

Exploring Code-Switching Practices in Verbal Communication among University Students in the Klang Valley: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the use of code switching among university students in verbal communication within the Klang Valley. The objectives of this study are to investigate the language varieties used in verbal communication, the forms of code switch used, the reasons for the use of code switch, the differences of reasons to code switch between universities, and the perception of university students towards the use of code switching. The theoretical framework used in this study is based on the social functions introduced by Holmes (2013) and the data collected was analysed with Holmes (2013) framework. The respondents consisted of university students from UiTM, MSU and UNISEL responded to a questionnaire survey consisting of question items related to the forms of code switching and reasons for the use of code switching. Some of the respondents were then chosen and interviewed to gain depth into their perceptions of the use of code switching. The results show that the majority of the students are inclined to using intra-sentential code switching in verbal communication and the students thought that the use of code switching in verbal communication was beneficial and helpful for both the speakers and listeners to establish better communication.

Keywords: Code-Switching, Verbal Communication, Code-Switching Practices.

INTRODUCTION

Code-switching is common in daily interactions in Malaysia and these language shifts create a shared code that conveys meaning and serves various communicative purposes (Serip Mohamad, 2022). Myers-Scotton (1993, cited in Rose, 2006) defined it as the use of more than one language within the same utterance or conversation. In Malaysia, the practice has roots in British colonial rule, which established English as both a medium of instruction and a tool of informal communication (Thirusankul & Yunus, 2014). The multilingual environment created by ethnic-based schools in Malay, English, Tamil, and Chinese further reinforced this practice. Today, mixing languages in daily speech is a natural feature of Malaysian communication, as seen in examples like: *"wei macha, you want to makan here or tapau?"*

Code-switching also allows speakers to address lexical or grammatical gaps in one language by incorporating features of another (Nazri & Kassim, 2023). For Riparip (2024), it is argued that code-switching in classroom links towards limited English proficiency. However, Amanda et al. (2024) shows teachers in vocational health-education settings use code-switching strategically to help students understand complex subject matter when English proficiency is limited. Similarly, Nawaz (2023) found that code-switching in urban ESL classrooms improves comprehension and increases student participation by bridging language gaps.

Findings across studies remain inconsistent, creating space for further investigation. This study therefore examines the types, forms, and functions of code-switching among Malaysian university students in Klang Valley, with attention to institutional differences.

While many studies have focused on school contexts, less is known about its role at the tertiary level. In Malaysian universities, where English dominates as the language of instruction, students still frequently switch to their mother tongues during interaction (Aziz & Salleh, 2024).

Likewise, Ali and Hashim (2021) observed that Malaysian undergraduates often mix languages on WhatsApp to express identity and strengthen peer relationships. Against this background, the present study aims to explore students' perspectives on code-switching in higher education.

Research Objectives

The statements below are the research objectives for this study:

1. To investigate the language varieties and forms of code switch used among university students in Shah Alam.
2. To examine the reasons for the use of code switch and the significant difference of reasons to code switch between UiTM, MSU and UNISEL.
3. To identify the perception of university students towards the use of code switching.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language variety in Malaysia

Malaysia's multiethnic population, which includes Malays, Chinese, Indians, and indigenous groups, is reflected in its linguistic diversity. English still plays a significant role alongside community languages like Mandarin, Cantonese, and Tamil, despite Malay being the official language. Majority Malaysians acquire multiple languages through family and education, resulting in code-switching becoming a common form of communication (Saringat & Ismail, 2024).

Definition and Types of Code Switching

Code-switching is the practice of alternating between two or more languages within a sentence or conversation. It functions to convey identity, solidarity, and enhance clarity in communication (Nazri & Kassim, 2023). It serves not only as a means of communication but also reveals the intricate cognitive processes involved in bilingualism. (Chandra, 2023; Al Mustopha & D 'Angelo, 2023). This study follows Poplack's (1980) framework, which distinguishes intra-sentential, inter-sentential, and extra-sentential switching.

i. Intra sentential code switching

Occurs within a sentence or clause and is the most complex form (Koban, 2013). Example:

"Don't be late nanti kena marah dengan teacher."

ii. Inter sentential code switching

Takes place across sentences or clauses, requiring fluency in both languages. Example: “Who told you to do that? Saya tak suruh pun.”

iii. Extra sentential code switching

Also called tag-switching, it involves inserting short tags without breaking syntax (Poplack, 1980). Example: “No one dared to speak in class tapi dia je yang berani.”

Social Functions for Users to Code Switch

Holmes (2013) outlined several functions of code-switching, including expressing solidarity, marking group boundaries, topic shifts, showing emotions, and persuasion.

i. Expressing Solidarity

Speakers may switch languages to show membership within a group that shares common ethnicity or background. This builds unity within or across groups often through “rojak” slang. Educators also use it to create a friendly environment, with Sert (2005) noting its role in making classrooms more approachable.

ii. Expressing Group Solidarity

Code switching can be used to distinguish one group from another or exclude outsiders. For instance, speakers may switch to Chinese in a Malay-speaking context for privacy and comfort. Rojas (2025) observed that such switching conveys status and respect among users.

iii. Discussing a Topic

Speakers often code switch depending on the subject. Holmes (2013) noted that certain topics invite language switching, such as the use of English for academic subjects and Malay for casual talk.

iv. Expressing Feelings

Holmes (2013) reported that bilinguals often rely on their L1 to express emotions or personal feelings, while L2 is reserved for formal situations. Switching becomes a tool when speakers want to express themselves more accurately.

v. Persuasion

Code switching may be used strategically to persuade or attract attention. Nerghees (2011) argued that when combined with strong arguments, it enhances credibility and facilitates systematic processing of information, making the speaker appear more reliable.

Perceptions towards the use of code switching

Code-switching is perceived by some as a way of expression of identity and building relationships (Kipchoge, 2024). Code-switching can facilitate comprehension in multilingual settings (William et al., 2025). However, others consider frequent code-switching to be a sign of weaker literacy and slower language development (William et al., 2025). Despite this, many studies show that efficient use of code-switching may increase communication and learning. This holds particularly true for multi-lingual environments where it is already in place.

METHODOLOGY

Purposive sampling was employed, with a Google Form distributed to university students in Shah Alam. A total of 74 respondents aged 18–29 were recruited from UiTM, MSU, and UNISEL, institutions chosen to align with the study’s objectives. Data collection involved two instruments. The first was a questionnaire adapted from Wong (2012), consisting of three sections: demographic information, close-ended questions on types of code-switching, and Likert-scale items on reasons for switching. The second instrument was a short interview comprising four open-ended questions, audio-recorded, and transcribed. The interviews explored both the use and perceptions of code-switching while allowing direct observation of switching forms, following similar methods used by Koban (2013).

Data were analysed using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Questionnaire responses were processed in SPSS, with descriptive statistics used to present demographic data and visualized through pie charts. One-way ANOVA and t-tests were then conducted to identify significant differences across universities regarding reasons for code-switching. Interview transcripts were analysed manually and coded into three categories of switching: intra-sentential, inter-sentential, and tag-switching based on the study’s conceptual framework and Holmes’ (2013) model of social functions. Relevant excerpts were extracted to complement the survey results, providing a narrative account of language varieties, forms, and functions of code-switching in students’ everyday communication.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Language Variety among University Students

Figure 1: Percentage of Students First Language

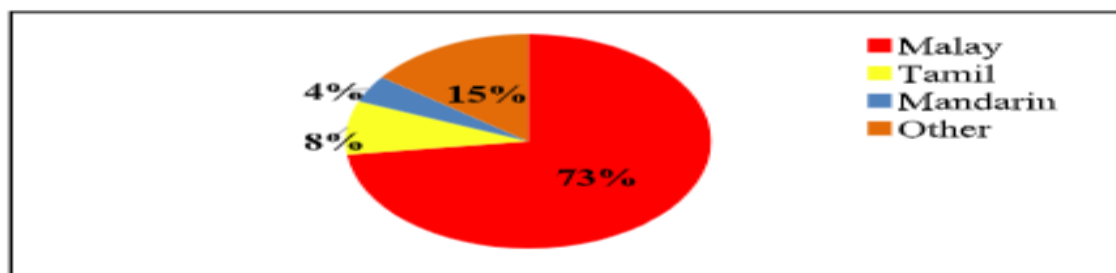


Table 1: Crosstabulation between students and language varieties.

University * Language Crosstabulation

Count

		Language				Total
		MALAY	TAMIL	MANDARIN	OTHERS	
University	UITM	35	0	0	3	38
	MSU	12	2	2	5	21
	UNISEL	5	4	1	5	15
Total		52	6	3	13	74

Table 1.2: Percentage of Crosstabulation within students and language varieties.

			University			Total
			UITM	MSU	UNISEL	
Language	MALAY	Count	35	12	5	52
		% within Language	67.3%	23.1%	9.6%	100.0%
		% within University	92.1%	57.1%	33.3%	73%
		% of Total	47.3%	16.2%	6.8%	73%
	TAMIL	Count	0	2	4	6
		% within Language	0.0%	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
		% within University	0.0%	9.5%	26.7%	8.1%
		% of Total	0.0%	2.7%	5.4%	8.1%
	MANDARIN	Count	0	2	1	3
		% within Language	0.0%	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
		% within University	0.0%	9.5%	6.7%	4.1%
		% of Total	0.0%	2.7%	1.4%	4.1%
	OTHERS	Count	3	5	5	13
		% within Language	23.1%	38.5%	38.5%	100.0%
		% within University	7.9%	23.8%	33.3%	17.6%
		% of Total	4.1%	6.8%	6.8%	17.6%
Total		Count	38	21	15	74
		% within Language	51.4%	28.4%	20.3%	100.0%
		% within University	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	51.4%	28.4%	20.3%	100.0%

Based on the descriptive statistics of the graph and crosstabulation, most respondents' first language is Bahasa Malaysia. It is found that the percentage of Malay as students' first language is 73% which consists of 35 students from UiTM, 12 from MSU and 5 from UNISEL. The statistics also state that the percentage of Tamil as students' first language is 8.1% which consists of 2 students from MSU and 4 from UNISEL. Other than that, the percentage for students who use Mandarin as their first language is 4.1% and for speakers with other first languages are 17.6% which consist of 2 students from MSU and 1 from UNISEL. Therefore, it is found that most of the students' first language are (1) Malay (n = 52), (2) Others (n = 13), (3) Tamil (n = 6), and (4) Mandarin (n = 3).

Table 1.3: The frequency of code switch done by university students

The Forms of Code Switching used by University Students

When you switch between languages, what do you usually switch?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Whole Sentence	15	20.3	20.3	20.3
	Clause	7	9.5	9.5	29.7
	Few Words	46	62.2	62.2	91.9
	Complete Phrase	3	4.1	4.1	95.9
	Fillers	3	4.1	4.1	100.0
	Total	74	100.0	100.0	

The descriptive statistics in Table 1.3 shows the frequencies of code switching used by university students in Shah Alam. The table shows that university students tend to code switch a few words (percentage = 62.2%) more than other forms. It is also seen in the table that code switching a few words is vastly higher than the whole sentence (percentage = 20.3%). The table above also indicates that code switching a complete phrase (percentage = 4.1%) and fillers (percentage = 4.1%) is equivalent and is rarely used by university students when code switching. The statistics also show that code switching a clause is slightly higher than complete phrase and fillers respectively. This shows that university students tend to code switch a few words when interacting.

Table 1.4: Forms of code switch used in an interaction.

What is the most frequent form of code switching that is usually used in your daily interaction?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	INTRA-SENTENTIAL	32	43.2	43.2	43.2
	INTER-SENTENTIAL	19	25.7	25.7	68.9
	TAG SWITCHING	23	31.1	31.1	100.0
	Total	74	100.0	100.0	

The descriptive statistics in Table 1.4 shows the forms of code switch used by university students in an interaction. The table shows that intra-sentential (percentage = 43.2%) is more frequently used. It also shows that the usage of tag switching (percentage = 31.1%) is slightly higher compared to inter-sentential code switching (percentage= 25.7%). The differences in the percentage of each form are not high which shows that all forms of code switch are used frequently similarly.

Table 1.5: Forms of code switch used to deliver a content.

Which form of code switching helps deliver the content in your interaction better?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	INTRA-SENTENTIAL	32	43.2	43.2	43.2
	INTER-SENTENTIAL	19	25.7	25.7	68.9
	TAG SWITCHING	23	31.1	31.1	100.0
	Total	74	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.5 shows the descriptive statistics that reflect the university students' opinion on the forms of code switch used to help deliver content better in an interaction. According to the table, intra-sentential (percentage = 43.2%) is indicated as the most effective when delivering content in an interaction. The total percentage of the forms of code switch also shows that the use of tag switching (percentage = 31.1%) is slightly higher than the use of inter-sentential (25.7%) when delivering content. The statistics from table 1.4 and table 1.5 indicate that the students frequently use the forms of code switch that is considered effective when delivering a context

and interacting. Both tables show that intra-sentential code switching is frequently used by university students in Shah Alam.

Reasons to Code Switch

Table 1.6: Mean of reasons to code switch in an interaction

Statistics

		Q1R	Q2R	Q3R	Q4R	Q5R	Q6R	Q7R	Q8R	Q9R	Q10R
N	Valid	74	74	74	74	74	74	74	74	74	74
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		4.23	4.32	4.41	3.80	3.97	4.58	3.82	3.73	4.18	4.22

Table 1.6 shows the descriptive statistics of the frequency of reasons for university students to code switch when interacting. The table shows that university students tend to code switch when they cannot find the right words to say in a certain language (mean = 4.58) more than other reasons. The total means of the reasons to code switch also indicates that code switching to clarify or further explain a concept is indistinctly higher than code switching to translate a concept or meaning respectively. Therefore, according to the mean of the use of code switch by university student, the reasons for university students to code switch is (1) cannot find the right word (mean = 4.58), (2) clarify concept (mean = 4.41), (3) translate a concept (mean = 4.32), (4) express feeling (mean = 4.23), (5) habit (mean = 4.22), (6) as sentence fillers (mean = 4.18), (7) topic is important (mean = 3.97), (8) show solidarity (mean = 3.82), (9) improve linguistic competence (mean = 3.8), and (10) exclude others (mean = 3.73). The differences between the means of each reason are slightly high which indicates that the reasons for university students to code switch are used frequently.

The Differences of Reasons to Code Switch between University

ANOVA

Table 1.7: One-way ANOVA sample test

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Q1R	Between Groups	.307	2	.154	.281	.756
	Within Groups	38.787	71	.546		
	Total	39.095	73			
Q2R	Between Groups	2.155	2	1.077	2.935	.060
	Within Groups	26.061	71	.367		
	Total	28.216	73			
Q3R	Between Groups	.478	2	.239	.542	.584
	Within Groups	31.359	71	.442		
	Total	31.838	73			
Q4R	Between Groups	8.741	2	4.371	6.305	.003
	Within Groups	49.218	71	.693		

	Total	57.959	73			
Q5R	Between Groups	1.429	2	.715	1.252	.292
	Within Groups	40.517	71	.571		
	Total	41.946	73			
Q6R	Between Groups	.927	2	.463	1.425	.247
	Within Groups	23.087	71	.325		
	Total	24.014	73			
Q7R	Between Groups	4.333	2	2.167	2.185	.120
	Within Groups	70.383	71	.991		
	Total	74.716	73			
Q8R	Between Groups	1.988	2	.994	.779	.463
	Within Groups	90.607	71	1.276		
	Total	92.595	73			
Q9R	Between Groups	1.548	2	.774	1.217	.302
	Within Groups	45.168	71	.636		
	Total	46.716	73			
Q10R	Between Groups	2.776	2	1.388	2.063	.135
	Within Groups	47.765	71	.673		
	Total	50.541	73			

Multiple Comparisons

Table 1.8: Comparison of differences between reasons and university

Dependent Variable	(I) University	(J) University	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Q1R	UITM	MSU	.099	.201	.875	-.38	.58
		UNISEL	.156	.225	.768	-.38	.70
	MSU	UITM	-.099	.201	.875	-.58	.38
		UNISEL	.057	.250	.972	-.54	.66
	UNISEL	UITM	-.156	.225	.768	-.70	.38
		MSU	-.057	.250	.972	-.66	.54
Q2R	UITM	MSU	.114	.165	.769	-.28	.51
		UNISEL	.447*	.185	.047	.01	.89
	MSU	UITM	-.114	.165	.769	-.51	.28
		UNISEL	.333	.205	.241	-.16	.82
	UNISEL	UITM	-.447*	.185	.047	-.89	-.01
		MSU	-.333	.205	.241	-.82	.16
Q3R	UITM	MSU	.188	.181	.554	-.24	.62

		UNISEL	.074	.203	.930	-.41	.56
	MSU	UITM	-.188	.181	.554	-.62	.24
		UNISEL	-.114	.225	.867	-.65	.42
	UNISEL	UITM	-.074	.203	.930	-.56	.41
		MSU	.114	.225	.867	-.42	.65
Q4R	UITM	MSU	.703*	.226	.008	.16	1.24
		UNISEL	.665*	.254	.029	.06	1.27
	MSU	UITM	-.703*	.226	.008	-1.24	-.16
		UNISEL	-.038	.281	.990	-.71	.64
	UNISEL	UITM	-.665*	.254	.029	-1.27	-.06
		MSU	.038	.281	.990	-.64	.71
Q5R	UITM	MSU	.264	.205	.407	-.23	.76
		UNISEL	-.107	.230	.888	-.66	.44
	MSU	UITM	-.264	.205	.407	-.76	.23
		UNISEL	-.371	.255	.319	-.98	.24
	UNISEL	UITM	.107	.230	.888	-.44	.66
		MSU	.371	.255	.319	-.24	.98
Q6R	UITM	MSU	.256	.155	.232	-.12	.63
		UNISEL	.151	.174	.662	-.27	.57
	MSU	UITM	-.256	.155	.232	-.63	.12
		UNISEL	-.105	.193	.850	-.57	.36
	UNISEL	UITM	-.151	.174	.662	-.57	.27
		MSU	.105	.193	.850	-.36	.57
Q7R	UITM	MSU	.264	.271	.594	-.38	.91
		UNISEL	.626	.304	.105	-.10	1.35
	MSU	UITM	-.264	.271	.594	-.91	.38
		UNISEL	.362	.337	.532	-.44	1.17
	UNISEL	UITM	-.626	.304	.105	-1.35	.10
		MSU	-.362	.337	.532	-1.17	.44
Q8R	UITM	MSU	.213	.307	.768	-.52	.95
		UNISEL	-.263	.344	.726	-1.09	.56
	MSU	UITM	-.213	.307	.768	-.95	.52
		UNISEL	-.476	.382	.430	-1.39	.44
	UNISEL	UITM	.263	.344	.726	-.56	1.09
		MSU	.476	.382	.430	-.44	1.39
Q9R	UITM	MSU	.337	.217	.272	-.18	.86
		UNISEL	.089	.243	.928	-.49	.67
	MSU	UITM	-.337	.217	.272	-.86	.18
		UNISEL	-.248	.270	.631	-.89	.40
	UNISEL	UITM	-.089	.243	.928	-.67	.49
		MSU	.248	.270	.631	-.40	.89
Q10R	UITM	MSU	.442	.223	.124	-.09	.98
		UNISEL	.261	.250	.551	-.34	.86

	MSU	UITM	-.442	.223	.124	-.98	.09
		UNISEL	-.181	.277	.792	-.84	.48
	UNISEL	UITM	-.261	.250	.551	-.86	.34
		MSU	.181	.277	.792	-.48	.84

*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The One-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference among university students in choosing to code-switch to improve linguistic competence, $F(2,71) = 6.305$, $p = 0.003$. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey test indicated that UiTM students scored higher than both MSU ($md = 0.703$) and UNISEL ($md = 0.665$). UNISEL, in turn, scored slightly higher than MSU ($md = 0.038$). These results suggest that UiTM students view code-switching primarily as a strategy to enhance their linguistic competence. For the reason of code-switching to translate a concept or meaning, no significant difference was found between UiTM and MSU students, $F(2,71) = 2.935$, although UiTM showed a higher mean. However, a significant difference was found between UiTM and UNISEL ($md = 0.447$), with UiTM scoring higher, while MSU scored higher than UNISEL ($md = 0.333$).

In contrast, no statistically significant differences were found between the three universities for other reasons to code-switch, including expressing feelings ($F(2,71) = 0.281$), clarifying or further explaining a concept ($F(2,71) = 0.542$), emphasizing an important topic ($F(2,71) = 1.252$), finding the right words ($F(2,71) = 1.425$), showing solidarity or group identity ($F(2,71) = 2.185$), excluding others from a conversation ($F(2,71) = 0.779$), using code-switching as a sentence filler ($F(2,71) = 1.217$), or using it as a habit ($F(2,71) = 2.063$). Overall, the findings suggest that while UiTM students tend to code-switch to improve linguistic competence more than their peers, the three universities share broadly similar reasons for code-switching in most other contexts.

Student Perceptions of Code-Switching

To support the survey findings, six students were interviewed about their views on code-switching. Thematic analysis revealed several recurring patterns.

Clarifying and Explaining Concepts

Students reported using code-switching to make explanations clearer, especially for abstract or technical terms. As Interviewee 2 stated, *"Kadang-kadang in legal jargons we have to use English or Malay, there are things like concepts where we have to cakap in Malay."* Similarly, Interviewee 5 noted that switching when giving definitions allowed peers to understand more quickly. Most used intra-sentential switching by blending Malay and English, with tag-switching (e.g., *lah, kan*) reinforcing or simplifying explanations. Overall, clarification was a key function of code-switching in academic settings.

Expressing Emotions and Creating Liveliness

Code-switching was also used to express feelings and make conversations more engaging. Interviewee 3 explained, *"When I want to express my ideas or feelings and to make a conversation sound lively."* Others described how switching emphasized emotions such as frustration or excitement. Students used intra- and inter-sentential switching, as well as tag-switching, to signal tone. This highlights how emotions were more effectively conveyed through code-switching.

Habitual Use and Communicative Ease

Some students described code-switching as a habit rather than a deliberate choice. Interviewee 1 shared, *"There's no purpose but it is also 50% habit and 50% the need to make people understand what I want to say."* Likewise, Interviewee 6 noted that switching often occurred unconsciously in daily conversation. Such accounts point to tag-switching and intra-sentential switching as natural, effortless features of multilingual communication.

Solidarity and Exclusion

A few students viewed code-switching as a way to build solidarity or exclude others. Interviewee 4 remarked, *"I mostly would do it to exclude others from my conversation and to express my feelings."* Here, inter-sentential switching was common, while tag-switching reinforced shared identity. This supports Holmes' (2013) view that code-switching also functions to manage group belonging and social boundaries.

Effectiveness in Communication

All students agreed that code-switching enhanced communication. Interviewee 5 stated, *"Yes. It helps a person to understand a complicated concept better,"* while Interviewee 6 added, *"Kadang-kadang lagi senang nak terangkan dalam BM."* Both intra- and inter-sentential switching clarified meaning, while tag-switching emphasized points and sustained engagement. Interestingly, two students did not code-switch during the interviews but acknowledged its importance in everyday communication. Overall, effectiveness depended on the flexible use of switching strategies.

Language Variety used among University Students

The findings show that most respondents' first language is Bahasa Malaysia. This is expected as many UiTM students are Bumiputera, who commonly use Malay as their main language. As a result, Malay was often preferred in communication, supported by interview data where even non-Malay students code-switched from English to Malay. Since Malaysia is multicultural, most non-Malays are fluent in Malay and adapt their language choice depending on their conversation partner. In this study, students reported using Malay, Tamil, and Mandarin, though Malay was dominant, especially when interacting with a Malay researcher.

Forms of Code Switch used among University Students

The results indicate that intra-sentential switching was most common, where students inserted words from another language into a sentence. This was more frequent than inter-sentential switching or tag-switching. Students often switched languages when struggling to recall a word, and interviews showed they shifted from English to Malay when unable to respond fully in English. Tag-switching also appeared as a habitual feature when students were searching for suitable expressions.

These findings align with Rajoo (2011), Koban (2013), and Poplack (1980), who also found intra-sentential switching dominant, especially among speakers with higher bilingual competence. However, Yusuf et al. (2018) reported different results, where inter-sentential switching appeared more often in Indonesian written texts. This difference may be due to their focus on literature, while the present study examined spoken interactions among Malaysian university students.

Reasons for the Use of Code Switch by University Students

The main reason for code-switching was difficulty in finding the right words. Students also used it to clarify concepts, translate meanings, or express feelings more accurately. These functions were observed in both survey and interview data. The study identified four main reasons: solidarity, group identity, marking importance, and emotional expression. This corresponds with Holmes (2013) and Wong (2012), who highlighted social and expressive functions of code-switching.

Differences in Reasons to Code Switch between Universities

The comparison across three universities showed that UiTM students were more likely to code-switch to improve linguistic competence and to translate concepts. While no major differences were found across universities, UiTM students reported code-switching more frequently. For example, English was often used in classrooms for formal discussions, while Malay was preferred for explanations. Students also code-switched to express solidarity and group identity, echoing Sert (2005), who emphasized its role in strengthening bonds and marking ethnicity.

Perception of the Students towards the Use of Code Switching

Students held both positive and negative views of code-switching. Some saw it as a sign of limited proficiency, especially when used as a strategy to fill vocabulary gaps. At the same time, they recognized its usefulness in ensuring understanding. This reflects Holmes (2013) and Wong (2012) who noted its role as a practical communicative tool.

Students also valued code-switching for clarifying academic concepts and expressing emotions, making conversations more lively, consistent with Rajoo (2011). Others described it as a habit or unconscious practice, which is noted as common in multilingual societies. Code-switching was also perceived as a tool for solidarity or exclusion, supporting Sert's (2005) view of its role in identity and boundary-marking. Finally, most students considered it effective in bridging gaps and maintaining communication. This aligns with Rajoo (2011), Koban (2013), and Poplack (1980), who argued that intra-sentential switching reflects bilingual competence rather than deficiency.

Overall, while some viewed code-switching as a weakness, the majority regarded it as a flexible and effective strategy for clarification, emotional expression, solidarity, and ease of communication, reflecting its complex role in multilingual university contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that code-switching among Malaysian university students is not a barrier but a communicative resource that enhances clarity, emotional expression, solidarity, and interaction. Rather than reflecting deficiency, it functions as a dynamic strategy that enables speakers to convey ideas more effectively than through a single language alone.

The findings also highlight implications for education, where code-switching can serve as a valuable pedagogical tool to support comprehension and engagement in multilingual classrooms. Its habitual use across social groups reinforces its role as a normalized feature of Malaysian society.

Nevertheless, the study was limited to a small sample in Shah Alam. Broader research across universities and contexts would provide deeper insights into the varied functions of code-switching in academic and social domains.

Overall, this research contributes to existing literature by demonstrating how students perceive code-switching as both a practical aid and a reflection of identity, underlining its significance as a natural and constructive aspect of multilingual communication.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The approval for conducting the research was obtained from the Ministry of Higher Education. In addition, the permission was gained from each of the participants and the participation of the said participants in this study was voluntary.

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