

Analysis of Language Dilemmas in English Language Teaching: Teacher Use of Local Context

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Abstract: This study explores the phenomenon of language dilemmas in English Language Teaching (ELT), focusing on Indonesian teachers' use of local context, code-switching, and code-mixing as pedagogical strategies. Language dilemmas refer to the conflicts teachers experience when deciding between maintaining English-only instruction and utilizing local languages to enhance student comprehension. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations in several Indonesian schools. This study aims to explore the language dilemmas in English language teaching, especially teacher use of local context. The findings reveal that teachers frequently face institutional and pedagogical dilemmas: they are encouraged to use English consistently but find that switching to Indonesian or local dialects facilitates better understanding and engagement. Integrating local culture and context in English lessons helps bridge cultural gaps and increases student motivation. Code-switching and code-mixing emerged as natural and effective strategies for clarifying concepts, maintaining classroom interaction, and supporting low-proficiency learners.

Keywords: Code Mixing; Code Switching; Language Dilemmas; Use of Local Context; ELT

INTRODUCTION

Language plays a central role in human communication, shaping how individuals express ideas, emotions, and identities. However, in various social, cultural, and professional contexts, speakers often face what can be described as language dilemmas situations where language choice, form, or expression creates uncertainty, conflict, or tension. These dilemmas may arise when individuals must choose between languages, dialects, or registers, or when linguistic expression risks misunderstanding, offending, or violating social norms.

Language is not merely a system of symbols or grammar rules, but a social practice that reflects and constructs human relationships. According to Halliday (1978), language functions as a "social semiotic," meaning that it operates within social contexts and carries meanings shaped by culture and interaction. In this sense, language is not neutral; it involves choices that reveal social positions, intentions, and interpersonal dynamics. When individuals face conflicting choices about how or what to express, they experience what scholars call language dilemmas.

In multilingual and multicultural societies, language dilemmas frequently emerge as

speakers navigate between maintaining their linguistic identity and adapting to dominant language norms. For instance, bilingual or multilingual speakers often struggle with code-switching and language preference depending on the social situation, audience, and purpose of communication. Similarly, in professional or academic settings, individuals may experience dilemmas about using formal versus informal language, or about balancing clarity and politeness in intercultural communication.

Language dilemmas in ELT refer to the practical, theoretical, and political tensions that arise when English language teaching intersects with multilingual realities, educational policies, socioeconomic expectations, and local identities. These dilemmas are not simply about which language should be used in the classroom, but encompass issues of language values, the pedagogical legitimacy of bilingual practices (e.g., code-switching/translanguaging), and the policy consequences for equity and social mobility. Recent studies have shown that these dilemmas are multidimensional and contextual changing according to local history, national policies, and class dynamics. The term language dilemmas in ELT refers to the conflicting choices teachers face in deciding what kind of English to teach, how to teach it, and whose norms to follow (Canagarajah, 2013). These dilemmas emerge because language teaching is not a neutral act, it is influenced by social, cultural, and ideological forces. As Kumaravadivelu (2003) argues, language pedagogy involves navigating between global pedagogical trends and local classroom realities.

Language dilemma is situations or conditions in which someone, especially a language teacher that faces difficult or conflicting choices regarding language use, teaching, or policy. In other words, language dilemmas arise when two or more language options or teaching approaches have both positive and negative consequences, forcing the teacher to decide which is most appropriate. In the context of English language teaching, language dilemmas refer to the conflicts or tensions that teachers face in determining which version of English to teach (British, American, or local), which culture to include (Western or local culture), which teaching method to use (global method or adapted to the local context).

Language dilemmas are not limited to linguistic form but also relate to power, identity, and social expectations. The way people choose their words can reflect or challenge social hierarchies, cultural values, and institutional norms. For example, teachers and students in educational settings might face dilemmas in balancing authority and friendliness through language use; diplomats or business professionals might confront challenges in expressing disagreement without causing offense; and individuals communicating online might struggle with tone, interpretation, and politeness strategies in digital discourse.

Several previous studies have examined the phenomenon of language dilemmas in various sociolinguistic and education context. Zein (2019) explored Indonesian teachers' use of English and local languages in English classrooms. The study revealed that teachers faced dilemmas between adhering to English-only policies and using Indonesian or regional languages to ensure students' comprehension. This linguistic tension highlighted the conflict between institutional norms and pedagogical effectiveness, a form of pedagogical language dilemma. Teachers often switched codes to clarify meaning, but feared being viewed as "unprofessional" for not maintaining English consistently. However, this study explores the language dilemmas in English language teaching. This study aims to explores the language dilemmas in English language teaching, especially teacher use of local context.

This study offers theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, this study contributes

to the growing body of research in the fields of sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and English language teaching (ELT) by providing a deeper understanding of how teachers experience in language dilemmas use of local context. This research provides theoretical insights into the intersection between language choice, pedagogy, and sociocultural norms. It helps to explain how the teacher explores in language dilemmas use of local context (code mixing and code switching).

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design, the aim to explore and describe the phenomenon of language dilemmas experienced by English teachers, particularly in relation to the use of local context, code-switching, and code-mixing in English Language Teaching (ELT). A qualitative approach is appropriate because it allows the researcher to capture teachers' perspectives, experiences, and attitudes in their natural teaching contexts. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research seeks to understand meanings individuals ascribe to social or human problems, making it suitable for examining linguistic and pedagogical dilemmas.

The study was conducted in several junior and senior high schools in Indonesia where English is taught as a foreign language. The participants consisted of English teachers who have experience in integrating local context and bilingual communication during classroom interaction. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, which allows the researcher to choose participants who are knowledgeable and experienced with the research topic (Patton, 2002).

Table 1

The Demographic Information of the Participants

Participant	Gender	School types	Educational background	English proficiency level	Teaching experience
P1	Female	Private	Bachelor's Degree of English Education-UMN Al Washliyah	B2	More than 10 years
P2	Male	Private	Bachelor's Degree of English Literature	A2	More than 15 years

Data were collected using multiple qualitative techniques to ensure depth and credibility of the findings: Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain in-depth information about teachers' experiences and perspectives regarding language dilemmas, local context use, and code-switching/mixing practices in the classroom. Interview questions focused on teachers' reasons for language choice, challenges faced, and strategies used to address linguistic dilemmas. Classroom observations were carried out to record natural instances of code-switching, code-mixing, and the use of local context during teaching. The researcher observed how teachers negotiated between English and local languages to support learning, manage classroom interaction, and address communication challenges.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. The analysis involved: 1) Familiarizing with the data by

repeatedly reading interview transcripts and classroom observation notes to gain a deep understanding of teachers' experiences related to language dilemmas in English language teaching. 2) Generating initial codes related to language dilemmas, code-switching practices, code-mixing practices, and the use of local context in classroom interaction. 3) Searching for patterns and potential themes across the data, particularly those related to pedagogical strategies, institutional expectations, and student comprehension. 4) Reviewing and refining themes to ensure coherence and alignment with the research objectives. 5) Defining and naming the final themes that represented teachers' experiences in balancing English use and local language use in the classroom. 6) Producing a narrative report supported by direct quotations from participants and evidence from classroom observations.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were applied. Triangulation was achieved by combining data from interviews and classroom observations to strengthen the validity of the findings. Member checking was conducted by confirming interview results and interpretations with the participants to ensure accuracy. Rich, thick descriptions of the research context, participants, and classroom practices were provided to enhance credibility and transferability. In addition, the researcher maintained consistency in data collection and analysis procedures to ensure dependability, and grounded all interpretations in the data to support confirmability.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that English teachers in Indonesian EFL classrooms often experienced language dilemmas when deciding whether to use only English or to include local languages to facilitate understanding. Most participants admitted that they were aware of the institutional expectation to maintain an English-only policy, but at the same time, they recognized the pedagogical need to use Bahasa Indonesia or local languages to clarify difficult concepts, explain grammar, and maintain student engagement.

Another key finding was that teachers frequently integrated local context, such as local culture, examples from students' daily lives, and local issues into their English lessons. Teachers believed that connecting English materials with students' cultural background improved comprehension and motivation.

The teacher said:

"when I used the examples from local context, the students more effective because they can relate to it"

This finding supports Kumaravadivelu's (2003) postmethod pedagogy, which emphasizes context-sensitive teaching that values local realities rather than rigidly following Western-based teaching methods. The use of local context also helps to resolve the cultural dilemma described by McKay (2002), allowing teachers to balance global English content with local identity.

The study found that code-switching and code-mixing were common and functional strategies used by teachers. These linguistic practices served multiple pedagogical functions: clarifying complex ideas or instructions, managing classroom interaction and discipline, and creating a more comfortable and interactive learning atmosphere.

Teachers often switched between English and Indonesian when explaining grammar

rules or vocabulary meanings.

The teacher said:

"I mix English and Indonesia because if I only speak in English, the students will lose their focus, but with mix this English and Indonesia language will make them more effective and understanding".

This aligns with Cook's (2001) view that code-switching can support learning by reducing anxiety and promoting understanding. Similarly, Macaro (2005) emphasized that switching between L1 and L2 can provide cognitive scaffolding for low-proficiency learners.

Code mixing refers to the blending of linguistic elements, such as words, phrases, or clauses from two or more languages within a single sentence or utterance. It usually occurs when speakers insert elements of one language (L2) into another (L1) in a fluid and spontaneous way.

The teacher said:

"anak anak coba perhatikan rumus past tense, if the verb berubah menjadi V2 maka ini adalah contoh dari simple past tense"
"perhatikan subjectnya terlebih dahulu, before you tentukan to-be nya"
"Please kerjakan tugasnya by yourself, jangan mencontek!"
"Dear lovely students, kumpulkan tugasnya before deadline ya"
"Kalau ada yang ingin bertanya, feel free nanya ke miss ya"

In these examples, English lexical items (past tense, if the verb, V2, simple past tense, subject, before, you, to be, please, by yourself, dear lovely students, before, deadline, feel free) are embedded within the Indonesia sentences. these kinds of code mixing help the students become familiar with English vocabulary while maintaining through L1. As stated of Muysken (2000), code mixing is "the embedding of elements from one language into another," often reflecting bilingual competence and identity rather than confusion. Similarly, Kachru (1992) emphasized that in multilingual societies like Indonesia, code mixing represents a natural linguistic behavior that mirrors how English has been localized and integrated into daily communication.

Code switching is the alternation between two or more languages across sentences or discourse segments within the same conversation. It is usually more systematic and situational than code mixing.

The teacher said:

"Okay everyone, please listen to me, sekarang perhatikan contoh di papan tulis"
"Well our topic today is comparison degree, jadi siapa yang tau bagaimana bentuk perbandingan itu"
"Good job, tapi coba perhatikan Kembali contoh yg sudah ada"
"In the previous meeting I have explained about past perfect tense, siapa yang tahu bagaimana bentuk kata kerja dalam kalimatnya"

Based on the examples, it can be concluded that the teacher alternates between English and Indonesian across sentences. The switch often signals a shift in function: English for instruction or modeling, and Indonesian for explanation or reinforcement. This practice reflects what Macaro (2005) called pedagogical code switching is a conscious linguistic strategy to scaffold understanding, especially for low-proficiency learners. Cook (2001) further argues that code switching in the classroom can serve pedagogical purposes such as clarifying meaning, explaining grammar, maintaining discipline, or expressing empathy. In multilingual classrooms, code switching is not seen as a deficiency, but as a strategic tool for

meaning-making and effective teaching.

Table 2

Summary of the Findings

Aspect	Code mixing	Code switching
Form	Mixing languages within a single sentence or clause	Alternating between languages across sentences or turns
Focus	Lexical or grammatical insertion	Functional and situational alternation
Example	<i>"Kita akan belajar present perfect tense hari ini."</i>	<i>"Okay, open your book. Sekarang, lihat halaman sepuluh."</i>
Function	Familiarize vocabulary, integrate local identity	Clarify, emphasize, or manage communication
Pedagogical role	Enhances vocabulary recognition	Facilitates understanding and engagement

CONCLUSION

This study explores how English teachers in Indonesia navigate linguistic challenges termed language dilemmas that arise from balancing English-only teaching expectations with the practical need to use local languages in the classroom. Drawing upon sociolinguistic and pedagogical theories (Halliday, 1978, Kumaravadivelu, 2003, McKay, 2002, Phillipson, 1992), it argues that English teaching is not neutral but shaped by power, identity, and cultural values.

The research adopts a qualitative descriptive method, involving interviews and classroom observations to explore teachers' language practices and perceptions. Findings indicate that teachers use code-switching and code-mixing strategically to support comprehension, maintain rapport, and connect lessons with students' sociocultural backgrounds. For instance, English and Indonesian are alternated or blended within discourse to clarify grammar, explain tasks, and engage learners. Integrating local context, such as cultural examples, regional expressions, and familiar scenarios enhances student motivation and understanding, aligning with post method pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2003), which values adaptability to local realities over rigid global methods.

Teachers' bilingual practices reflect Cook's (2001) and Macaro's (2005) perspectives that code-switching serves cognitive and communicative functions rather than signaling linguistic deficiency. Furthermore, Muysken (2000) and Kachru (1992) emphasize that code-mixing in multilingual societies like Indonesia represents linguistic creativity and localized English use. In conclusion, the study underscores the pedagogical value of embracing multilingualism and local culture in ELT. Rather than viewing code-switching and code-mixing as unprofessional, they should be recognized as vital tools for inclusive, effective, and culturally responsive language teaching.

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