted the data. These strategies helped minimize bias and increased the rigor of the qualitative analysis, making the results more robust and reflective of real student experiences in a multilingual academic setting.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal diverse motivations and impacts of code-switching and code-mixing practices among English Education students at Widyatama University. Through thematic analysis of the open-ended responses, three major themes emerged: linguistic facilitation, expressive capacity, and social inclusion.

The analysis of the questionnaire responses highlights that code-switching and code-mixing are widely practiced by students in the English Education program at Widyatama University. These linguistic behaviors are not random but appear to be intentional strategies employed to navigate complex academic content, build peer rapport, and manage linguistic challenges in real-time communication. The prevalence of these practices suggests that students perceive multilingualism as a resource rather than a barrier, supporting the view that effective communication often requires blending linguistic repertoires, especially in multilingual settings.

Moreover, the students' reflections reveal that their use of multiple languages is closely tied to context, audience, and communicative goals. For example, in informal group discussions, students are more likely to mix languages to maintain social comfort and express themselves naturally. In contrast, during formal presentations, they tend to minimize mixing to align with academic expectations. These findings reflect the fluid and situational nature of language use among young multilinguals, and they reinforce the importance of understanding language practices not just as technical usage but as part of broader social, emotional, and educational experiences.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Respondents

Detail	Description
Number of participants	20

Gender distribution	14 Female 6 Male
Age Range	19-21 years
Languages Spoken	Bahasa Indonesia (100%), Sundanese (70%), English (100%)

The demographic profile of the respondents in this study provides important context for interpreting the findings. The participants, 20 English Education students from Widyatama University, represent a young adult demographic aged between 19 and 21 years. A significant majority (70%) of the participants also speak Sundanese in addition to Bahasa Indonesia and English, illustrating a multilingual background typical of the West Java region.

The predominance of female participants (70%) may influence linguistic behavior, as previous studies have shown gendered differences in language usage and code-switching tendencies. The universal fluency in Bahasa Indonesia and English among respondents also highlights their bilingual environment, with Sundanese playing a role as a third language for most.

This linguistic diversity provides a rich ground for analyzing code-switching and code-mixing phenomena, particularly in how students navigate and integrate their multilingual capabilities in academic and social settings. Their diverse backgrounds enable an exploration of how sociocultural and educational factors interact with linguistic behavior in a higher education context.

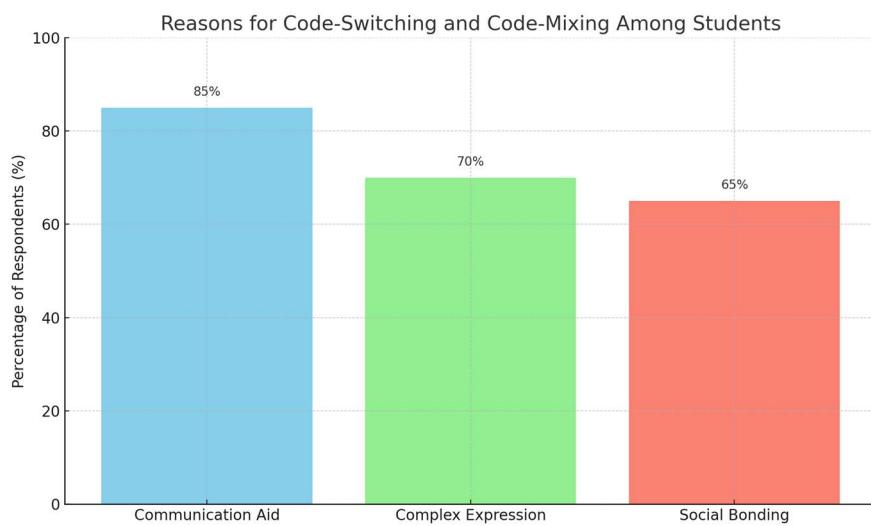
Given their multilingual backgrounds and academic focus, the respondents' demographic profile provides a valuable foundation for understanding their motivations. Building on this, the majority of respondents indicated that they engage in code-switching and code-mixing for the following reasons.

Table 2. Appendix: Demographic Breakdown by Gender

Gender	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Male	8	40%
Female	12	60%

Interpretation: With a slight majority of female respondents (60%), the dataset allows for a preliminary gender-based analysis. Future studies could further stratify responses by code-switching purposes, frequency, or context (e.g., academic vs. social situations).

Diagram 1. Reasons for Code-Switching and Code-Mixing



**Communication Aid (85%)** The highest percentage of students indicated that they use code-switching and code-mixing primarily to overcome vocabulary limitations. This shows that students rely on their native language as a support system when they encounter difficulties in expressing themselves in English. It reflects a functional use of bilingualism as a coping mechanism to maintain communication flow.

**Complex Expression (70%)** A significant number of respondents use mixed codes to convey nuanced or academic ideas that may be challenging to articulate in English alone. This aligns with the sociolinguistic perspective that language mixing enables richer expression, especially in contexts involving cultural or academic complexity.

**Social Bonding (65%)** Many students switch languages to foster relational closeness and a sense of community with peers. This suggests that code-switching is not only a linguistic choice but also a social strategy to create solidarity and engagement in academic and informal interactions.

For example:

- *"Sometimes I don't know the exact word in English, so I switch to Indonesian to make my point clear." (Respondent 5)*
- *"When discussing academic topics, I mix English with Bahasa Indonesia because some terms are easier to understand in my native language." (Respondent 12)*

These underlying motivations not only reveal why students resort to code-switching and code-mixing, but they also shed light on how these practices shape their day-to-day interactions. To better understand this, it is essential to examine the impact of such language behaviors on the students' overall communication style.

Table 2. Impact of Code-Switching and Code-Mixing on Communication Style

Impact	Description	Percentage

Positive (enhances flow)	Students feel conversations are smoother, more engaging, and easier to follow.	90%
Negative (affect image)	Some students fear being judged as less proficient in English.	40%

The data reveals that code-switching and code-mixing have a generally positive influence on students' communication styles. A large majority (90%) of respondents expressed that these practices help make conversations more fluid, accessible, and enjoyable. By alternating between languages, students feel they can maintain the flow of discussion, especially when facing lexical gaps or trying to explain complex ideas more clearly.

However, not all perceptions are entirely positive. Approximately 40% of respondents voiced concern about potential negative social impressions—specifically, the fear that frequent code-switching may be interpreted as a lack of fluency in English. This dual perception highlights the sociolinguistic tension between communication effectiveness and perceived language competence.

These findings underscore the importance of viewing code-switching and code-mixing not merely as fallback strategies but as tools that can enhance conversational engagement while also reflecting deeper concerns about language identity and social perception.

Table 3. Impact of Code-Switching and Code-Mixing on English Proficiency

Impact	Description	Percentage
Improvement	Helps in learning new vocabulary through contextual usage.	30%
Hindrance	Reduces confidence in speaking English fluently without relying on native language.	50%
Neutral	Impact depends on the frequency of practicing English-only communication.	20%

Students' perceptions of how code-switching and code-mixing affect their English proficiency were notably varied. A portion of the respondents (30%) viewed these practices as beneficial, highlighting that switching between languages often introduces them to new vocabulary and enhances their language acquisition through contextual learning.

Conversely, the majority (50%) believed that code-switching could hinder their fluency. These students felt that relying on their native language when struggling to express themselves in English might reduce their confidence and limit their ability to develop full fluency.

Meanwhile, 20% of the respondents maintained a neutral stance, suggesting that the impact of code-switching on proficiency largely depends on how often they engage in English-only conversations. This implies that intentional practice in monolingual settings may balance the effects of language mixing.

Overall, the mixed responses reflect the complex role that code-switching plays in second language development. While it can support learning in some contexts, it also poses challenges that educators must consider when designing language instruction strategies.

These findings suggest that code-switching and code-mixing are not random or careless practices but are systematically used by students to enhance clarity, foster engagement, and navigate bilingual identity. The phenomenon reflects broader trends in globalized education where multilingual competence is increasingly valuable and should be acknowledged, not suppressed.

Beyond their reasons for code-switching and code-mixing, students' responses reflect how these practices shape their overall communication style. Many reported that switching between languages allows them to maintain spontaneity and express themselves more naturally, especially in informal contexts. The use of mixed codes often softens the tone of conversations and allows for humor, cultural references, and social alignment with peers. Consequently, code-switching becomes not only a linguistic strategy but also a form of interpersonal engagement that fosters comfort and fluidity in interactions.

However, the impact on English language proficiency is more nuanced. While 30% of students claimed that switching helps them learn new vocabulary and supports contextual understanding, a greater proportion (50%) expressed concern that overreliance on their native language may reduce their confidence in using English fluently. This tension highlights the need for balanced language exposure: while code-switching can scaffold understanding, excessive use might prevent learners from fully immersing in English discourse. Therefore, these practices, when not guided, may limit students' opportunities to develop advanced linguistic structures and independent fluency.

Despite the valuable insights obtained, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the relatively small sample size of 20 participants from a single department and university limits the generalizability of the findings. Broader sampling across institutions and diverse linguistic backgrounds could provide a more comprehensive view of student perceptions. Second, the reliance solely on self-reported data through online questionnaires may not capture the full depth of code-switching behaviors. Future research could incorporate classroom observations, interaction analysis, or in-depth interviews to triangulate the data and enrich the understanding of how and when students switch codes in practice.

Furthermore, the study did not examine how demographic factors such as gender, native language, or exposure to multilingual environments might influence code-switching habits. These variables may reveal subtle but meaningful patterns in communication behavior and language development. In addition, external factors like curriculum structure, lecturer attitudes, or institutional language policies were not considered but may significantly shape students' language choices. Future investigations that include these elements could offer a more nuanced understanding of bilingual education dynamics in multilingual academic contexts.

## DISCUSSION

While this study provides valuable insights into students' perceptions and motivations for using code-switching and code-mixing in an English Education program, several limitations must be acknowledged.

First, the sample size and representation were limited to only 20 respondents from a single department at one institution. These narrow demographic limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research should expand the participant pool to include students from different study programs and institutions across various regions. Such expansion would offer more comprehensive data that reflects a broader sociolinguistic context.

Second, the study relied solely on online questionnaires. While effective for collecting self-reported data, this approach lacks methodological triangulation. Incorporating classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and analysis of recorded group discussions or presentations would enrich the findings and improve data validity.

Third, the study did not account for external institutional factors that may influence the use of code-switching and code-mixing. These include the language policy of the university, lecturer's language background, and the implementation of bilingual or international curricula. Including these variables would provide a more nuanced understanding of the socio-educational dynamics involved.

Fourth, the paper did not analyze potential variations based on gender or first language, although demographic data were collected. Exploring these aspects could uncover important patterns related to identity, language attitudes, or motivation for language alternation. Gender-based or L1-based tendencies in code-switching behavior could yield insightful implications for language education.

Finally, although the theoretical framework employed is grounded in sociolinguistic principles, incorporating perspectives from other disciplines could enhance the analysis. For instance, cognitive psychology can offer insights into the role of working memory and cognitive load in switching behaviors. Similarly, language education theories can shed light on how such practices facilitate or hinder second language acquisition.

## CONCLUSION

This study reveals that English Education students at Widyatama University engage in code-switching and code-mixing primarily to enhance communication clarity (85%), convey complex ideas (70%), and build peer connections (65%). These practices are not signs of deficiency, but rather reflect strategic linguistic choices rooted in students' multilingual identities and academic needs. Code-switching allows students to navigate lexical gaps and enrich their expressive capacity, while code-mixing supports contextual communication across social and academic domains.

However, the impact on English proficiency is ambivalent. While 30% of students report improved vocabulary learning through mixed codes, a larger portion (50%) perceive a potential barrier to developing full fluency in English. These findings underscore the need for pedagogical approaches that balance the cognitive and social benefits of bilingualism with structured English immersion. Educators should embrace code-switching as a transitional tool while providing intentional opportunities for monolingual English use to strengthen students' confidence and competence in formal communication contexts.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to support effective bilingual communication and enhance English language proficiency among students:

1. Broaden Respondent Demographics: Include students from various departments and institutions to allow for more generalized findings.
2. Employ Mixed Methods: Supplement questionnaires with observations, interviews, and audio/video recordings of classroom interactions.
3. Consider External Factors: Investigate the influence of language policy, lecturer profiles, and curriculum design on language choice.
4. Analyze Gender and L1 Differences: Use demographic data to explore variations in switching behavior based on gender and native language.
5. Adopt Multidisciplinary Approaches: Integrate theories from cognitive psychology and language education for a more holistic analysis.

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