

## CODE-SWITCHING IN THE EFL CLASSROOM: YEAH OR NAY?

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### ABSTRACT

*Code-switching between bilingual and multilingual teachers and students at St. Nicholas School (SNS) is a natural and inescapable language phenomenon. This motivated the researcher to study whether code-switching affected teachers and students negatively or favorably, particularly in terms of their academic activity. The researcher specifically delved into how English teachers and students in EFL classes at SNS saw code-switching and perceive the methods, purposes, and issues that came with it. To find out how respondents feel about code-switching, this study employed a mixed-methods research methodology and an adapted questionnaire to collect data. According to the study, code-switching has a ton of advantages for students and teachers, making teaching and learning rich, fruitful, and engaging. Also, it aided in the accomplishment of educational objectives, made it easier to understand complex ideas, and sped up the process of acquiring language abilities. Despite the positive outcome, some drawbacks impair teachers' and students' ability to communicate, particularly when dealing with English-only speakers when they are immersed in the outside world. Also, when utilized improperly, it might have compromised the teaching-learning process. Code-switching in the classroom is therefore both a yeah and a nay! To optimize the benefits of code-switching, the study suggested finding a balance. The long-term harmful effects of learning a language can be avoided in large part by teachers. The usage of the target language should be required in classroom settings where formal education takes place. Code-switching can only be used to bridge the gap between the text and the pupils' comprehension if there is a communication breakdown. Only in such circumstances are code-switching instances tolerable, if not acceptable. When two languages are sufficiently developed, code-switching will finally produce more intellectual advantages than disadvantages.*

*Keywords: English language; code-switching; EFL classroom, EFL teachers; Thai English Language Classrooms*

### INTRODUCTION

Code-switching is a common occurrence in Thailand as it is considered to be one of the most well-liked travel destinations and residency locations contributing to its diversified culture and language. Thus, it is beneficial to use a common language that will bridge the gap between the natives and the countless immigrants who make up Thailand's population. Chinese, Filipino, Korean,

English, Indian, Burmese, Lao, and Khmer are just a handful of the languages that coexist with the Thai language. This is a lovely representation of multiculturalism in Thailand, but it also presents a significant challenge for speakers because it hinders communication, particularly if they have already used up all of their language vocabulary. Bilinguals often express themselves by switching to a language in which they are proficient or at least comfortable (Khuwaileh et al., 2022).

In Thailand's educational system, English is taught as a foreign language. It is also common for local and foreign teachers and students to switch between different languages in the classroom for a variety of reasons, which can have both advantageous and disadvantageous effects on their ability to comprehend, learn, and communicate. Most of the time, teachers will use established language to help pupils understand or prevent further misunderstanding when explaining a difficult concept, especially a technical one. The use of English as a teaching language is governed by rules imposed by educational institutions, but these rules are seldom strictly enforced because teachers frequently stray from the rules to effectively communicate their ideas. This is done to make the classroom environment more neutral.

Saint Nicholas' School (SNS) is an English language institution composed of students and teachers from many different countries and languages. Teachers often switch between English, their native language, and even their dialect, especially when speaking with peers and students. In SNS, code-switching appears to be an organic and unavoidable linguistic phenomenon among bilingual or multilingual learners, whether it occurs outside or within the classroom. As an academic administrator, these phenomena have sparked the interest of the researcher, who has begun to question whether code-switching is negatively or positively affecting students, especially their academic aspirations. This prompted the researcher to look into the methods, purposes, and perceptions of English teachers and students who code-switch in EFL classes in SNS.

It is still rare to find studies of code-switching among English teachers and students in Thai English schools. Thus, it is important to investigate the effects of code-switching in a detailed manner as well as to identify what students' and teachers' perceptions are of the phenomenon. Also, it is appropriate to identify the issues brought on by code-switching that develop in a multi-cultural classroom with many native languages and provide teachers, students, and parents with workable solutions. This study aims to offer recommendations to school officials, English teachers, and EFL students on the appropriate

times and situations in which code-switching can be effectively utilized in the classroom.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aims:

1. To find out students' levels of perception towards code-switching along with the following domains:
  - 1.1. developing language skills
  - 1.2. effects on L1 and L2
  - 1.3. effects on their identity
  - 1.4. effect on learning
2. To determine the significant difference in the student's level of perception towards code-switching along with the following domains:
  - 2.1. developing language skills
  - 2.2. effects on L1 and L2
  - 2.3. effects on their identity
  - 2.4. effect on learning
3. To find out students' levels of perception towards the use of code-switching concerning their sex.
4. To determine the significant difference between students' level of perception towards the use of Code-switching concerning their sex.
5. To find out teachers' levels of perception towards code-switching along with the following domains:
  - 5.1. social function
  - 5.2. methodological function
6. To determine the significant difference between teachers level of perception towards the following:
  - 6.1. Use of code-switching for social function.
  - 6.2. Use of code-switching methodological function.



7. To find out teachers' levels of perception towards the use of code-switching concerning their sex.
8. To determine the significant difference in teachers' levels of perception towards the use of code-switching concerning their sex.
9. To identify common student and teacher-perceived code-switching issues and concerns encountered in the classroom.

## METHODOLOGY

This research used mixed methods in gathering the data. Survey questionnaires adapted from Al-Qaysi (2016) were distributed to both teachers and students of SNS. Respondents of this research were 75 (composed of 40 boys and 35 girls) Grades 7-10 students and 10 Language teachers (3 males and 7 females).

Data were collected through Google forms linked to a QR code which was scanned by the students and teachers through their mobile phones. The collection of data was accomplished on December 15, 2021. Table 1 shows the respondents of the research.

Data were examined using the Mean, SD, f, and p tests.

**Table 1**  
*Respondents of the study*

Respondents	Sex	Number	Total
Students	Male	40	75
	Female	35	
Teachers	Male	3	10
	Female	7	

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Students' levels of perception towards code-switching and when grouped according to Code-switching in developing language skills, Code-switching and its effects on L1

### and L2, Code-switching and its effects on their identity, Code-switching and its effect on learning

#### 1.1. In terms of Code-switching in developing language skills

**Table 2**  
*Student's perception towards code-switching*

Domains	Mean	Inter.	Overall Mean	Inter.
Code-switching and developing language skills	3.78	Agree		
Code-switching and its effects on L1 and L2	3.67	Agree	3.64	Agree
Code-switching and its effects on their identity	2.96	Undecided		
Code-switching and its effects on learning	3.70	Agree		

The result revealed that students generally exhibit a positive perception towards code-switching with an overall mean of (3.64). Specifically, students strongly agree that code-switching makes their conversation meaningful and effective with a mean score of (4.29) which is the highest among the items; moreover, they strongly agree on the item that code-switching makes them learn new words easily (3.89). Students are also in agreement on the issues that code-switching helps them understand better, and that it helps them practice the second language that they use with the same mean of 3.83. On the downside, students do not believe that code-switching made them prestigious as shown in the result being the only item with the mean lower than three (2.99).

#### 1.2. In terms of Code-switching in developing language skills



**Table 3**  
*Students' mean level of perception on code-switching in developing language skills*

Indicators	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent	Overall Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
1.Code-Switching makes my conversation meaningful and effective	4.29	Strongly Agree	3.78	Agree
2.Code-Switching enhances my communication skills	3.56	Agree		
3.Code-switching helps me to develop language skills.	3.49	Agree		

Indicator numbers 1-3 deal with code-switching in developing language skills. Students express a positive perception towards this domain with a mean of 3.78. Students strongly agree that code-switching makes their conversation effective and meaningful. Students also agree that code-switching enhances their communication skills and helps them develop their language skills.

### 1.3. In terms of code-switching and its effects on L1 and L2

Indicator numbers 4-7 deal with code-switching and its effects on L1 and L2. Students express a positive perception towards this domain with a mean of 3.67. Students agree on all four indicators of this domain; that means to say, students agree that they code-switch due to a lack of English/Thai equivalents and difficult words, code-switching helps them practice the 2<sup>nd</sup> language that they use, and helps them learn new words.

**Table 4**  
*Students' mean level of perception on code-switching and its effects on L1 and L2*

Indicators	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent	Overall Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
4. I Code-switch due to the lack of English equivalents.	3.47	Agree	3.67	Agree
5. Code-switching helps me to practice the second language that I use.	3.83	Agree		
6. Code-switching helps me in learning new words from the teachers while they are switching between English and Thai.	3.73	Agree		
7. Code-switch with my friends due to the difficulty of some words in my native language.	3.64	Agree		

### 1.4. In terms of code-switching and its effects on their identity

Indicator numbers 8-9 deal with code-switching and its effects on students' identity. The result shows varying perceptions towards this domain as shown in the overall mean of 2.96 which is interpreted as undecided. Students agree on indicator number 8 that code-switching shows that they are educated as shown in the mean of 3.43. On the flip side, students disagree that code-switching makes them prestigious.



**Table 5**  
Students' mean level of perception on code-switching and its effects on their identity

Indicators	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent	Overall Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
8. Using code-switching shows that I'm well-educated.	3.43	Agree	2.96	Undecided
9. Using code-switching shows that I'm prestigious.	2.49	Disagree		

### 1.5. In terms of code-switching and its effects on learning

**Table 6**  
Students' mean level of perception towards code-switching and its effects on learning

Indicator	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent	Overall Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
10. Code-switching allows me to understand better.	3.83	Agree	3.70	Agree
11. Code-switching helps me to learn new words easily.	3.89	Agree		
12. Code-switching makes me feel more comfortable and confident in classrooms.	3.67	Agree		
13. I Code-switch with my friends for discussing lectures and tests.	3.55	Agree		
14. Usage of English allows me to express the ideas that I can't express in Thai.	3.63	Agree		
15. Usage of code-switching keeps me attentive in the classroom.	3.63	Agree		

Indicator numbers 10-15 deal with code-switching and its effects on learning. Students are in unison in their perception of this domain as shown in the mean of 3.70 which is interpreted as "agree". Students believe that code-switching allows them to understand better, learn new words

easily, make them comfortable and confident in the classroom, understand lectures and tests better, express their ideas in discussions, and keep them attentive in class.

### 2. Significant differences in the students' level of perception towards code-switching along with the following domains developing language skills, effects on L1 and L2, effects on their identity, effect on learning

**Table 7**  
One-way ANOVA results on the difference in students' perception of code-switching along with the identified domains

Main Effects	f	p	Interpretation/Decision
	1.0944	0.3518	Not Significant
			Reject Ho
<b>Domains</b>			<b>Mean</b>
Code-switching and developing language skills			3.78
Code-switching and its effects on L1 and L2			3.67
Code-switching and its effects on their identity			2.96
Code-switching and its effects on learning			3.70

As presented by (Al-Emran & Shaalan, 2015) in analyzing the students' level of perception towards code-switching along with the identified domains, a one-way ANOVA test was performed to investigate if there is a statistically significant difference among the students' perceptions towards using code-switching.

The result shows no significant difference in the level of students' perception towards code-switching along with the development of language skills, effects on L1 and L2, effects on their identity, and effects on learning ( $p < 0.3518$ ).

### 3. Students' perceptions towards the use of Code-Switching along with their Sex



**Table 8**  
*Student's perception towards code-switching according to Sex*

Sex	N	Mean	SD
Male	45	3.68	3.26
Female	30	3.58	3.16

The results indicated that both male and female students have positive perceptions of code-switching in the classrooms as presented in Table 8. Both male and female students agree that code-switching is beneficial in their student life as shown in the mean score with the male students having a higher mean of 3.68 (female 3.58).

#### 4. Significant difference between students' perceptions towards the use of Code-Switching with regards to their Sex

**Table 9**  
*Significant difference in students' perceptions towards the use of Code-Switching with regard to Sex*

Main Effects	f	p	Interpretation/Decision
	0.0181	0.8934	Not Significant Reject Ho
<b>Sex</b>			<b>Mean</b>
Male			3.68
Female			3.58

As presented by (Al-Emran & Shaalan, 2015) in analyzing the students' perceptions concerning their Sex, an independent samples *t*-test was performed to investigate if there is a statistically significant difference among the students' perceptions towards using code-switching concerning their Sex. The mean values for both sexes don't reveal any statistically significant difference ( $p = 0.143$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) among the learners' perceptions which made the hypothesis rejected.

The study has found that code-switching is an accepted linguistic action in the context of Saint Nicholas School. Results revealed that students, both male and female show high regard towards code-switching in the classroom, and their means do not show a significant difference. The respondents believe that code-switching makes their conversation meaningful and effective, enhances their communication skills, helps develop language skills, and shows that they are well-

educated. Student respondents agree that they code-switch due to the lack of English equivalents, it allows them to understand better, helps them to learn new words easily, it makes them feel more comfortable and confident in classrooms. Further, they agree that code-switching is very useful especially when discussing lectures and tests with friends and teachers, practicing the second language, and helps them in learning new words from the teachers while they are switching between English and Thai. They also find code-switching important especially when they encounter difficult words in both English and Thai; code-switching also helps them express their ideas that they cannot express in either language (English & Thai), and it keeps them attentive in class. On the flip side, students do not believe that code-switching makes them prestigious. When grouped according to domains, students agree that code-switching helps in the development of their language skills and their learning in the classroom but do not agree that code-switching enhances their identity. The above results affirmed the study of Rihane (2015).

#### 5. Teachers' Perceptions towards the use of Code-Switching

**Table 10**  
*Teachers' mean level of perception toward code-switching*

Domains	Mean	Inter.	Overall Mean	Inter.
Social Function	3.78	Agree	4.78	Strongly Agree
Methodological Function	3.67	Agree		

Table 10 contains the educators' perceptions towards using code-switching. All educators exhibit very high perceptions towards code-switching inside the classroom as shown in the overall mean of 4.78. With the highest mean of 4.90 teachers strongly agree that they code-switch because students are not exposed to English, code-switching help boost their second language skills, and students feel more comfortable and comfortable while learning. Items with the highest mean score of 4.80 show that teachers strongly agreed that code-switching made their



conversation meaningful and effective, code-switching made teachers strongly bond with their students, due to the complexity of some words, teachers believe that code-switching enhances their communication skills with their students and because they cannot express themselves in English. Furthermore, findings illustrated that the third-highest mean score (4.70) of the surveyed items tends to the concerns that code-switching helps them to convey meaning easily to their students, students learn the second language fast, illustrating new words made easy, makes a discussion interesting, and learn new words fast. On the downside, the result showed that the lowest mean score (4.60), which is considered very high when compared to the highest mean score (5), was the concern that code-switching while teaching helps students understand better.

### 6. Teachers’ perception towards the social function code-switching in the classroom

**Table 11**  
*Teachers’ mean level of perception toward the social function of code-switching*

Indicators	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
1. Code-Switching makes my conversation meaningful and effective	4.80	Strongly Agree
2. Code-switching helps me to bond strongly with my students.	4.80	Strongly Agree
3. I Code-switch because I feel that the students are not exposed to English.	4.90	Strongly Agree
4. Code-switching enhances my communication skills with the students.	4.80	Strongly Agree
5. Code-switching enables the students to boost up their second language skills.	4.90	Strongly Agree
6. Code-switching makes the students feel more comfortable and confident while learning.	4.90	Strongly Agree
7. Usage of Thai allows me to express ideas that I can’t express in English.	4.80	Strongly Agree
8. Usage of code-switching keeps my students attentive in the classroom.	4.90	Strongly Agree

Indicator numbers 1- 8 deal with the social function of code-switching in the classroom. The social function of code-switching in the classroom includes disciplining the students, giving them

instructions about classroom activities, or dealing with the emotional side of the students’ personalities. These functions are not directly related to target language teaching.

All teachers exhibit a very high perception of the social function of code-switching in the classroom. All indicators were rated by teachers as “strongly agree”, with the following indicators having the highest ratings: I code-switch because I feel that students are not exposed to English, code-switching enables the students to boost up their second language skills, code-switching makes the students feel more comfortable and confident while learning and usage of code-switching keep my students attentive in the classroom.

### 7. Teachers’ perception towards the methodological function code-switching in the classroom

Indicator numbers 9- 15 deal with the methodological function of code-switching in the classroom. Methodological functions include all the language-related functions of code-switching by the teachers to teach the target language, i.e. translation, explanation of difficult concepts, and other communicative strategies between the teachers and the learners. It may also include reviewing a lesson, defining a word, explaining a concept, and/or negotiating cultural relevance.

**Table 12**  
*Teachers’ mean level of perception towards the methodical function of code-switching*

Indicators	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
9. I Code-switch while teaching to help my students understand better.	4.60	Strongly Agree
10. Code-switching helps me to convey meaning easily to students.	4.70	Strongly Agree
11. Usage of Codeswitching helps the students in learning the second language.	4.70	Strongly Agree
12. I Code-switch due to the complexity of certain words in the language.	4.80	Strongly Agree
13. Using Code-switching while illustrating new terms helps the students to learn better.	4.70	Strongly Agree
14. Code-switching makes the discussions more interesting.	4.70	Strongly Agree
15. Code-switching helps students learn new words when teachers are switching between English and Thai.	4.70	Strongly Agree

All teachers at SNS exhibit a very high perception of the methodological function of code-



switching in the classroom. All indicators were rated by teachers as “strongly agree”, with this indicator having the highest rating: “I code-switch due to the complexity of certain words in the language.” The rest of the indicators scored 4.70 and 4.60 respectively which reflect their strong agreement of the use of code-switching in the classroom.

**8. Significant difference between teachers' levels of perception towards the following:**

- Use of code-switching for social function
- Use of code-switching for methodological function

**Table 13**  
*One-way ANOVA results on the difference of students' perception of code-switching along with the identified domains*

Main Effects	F	P	Interpretation/Decision
	0.0028	0.9590	Not Significant Reject Ho
<b>Domains</b>			<b>Mean</b>
Social function			4.90
Methodological function			4.78

As presented by (Al-Emran & Shaalan, 2015) in analyzing the teachers' level of perception towards code-switching along with the identified domains, a one-way ANOVA test was performed to investigate if there is a statistically significant difference.

The result shows no significant difference in the level of teachers' perception towards code-switching as a social function and as a methodological function ( $p < 0.9590$ ).

**9. Teachers' perceptions towards the use of Code-Switching concerning their sex**

**Table 14**  
*Teachers' mean level of perception towards code-switching concerning Sex*

Sex	N	Mean	SD
Male	3	4.79	4.28
Female	7	4.77	4.27

The results indicated that both male and female teachers have very positive perceptions of

code-switching in the classrooms. All teachers at SNS strongly agree with the use of code-switching in the classroom with male teachers having a higher mean of 4.79.

**10. Significant difference between teachers' perceptions towards the use of Code-Switching with regard to their sex**

**Table 15**  
*Significant difference in teachers' perceptions towards the use of code-Switching with regards to sex*

Main Effects	F	p	Interpretation/Decision
	0.0181	0.9948	Not Significant
			accept Ho
<b>Sex</b>			<b>Mean</b>
Male			4.79
Female			4.77

In analyzing the teachers' perceptions concerning their sex, the researcher carried out a one-way ANOVA test to examine whether there is any statistically significant difference among the teachers' perceptions towards using code-switching concerning their Sex. As presented in Table 15, the mean values for both Sexes of educators do not reveal any statistically significant difference ( $p = 0.9948$ , at  $p > 0.05$ ), thus the hypothesis is accepted.

Both males and females show very positive perceptions towards code-switching inside the classroom. Findings indicated that most teachers have positively agreed that they code-switch to make their conversation meaningful and effective, to help their students, understand better, to bond strongly with their students, to convey meaning easily to students, and to help the students in learning the second language. Moreover, teachers code-switch for methodical reasons, such as when they encounter the complexity of certain words in language, for an interesting discussion, for better expression of ideas, and to learn new words in both English and Thai languages. Teachers also strongly agreed to use code-switching inside the classroom because they think that students are not



so exposed to English, to enhance their communication skills with their students, to boost students' second language skills, and to keep their students attentive in the classroom. Finally, they code-switch to make their students comfortable and confident while learning and to make their students understand better. When grouped according to domains, teachers strongly agree that both functions (methodological and social) of code-switching help in achieving educational objectives. Respondents show a very high perception of code-switching regardless of sex. These results affirmed the study of Nhi and Nhung (2020).

### 11. Common student/teacher perceived code-switching issues and concerns encountered in the classroom

**Table 16**  
*Common student/teacher perceived code-switching issues and concerns encountered in the classroom*

Student-perceived concerns related to code-switching	Frequency
I might code-switch when speaking with a native English speaker.	15
I will not be fluent in English if I code-switch all the time.	8
My knowledge of English is affected because of code-switching.	2
Some of my classmates do not listen to teachers who speak straight English as they depend on translations.	1
Teacher-perceived concerns related to code-switching	Frequency
Students' English language skills acquisition is in jeopardy.	1
Code-switching has become my habit and my communication and fluency in the English language are also affected.	4
Code-switching can be beneficial to other subjects like mathematics, sciences, computer, music, etc. with difficult technical terminologies, but not in teaching English.	3
There should have a mastery of the language as one can love the first and despise the second.	2
I am worried that my students' English communication skills will be at risk as code-switching will result in a weak foundation.	2

Despite the high levels of perception of teachers and students towards code-switching/mixing in the classroom, both groups of respondents underscored issues and concerns worthy of investigation. Respondents were given the chance to write their commonly encountered

issues in schools related to the above-mentioned variable. The table below shows the problems encountered by teachers and students to which the values represent the frequency as each problem arises.

Despite the very affirmative result, teachers and students identified issues and concerns worthy of inquiry. Affirming the study of Boztepe (2003), respondents raised concerns that code-switching might affect their language facility and when inside the classroom, may depend on translations. Moreover, other identified concerns that code-switching might jeopardize students' language skills acquisition are the worries that code-switching might become their habit and their communication skills get affected. Respondents were one with McCluney, et.al. (2019) in their conclusion that not in all subjects that code-switching is applicable, and they were worried that students may have a weak foundation in both L1 and L2.

### CONCLUSION

To answer the question "Is code-switching in the classroom a yea or a nay?" Code-switching has offered tons of benefits to both students and teachers that made teaching and learning rich, fruitful, and meaningful. Code-switching helps achieve educational goals, aids in the comprehension of difficult concepts, and simplifies the progress of language skills acquisition.

Nevertheless, it also presented downsides that may potentially affect both teachers' and students' communication, especially when interacting with monolingual speakers of the English language when they immerse themselves in the outside world. Moreover, it potentially jeopardizes the teaching-learning process when not used in a proper context. Therefore, code-switching in the classroom is both a yeah and a nay!

### RECOMMENDATION

A balance must be observed at all times to achieve a beneficial result of code-switching. Teachers have a vital role in preventing the lasting adverse effects on language (L1 and L2) skills acquisition. The usage of the studied language

should be required in the classroom, where formal learning, including the development of language proficiencies in the L1 and L2, takes place (Aljoundi, 2013). Code-switching should only be used as a bridge to close the gap between the text and the students in the event of a comprehension breakdown. Therefore, it is only under such conditions that code-switching incidents are bearable, if not acceptable. Code-switching will ultimately result in more intellectual benefits than drawbacks when two languages are adequately developed (Baker, 1988).

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