

PERCEPTION OF ESL AND EFL STUDENTS TOWARDS CODE-SWITCHING IN ONLINE CLASSROOMS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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Abstract

COVID-19 pandemic resulted in paradigm shifts and changes in educational landscape especially in the field of English Language Teaching, thus requiring teachers to tailor instruction and even relax language prescription to aid students in the new normal. Code-switching, a linguistic phenomenon normally practiced by ESL and EFL students, penetrates online classrooms beyond doubt. The purpose of this study is to examine the ESL and EFL students' perception towards code-switching in online classrooms. Using a qualitative method, data were collected through a focus group discussion with 2 sets of participants: 9 Filipino ESL students and 7 Vietnamese EFL students. Moreover, this study used the sequential analysis by Creswell (2018) on data generation. Findings indicated that a majority of FGD participants believe that shifting from English to their native language enhances their language proficiency in the target language, increases their participation, and has become a normal linguistic practice in online classrooms. However, a few FGD participants have ambivalence towards code-switching such as poor English language proficiency and extreme dependence and reliance on their teachers. The analysis also revealed three ways how code-switching is used as tool for English language learning in the online classrooms: (1) achieving linguistic competencies prescribed in the curriculum, (2) managing online classrooms, and (3) building connection between teachers and students. FGD participants call ESL and EFL teachers to use code-switching as an accommodation strategy for more effective English language learning and teaching in the new normal.

Keywords: code-switching; online classrooms; new normal; accommodation strategy; paradigm shift; educational landscape

Introduction

Unbeknownst to many that COVID-19 global pandemic has affected people's daily lives with measures such as border closures and community quarantines imposed by the government to curb the spread of the highly contagious virus (Wu, Chen & Chan, 2020). One sector that is overwhelmed with plethora of challenges is education because of paradigm shifts and changes in educational landscape brought about by the radical shift to online learning (Madrurnio, 2020). This entails recalibration of teaching methodologies with a goal for educators to be equipped of and informed about the latest thrusts and trends in online instruction which is mostly achieved by attending webinars/e-lectures (Tarrayo, Paz & Gepila, 2021).

On the part of students, even though their generation is well-immersed in technology (Gepila, 2020), they still encounter challenges with the new mode of learning especially in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. Recent studies reveal that English language learners are not satisfied with continuing online learning due to various reasons such as not fulfilling the expected progress in language learning performance and development, increased stress, and communication challenges spawned by the present health crisis (Hartshorn, 2020;

Mahyoob, 2020; Verawardina, 2020). With these challenges in online language learning, it is interesting to explore code-switching, which beyond doubt, penetrates online ESL and EFL classrooms. This practice of shifting from one language to another is inevitable in bilingual and multilingual contexts wherein English is not the primary language (Selamat, 2014). Furthermore, it is defined by Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.) as *“the action of switching within a discourse between two or more languages, or between language dialects or registers, especially in response to a change in social context.”*

In the previous years, code-switching has become a fertile area of research as a myriad of scholarly studies burgeoned and weighed in on its interactional and pedagogical purposes in the teaching and learning process (Wei & Martin, 2009; Uys & Van Dulm, 2011; Willans, 2011; Azlan & Narusahan, 2013; Bahous, Nabhani & Bacha, 2013; Martin, 2014; Selamat, 2014; Chen & Avila, 2015; Simasiku, Kasanda & Smit, 2015; Cahyani, De Courcy & Barnett, 2016; Fareed, Humayun & Akhtar, 2016; Grant & Nguyen, 2017; Fachriya, 2017; Nukuto, 2017; Rosario & Maguddayao, 2019; Younas et. al, 2020). Some scholars recognize the pedagogical merits of code-switching for effective teaching and learning; its role in facilitating students’ comprehension and knowledge; and ability to mitigate the students’ learning anxieties. However, some studies say otherwise and argue that code-switching undermines the learning process and that its practice inside the classroom should be discouraged.

At the forefront of asserting that code-switching is a dysfunctional practice and detrimental to the students’ ability to use English are educational policymakers and educational managers (Martin, 2014). This negative attitude is believed to have stemmed from what has been called the 'monolingual fallacy' which is a notion or practice that penetrates English language classes up until in the present time (Phillipson, 1992, as cited by Chen & Avila, 2015). Monolingual fallacy is the idea that English is best taught monolingually and an assumption that using English as a language of instruction across all subjects improves English proficiency (Chen & Avila, 2015).

With the changing landscape of language education brought by the COVID-19 pandemic and continuous advancement of technology, it is compelling to conduct a study eliciting the insights of ESL and EFL students concerning the presence of code-switching in online classrooms. Recent studies brought to light some experiences of students in online English language learning such as being demotivated, stressed, and feeling stagnant with learning progress (Hartshorn, 2020; Mahyoob, 2020; Verawardina, 2020). As such, it is enthralling to know the students’ beliefs about language alternation in online classrooms. Thus far, no research exploring codeswitching in online classrooms has been conducted yet. For this study, Philippines was chosen as an ESL country and Vietnam as an EFL country.

As unearthed, there is a lacuna/paucity of literature on the ESL and EFL learners’ perception towards code-switching in online classrooms. Thus, the present study sought to achieve the following objectives:

- (1) To explore the beliefs of online Grade 10 ESL/EFL learners about code-switching in online classrooms; and
- (2) To investigate how code-switching is used as a tool for English language learning in online classrooms.

Materials and Methods

Participants

Two groups of students volunteered to participate in online focus group discussion: 10 Filipino ESL learners and 10 Vietnamese EFL learners. They are in the last grade level in Junior High School (JHS), thus chosen for two main reasons: (1) homogeneity in terms of language learning competencies prescribed in the curriculum; and (2) among grade levels in their respective department, they are the most senior. As such, researchers believe they have enough knowledge and experience to provide responses useful for this endeavor. To leave a room for data saturation, from 6-8 participants as proposed by Hennink (2014) for conducting focus group discussion, the researchers selected ten participants from a secondary school in Lubang Island, Occidental Mindoro, the Philippines and another ten from a secondary school in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. To date, no research has been done focusing on the perceptions of high school students in an island-based academic institution in the Philippines. As such, it is interesting how learners from far-flung areas view code-switching as a linguistic phenomenon in the online classroom – a radical shift due to COVID-19. Likewise, there is scant research on the Vietnamese students' perceptions towards code-switching – a topic that remains unexplored according to Nguyen (2018). The selection of participants was through two sampling techniques: purposive and convenience sampling. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who can provide in-depth and detailed information about code-switching as a linguistic phenomenon. Chosen participants have specific characteristics or experience that can best inform the research issues. Also, convenience sampling was used since Researcher 1 is a native of Lubang Island and Researcher 4 is a Vietnamese who is a foreign student in the Philippines. Hence, planning for the study became easier since both researchers are accustomed to the targeted schools and the gatekeepers.

Codes used for participants and researchers

To ensure anonymity of participants, the qualitative responses were identified as codes. For example, Filipino participants were recognized as FP1, FP2 for Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Likewise, Vietnamese participants were addressed as VP1, VP2 for the same form of qualitative research method. This is in recognition of the consent forms signed by the participants that their names will not appear anywhere in written report and responses will be kept in the strictest of confidence and will be available only to the researchers. As regards researchers, codes used were R1, R2, R3 etc.

Data Collection and Analysis

A request letter was sent to the concerned offices to secure permission to conduct the online focus group discussion. The researchers sent a letter which contains who the researchers are; the title of the study; and the purpose of the study. Upon having been given consent, the researchers contacted the participants referred by the two academic institutions and informed them of the general purpose of the study. Researchers created a group chat – a feature of messenger – to do a sort of interview to assess the willingness and openness of participants in the study and for them to have a comfortable environment. Since there is homogeneity among the participants as most of them are classmates, it helped increase the level of acquaintance. Moreover, it should be noted that no participant was pressured to join the study and the researchers were very respectful and sensitive to the cultural, religious, language and gender differences

especially those of Vietnamese participants. In fact, among the six members in the group of researchers, one is a foreign student from Vietnam. Hence, the five researchers were briefed on the ethical behaviors to be demonstrated during the online focus group discussion. During the course of discussion, all participants whether Filipinos or Vietnamese were given the same treatment and involved each as a collaborator and stayed to the questions stated in the FGD protocols. Moreover, the researchers respected the privacy and anonymity of the participants who refused to be acknowledged once the study is complete. Focus Group Discussion was conducted on the scheduled date and time thru videoconferencing tool called Microsoft Teams. But before which, participants were briefed on the objectives of the study

After data collection, researchers analyzed and interpret the data thematically. In generating data, the researchers heeded to the research tip by Creswell (2018) showing sequential analysis, from specific to general, and multiple levels of analysis. Researchers used a data analysis software program called MAXQDA to gain insights from the transcripts. As urged by Creswell (2018), the researchers' first step was organizing and preparing the data analysis. Since this study utilized Focus Group Discussion (FGD), sources of information were the transcribed discussion made by R3 and the recorded video by R5. Second, the researchers read or look at the data which *"provides a general sense of the information and an opportunity to reflect on its overall meaning"* (Creswell, 2018, p. 268). As such, researchers dwelled on the general ideas of the participants, the tone of ideas, and overall depth, credibility, and use of the information. Third, the researchers coded the collected data using MAXQDA to assist them in data analysis – organizing, sorting, and searching for information in text (Creswell, 2018). Fourth, the researchers generated categories of theme which are the major findings used as headings for results where findings are discussed. Multiple perspectives were considered and then supported by diverse quotations. Fifth, the researchers represented the description and themes for narrative passage wherein the findings of the analysis were conveyed. This includes detailed discussion of subthemes, multiple perspectives from selected participants, and quotations. Finally, researchers employed qualitative validity wherein member checking was used as a procedure to determine if the qualitative findings were accurate. This involves taking the final report's specific descriptions or themes back to the participants and asking them to verify whether they are accurate

Results

Beliefs about Code-switching

Positive Beliefs

Under this theme, three categories emerged from the data collected from the Filipino participants. First, Filipino participants believe that code-switching helps in enhancing their English language proficiency. It serves as a scaffolding upon which higher levels of linguistic competencies can be developed for L2. Second, code-switching increases students' participation as it plays an essential role in the communication process in online classrooms. It gives students the opportunities to respond to questions comfortably and that it is useful in cooperative/collaborative learning wherein students can maximize each other's potential. And third, Filipino participants believe that shifting from English to Filipino is normal in online ESL classrooms and that it's a prevalent linguistic practice they utilize in their learning processes.

Negative Beliefs

The sentiments shared by the FGD participants as regards their dismissive stance on code-switching in online classrooms: First, Filipino participants expressed that excessive code-switching may result in poor English language proficiency because they are sometimes deprived of opportunities to practice the target language. However, this belief is normatively based and obsolete. Students' remarks may have been influenced by the monolingual beliefs of their English language teachers – a false assumption that using English as a language of instruction across all subjects improves English language proficiency. Meanwhile, the second category reveals students' insight that code-switching may result in extreme dependence and reliance. Filipino participants surmise that code-switching may spawn complacency as they are no longer challenged to strive more for their communication skills.

Code-Switching as Tool for Online English Language Learning

Under this theme, 3 subthemes emerged. Filipino and Vietnamese participants' perceived functions of code-switching in online ESL and EFL classrooms show that it is useful in online classroom as it has been in physical classes. However, this linguistic phenomenon plays a bigger role in online distance learning as it accommodates the learners who scramble to adjust to the mode of learning due to paradigm shifts and changes in educational landscape brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Achieving Competencies Prescribed in the Curriculum

Under this subtheme, two categories emerged from the data collected from the participants. First, code-switching helps in explaining the meaning of complex words or in emphasizing the explanation of the complex vocabulary words. They assert that if teachers don't resort to code-switching to introduce new words that are difficult for them to grasp, it leads to poor academic performance. As such, it can be gleaned that code-switching facilitates students' comprehension and language acquisition by helping them build vocabulary. And second, code-switching helps in explaining difficult concepts especially as regards sentence structure. When this strategy is used, students are no longer left with no understanding because this is the best approach to relate the content to a personal, meaningful context or to existing prior knowledge.

2. Managing Online Classrooms

Under this subtheme, a single category emerged from the data collected from the participants. Online ESL and EFL learners assert that code-switching helps in organizing online classrooms. Filipino participants shared that through code-switching, they can understand the house rules being implemented by the teacher. Oftentimes, failure to follow the house rules stem from their inability to comprehend because of recondite or esoteric words. Code-switching is used when teachers ask students to turn on/off their cameras, mute/unmute their microphones, etc. Meanwhile, Vietnamese share the same sentiments as they believe that code-switching is a helpful tool in maintaining order during their English class. More so, they claimed that discipline can be best observed when the students fully understand instruction provided by their English language teachers.

3. Building Connection in Online Classrooms

Under this subtheme, two categories emerged from the data collected from both the participants. First, both online ESL and EFL learners believe that code-switching helps in building and strengthening relationships between teachers and students. Filipino participants shared that they are reluctant to participate in the discussion because of fear that they will commit grammatical mistakes and eventually be ridiculed. This results in students' intimidation and timidity to participate in classroom activities. Through code-switching, teachers can build rapport with the students which makes the students more comfortable to express themselves. Meanwhile, Vietnamese participants share the same sentiments contending that allowing code-switching when asking queries and assistance creates a sense of companionship. They become more comfortable in the learning environment – thus, online discussion becomes more interactive.

As for the second category, both Filipino and Vietnamese participants claim that code-switching reduces students' anxiety in learning English because it creates a low-anxiety classroom atmosphere. Filipino participants share that the current mode of learning is novel – thus, it causes anxiety. As such, relaxing language prescription by allowing code-switching helps them cope with the language learning difficulties poised by the present educational circumstances. On the other hand, Vietnamese participants assert that code-switching helps them build confidence and encourages active participation.

Discussion

The study aimed to shed light on the beliefs of ESL and EFL students about the practice of code-switching in online classrooms and how this linguistic phenomenon is used as a tool for English language learning in the present landscape of education. In this section, the research questions are answered under the light of results and theoretical foundations.

Beliefs about code-switching

The first facet of the investigation dealt with the beliefs of ESL and EFL students about the practice of code-switching in online classrooms. An analysis of responses demonstrated that a majority of FGD participants believe that shifting from English to their native language enhances their language proficiency in the target language, increases their participation, and has become a normal linguistic practice in online classrooms. However, a few FGD participants have ambivalence towards code-switching such as poor English language proficiency and extreme dependence and reliance on their teachers.

Enhancement of English language proficiency

Fluency is universally understood as one's ability to use a particular language with ease and accuracy. It includes the application of the finite rules of language called grammar. In the context of acquiring or learning a second language, Krashen (1985) argues that exposure to the target language is an utmost necessity; thus, L1 should be relegated to the margin as it will just detract learners from learning the English Language. However, it is important to note that this premise has been made roughly 40 years ago – as such, this is already obsolete. Evident to this are the assertions made by a majority of FGD participants that code-switching helps in the enhancement of their English language proficiency as expressed by the following participants:

“...code-switching helps students like me to enhance my English language proficiency because when this is utilized by our teachers, I can understand our language lessons better.” [FP6]

“When we do not understand some English words because of its complexity, our teachers use codeswitching which eventually helps us enhance our English language proficiency in the long run because we get to understand what those words meant. [VP7]’

This contention is concurrent with the studies of Simasiku, Kasanda, & Smit (2016) and Azlan & Narusaman (n.d.) claiming that shifting from target language to native language enhances students' learning of the English language. Student' L1 serves as a scaffolding upon which higher levels of linguistic competencies can be developed for L2. As observed in the responses, English teachers no longer carry an attitude which is stemmed from what has been called the 'monolingual fallacy' (Phillipson, 1992), which is the idea that English is best taught monolingually and the false assumption that using English as a language of instruction across all subjects improves English proficiency

Increasing students' participation

FGD participants reveal the essential role of code-switching in the communication process in online classrooms. Shifting from one language to another is perceived as a better way to express oneself or relay information. When code-switching is allowed, students are given the opportunities to respond to questions comfortably. They also get to further elaborate their points when linguistic prescription is relaxed. As such, all these result in increased students' participation during class discussion. Students become more active because CS reduces their anxiety. As revealed in the following responses:

"Yes, I become more participative if/when code-switching is allowed because I can express and explain my answers well to my teachers." [FP8]

"Code-switching helps me share my thought well, And so, I am more active in the class especially in group activities." VP3

The above-mentioned claims are concurrent with the studies of different scholars in the field of Bilingual Education. Limoso (2012) claims that code-switching engages the students in the learning process thru active participation in the lesson and collaborative class activities. It can be gleaned that benefits of code-switching are not confined to one's own learning but also advantageous for cooperative learning wherein students can maximize each other's potential. On the other hand, in the study of Rosario & Magundayao (2019), code-switching turns out to be the reasons why students actively participate in the discussion because of "easier self-expression". Students discerned the practice of code-switching as motivation for actively participating in classroom activities. This finding concurs the study of Ahmad & Jusoff (2019) and Selamat (2014) wherein code-switching is viewed students as an engine of opportunities to communicate and enhance the understanding of the lecture at the same time.

Normalized linguistic practice in online classrooms

Since the onset of COVID-19 pandemic, there have been paradigm shifts and changes in educational landscape. One of which is the radical shift to online classes which has made the English language more challenging. But, the ESL and EFL students seemed to have used to it. An analysis of responses reveal that FGD participants are cognizant of code-switching as a linguistic phenomenon occurring in online ESL classrooms. As the following extracts reveal:

"Well, I think that code switching is a process) the alternation or: shifting of one language to another (1) and i think that <I> uhm code switching really exists in an online classroom especially (1) based in my experience it REALLY does exist in online classrooms. [FP1]"

"For me, code-switching is using two languages at the same time in an online classroom setting. For example, in our case we use both Vietnamese and English together during our virtual classes. [VP4]"

With the given insights, it is safe to infer that code-switching has been normalized in ESL/EFL classrooms, and now a prevalent linguistic practice that students utilize in learning processes. It can therefore be gleaned that shifting from one language to another is not a novel linguistic practice inside the classroom, be it physical or online.

It is being practiced by both teachers and learners. Indeed, shuttling between two or more languages has become a very common phenomenon in today's world (Bhatti, Shamsudin & Said, 2018).

Poor English Language Proficiency

FGD participants have a conjecture that shifting from L2 to L1 would result in low English language proficiency. It is believed that resorting to language alternation sometimes deprives students of opportunities to practice the target language and be exposed to it. The following statement indicate this perspective:

“I beg to disagree that codeswitching doesn't have any disadvantage because everything has two sides. And the other side of the coin in terms of codeswitching is poor English language proficiency. Of course, the essence why we study English language is to practice it and if we keep on codeswitching then it's useless”. [FP6]

“In the classroom during the lecture, sometimes the teacher will also use code-switching a lot and we tend to have slow progress in the lesson and it affects our thinking in the future that we will have to rely on this.” [VP1]

It is safe to say that students' belief about code-switching is normatively-based – not research-based nor experience-based. It can be inferred that students' premise may have been influenced by the monolingual beliefs of their English teachers during face-to-face classes. This view stems from 'monolingual fallacy' (Phillipson, 1992), it is the idea that English is best taught monolingually and the false assumption that using English as a language of instruction across all subjects improves English proficiency (Chen & Avila, 2015). These negative assumptions about code-switching are no longer tenable. A barrage of research and studies show that code-switching is a possible scaffold upon which higher levels of linguistic competencies can be developed for each of the two languages (Bernardo, 2015). Also, there needs to be a distinction drawn between language of instruction and language of learning; and academic institutions with their policymakers and administrators shall revisit their language policies that it does not stifle the students' opportunities to learn (Willans, 2011).

Extreme dependence and reliance

The FGD participants' perceived downside of code-switching in online ESL and EFL classrooms is their extreme dependence and reliance on teachers. They assert that allowing code-switching may spawn complacency as they are no longer challenged to strive more or exert more effort in their communication skills in the target language. Moreover, frequent shifting from students' L2 to L1 may be normalized and therefore strip students off the opportunity to improve competence among the macro skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Some of the participants claimed that:

“For me, the disadvantage is that it is seen by other students as a pressure. But, pressure helps us to strive to the next level of learning. So if we will get used to always using Tagalog, we will just rely always on our teachers. How can we learn and how are we going to get used to it? So, I think it is what they need to overcome.” [FP2]

“I think that code-switching should be used but not excessively because this may affect our independence as learners in the long run”. [VP4]

While Jameen, Farid, & Hussain (2021) acknowledges that code-switching serves pedagogical aims and facilitates ESL teaching and learning processes, a highlight of their study concurs with the assertion of FGD participants that code-switching may result in poor language skills and development and that students may suffer in the long run due to their reliance on the usage of code-switching. In consideration of this, In consideration of the online ESL/EFL students’ ambivalence towards code-switching and also not to overtake the target language, there is a need to draft and design guidelines on how teachers should use code-switching in the teaching and learning processes.

Code-switching as tool for learning English language online

The second facet of investigation dealt with how code-switching is used as tool for English language learning in online classrooms as perceived by the ESL and EFL participants. The subsequent findings cover three major themes: (1) achieving linguistic competencies prescribed in the curriculum, (2) managing online classrooms, (3) building connection or relationship among students and teachers.

1. Achieving Competencies Prescribed in the Curriculum

For this theme, two subthemes emerged: (1) explain the meaning of complex words, (2) and understanding difficult concepts and topics.

1.1 Explain the meaning of complex words

FGD participants contend that code-switching helps in explaining the meaning of complex words when utilized by the English language teachers. More often than not, students’ failure to understand unfamiliar words which they encounter during the class discussion leads to poor academic performance. Such a scenario happens because students are extra challenged to meet the prescribed competencies in a subject which they barely understand because of a language barrier. As indicated in these extracts:

“Code switching really helps me to better understand the meaning of a word because in some instances, I have a hard time understanding newfound vocabularies introduced to us. So for me, code-switching really helps a lot with understanding those particular words and as for the teachers, I think that code switching should really be used because not all have the same level of intelligence when it comes to a language or in English. so, I think that the teacher should use code switching.” [FP6]

“... [English] can have a lot of Vietnamese meanings and there are plenty of advanced words, we need the flexibility in using languages of the teacher to help the students understand the meaning clearly. A word will have different meanings in different circumstances. Therefore, I believe that using code-switching is a necessary thing. When my teacher uses code switching in teaching English, it can really help me and my friends and I want my teacher to use code

switching more to enhance the understanding of a word, a sentence more usefully.” [VP3]

Such a revelation is concurrent with the study of Selamat (2014) which argues that code-switching or shifting from target language to students’ native language greatly helps in explaining difficult words and meanings. This is also affirmed by the study of Fanani & Ma’u (2017) which shows that language alternation emphasizes the explanation of the complex vocabulary words. The mentioned scholarly studies assert that code-switching helps in facilitating students’ comprehension and language acquisition by helping students build their vocabulary which is of paramount importance because robust vocabulary helps develop other language skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Cameron, 2001 as cited in Alqahtani, 2015). Poor vocabulary impedes successful communication – thus, resorting to code-switching to introduce new words that are difficult for the students to grasp when only English is used is really an advantage.

1.2 Understanding difficult concepts and topics

FGD participants assert that code-switching helps in introducing difficult concepts and topics. They argue that learning unfamiliar materials is challenging for them especially that some of them are admittedly low proficient in the English language. By shifting from target language to students’ native language, learners are accommodated and that transfer of knowledge becomes smoother. As revealed in these responses:

“Code switching is extremely effective because it helps us understand complex ideas clearly. And as a student, it also is convenient to express my thoughts. I think it’s also effective when the teacher code-switches so that, us, students can understand the concept and process our thoughts”. [FP6]

“For me, code-switching really helps to know unfamiliar topics or materials. We can easily understand what the teachers are teaching when they code-switch. Also, I improve as a student using this way of teaching.” [P8]

“Most of the teachers explain the topic in code switching because there are too much advanced English words in the material that it is better for the teacher to code switch or provide materials that can help us understand..” [VP5]

The assertion made by the FGD participants is concurrent with the study of Jingxia (2010) protesting that code-switching helps in giving background information that leads to increased comprehension. }.” It should be noted that spiral progression approach is being embraced in the teaching of English language in the Philippines as the country shifts to K to 12 program. This means that lessons are taught incrementally, from basic principles to most complex forms. As such, resorting to code-switching helps in making sure that learners will not have knowledge gap and fragmented learning.

This contention is concurrent with the study of Rosario and Maguddayao (2019) which argues the code-switching helps in explaining complex concepts. Shifting from target language to students’ native language helps in simplifying difficult lessons Another study that affirms the claim above is the probing done by Memory, Nkengbeza & Liswaniso (2018) on code-switching. They conducted interviews and made

observations at two schools in Sibbinda Circuit. Results reveal that code-switching helps learners understand difficult aspects of their lesson which avoids students being left with no understanding of the topic. Code-switching is a better tool because it helps learners to understand what is being taught that leads to students' awareness, interests, and even active participation during the discussion.

When teachers don't utilize code-switching, there is a tendency that students may fall back on memorization (Selamat, Kasanda & Smit, 2015). Code-switching is really effective because there are concepts in the target language that do not have equivalent in the culture of students' first language or mother tongue. This linguistic phenomenon provides students especially low proficient learners with the opportunities to communicate and enhance understanding of the lecture (Selamat, 2014). Lastly but more importantly, code-switching is the best strategy to relate the content to a personal, meaningful context or to existing prior knowledge.

2. Managing Online Classrooms

Code-switching plays an important role in organizing online classrooms. FGD participants reveal that making use of their native language or L1 helps them understand the house rules being implemented by the teacher. As such, they can apply and follow whatever regulations being imposed on them. They also shared that failure to heed the house rules often stem from their inability to comprehend because of recondite or esoteric words leaving them in bewilderment. These extracts would prove these points:

"For me, it is better for the teacher to use code-switching so that we can understand more the rules and regulations and for us to easily follow them."
[FP8]

"Students can easily understand my teacher when she uses common or basic Vietnamese words. Sometimes she would use code-switching in relaying instructions before the class like making sure to keep cameras open during online class or keeping on mute. [VP2]"

The assertion above is concurrent with the study of Fachriya (2017) in which he revealed that code-switching assists in managing the teaching-learning activities. This function is one of the basic functions of shifting from L2 to L1 which really puts the second or foreign language learners on pedestal. Another breakthrough study that affirms the significant role of code-switching in classroom management is that of Selamat (2014). Selamat (2014) claims that code-switching is very effective in managing students' behavior. This practice also encourages students to be active during discussion which he believed to be very crucial in maintaining the flow of the lesson. Among instances when CS is used include: (1) *opening class, negotiating directions, managing discipline, teacher's command, teacher's mitigation and among others* (Selamat, 2014: p. 28).

Emergence of COVID-19 pandemic resulted in paradigm shifts and changes in educational landscape. Because of it, a radical shift to online classes transpired. If classrooms are hard to manage during face-to-face classes – how much more in virtual space? Responses from the FGD participants show that code-switching is helpful in online classroom management. Shifting from one target language to native language is used when asking students to turn on/off their cameras, mute/unmute themselves, etc.

3 .Building Connection in Online Classrooms

For this theme, two subthemes emerged: (1) building and strengthening relationships, (2) reducing students' anxiety.

3.1 Building and Strengthening Relationships

FGD participants revealed that code-switching helps in building and strengthening relationships between teachers and students. They assert that code-switching makes it possible for teachers to build rapport with them. Learning English as a second language can be very challenging. More often than not, students are reluctant to participate in the discussion because of fear that they will commit grammatical mistakes and be ridiculed for such a reason. And so, when teachers allow students to practice code-switching, the latter are more comfortable to express themselves. When an English teacher doesn't strictly implement English Only Policy (EOP) or relaxes language prescription, this is seen by students as an indicator that they are close with their teachers. As revealed in these responses:

“Based on my experience, that’s where teacher builds or establishes a good rapport with us. I think code-switching helps both teachers and students to have deep connection with each other. Conversation is healthy. We can express ourselves better because teachers can deliver the lesson more effectively with the help of code-switching. We are left with no questions in our minds because lessons are well-explained. This way, teachers and students can have healthy relationships.” [FP1]

“I sometimes ask my friends about the lessons and I feel comfortable doing that because they always have my back, the teachers also always ask if we have questions and I do not feel shy at answering at all if I do have questions. [VP3]”

FGD participants' contentions on the benefits of CS in building and strengthening relationship between teachers and students are concurrent with various scholarly studies. Rosario and Maguddayao (2019) claims that code-switching is effective in rapport building because students can freely express themselves to teacher without grammar concerns. Students are encouraged to be more active in the classroom discussion. Meanwhile, Ramos (n.d.) holds the same sentiments as he believes that language alternation helps students to elaborate and expand their ideas which are being processed in their minds. It can be inferred that when teachers implement language policies that lean to prescriptivism or purism; it results in students' intimidation and timidity to participate in classroom activities. More so, it strains the relationship between students and teachers.

3.2 Reducing students' anxiety

FGD participants shared that code-switching reduces students' anxiety in learning English. They have a sentiment that the current mode of learning which is novel to them causes anxiety as they worry about their academic performance. However, they assert that relaxing language prescription by allowing code-switching helps them cope with the language learning difficulties poised by the present educational circumstances. This means that they are averse to the idea of strictly using the target language as they believe that it's inevitable in their bilingual context. The reason behind such attitude is that students who cannot respond to the questions of teacher are stigmatized as stupid, witless, or empty headed. Some of the participants claimed that:

“Students had a lot of anxiety in regards with online classes and based on my experience, by allowing code-switching, it really does make sure that the students have the confidence to answer questions that are asked to them”.
[FP4]

“Yes, I myself feel relieved when my teacher uses code switching to equip me with knowledge of English [] and when I find something difficult to understand, I feel more courageous to ask my teacher, especially the easy-going teachers.
[VP6]”

Contentions made by FGD participants above are concurrent with the study of Ferguson (2009) which reveals that code-switching is instrumental in creating a low-anxiety classroom atmosphere. As such, students become more participative and responsive to the inquiries of teacher. They become assertive to clarify things, express opinions, and reason out because they are not coerced to speak in the language that they are not comfortable with. Meanwhile in the studies of Jingxia (2010) and Nordin et. al (2012), both affirm Ferguson's claims as their studies reveal that code-switching reduces students' nervousness or anxiety and therefore makes students more confident and comfortable. It can be gleaned that code-switching makes the learning atmosphere more interactive and enjoyable.

Conclusion

This study contributes to understanding the ESL and EFL learners' beliefs about code-switching in online classrooms and how it used as tool for English language learning in online classrooms. Overall, FGD participants from the Philippines and Vietnam showed optimism towards the practice of code-switching in online ESL/EFL classrooms. Penetration of this linguistic phenomenon in online language classrooms enhances students' English language proficiency and increases students' participation in the current mode of learning which is by and large novel. Likewise, code-switching is believed to be a normal linguistic phenomenon that is widely practiced in online ESL/EFL classrooms. It is a communication tool that helps students further elaborate their thoughts and ideas during recitation. Thus, code-switching should be employed as an online english language teaching strategy. Furthermore, it can be gleaned that code-switching linguistically accommodates the students especially the low-proficient ones to cope with the challenges brought by the paradigm shifts and changes in educational landscape due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Code-switching is utilized mainly for three purposes: (1) achieve linguistic competencies prescribed in the curriculum, (2) manage

online ESL and EFL classrooms, and (3) build relationships. As such, ESL and EFL teachers should relax language prescription and adjust to students' preferences and needs by acknowledging and legitimizing code-switching as a subsidiary teaching and learning strategy in consideration of difficulties encountered by learners in the new normal.

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