Open Access Research Journal of
Multidisciplinary Studies
Journals home page: https://oarjpublication/journals/oarjms/
ISSN: 2783-0268 (Online)

OARJ OPEN ACCESS RESEARCH JOURNALS

(RESEARCH ARTICLE)

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MAKING MEANING OF CODE-SWITCHING: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH TEACHERS' INSTRUCTIONAL DECISION-MAKING PRACTICES AT PARAÑAQUE NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL-MAIN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Open Access Research Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies, 2026, 12(02), 044–051

Publication history: Received on 30 September 2026; revised on 09 November 2026; accepted on 11 November 2026

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.53022/oarjms.2026.12.2.0047

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ABSTRACT

This study endeavored to explore the experiences of senior high school English teachers in utilizing code-switching as an instructional strategy in multilingual classrooms. In the context of the Philippines, where English and Filipino coexisted alongside various regional languages, teachers navigated complex linguistic environments to facilitate effective learning. Grounded in the challenges of teaching English as a second language, the research examined how educators made instructional decisions regarding language use and how code-switching shaped classroom discourse and student comprehension. Using a qualitative research design, the study gathered insights from selected senior high school English teachers through in-depth interviews and classroom observations. The findings revealed that code-switching was not merely a spontaneous linguistic behavior but a deliberate pedagogical tool employed to clarify complex concepts, maintain student engagement, and bridge gaps in understanding. Teachers reported that alternating between English and the students' first languages enhanced comprehension, especially when dealing with abstract or unfamiliar content. Moreover, the study highlighted that code-switching supported inclusive learning by acknowledging students' linguistic backgrounds and reducing language anxiety. However, it also identified certain tensions, such as the need to balance English proficiency development with the practical benefits of using the mother tongue. Teachers expressed concerns that overreliance on code-switching could potentially limit students' exposure to English. The study concluded that code-switching played a significant role in shaping effective classroom language practices in multilingual settings. It recommended that educators adopt a strategic and reflective approach to code-switching, supported by clear institutional guidelines and professional development. Ultimately, the research contributed to a deeper understanding of language use in education and offered practical implications for improving English language teaching in diverse linguistic contexts.

Keywords: Code-switching, English teachers, English language, Language teaching

1 INTRODUCTION

The study on code-switching, as a linguistic activity, has received a considerable attention among researchers and language teachers alike (Sabouh & Meygle, 2025; Familgan & Adriano, 2026; Khurshid et al., 2025). The traditional interests in the said activity gain an extensive focus of attention given the fact that language does not only serve as a mode of communication but also provide wider implications in the community or country e.g. a means of upgrading and

boosting socioeconomic stature or enhancing and facilitating international relations (Xhemaili, 2025; Efendi, et.al., 2025).

In the Philippine educational contexts, code-switching has become a practice among English teachers in dealing with the students to make the discussions or discourse in class more purposive and that students can understand the lessons that involve concepts or notions are seem perplexing for the students. In such case, code-switching or a process of alternation between English and students' first language/s takes place.

The body of literature provides a bonanza of studies concerning the use of code-switching. In multilingual classrooms, especially in linguistically diverse regions such as the Philippines, Southeast Asia, South Africa, and East Africa, code-switching is understood not merely as the temporary use of different languages but also as a pedagogical strategy through which teachers addressed students' communication and cognitive needs by drawing on their linguistic resources to support academic learning (Wagan et al., 2025).

Susiawati et al. (2025) identified forms of code-switching. The first is inter-sentential switching, which occurred at sentence boundaries. Second, intra-sentential switching, which occurred within a sentence. Third,tag-switching, which involved the insertion of short expressions from another language. And, fourth, code-mixing, which involved incorporating words from one language into another.

Interestingly, the diversity of languages present in a speech community has compelled teachers to utilize code-switching so that students can have a grasp of what is taught in English. For instance, Ajmi et al. (2026) found that teachers used code-switching not only to explain concepts but also to manage classrooms and provide emotional support, while learners used it to address language difficulties and sustain cognitive engagement. This finding is in conjunction with what Putri et al. (2025) identified. It was posited that code-switching provide several instructional benefits such as, but not limited to: explaining concepts, checking students' understanding, providing feedback, repeating key points, clarifying messages, and presenting concrete examples. The study also identified twelve classroom management functions, such as gaining students' attention, organizing classroom activities, easing tension, re-engaging disinterested learners, and maintaining the continuity of classroom interactions. These findings indicated that appropriately timed code-switching addressed not only students' cognitive needs but also the affective and behavioral dimensions of teaching and learning (Batool et al., 2025).

Moreover, students reported that using their mother tongue helped them address comprehension difficulties, understand complex grammatical structures and vocabulary, and manage language-related anxiety. These functions enabled them to sustain cognitive engagement and participate more actively in classroom activities (Wagan et al., 2025).

In line with this, Asra et al. (2024) found that code-switching activities strengthened students' metalinguistic awareness, or their ability to reflect consciously on language structures and functions beyond the immediate demands of a particular content area.

It has been found that during classroom discussions, teachers used code-switching to clarify difficult concepts, sustain conversations, and encourage students who might otherwise have remained silent because of limited English proficiency. During collaborative group work, code-switching supported peer interaction, clarified instructions, and enabled teachers to provide corrective feedback when students experienced difficulties understanding lesson content (Batool et al., 2025).

However, despite the identified advantages of using code-switching in classrooms, there are studies that tell otherwise. In a phenomenological study involving Pakistani schoolteachers indicated that teachers generally felt comfortable using code-switching and regarded it as a practical response to students' linguistic diversity. Nevertheless, some teachers expressed concern that excessive reliance on code-switching could weaken students' English proficiency. code-switching provided immediate instructional support and facilitated comprehension, but excessive dependence on first-language assistance could potentially restrict opportunities for developing second-language skills (Farooq et al., 2026).

In another view, Wang & Rahman (2025) asseverated that using code-switching in classes frequently could lead to teacher-centered environment rather than student-centered which would allow students to have autonomy with their learning. Another aspect taken into consideration is the debilitating and languishing competence in English proficiency. Thus, more frequent code-switching is associated with weaker English academic outcomes, suggesting that excessive language alternation might limit proficiency development (Bardinas et al., 2025). Likewise, the frequent use of code-switching could unintentionally lead students to perceive English as supplementary rather than essential for academic success, potentially weakening their motivation to develop English proficiency (Habintwali et al., 2024).

In effect, this practice of code-switching raised pedagogical questions regarding whether deliberate code-switching served as a means of developing English language competence or potentially hindered its development (Caridad & Chico, 2026)

To resolve this dichotomy in the use of code-switching thereby ensuring that balance is observed, teachers strategize in their English classes. Alignment among institutional guidelines, teacher preparation programs, curricular expectations, and professional support mechanisms (Alsalami, 2025). Strategic implementation and regulation were consequently understood as essential components of effective multilingual instruction rather than as efforts to eliminate language alternation. Corollary,teachers strategically implemented and teacher-directed code-switching could benefit language learners by encouraging active participation, strengthening confidence, and reducing language-related anxiety (Sabouh & Meygle, 2025). Consequently, it is necessary to examine the contexts of the learning environment , taking into considerations the institutional policies, students holistic needs, and the like. Thus, when to use code-switching may serve as a guiding principle for teachers to put in motion in their classes.

Insofar as the Philippines is concerned, it has been held that English proficiency contributed to employment opportunities, access to information, and lifelong learning, the development of English language skills remained an important consideration in pursuing the country's long-term development vision (National Economic and Development Authority [NEDA], 2024).

Similarly, the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II) identified continuing concerns regarding instructional quality and learning outcomes and emphasized the need for approaches that strengthened teaching effectiveness and student achievement (Second Congressional Commission on Education, 2026). These policy priorities provided a national context for examining instructional strategies that addressed students' diverse linguistic needs while supporting the development of English proficiency.

The commitment of the Philippines in increasing students' competencies is beyond cavil. None other than the 1987 Constitution Philippine states that the State recognizes the vital role of the youth in nation-building and shall promote and protect their intellectual well-being. The government in effect, commits itself to provide quality education at all levels and take necessary steps to make such education accessible to all. Comparably, as the Philippines is a member of community of states, it thus adheres to the notion as provided for in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 emphasized the importance of inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Notwithstanding the pronounced commitments and identified studies above,a gapspringsthereof that necessitate a further investigation. Existing studies reported that strategic code-switching could enhance learner confidence, comprehension, and engagement, limited attention had been given to teachers' lived experiences and the instructional significance they attributed to this practice in multilingual senior high school classrooms.

Accordingly, the following objectives are sought to be achieved in this study *viz*:

- To determine pedagogical decision-making processes and lived experiences of senior high school English teachers in using code-switching in the language classroom;
- To examine how teachers perceived and utilized the pedagogical affordances and limitations of code-switching across various instructional activities, such as group discussions and oral presentations;
- To understand how teachers construct and regulate their code-switching practices through moment-to-moment instructional decisions; and
- To develop an empirically grounded typology of strategic code-switching in English language instruction

2 METHODOLOGY

The research employed phenomenological qualitative research design. Ten Senior High School (SHS) English teachers participated in the conduct of the investigation. All of whom were teaching grade SHS 11 students at Parañaque National High School-Main, Schools Division of Parañaque City.Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Using NVivo or ATLAS.ti software, data were digitized and organized. Finally, anchored on and followingwith the Braun and Clarke's (2021) Reflexive Thematic Analysis constructs, data were examined,analyzed and validated for the productions of themes pertinent to the study.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that the participants regarded code-switching as an instructional resource that helped address students' comprehension difficulties and supported their participation in classroom activities. However, they also recognized the need to maintain English as the primary language of instruction to provide students with opportunities

to practice and develop their English communication skills. Their experiences reflected continuing efforts to balance linguistic support and English-language exposure, particularly when students encountered difficulties expressing their ideas, understanding unfamiliar concepts, or participating in oral activities.

The analysis further revealed that the participants employed different strategies to regulate classroom language use. These included establishing clear language expectations, allowing Filipino for clarification, implementing English-only policies during selected activities, providing peer assistance, giving constructive feedback, and using positive reinforcement. The participants' accounts also highlighted the importance of creating a supportive classroom environment in which students felt encouraged to communicate despite grammatical errors and initial hesitation. Differences in their approaches reflected their interpretations of students' needs, classroom expectations, and instructional objectives.

In particular, the analysis of the participants' responses revealed four major themes: (1) Establishing Clear Language Expectations and Consistent Classroom Guidelines; (2) Encouraging Student Engagement Through a Supportive and Nonthreatening Learning Environment; (3) Balancing English-Language Practice with the Need for Linguistic Support; and (4) Promoting Motivation, Positive Language Behavior, and Gradual Development of Confidence. These themes demonstrated how the participants understood the relationship between classroom language policies, student engagement, motivation, behavior, and the overall learning environment.

The participants generally perceived code-switching as a purposeful instructional strategy rather than merely an alternation between English and Filipino. They described using Filipino when students experienced difficulty understanding abstract concepts, unfamiliar vocabulary, classroom instructions, and discussion questions. Their accounts indicated that code-switching became particularly meaningful when English-only explanations appeared insufficient to facilitate understanding. Thus, as propounded by Participants (P) stated:

"One memorable experience was when students struggled to understand an abstract concept in English. After briefly explaining it in Filipino, they became more confident and were able to participate in the discussion. It showed me that language can either become a barrier or a bridge to learning. I see code switching as a bridge between students existing knowledge and new English concepts."— P1

"I was discussing a specific concept in English when I noticed my students' facial expressions. It seemed like they were trying to comprehend what I was saying. However, when I switched to Filipino, I saw a sense of ease on their faces. It's a way to make discussion more meaningful and comfortable for students."— P2

"I remember every time I explain a difficult English concept in my subject several times but some students are confused. So, when I explain it in Tagalog or in Filipino language, they understood it and they were able to participate."— P3

"Yes, I've noticed a lot of improvements in terms of comprehension when I allow them to speak Filipino language."— P10

The findings support what Ajmi et al. (2026) asserted that teachers used code-switching to enable the students to have support in their understanding with the subject-matter presented by the teacher. It likewise allows the students to be emotionally supported.

One significant meaning that emerged from their accounts was code-switching as a bridge to comprehension. This corroborates what Batool et al. (2025) stated that code-switching continuity of interests among students thereby their comprehension or understanding increases. The participants recalled instances when students appeared confused or struggled to respond during English discussions. As aptly stated:

"One memorable experience I encountered was when my students had a hard time understanding my lesson, specifically the time when I asked them a question. The students were challenged to understand it in English. That's why I briefly explained the difficult part using the Filipino language, and they got more comfortable in explaining and participating."— P6

Another important meaning concerned code-switching as a means of building confidence and encouraging participation. This finding is in parallel with what Sabouh & Meygle, (2025) stated that students who code-switch in their class tend to exhibit linguistic confidence and become participative in class.

The participants described how students appeared more comfortable asking questions, answering classroom activities, and engaging in discussions when explanations became more accessible. Thus:

"After briefly explaining it in Filipino, they became more confident and were able to participate in the discussion."— P1

"One memorable experience was when the student struggled to understand a difficult concept explained in English. I briefly used Filipino to clarify the main idea, then provided an English example. Then the students became more responsive and started asking questions."— P10

"So, I explained it again in Filipino, and after that, they became more engaged and were able to answer the questions."— P5

The participants' accounts also revealed that code-switching involved responsive instructional decision-making. They explained that their language choices were influenced by students' facial expressions, repeated questions, comprehension difficulties, and levels of participation.

On the part of the teachers, nonetheless, the utilization of code-switching provides professional growth and changing beliefs about effective English teaching. Some teachers initially believed that consistently speaking English demonstrated their competence as English teachers. Through their experiences, however, they came to understand that effective instruction involved more than maintaining English-only communication.

"At first, I thought I was robbing students of the opportunity to speak in English, but it's actually helping them understand better. It has made me a more flexible, responsive, even student-centered teacher."— P2

The lived experiences of the ten English teachers revealed that code-switching had acquired meaning as a deliberate pedagogical response to the linguistic and instructional demands of the classroom. Through their experiences, the teachers developed a more flexible understanding of English instruction, recognizing that effective teaching required not only knowledge of the target language but also the ability to make context-sensitive decisions that supported students' understanding and participation.

It has been identified that code-switching as a pedagogical practice offered important benefits while presenting challenges that required careful instructional judgment (Wagan et al., 2025). Their accounts demonstrated four interconnected meanings: improved comprehension, increased classroom participation, concerns about dependence on Filipino, and the need to differentiate language support according to students' English proficiency. As such the response by participant provides hence,

"The students become more comfortable and, at the same time, are really participative when they use Filipino during group work."— P3

Teachers who adopt the practice of code-switching understood that the same isa deliberate, responsive, and goal-oriented instructional decision shaped by students' comprehension and the objectives of classroom learning. This is pursuant to Alsalami (2025)'s assertion that teachers must weigh things when and how to use code-switching. Their accounts did not portray language alternation as an indiscriminate practice. Instead, they described a process of assessing students' needs, selecting an appropriate response, monitoring comprehension, and adjusting language use accordingly.

Concomitantly, their experiences highlighted the importance of balancing immediate comprehension with sustained opportunities for English language practice. As pointed by *participant that:*

"This made me realize that code-switching can be a double-edged sword. It can help students understand the lesson more easily, but excessive use may cause them to rely on Tagalog instead of practicing English."— P4

"As an English teacher, although Tagalog can sometimes distract learners, I realized that it can also be an effective strategy, especially when giving instructions, clarifying ideas, or emphasizing lessons that I believe are beneficial to them."— P4

Nevertheless, the findings suggested that the participants' decision-making processes were guided by their efforts to ensure that language supported rather than obstructed learning. They interpreted code-switching as most appropriate when it addressed a specific instructional need, remained proportionate to that need, and was followed by a return to English when the learning situation permitted. This result seems contrary to what Habintwali et al. (2024) posited that frequent use of code-switching would or might lead to weakening of students' English language proficiency.

"Throughout my teaching career, I have learned to use code switching more purposefully. Before, I used it mainly to make my lessons easier to understand, but now, I see it as a strategic way to support students, encourage participation, and connect lessons to their experiences."— P8

"I have learned to use code switching more purposefully based on my students' needs. It has made me a more flexible teacher who focuses on meaningful learning."— P9

Concerning the balance between using pure English and code-switching, as a continuing instructional challenge is shaped by competing but related educational goals. Their accounts demonstrated four interconnected concerns: supporting comprehension while maintaining English exposure, preventing excessive dependence on Filipino, encouraging students to communicate despite their fears of making mistakes, and developing confidence in instructional decision-making. The benefits are noted but problems likewise arise as indicated by teachers' observations:

"Students may become too dependent on Filipino and less motivated to practice English."— P6

"One concern I've noticed is that sometimes when I use Filipino to clarify something, students may choose to continue in Filipino because it's easier for them. So I have to remind them to try expressing their ideas in English."— P7

"However, I also find it challenging because students may depend too much on their first language instead of practicing English."— P8

For the solution, teachers adopt moderation practices during classroom instructions. This is to ensure that the target language is still observed and that code-switching would not be used to defeat the required outcome; that is, English proficiency or communicative competence. As vividly pointed out by participant that:

"However, I also find it challenging because students may depend too much on their first language instead of practicing English."— P8

"Some students may become too dependent on Filipino if it is used too often."— P9

"For the concerns, because we are teaching Effective Communication, my concern is that maybe they will be dependent on the use of code switching or the Filipino language during my subject or during my time."— P10

"I decide to use code switching based on my students' level of understanding, the difficulty of the topic, and the classroom situation." (P8)

"If the objective focuses on English speaking, I minimize code switching. If the objective focuses on understanding a concept, I may use it as a support." (P1)

As a teacher, I balance it. For example, the student will ask about a word or the concept, so I try to find another English word or simple terms that are suitable for the concept. I also code-switch between English and Filipino and explain it in Filipino language as well." (P10)

The following responses above indicate that teachers, as persons having first hand knowledge of the students' foundational skills and competencies in the English language, are in a proper position to determine whether or not to code-switch or otherwise. The responses also highlighted that necessity to balance the use of L1 and L2, as the circumstances may warrant.

Given the differences of the students, teachers become more flexible and that they weigh the utilization of code-switching vis-à-vis English language in relation with the lessons at hand. As aptly indicated by participants that:

"The difficult part is finding the balance between making students comfortable and still challenging them to use English. I don't want them to be afraid of speaking, but I also don't want them to automatically choose Filipino because it's easier." (P7)

"However, in most cases, other students have a dilemma in speaking English because they think that their English or grammar is grammatically incorrect." (P10)

"For instance, while I promote English and tasks that encourage language use, I also encourage Filipino when students need clarification and even for word translations."

Based on the above disquisitions culled from and in conjunction with the responses of the participants, the researcher upon validation and scrutiny, submitted the following framework-guidelines for the language teachers to utilize in their learning

environment. The guidelines is coupled with procedures thereby allowing the language teachers and other persons concerned, as the case may be, to adopt the same in practice.

The following are the guidelines:

- Guideline 1. English Shall Remain the Primary Language of Instruction
- Guideline 2. Teachers Shall Identify Learners' Needs Before Switching Languages
- Guideline 3. English-First Strategies Shall Be Attempted Before Filipino Clarification
- Guideline 4. Code-Switching Shall Be Appropriate to the Classroom Activity
- Guideline 5. A Supportive and Nonthreatening Learning Environment Shall Be Maintained
- Guideline 6. Filipino Support Shall Be Brief, Purposeful, and Gradually Reduced
- Guideline 7. Classroom Language Expectations Shall Be Communicated Clearly
- Guideline 8. The Effectiveness of Code-Switching Shall Be Monitored

The guidelines may be implemented through the following classroom process.

Step 1: Establish the language objective
Identify the purpose of the lesson,and the expected use of English
Step 2: Observe learner responses
Check comprehension, participation, questions, and task performance
Step 3: Provide the least intrusive support
Rephrase in English, give examples, use visuals, or encourage peer assistance
Step 4: Use Filipino when necessary
Briefly clarify the difficult concept,instruction, or unfamiliar term
Step 5: Return to English
Ask learners to restate, respond, or continue the activity in English when appropriate
Step 6: Evaluate and Reflect
Determine whether the support improved comprehension and whether learners resumed using English.

The implementation of these classroom guidelines was expected to promote a more purposeful and consistent approach to code-switching in English language instruction. Specifically, it was expected to:

- improve learners' access to difficult concepts and classroom instructions;
- encourage active participation and greater confidence in English communication;
- preserve meaningful opportunities for English exposure and practice;
- reduce unnecessary translation and excessive dependence on Filipino;
- strengthen teachers' instructional judgment in responding to diverse learner needs; and

support a classroom environment that balanced linguistic assistance with the development of independent English-language use.

The proposed classroom guidelines translated the findings of the study into practical recommendations for English language instruction. They recognized that effective code-switching depended on the purpose, timing, and extent of language support rather than on the mere presence or absence of Filipino. By establishing English as the primary target language while allowing brief and purposeful clarification when necessary, the guidelines sought to balance comprehension, learner confidence, classroom participation, and English-language development.

The guidelines were intended to serve as a basis for professional discussion and classroom-level implementation at Parañaque National High School – Main Senior High School. Their application should remain responsive to learners' proficiency, the objectives of each activity, and the instructional judgment of teachers. Any broader adoption should be accompanied by monitoring and evaluation to determine their suitability and effectiveness in the school context.

4 CONCLUSION

The present study revealed that teachers deliberately utilized code-switching in their classes to ensure that students especially those who are having a difficult time to grasp the lessons, can understand the discussions, clarify complex concepts, maintain student engagement, and bridge gaps in understanding. This has been found to be an effective and strategic pedagogical technique and methodology so as to enable a smooth and continuous discussion of the lessons. However, it has likewise been found that teachers modify instances when to use and allow themselves including students to employ code-switching. Hence, code-switching albeit a pedagogical tool is used as the circumstances needed it. The balance between L1 and L2 is observed by taking into considerations the context within which the use of code-

switching is warranted. In summation, the findings of this investigation although not conclusive and thus applicable to every learning environment but nonetheless provide a general view on how code-switching works in practice. It is hereby recommended that further investigations on the variable/s are desired to examine the intricacies of code-switching and its other consequences, adverse or otherwise if any, in the teaching-learning process insofar as English classes are concerned.

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