

# Focusing on Code Switching: *Educators' Perceptions in Assessing Learners' Foreign Language Proficiency*

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**Abstract**—*In Indonesia, educators usually apply more than one code in the EFL classroom as an alternative way to support language learning activities. This issue is known as code-switching. This research focused on investigating educators' perceptions of assessing learners' foreign language proficiency. Particularly, it aimed at finding the educators' attitudes toward code-switching, factors influencing the educators' code-switching within the class and the functions of the educators' code-switching toward learners' foreign language proficiency. This research employed a qualitative method. Observations and questionnaires were carried out to obtain the data. Those data were analyzed by using descriptive analysis following Knight's (1992) framework for assessing speaking skills. Participants of this research were ten educators in Senior High School selected by purposive sampling. The analysis shows that educators have a positive attitude toward code-switching, employ code-switching to convey meaning. The analysis also shows that learners' foreign language proficiency can easily improve through their understanding of switching as an appropriate way to explain materials, teach new vocabularies and encourage learners' participant in classroom activities. This study contributes to how code-switching is applied for effective teaching and learning.*

**Keywords:** *code-switching, educators' perceptions, foreign language proficiency*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the EFL setting, Educators usually apply more than one language with specific purposes. This kind of phenomenon, as known as code-switching, comes up with a disputed matter related to the impact of the students' achievement in classroom activities. Code-switching used to be a matter for a few specialists in the 1950s and 1960s, of peripheral importance for linguistics as a whole (Auer, 2002, p. 1). However, according to linguists' point of views, who study language objectively, code-switching is viewed as an index of bilingual proficiency, where it provides a unique window on the structural outcomes of language contact and can be studied as a reflection of social constructs and of the cognitive mechanisms that control language switching (Bullock & Torribio, 2009, p. 1). Through many perspectives of study, code-switching can only be properly understood. Concisely, it shows how sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic,

grammatical and developmental aspects of code-switching are all interdependent, and findings in each area are crucial to others (Chloros, 2009).

The Code-switching phenomenon is widely observed by some researchers (Ahmad & Jusoff, 2009; Liebscher and Dailey-O'cain, 2005; Sert, 2005). The latest research comes from Gustavsson and Karakitsos (2019), their study was to investigate the teacher-student and in-service teacher beliefs about using code-switching in the English language classroom. The results showed that in-service teachers need to reflect on how and why they use code-switching while teacher education programs need to acknowledge multilingual strategies and make students aware of when such strategies are beneficial to learning, and when they are not. Yulandari, Muhaimi, and Azis (2008) also give a contribution to the code-switching phenomenon. They tried finding out about the most frequently used type and the function of code-switching, also the implication of code-switching towards the teaching and learning situation. The finding showed that there were two functions of code-switching found in this study, they were translation and communicative function which included motivating, giving feedback, checking comprehension, joking, and expressing the state of mind.

Based on the previous researches above, we can see that all of them covered the code-switching phenomena occur in the classroom and focused on the teachers' and students' beliefs without having focus attention on the teachers' perceptions only and digging deeply those perceptions in assessing students speaking skill. Thus, to fill in the gap, this research concerns the educators' perceptions in assessing the learners' foreign language proficiency. More specifically, this study attempts to seek for educators' perceptions in assessing learners' foreign language proficiency and the educators' perceptions in assessing learners' foreign language proficiency.

### *Code-Switching*

Dealing with the meaning of code-switching, many researchers (Ahmad & Jusoff 2009; Arthur, 1996; Moore, 2002) point out their perspectives about the advantages and disadvantages of code-switching itself. In code-switching, a speaker can replace even one single word or a whole sentence to keep the conversation flowing (Ustunel, 2016). Besides, Wardaugh (2006, p. 101) points out that code-switching is a process whenever the speakers decide to switch from one code

to another or to mix codes even within sometimes very short utterances and thereby create a new code in a process. Code-switching can be assumed as an appropriate way which is done by speakers to convey meaning, as stated by Meyerhoff (126, p. 116) that code-switching is an alternation between varieties, or codes, across sentences or clause boundaries. Poplack (1980) cited in Romaine (1995, p. 122-123) states that the types of code-switching are included: a) tag switching, b) inter-sentential switching and c) intra-sentential switching.

EFL setting shows how educators speak the mixed language and they also switch back and forth between two languages immediately. Foreign language educators come as guidance to convey language learning, both directly through talk-in-interaction, and indirectly through teachers' facilitation of peer and/or group interactions or autonomous learning opportunities through classroom activities (Ustunel, 2016, p. 2). Besides, Auer (2002, p. 3) stated that the dominant perspectives on code-switching taken in research have been either sociolinguistic or grammar. Besides, code-switching was formally used to do functions like introducing, explaining, commenting, practicing, the target language, and so forth (Gulzar, 2010). Then, Paramesvaran and Lim (2018) say that in EFL settings, code-switching often used as keyword translations, repetitions, and explanations.

Code-switching is close related to students' speaking skills. However, in assessing speaking skills, teachers usually use an assessment rubric. One of the assessment rubrics comes from Knight (1992), he points out that there are eight lists of assessment criteria, such as a) grammar, b) vocabulary, c) pronunciation, d) fluency, e) conversational skill, f) sociolinguistic, g) non-verbal and h) content.

**II. METHOD**

In obtaining the data, this research used a qualitative method to investigate the educators' perceptions in assessing learners' foreign language proficiency. Particularly, to know educators' attitudes toward code-switching and factors influencing the educators' code-switching within the class and the functions of the educators' code-switching toward learners' foreign language proficiency. Before conducting the data, this research must decide the way to take the sample. The term sampling, as used in research, refers to the process of selecting the individuals who will participate (e.g., be observed or questioned) in a research study (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012, p. 99). Purposive sampling was used as a tool to select the participants because the researcher selects the sample based on the purpose of the research and refers to the data that the researcher needs. As stated by Fraenkel et al. (2012, p. 99) that in purposive sampling researchers do not simply study whoever is available but rather use their judgment to select a sample that they believe, based on prior information, will provide the data they need. The Participants of the study consist of ten teachers of Senior high schools in Bandung which have been teaching for several years as English Teachers.

In collecting the data, this research used observation and questionnaire. Two hours of each class were observed by the

researcher. This observation was conducted to know the interaction between teachers and students, how teachers used code-switching in class and how it was related to assessing students' English foreign language proficiency. During this observation, the researcher took notes to know how code-switching happens and how often code-switching occurs during classroom activities. Before the researcher did the next step of collecting the data, the researcher checked the validity and reliability of the question before the questionnaires were given to the teachers. Here is the result of the validity test and reliability test:

**1. Validity test**

A validity test was conducted to know whether the questionnaires were valid or not. If  $r_{\text{arithmetic}} > r_{\text{table}}$ , the questionnaires were valid and if  $r_{\text{arithmetic}} < r_{\text{table}}$ , the questionnaire were not valid. For this research,  $r_{\text{table}}$  is 0,632. Using SPSS, the result showed that all the questionnaires were valid.

**2. Reliability test**

A reliability test was conducted to know whether the questionnaire was reliable or not. If  $\alpha > r_{\text{table}}$ , the questionnaires were reliable and if  $\alpha < r_{\text{table}}$ , the questionnaire were not reliable. For this research,  $r_{\text{table}}$  is 0,632. Using SPSS, the result in Table I. showed that:

TABLE I. RELIABILITY STATISTICS

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.860	8

After all the questions were valid and reliable to be used, those questions were given to the teachers to identify their perceptions' in assessing students' English foreign language proficiency. The questionnaires were given in closed-ended questions. Those questions consist of eight criteria of assessment rubric from Knight (1992) such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and conversational skill, sociolinguistic skill, non-verbal and content. After the teachers have finished filling all the questions, then the researcher collected all the data and analyzed those data through descriptive analysis by using SPSS.

**III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

**A. Findings**

The analysis reveals that ten teachers in Senior High Schools often switch their codes between two languages; English and Bahasa. Through observation and questionnaire, the educators' attitudes toward code-switching, the factors of educators' code-switching within the class and the function of educators' code-switching in assessing students' foreign language proficiency can be found out. In observation, it was found out that teachers have a good attitude toward code-switching, it reflected how they always switch their language for specific purposes in conveying meaning in classroom activities. It is in line with statement come from Jingxia (2010) that code-switching takes a positive role in the process of teaching and learning of the English language. Those specific

purposes include how to explain materials, to make students understand deeply about what teachers have explained due to the common phenomenon that each student has different abilities in accepting the material, so it comes as an appropriate way to be used. According to Narayan (2019), code-switching can be accepted as an optimistic language learning strategic tool in classroom discourse. Besides, Mahdi and Almalki (2019) note that the code-switching in classroom activities concern on the students' need and assist low-level learners and to facilitate different language tasks. Then, dealing with vocabulary acquisition teachers used code-switching to translate the difficult meaning of vocabulary. Besides, teachers used code-switching also to check students' comprehension about materials that have explained and to build closeness between teachers and students. As stated by Rahman, Othman, and Unin (2019) that most of the lecturers used code-switching in the context of interactional, pedagogical and administrative as there is a need to make students feel comfortable, to understand the subject matter better, to take instructions.

Furthermore, the result of the questionnaire showed that in assessing learners' foreign language proficiency, the teachers assumed that some assessment criteria have been improved. The data can be seen below:

1. Grammar

In terms of grammatical structure, several students' showed their understanding of grammar. It reflected how they can construct good sentences when they speak. On the other hand, several students still had difficulties in constructing sentences with good grammatically structure (see Fig.1).

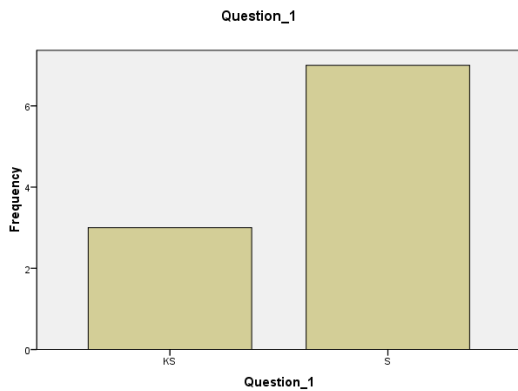


Fig. 1. The teachers' perception in assessing learners' foreign language proficiency in a grammar context

2. Vocabulary

In terms of vocabulary mastery, students were able to use various words in speaking, explored to find new lexicons (See Fig. 2).

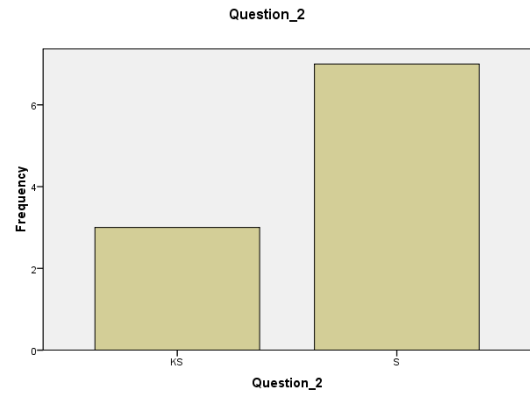


Fig. 2. Fig. II. The teachers' perception in assessing learners' foreign language proficiency in vocabulary context

3. Pronunciation

In terms of pronunciation, students show their ability to pronoun words better, while they still had difficulties pronouncing difficult or uncommon words (See Fig. 3).

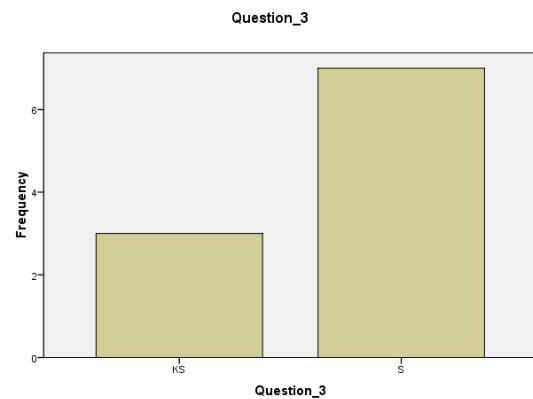


Fig. 3. Fig. III. The teachers' perception in assessing learners' foreign language proficiency in pronunciation context

4. Fluency

In terms of fluency, the teachers show their perceptions that students' fluency in English is good enough. Although, their skill at this point did not show good improvement student performances can be identified from their improvement in their fluency (See Fig. 4).

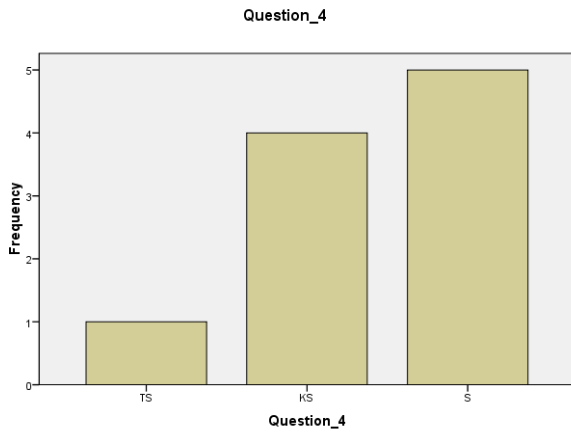


Fig. 4. Fig. IV. The teachers' perception in assessing learners' foreign language proficiency in fluency context

5. Conversational skill

In terms of conversational skill, several students showed that they developed the topic of their speaking, initiative to control the topic and maintain the conversation (See Fig. 5).

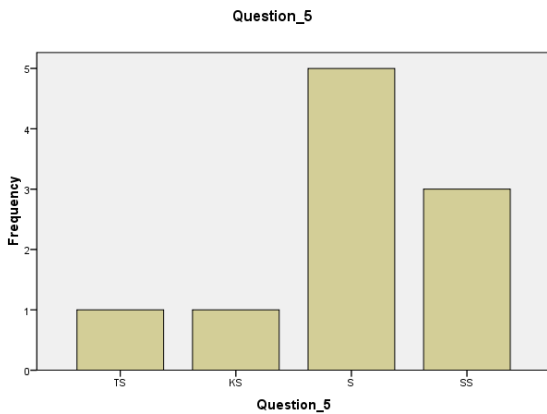


Fig. 5. Fig. V. The teachers' perception in assessing learners' foreign language proficiency in a conversational skill

6. Sociolinguistic skill

In terms of sociolinguistic skills, most of the students were able to distinguish between register and style in formal and informal situations, persuasive or conciliatory in speaking. On the other hand, several students experienced difficulties distinguishing those situations (See Fig. 6).

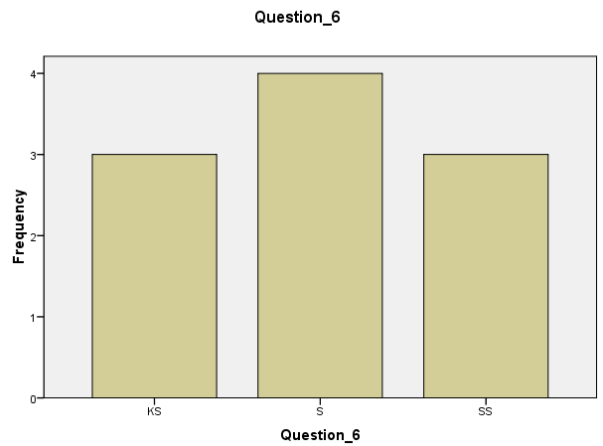


Fig. 6. Fig. VI. The teachers' perception in assessing learners' foreign language proficiency in the sociolinguistic skill context

7. Non-verbal context

In terms of non-verbal context, students show their good self-confidence in speaking performance including eye-contact, body gesture, and facial expressions. Teachers' code-switching in class encouraged students' participation in classroom activities, they motivated to try speaking even they still switch their language but it can help their proficiency in speaking English (See Fig. 7).

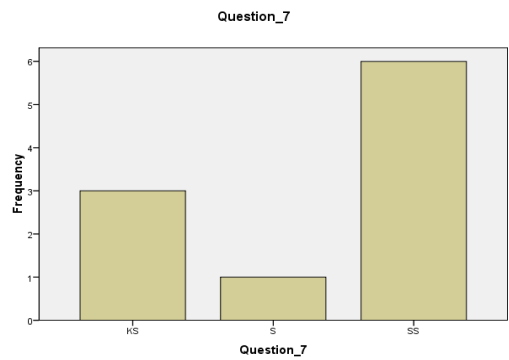


Fig. 7. Fig. VII. The teachers' perception in assessing learners' foreign language proficiency in non-verbal context

8. Content

Related to the content, the students show good point in giving arguments which are coherence and relevance to the topic (See Fig. 8).

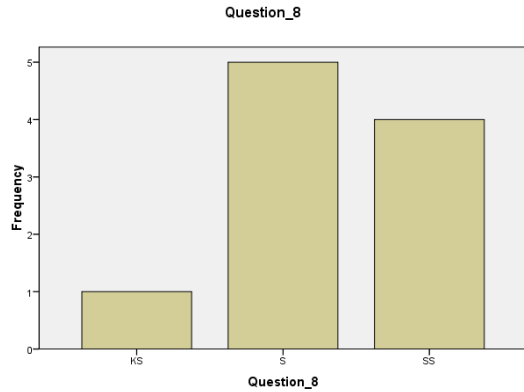


Fig. 8. Fig. VIII. The teachers' perception in assessing learners' foreign language proficiency in content context

### B. Discussion

Based on the findings, it can be revealed that educators have many perceptions in assessing learners' foreign language proficiency related to their code-switching within the class. Educators have a good attitude toward code-switching and they do code-switching for several reasons such as explaining materials, make students understand deeply about what teachers have explained, deal with vocabulary acquisition for which the teachers use code-switching to translate difficult meanings of vocabulary. Besides, the teachers use code-switching to check students' comprehension about material that had been explained. Furthermore, in assessing students' language proficiency, the teachers assess that most of point in speaking skills rubrics are completely mastered by students, such as a) grammar; the students can construct good sentences when they speak because they get deep understanding about the material that have been delivered through teachers' code switching within the class, b) vocabulary; the students are able to use various words in speaking, c) pronunciation, the most students' ability to pronoun words is good enough, while some students still got obstacle to pronoun some uncommon words, d) fluency; the students' fluency in speaking is better, there is little hesitation before or during they are speaking in classroom, e) conservational skill, in developing the topic of speaking, the teachers often find that it was easy to do due the students can develop the topic of their speaking, initiative to control the topic and maintenance the conversation, f) sociolinguistic skill, the students can easily distinguish whether they have to be formal or informal in different occasion in classroom activities, g) non-verbal context, students performances when they are speaking in front of class are also assessed by the teachers. It showed that most of the students have good self-confidence in speaking performance, they use eye contact to communicate with the audience, the body gesture and facial expression to make the meaning of their utterances are easy to be understood by the audience and the last is h) content; students' performance showed that they have good point in giving arguments which are coherence and relevance to the topic, it can be done because the students have

good understanding in material after the teachers explain the material used code switching.

### IV. CONCLUSION

In classroom activities, code-switching can be used as an appropriate way to convey meaning. This research tried to investigate educators' perceptions in assessing learners' foreign language proficiency". Particularly, it aimed at finding the educators' attitudes toward code-switching, factors influencing the educators' code-switching within the class and the functions of the educators' code-switching toward learners' foreign language proficiency. From the data findings, it can be seen that the teachers have a good attitude toward the use of code-switching. The factors that influence the teachers' code-switching within the class, such as explaining materials to make students understand deeply about what teachers have explained, to translate the difficult and uncommon meaning of vocabulary. Besides, teachers used code-switching also to check students' comprehension of materials that have explained. Teachers' perceptions in assessing learners' foreign language proficiency lead to the advantages and disadvantages of code-switching itself. Code-switching can help students in the context of vocabulary mastery, conservational skill, non-verbal and content while the students do not show good improving on grammar, pronunciation, fluency and sociolinguistic skill.

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