

Students' Code-Mixing Practices In Bilingual Classroom Interaction

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ABSTRACT. Code-mixing is a common phenomenon in bilingual and multilingual contexts, occurring not only in daily communication and on social media but also increasingly in educational settings, particularly in speaking-class activities. This study aims to investigate the types of Indonesian–English code-mixing and the reasons and factors influencing its use in students' speaking class activities. The research employed a descriptive qualitative method. The data were collected from students' speaking class activities through classroom video recordings and unstructured interviews. The recorded utterances containing code-mixing were transcribed into written data and subsequently analyzed by type of code-mixing. The data were then analyzed to identify the reasons and factors underlying students' code-mixing. The findings reveal that students produced three types of code-mixing: insertion (34 data), alternation (26 data), and congruent lexicalization (3 data). Insertion emerged as the most dominant type, indicating that students tend to embed English lexical items within Indonesian sentence structures. The reasons for using code-mixing include talking about a particular topic, being emphatic about something, inserting sentence fillers or interjections, repetition for clarification, and clarifying speech content for the interlocutor. Furthermore, factors influencing code-mixing include speaker–interlocutor interaction, limited mastery of vocabulary, and classroom communication needs. These findings suggest that code-mixing functions as a communicative and pedagogical strategy that facilitates interaction, comprehension, and students' active participation in speaking activities. This study contributes to the field of language education by highlighting the positive role of code-mixing in bilingual classroom contexts.

Keywords: *Code-mixing, Bilingual classroom, Speaking class activities, Types of code-mixing, Language learning strategies*

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INTRODUCTION

Humans are inherently social beings who rely on interaction to construct meaning and maintain social relationships (Azizah et al., 2025; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Olsen, 2025). Language therefore plays a crucial role as the primary medium through which communication occurs, enabling individuals to express ideas, emotions, and experiences (Ezel Acar & Erozan, 2024). In multilingual societies, language use is rarely monolithic; instead, speakers often draw on more than one linguistic resource to achieve communicative goals (Attaufiqi et al., 2024; Supriyanto et al., 2025; Triyono et al., 2023). This phenomenon becomes particularly salient in educational settings, where language functions not only as a means of interaction but also as a tool for learning (Bosli, 2025; Nurhayati et al., 2022; Syamsi et al., 2024).

Indonesia represents a linguistically diverse context in which bilingualism and multilingualism are common. Alongside Bahasa Indonesia as the national language, regional

languages and foreign languages especially English are widely used and taught in schools (Musliadi et al., 2024; Sartini et al., 2025). As a result, Indonesian learners of English frequently operate in bilingual environments where more than one language coexists in classroom interaction. Such conditions naturally give rise to code-mixing, a sociolinguistic phenomenon in which speakers combine elements from different languages within a single utterance (Ataeifar et al., 2019). In English-speaking classrooms, code-mixing often emerges as a communicative strategy rather than a linguistic deficiency.

Previous studies on code-mixing have largely focused on university students, social media discourse, or informal communication contexts (Aziz et al., 2025; Dearman et al., 2018; Hashimov, 2015; Sartini et al., 2025). While these studies have provided valuable insights into the types and motivations of code-mixing, they offer limited explanations of how code-mixing functions pedagogically in primary school classrooms, particularly within bilingual or faith-based educational settings (Attaufiqi et al., 2024; Falah et al., 2025; Sholihah et al., 2024; Urooj et al., 2024). Moreover, many existing studies emphasize classification of code-mixing types without sufficiently examining the underlying factors that shape students' language choices during speaking activities. This gap indicates that current literature has not fully captured the complexity of classroom-based code-mixing among younger learners.

In English language learning, speaking is a fundamental skill that requires not only linguistic competence but also confidence and sufficient exposure to meaningful interaction (Msamba et al., 2023; Nurhayati et al., 2022; Sormin et al., 2025; Triyono et al., 2023). However, students often face challenges such as limited vocabulary, insufficient grammatical mastery, and anxiety about making mistakes when speaking English (Ataeifar et al., 2019). These constraints frequently lead learners to rely on their first language while attempting to communicate in English. In such circumstances, code-mixing becomes a practical strategy that allows students to participate in speaking activities despite their linguistic limitations.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to examine classroom code-mixing in a bilingual speaking context by focusing on the types and factors influencing students' use of mixed linguistic codes during classroom interaction. The study seeks to demonstrate that code-mixing is not merely a sign of inadequate English proficiency, but a functional and context-sensitive communicative practice shaped by students' linguistic background, affective factors, and instructional conditions. By doing so, this research contributes to educational sociolinguistics by providing empirical evidence from a classroom setting that has been underrepresented in previous studies.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to examine Indonesian–English code-mixing in classroom interaction. Qualitative research is appropriate when the aim is to obtain an in-depth understanding of naturally occurring phenomena and to describe participants' experiences and language use in their real contexts (Creswell, 2014). The primary objective of the research was to systematically describe the types of code-mixing produced by students and to explore the factors influencing its use as it naturally occurred in a bilingual Islamic educational setting. This study did not aim to test hypotheses or to statistically measure variables; instead, it focused on capturing authentic linguistic practices through detailed description and interpretation of classroom discourse (Patton, 2014).

The research was conducted during the 2024/2025 academic year in English classes at a selected Islamic bilingual elementary school. The participants consisted of approximately 28 students, who were selected using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to select participants who are most likely to provide rich and relevant data related to the research focus. The selection was based on students' active engagement in English learning activities and frequent participation in classroom interaction. During data collection, the researcher acted as a non-participant observer to maintain the natural

classroom atmosphere and minimize disruption to the teaching and learning process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. Classroom interactions were audio-recorded to capture students' spoken language during English lessons, as audio recording is widely used in qualitative language research to ensure accuracy in capturing verbal data. The recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim to identify instances of Indonesian–English code-mixing. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students to gain deeper insights into the factors influencing their use of code-mixing, such as communicative needs, comfort in speaking, motivation, and limitations in English vocabulary. Semi-structured interviews allow flexibility while still providing systematic coverage of key research themes.

The research instruments included an observation guide, an audio recording device, and a semi-structured interview guideline developed based on relevant theories of code-mixing and bilingual communication. The instruments were designed to be clear, systematic, and appropriate to the students' language proficiency levels to support effective and reliable data collection.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by (Miles et al., 2014) Huberman and Saldana, which consists of three main steps: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The types of code-mixing were classified according to Muysken's (2000) typology, which includes insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalization. Meanwhile, the factors influencing students' use of code-mixing were interpreted using sociolinguistic and bilingualism theories. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were employed, including data triangulation, careful and repeated transcription, systematic coding procedures, and prolonged engagement in the research setting. These strategies are commonly recommended in qualitative research to enhance credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Miles et al., 2014; Creswell, 2014).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Based on the analysis of students' utterances collected during classroom observation, three types of code-mixing were identified: insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalization, with insertion emerging as the most frequently used type. This pattern suggests that students tend to insert English lexical items into Indonesian sentence structures without altering the dominant grammatical pattern. For example, during a speaking activity, a student stated "listen-nya belum jelas" (Data 50), while another said "readingnya tentang animals" (Data 48). These utterances were captured in classroom audio recordings and confirmed through observation notes.

These examples demonstrate congruent lexicalization, in which students attach Indonesian morphological markers to English lexical items. This finding is consistent with more recent discussions of code-mixing which emphasize that congruent lexicalization emerges when the interacting languages share compatible grammatical and lexical frameworks, allowing elements from both languages to be integrated within a single structure (Deuchar, 2020; Gardner-Chloros, 2018). Observation data further reveal that such mixed forms frequently occurred when students asked questions or sought clarification during speaking tasks.

Further evidence from classroom documentation supports these findings. Lesson plans and task instructions show that English keywords such as listening, reading, and task were often introduced by the teacher within Indonesian explanations. This instructional practice creates a bilingual input environment that encourages students to reproduce similar mixed forms in their spoken responses. Additionally, students' task submission notes indicate consistent use of English lexical items embedded in Indonesian sentences. Evidence from teacher interviews further explains the reasons behind students' code-mixing. The English teacher stated. "*Students often mix languages because their English vocabulary is still limited, but they want to keep talking. By mixing languages, they are more confident in asking questions.* (Teacher Interview, Data W1: 2025)

This interview excerpt confirms that code-mixing functions as a strategic communicative resource rather than random language interference. In line with this, the dominant reasons for code-mixing identified in this study include clarifying instructions, clarifying task procedures, and asking for topic confirmation, as shown in Table 1.

Regarding influencing factors, the findings indicate that speaker–interlocutor interaction, classroom communicative needs, and limited English vocabulary mastery are the primary factors contributing to students' use of code-mixing. These factors were consistently identified across observation data, interview responses, and classroom documentation. This supports previous studies arguing that classroom code-mixing should be understood as a means of maintaining communication flow and encouraging student participation rather than as a linguistic deviation (Sert, 2005; Lin, 2013).

Overall, the qualitative field data demonstrate that code-mixing functions as a linguistic bridge that assists students in expressing ideas, understanding instructions, and actively participating in speaking activities. Therefore, code-mixing should not always be avoided in bilingual classrooms; instead, it should be recognized as a natural and functional component of students' language development process

Table 1: Type of Code-Mixing

Type of Code-Mixing	Description	Example	Data
Insertion	Insertion of English lexical items into Indonesian sentence structures	<i>listen-nya</i>	Data 50
Alternation	Alternating between Indonesian and English clauses or phrases	Indonesian sentence followed by English phrase	Classroom data
Congruent Lexicalization	Use of Indonesian grammatical structure with English lexicon	<i>readingnya</i>	Data 48

The data presented in Table 1 illustrate the types of Indonesian–English code-mixing identified in students' classroom utterances. Three types of code-mixing were found, namely insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalization. Among these, insertion and congruent lexicalization appeared most frequently in students' spoken interactions. The insertion type is characterized by the inclusion of English lexical items into Indonesian sentence structures without changing the overall grammatical pattern. An example of this type is *listen-nya* (Data 50), where the English verb *listen* is inserted into an Indonesian syntactic frame and combined with the Indonesian possessive suffix *-nya*.

Alternation, on the other hand, refers to the switching between Indonesian and English clauses or phrases within a single utterance. Although alternation was observed in classroom interactions, it occurred less frequently than insertion. This suggests that students were generally reluctant to shift fully between linguistic systems and instead preferred to maintain Indonesian as the base language while incorporating English elements selectively. Congruent lexicalization, as shown by examples such as *readingnya* (Data 48), reflects the use of Indonesian grammatical structures with English lexical items. This type of code-mixing indicates that students were able to creatively combine elements from both languages when the grammatical systems were perceived as compatible.

Table 2: Type of Code-Mixing

No.	Utterance Example	Type	Function	Data
1	<i>listen-nya belum jelas</i>	Congruent Lexicalization	Clarifying instruction	Data 50
2	<i>readingnya tentang animals</i>	Congruent Lexicalization	Asking for topic confirmation	Data 48
3	<i>tugasnya dikumpulkan besok</i>	Insertion	Clarifying task procedure	Data 45

Table 2 provides more detailed examples of students' utterances, linking each instance of code-mixing to its communicative function. The utterance *listen-nya belum jelas* (Data 50) is categorized as congruent lexicalization and functions to clarify instructional content. This shows that students use code-mixing to ensure comprehension when instructions delivered in English are not fully understood. Similarly, the utterance *readingnya tentang animals* (Data 48) demonstrates congruent lexicalization and serves the function of asking for topic confirmation. In this case, the student combines English content vocabulary with Indonesian structure to seek clarification about the lesson topic.

Another example, *tugasnya dikumpulkan besok* (Data 45), represents the insertion type of code-mixing and functions to clarify task procedures. Here, English-related classroom discourse is embedded within Indonesian to convey practical information more efficiently. These examples indicate that code-mixing is closely tied to pedagogical needs, particularly in facilitating understanding, reducing ambiguity, and maintaining the flow of classroom interaction.

The two tables demonstrate that code-mixing in this study is not merely a linguistic deviation but a functional communicative strategy. The types of code-mixing identified are systematically linked to specific classroom functions, such as clarifying instructions, confirming topics, and explaining task procedures. This supports the argument that code-mixing serves as a linguistic bridge that enables students to participate actively in speaking activities despite limited English proficiency. Consequently, the findings reinforce the view that code-mixing should be understood as a natural and productive component of bilingual classroom discourse rather than as an obstacle to language learning.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that Indonesian–English code-mixing plays a significant and functional role in students' speaking activities during English classroom interaction (Msamba et al., 2023; Simanjuntak et al., 2025; Yudhiantara et al., 2024). The frequent occurrence of insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalization indicates that students rely on mixed-language strategies to support communication in a bilingual learning environment. This confirms that code-mixing is not an incidental or random linguistic behavior, but rather a systematic and purposeful practice shaped by learners' linguistic competence, classroom demands, and social interaction patterns.

In relation to **code-mixing**, this type of classroom interaction provides a natural context for the use of Indonesian–English mixed utterances. When students respond to questions, ask for clarification, or participate in speaking activities, they often combine Indonesian as their dominant language with English lexical items (Gardner-Chloros, 2009). This occurs particularly when students have limited vocabulary or are unsure about using full English expressions. The image represents how code-mixing emerges naturally in classroom interaction as a communicative strategy (Muysken, 2011). It enables students to understand instructions, express ideas, and maintain participation in speaking activities. Rather than hindering learning, code-mixing functions as a supportive linguistic resource that facilitates communication and promotes student engagement in a bilingual classroom setting.

Among the three identified types, insertion emerged as the most dominant form of code-mixing. This finding is consistent with the framework, which explains that insertion is cognitively and structurally the most accessible type of code-mixing for bilingual speakers, particularly language learners. Insertion allows students to retain the grammatical structure of their first language while embedding lexical items from the target language, thereby reducing the cognitive load required to construct fully grammatical sentences in English (Suryanto et al., 2024).

In the present study, students frequently inserted English words into Indonesian sentences without altering the overall syntactic pattern. This pattern suggests that students prioritize fluency and effective message delivery over grammatical accuracy in the target language, especially during spontaneous speaking activities. Such behavior reflects students' need to communicate meaning efficiently while compensating for limited English proficiency (Indasari et al., 2024).

This tendency is also observable in the classroom interaction illustrated in the image above. The image shows students actively engaging with the teacher during the lesson, responding to

instructions and participating in classroom discourse. In such interactive moments, students are required to react quickly, ask questions, or clarify tasks. As a result, insertion becomes a practical strategy that enables them to participate without hesitation by combining familiar Indonesian sentence structures with key English lexical items related to the lesson.

The dominance of insertion in this study can be understood not only as a linguistic preference but also as a response to the real-time communicative demands of classroom interaction. The classroom setting depicted in the image highlights how code-mixing, particularly insertion, functions as a linguistic bridge that supports student participation, maintains interactional flow, and facilitates learning in a bilingual educational environment.

This dominance of insertion aligns with previous classroom-based studies that found insertion to be the most frequent form of code-mixing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. These studies argue that insertion enables learners to participate actively in communication even when their proficiency in the target language is limited. From a pedagogical perspective, this supports the notion that insertion functions as a linguistic scaffold, allowing students to gradually incorporate English elements into their speech while relying on their first language as a structural base.

The occurrence of congruent lexicalization, particularly in forms such as listen-nya and readingnya, reflects students' creative linguistic competence in combining English lexical items with Indonesian morphological markers. According to Muysken (2000), congruent lexicalization occurs when two languages share compatible grammatical features, allowing elements from both languages to be blended seamlessly. In the Indonesian–English context, the attachment of Indonesian suffixes such as -nya to English words demonstrates how learners adapt foreign lexical items into a familiar grammatical system. This strategy reduces cognitive load and enables students to express meaning more efficiently.

This finding supports Poplack's (1980) argument that bilingual speakers use their linguistic repertoire strategically to maximize communicative effectiveness. Rather than signaling linguistic confusion, such mixed forms indicate learners' awareness of both linguistic systems and their ability to manipulate them for communicative purposes. Holmes (2013) further emphasizes that code-mixing often serves as a resource for meaning-making, particularly in instructional settings where learners must respond quickly and accurately to academic demands. In this study, congruent lexicalization frequently appeared when students asked questions or sought clarification, indicating its role in maintaining interactional flow.

In addition to structural patterns, this study highlights the functions of code-mixing in classroom interaction. The findings reveal that code-mixing serves several pedagogical functions, including clarifying instructions, explaining task procedures, and confirming lesson topics. These functions demonstrate that code-mixing is context-sensitive and goal-oriented. Students use mixed-language utterances to ensure comprehension, avoid misunderstanding, and remain engaged in classroom activities. This supports Sert's (2005) view that code-mixing in educational contexts functions as an interactional strategy that facilitates communication rather than obstructing language learning.

Similarly, Lin (2013) argues that code-mixing allows learners to negotiate meaning and participate more confidently in classroom discourse. In bilingual classrooms, strict monolingual policies may inhibit participation, particularly among learners with limited proficiency. The present findings reinforce this argument by showing that students rely on code-mixing to reduce communication breakdowns and sustain interaction. When students are allowed to draw on both languages, they demonstrate greater willingness to speak and ask questions, which is essential for developing speaking competence.

The influencing factors identified in this study further explain why code-mixing occurs frequently in students' speaking activities. First language dominance emerges as a primary factor. As Indonesian is the students' first language, it naturally serves as the dominant linguistic system during interaction. This finding is consistent with Holmes' (2013) assertion that speakers tend to

rely on their most proficient language in cognitively demanding situations. Speaking activities in a foreign language classroom require rapid processing, vocabulary retrieval, and grammatical construction, making reliance on the first language a practical choice.

Limited English vocabulary mastery also plays a crucial role in students' use of code-mixing. Students often lack the lexical resources needed to express complex ideas fully in English. As a result, they insert familiar Indonesian words or combine them with English lexical items to convey meaning. This finding aligns with (Sahayu et al., 2026) study, which highlights vocabulary limitation as a major barrier to speaking proficiency in EFL contexts (Rafida et al., 2024; Susilowati et al., 2025). Code-mixing thus becomes a compensatory strategy that allows students to communicate despite lexical gaps.

Another significant factor influencing code-mixing is classroom interactional need. Classroom discourse often requires immediate responses, clarification, and negotiation of meaning. In such situations, students prioritize communicative success over linguistic accuracy. According to Gumperz (1982), code-mixing in interaction serves as a contextualization cue that helps speakers manage discourse and align with interlocutors. In this study, students frequently used code-mixing when addressing the teacher or peers, indicating its role in maintaining social and instructional alignment.

Affective factors, particularly anxiety about making mistakes, also contribute to students' reliance on code-mixing. Fear of incorrect pronunciation, grammatical errors, or peer ridicule discourages students from speaking fully in English. By mixing languages, students reduce the risk of error and increase their confidence. This finding supports Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1985), which suggests that anxiety and low self-confidence can impede language acquisition. Code-mixing helps lower the affective filter by providing a safer communicative space for learners.

From a broader perspective, the findings of this study challenge deficit-oriented views of code-mixing in EFL classrooms. Rather than interpreting code-mixing as a sign of inadequate proficiency, the results support sociolinguistic perspectives that view bilingual language use as a natural and dynamic practice. Wardhaugh and Fuller (2021) emphasize that bilingual speakers do not operate with separate linguistic systems, but rather draw from an integrated linguistic repertoire. In this sense, code-mixing reflects linguistic flexibility and adaptive competence.

Pedagogically, the findings suggest that teachers should reconsider rigid monolingual language policies in bilingual classrooms. Allowing controlled and purposeful code-mixing can support comprehension, participation, and confidence, particularly for learners at lower proficiency levels (Riceur & Thompson, 2016). However, this does not imply abandoning target language use altogether. Instead, teachers can strategically guide students from mixed-language utterances toward fuller English production as proficiency develops. This approach aligns with (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the role of scaffolding and social interaction in learning.

In conclusion, the discussion of findings demonstrates that Indonesian–English code-mixing in speaking classrooms functions as a meaningful communicative and pedagogical resource. The dominance of insertion, the creative use of congruent lexicalization, and the identified communicative functions all support existing theories and empirical studies in sociolinguistics and second language acquisition. Code-mixing emerges as a natural outcome of bilingual interaction, shaped by linguistic competence, classroom demands, and affective factors. Therefore, it should be understood not as a linguistic deficiency, but as an integral part of students' language development process in bilingual educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

The main findings of this study indicate that Indonesian-English code-mixing practices in bilingual classroom interactions play a significant role and do not simply reflect students' limited English proficiency. Based on classroom data analysis, students consistently produced three types of code-mixing: insertion (34 instances), alternation (26 instances), and congruent lexicalization (3 instances), with insertion being the most dominant type. These findings indicate that students prefer to insert English lexical elements into Indonesian sentence structures, for example in listening and reading, to maintain fluency. This dominance of insertion challenges the long-held assumption that code-mixing is a linguistic error and opens new discussions about its function as a conscious and systematic communication strategy in classroom speaking activities.

In terms of scientific contribution, this study strengthens previous findings in sociolinguistics and EFL studies that suggest code-mixing is a natural and functional linguistic practice in bilingual contexts. It also challenges the deficit-oriented view by demonstrating that code-mixing serves to clarify instructions, confirm topics, and explain task procedures, thereby encouraging active student participation. Furthermore, this study enriches the scientific discussion by integrating an analysis of code-mixing types, pedagogical functions, and influencing factors such as vocabulary limitations, classroom interaction needs, and first language dominance in a relatively under-researched elementary school learning context.

The limitations of this study lie in the limited sample size and focus on one specific classroom context, making the results unable to be broadly generalized. Furthermore, variations in the data based on differences in age, gender, and students' English proficiency levels have not been explored in depth. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples and employ a mixed-methods approach to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between language proficiency level and the frequency of code-mixing use in students' speaking development.

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