

The Effects of Code-Switching on the Speaking Performance of English Majors during Oral Presentations: An Integrative Approach

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ABSTRACT: In multilingual educational contexts, code-switching is frequently observed in oral academic tasks, yet its role in speaking assessment remains contested. This study investigated the effects of codeswitching on the speaking performance of pre-service English teachers during classroom oral presentations in a Philippine higher education setting. Employing an integrative mixed-methods design, the study examined the frequency and functions of code-switching, its influence on fluency, coherence, and grammatical accuracy, students' perceptions of its use, and performance differences across year levels. Quantitative data were obtained from rubric-based speaking assessments adapted from the IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors and analyzed using descriptive statistics and Welch's independent samples t-test. Qualitative data were drawn from classroom observations and a focus group discussion and analyzed thematically. Findings indicate that students employed codeswitching strategically to clarify complex ideas, sustain fluency, and engage the audience, with minimal negative impact on grammatical accuracy. Although third-year students obtained slightly higher mean speaking scores than second-year students, the difference was not statistically significant. Qualitative findings further revealed that students perceived code-switching as a facilitative communicative resource that reduced anxiety and reflected bilingual identity, while remaining mindful of its appropriate use in formal contexts. The study argues that code-switching should be recognized as a legitimate component of communicative competence and calls for contextsensitive speaking assessment frameworks in multilingual English language classrooms.

KEYWORDS: Code-Switching; Multilingual Education; Oral Presentations; Pre-service English Teachers; Speaking Performance

INTRODUCTION

In multilingual educational contexts, speakers frequently draw on more than one linguistic code to accomplish communicative goals. One such practice, code-switching, refers to the alternation between two or more languages within a single interaction (Poplack, 1980; Myers-Scotton, 1993). In countries such as the Philippines, where English coexists with Filipino and regional languages, codeswitching is not only a sociolinguistic reality but also a common feature of classroom discourse, particularly during oral academic tasks (Bautista, 2019; Tupas & Lorente, 2019). Despite its prevalence, the role of code-switching in formal speaking performance, especially in assessment contexts, remains contested.

Within English language education, code-switching has long been viewed ambivalently. Earlier monolingual ideologies framed it as evidence of linguistic deficiency or inadequate target-language proficiency (Macaro, 2020). More recent scholarship, however, recognizes code-switching as a strategic communicative resource that bilingual speakers employ to manage meaning, sustain fluency, accommodate audiences, and regulate cognitive load (García, 2009; Wei, 2022). This shift has prompted renewed interest in how code-switching functions in pedagogical contexts, particularly in speaking tasks that require real-time language processing, such as oral presentations.

For pre-service English teachers, effective spoken communication is a critical professional competency. Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSED) students majoring in English are expected to demonstrate fluency, coherence, and grammatical control in academic speaking, as they prepare for future instructional roles (Bernardo & Gonzales, 2020). Observations in Philippine higher education classrooms, however, indicate that these students frequently engage in Filipino–English or Cebuano–English code-switching during oral presentations (Villanueva & Gamiao, 2022; Ilarde et al., 2024). While such practices may support clarity and engagement, they raise important questions regarding how speaking performance should be evaluated in multilingual contexts.

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Existing research on code-switching has largely focused on learners' motivations, attitudes, and classroom interactional functions (Masna, 2020; Karakaya & Dikilitaş, 2020; Ye, 2021). Although these studies provide valuable sociolinguistic insights, fewer investigations have examined how code-switching affects assessed speaking performance, particularly in formal academic tasks. Moreover, most speaking assessment frameworks continue to be grounded in monolingual norms, often penalizing language alternation without distinguishing between strategic and unregulated use (Botes & Mkhize, 2022; Punzalan, 2021). This disconnect risks misrepresenting the communicative competence of multilingual learners.

Addressing these gaps, the present study examines the effects of code-switching on the speaking performance of BSED-English students during classroom oral presentations. Anchored in Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles & Ogay, 2007), and Dominance and Goal Orientation (Cameron & Kulick, 2003), the study adopts an integrative mixed-methods approach to analyze the frequency and functions of code-switching, its relationship with fluency, coherence, and grammatical accuracy, learners' perceptions of its use, and differences across year levels. By situating code-switching within both communicative practice and assessment discourse, the study seeks to contribute to more context-sensitive approaches to evaluating speaking performance in multilingual English language classrooms.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Code-Switching as a Communicative Resource in Multilingual Classrooms

Code-switching has been extensively documented in bilingual and multilingual educational settings and is now widely understood as a rule-governed and purposeful linguistic behavior rather than a random mixing of languages (Auer, 1998; Myers-Scotton, 1993). In multilingual classrooms, learners' alternate languages to negotiate meaning, manage interaction, and achieve communicative goals (Creese & Blackledge, 2015). Contemporary perspectives emphasize that such alternation reflects speakers' linguistic repertoire and pragmatic awareness rather than linguistic inadequacy.

In the Philippine context, code-switching is deeply embedded in classroom discourse, serving both pedagogical and interactional functions (Bautista, 2019; De Castro et al., 2021). Studies involving English majors and pre-service teachers indicate that learners frequently switch languages during explanations, examples, and audience engagement, particularly when addressing complex or abstract concepts (Villanueva & Gamiao, 2022; Cuaresma & Abing, 2024). These findings suggest that code-switching operates as a meaning-making strategy that supports communication rather than undermines it.

Code-Switching and Oral Fluency

Fluency is a central dimension of speaking performance, typically characterized by the smooth flow of speech, minimal hesitation, and effective pacing (O'Sullivan, 2019). Research indicates that codeswitching can support oral fluency by allowing speakers to bypass lexical retrieval difficulties and maintain discourse continuity (Noorbar & Mamaghani, 2023). By temporarily drawing on a more accessible linguistic code, learners are able to sustain speech flow without prolonged pauses or breakdowns.

Empirical studies in ESL and EFL contexts show that students who employ code-switching strategically demonstrate greater confidence and spontaneity during oral tasks (Magpayo-Bon et al., 2021; Iqbal et al., 2022). Rather than interrupting speech, language alternation often functions as a compensatory mechanism that enables speakers to continue articulating ideas. Concerns regarding reduced target-language exposure are generally associated with habitual or uncontrolled switching, rather than deliberate and context-sensitive use (Macaro, 2020).

Code-Switching and Grammatical Accuracy

Grammatical accuracy remains a key criterion in the evaluation of academic speaking, particularly in formal contexts (IELTS, 2023). Earlier perspectives frequently linked code-switching to grammatical interference or incomplete language control. However, more recent research demonstrates that bilingual speakers often maintain grammatical integrity within each language system, switching at linguistically permissible points (Poplack, 1980; Aquino, 2022).

Studies involving English majors in multilingual settings reveal that strategic code-switching does not necessarily result in increased grammatical errors (Lee & Lim, 2020; Ilarde et al., 2024). Instead, learners often preserve grammatical accuracy in English while using their first language selectively to ensure clarity or precision. Grammatical disruption tends to occur when code-switching is excessive or unregulated, particularly among learners with lower proficiency levels (Lee & Lim, 2020).

Code-Switching and Coherence

Beyond fluency and accuracy, coherence and communicative effectiveness are essential components of successful oral presentations. In multilingual discourse, code-switching can contribute to coherence by signaling topic shifts, emphasizing key points, and rephrasing complex ideas (Auer, 1998). Strategic alternation allows speakers to organize discourse more effectively and adapt to audience expectations (Giles & Ogay, 2007).

Research in higher education contexts indicates that students often code-switch to maintain audience engagement and enhance comprehensibility (Mahfouz & Al-Dhefiri, 2021; Santos & Reyes, 2022). When employed deliberately, such practices support

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logical sequencing and pragmatic clarity. Conversely, unpredictable or excessive switching may disrupt coherence and reduce message clarity (Toh & Chan, 2020).

Learner Perceptions of Code-Switching in Academic Speaking

Learners' perceptions play a crucial role in shaping communicative behavior. Recent studies suggest that multilingual students generally view code-switching positively, associating it with increased confidence, reduced anxiety, and more authentic self-expression (Delos Reyes & Dizon, 2022; Hernández & Beltrán, 2021). In teacher education programs, students often report that codeswitching helps them connect with their audience and convey meaning more effectively (Ilarde et al., 2024).

At the same time, some learners express concern that code-switching may be perceived negatively in formal academic contexts, particularly in assessment situations (Apostol & Garcia, 2021). This tension reflects the persistence of monolingual ideologies within evaluation practices and underscores the need for clearer pedagogical guidance regarding strategic language use.

Speaking Assessment in Multilingual Contexts

Traditional speaking assessment tools are typically grounded in monolingual norms and rarely account for multilingual communicative strategies such as code-switching (O'Sullivan, 2019; Botes & Mkhize, 2022). As a result, learners' communicative competence may be underrepresented or misinterpreted. Scholars increasingly advocate for context-sensitive assessment frameworks that consider sociolinguistic realities, audience adaptation, and communicative effectiveness (AlMahrooqi & Molina, 2020; Villareal & Castillo, 2022).

In the Philippine context, researchers have emphasized the need for localized speaking assessment models that reflect bilingual and multilingual practices in higher education (Punzalan, 2021; Bernardo & Gonzales, 2020). Incorporating criteria that distinguish strategic code-switching from unregulated language mixing may lead to more valid and equitable evaluation of speaking performance.

The reviewed literature demonstrates that code-switching, when used strategically, supports key dimensions of speaking performance, including fluency, coherence, and communicative effectiveness, while exerting minimal negative influence on grammatical accuracy. Although learners generally perceive code-switching positively, assessment practices have not fully adapted to these insights. Notably, limited research has examined code-switching in formal oral presentations, particularly among pre-service English teachers, and few studies have explored how such practices relate to assessed speaking performance across academic levels. Responding to these gaps, the present study positions code-switching as a legitimate component of communicative competence and examines its implications for speaking assessment in multilingual English language classrooms.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted an integrative mixed-methods design to examine the effects of code-switching on the speaking performance of pre-service English teachers during classroom oral presentations. Quantitative data were used to measure speaking performance outcomes, while qualitative data provided contextual insights into learners' strategic language use and perceptions. The integration of these data sources enabled triangulation and strengthened the interpretive validity of the findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Participants and Context

Participants were Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSED) students majoring in English enrolled during the second semester of the 2024–2025 academic year at PHINMA Cagayan de Oro College, Philippines. The sample included second-year ($n = 236$) and third-year ($n = 160$) students who were regularly engaged in formal oral presentations as part of their coursework. These cohorts were selected due to their comparable instructional experiences and relevance as pre-service teachers.

Sampling

A total enumeration approach was employed for classroom observations and qualitative data collection to capture naturally occurring code-switching practices across cohorts. For quantitative analysis, a purposive subset of presentation data was selected based on complete audio recordings and full inter-rater agreement, ensuring reliability and comparability of speaking performance scores (Taherdoost, 2016).

Instruments

Data was collected using four instruments. A classroom observation checklist documented the types, contexts, and perceived effects of code-switching during presentations. A speaking performance rating sheet, adapted from the IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors, assessed fluency, coherence, and grammatical accuracy. Audio and video recordings supported accurate transcription and verification of spoken data. A semi-structured focus group discussion (FGD) guide elicited students' perceptions and strategic considerations regarding code-switching.

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Data Collection

Data collection involved three classroom observation sessions during group oral presentations, with each group presenting for approximately 15–20 minutes. Speaking performances were independently rated by two trained raters, and averaged scores were used for analysis. A focus group discussion with 15 volunteer participants from both year levels was conducted within one week of the observations to capture immediate reflections on language use.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Welch's independent samples t-test to examine differences in speaking performance across year levels. Qualitative data from observations and FGDs were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns related to the functions and perceived effects of code-switching. Findings from both strands were integrated during interpretation to provide a comprehensive account of the phenomenon.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection. Informed consent was secured from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained through anonymized coding of data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examined how code-switching functions during oral presentations and how it relates to speaking performance among pre-service English teachers. Findings from classroom observations, speaking performance ratings, and focus group discussions (FGDs) are integrated below to present a coherent account of the communicative, linguistic, and assessment-related dimensions of codeswitching.

Functions and Frequency of Code-Switching in Oral Presentations

Classroom observations revealed that code-switching was a systematic and strategic practice rather than a random alternation of languages. Among the observed types, intra-sentential code-switching occurred most frequently, particularly during explanation and clarification of complex concepts. Intersentential switching appeared at discourse boundaries, such as transitions between major points, while tag-switching was used sparingly for emphasis or audience engagement.

These patterns align with prior findings that bilingual speakers tend to switch languages at structurally and pragmatically appropriate points (Poplack, 1980; Aquino, 2022). In the present study, codeswitching was most commonly employed to (a) clarify technical terms, (b) emphasize key ideas, and (c) sustain audience engagement—functions consistently observed in multilingual ESL classrooms (Villanueva & Gamiao, 2022; Ilarde et al., 2024). The predominance of meaning-oriented switching supports sociocultural perspectives that view language alternation as a cognitive scaffold facilitating comprehension and interaction (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf et al., 2023).

Code-Switching and Speaking Performance

Fluency and Coherence

Across observed presentations, strategic code-switching contributed positively to fluency and discourse continuity. Students who alternated languages judiciously demonstrated fewer extended pauses and were able to maintain the flow of speech when encountering lexical or conceptual difficulty. Rather than interrupting communication, code-switching functioned as a compensatory strategy that enabled speakers to sustain real-time oral production.

This observation was reinforced by FGD data, where students reported that code-switching allowed them to “continue speaking without getting stuck” and made their delivery feel more “natural” and “interactive.” These findings are consistent with research indicating that code-switching can reduce cognitive load and support spontaneous speech in multilingual speakers (Noorbar & Mamaghani, 2023; Macaro, 2020).

In terms of coherence, language alternation did not disrupt logical sequencing or message clarity. On the contrary, students often used their first language to rephrase or reinforce key points, thereby enhancing audience understanding. This supports previous claims that coherence in multilingual speech is shaped not by language uniformity, but by pragmatic organization and audience adaptation (Auer, 1998; Giles & Ogay, 2007).

Grammatical Accuracy

Observed instances of grammatical interference associated with code-switching were minimal and did not substantially affect intelligibility. Speakers generally maintained grammatical integrity within English segments, switching languages at syntactically permissible points. This finding challenges deficit-oriented views that equate code-switching with grammatical weakness and aligns with studies demonstrating that bilingual speakers can manage multiple linguistic systems without compromising accuracy (Lee & Lim, 2020; Ilarde et al., 2024).

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While isolated cases of overreliance on the first language were noted, these did not characterize the majority of performances. Overall, the data suggest that strategic code-switching supports meaningmaking without significantly undermining grammatical performance, particularly when speakers demonstrate metalinguistic awareness.

Comparison of Speaking Performance Across Year Levels

Quantitative analysis revealed that third-year students obtained slightly higher mean speaking performance scores than second-year students; however, Welch's independent samples t-test indicated no statistically significant difference between the two groups. This suggests that year level alone did not substantially influence speaking performance when students engaged in codeswitching during oral presentations.

This result aligns with previous research showing that speaking development in ESL contexts is often incremental and non-linear, especially when learners are exposed to similar instructional practices and assessment criteria across academic levels (Saito & Plonsky, 2019; Bernardo & Gonzales, 2020). From a sociocultural perspective, students across year levels may operate within comparable zones of proximal development when performing similar communicative tasks under shared classroom conditions (Lantolf et al., 2023).

Notably, qualitative findings indicate that both second-year and third-year students exhibited comparable levels of strategic language use, suggesting that communicative effectiveness was shaped more by discourse management and audience awareness than by academic seniority. This supports arguments that speaking competence cannot be inferred solely from year level or proficiency labels, but must be understood in relation to contextualized language use (Sert, 2021; Rose & McKinley, 2023).

Learner Perceptions and Affective Dimensions of Code-Switching

FGD findings revealed that students generally perceived code-switching as a facilitative and confidence-enhancing strategy. Participants reported that alternating languages reduced speaking anxiety, fostered audience connection, and allowed them to express ideas more effectively. These affective benefits mirror findings from Philippine and international studies linking code-switching with increased participation and reduced communicative apprehension (Delos Reyes & Dizon, 2022; Sholikhah & Isnaini, 2024).

At the same time, some students expressed concern about potential negative evaluation in formal academic contexts, particularly when code-switching was perceived as excessive. This tension reflects the persistence of monolingual assessment ideologies, even within multilingual classrooms (Botes & Mkhize, 2022). Such concerns underscore the need for clearer pedagogical guidance and assessment criteria that distinguish strategic from unregulated code-switching.

Integrative Interpretation and Assessment Implications

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative findings position code-switching as a legitimate communicative resource that supports fluency, coherence, and audience engagement while exerting minimal negative influence on grammatical accuracy. The absence of significant performance differences across year levels further suggests that effective speaking is less dependent on academic progression and more closely tied to strategic language use and communicative competence.

These findings challenge monolingual assumptions embedded in many speaking assessment frameworks and highlight the importance of context-sensitive evaluation practices. When codeswitching is treated solely as an error, assessments risk overlooking learners' pragmatic skill, discourse control, and sociolinguistic awareness. Conversely, recognizing strategic code-switching allows for a more valid representation of multilingual speakers' communicative ability, particularly in teacher education contexts where future educators must navigate linguistically diverse classrooms.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of code-switching in the speaking performance of pre-service English teachers during classroom oral presentations in a multilingual Philippine context. Drawing on an integrative mixed-methods design, the findings demonstrate that code-switching functions as a strategic communicative resource rather than a linguistic deficiency. Students employed language alternation purposefully to clarify complex ideas, sustain fluency, maintain discourse coherence, and engage their audience, with minimal negative impact on grammatical accuracy.

Quantitative results revealed no statistically significant difference in speaking performance between second-year and third-year English majors, despite slightly higher mean scores among more advanced students. This finding suggests that speaking competence in multilingual academic settings develops incrementally and is shaped less by academic year level than by strategic language use, discourse management, and audience awareness. Qualitative evidence further showed that students across year levels demonstrated comparable metalinguistic awareness in their use of code-switching, reinforcing the view that communicative effectiveness cannot be inferred solely from proficiency labels or academic progression.

Importantly, learners' perceptions highlighted both the facilitative and affective dimensions of codeswitching. While students viewed code-switching as a means to reduce anxiety and enhance expressiveness, some expressed concern about potential negative

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evaluation in formal academic contexts. This tension reflects the continued influence of monolingual assessment ideologies, even within multilingual classrooms where language alternation is a natural and functional practice.

Overall, the findings challenge deficit-oriented views of code-switching and support a reconceptualization of speaking competence as a context-sensitive, multilingual construct. When evaluated through this lens, code-switching emerges as an indicator of communicative adaptability and pragmatic control rather than as a marker of inadequate English proficiency.

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