



EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF CODE-SWITCHING FUNCTIONS AND EFFECTS IN GENERAL ENGLISH CLASSES

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Abstract: This exploratory study investigated how EFL teachers perceived the functions and effects of code-switching in General English (GE) classes at a tertiary institution in Vietnam. Data were collected through a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire completed by 34 teachers and in-depth interviews with five selected participants. The findings reveal that the teachers viewed code-switching as a purposeful pedagogical tool to support students' language learning and facilitate classroom communication. They reported using code-switching to construct knowledge, manage classroom interactions, and provide emotional support. The teachers expressed positive attitudes toward code-switching in both instructional and interpersonal contexts, emphasizing its practical value in enhancing comprehension and engagement. The study suggests that code-switching is a meaningful and effective strategy in General English instruction and should be acknowledged in teacher training programs to better support EFL teaching in similar contexts.

Keywords. teachers' perceptions; code-switching; general English.

1. Introduction

Code-switching (CS), defined as the alternate use of two languages in communication, is a common practice in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom (Gumperz, 1982; Myers-Scotton, 1993). In Vietnam, where both teachers and students share Vietnamese as their first language (L1), switching between English and Vietnamese is frequently observed. Teachers often employ Vietnamese to clarify meaning, explain complex concepts, manage classroom procedures, and build rapport with students (Nguyen Quang Tien, 2012; N. T. Nguyen et al., 2016). This practice becomes especially important when learners struggle to fully grasp lessons delivered solely in English.

Research has shown that teachers' beliefs significantly influence their instructional practices (Lewis, 2001). While traditional monolingual teaching approaches advocate for the exclusive use of the target language, such approaches have been increasingly questioned,

especially in contexts where the teacher and learners share a common L1 (Rasouli & Simin, 2016). For example, Hazaymeh (2022) reported that many teachers view CS as a helpful tool for maintaining classroom control and enhancing students' comprehension. Therefore, exploring teachers' perceptions can provide important insights into how CS is strategically employed to support learning outcomes.

Although code-switching is widely practiced in Vietnam, existing studies have largely focused on secondary education or general educational settings (Nguyen Cam Nhung & Vu Van Duy, 2019; Nguyen Quang Tien, 2012; N. T. Nguyen et al., 2016). There remains a lack of research examining tertiary EFL teachers' perspectives on the pedagogical use of CS, particularly in General English (GE) courses. Understanding these perceptions is essential for determining how CS can be effectively integrated into English instruction at the university level.

This study seeks to investigate Vietnamese EFL teachers' perceptions of the functions, frequency, and perceived effects of code-switching in GE classes at the tertiary level. The findings aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of CS as a pedagogical strategy and to inform teacher training and classroom practices in similar educational contexts. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are Vietnamese EFL teachers' perceptions of the frequency and functions of code-switching in General English classes?
2. What are Vietnamese EFL teachers' perceptions of the effects of code-switching on students' learning experiences in General English classes?

2. Literature review

2.1. *Conceptualizing code and code-switching*

The term *code*, as described by Sondang and Bonik (2018), refers to a communication system that is commonly shared among members of a particular community. This system, which can be a full language or a variety such as a dialect, pidgin, or creole, serves the function of facilitating mutual understanding. The act of using such a system involves the expression of social values, beliefs, and attitudes, reflecting the identity of the users (Mabule, 2015). Understanding code as a system of linguistic signs - like English or Vietnamese - used for exchanging information enables researchers to explore how language operates within social and educational contexts (Harya, 2018; Wardhaugh, 2006).

Code-switching, which refers to the alternation between two or more languages within a single conversation, has been extensively studied as both a linguistic and sociocultural phenomenon. According to Blom and Gumperz (2000), CS functions as a strategic tool for social

interaction, enabling speakers to navigate topic shifts or accommodate interlocutors. In the educational context, CS plays a significant pedagogical role. Jingxia (2010) defined as the alternating use of the native and target language by teachers when necessary to maintain communication in foreign language classrooms. Recently, Aprilia (2023) highlights that CS often occurs for specific social or pragmatic purposes, such as clarifying meaning, managing classroom dynamics, or reducing learners' anxiety. In this study, CS specifically refers to the alternate use of the target language (TL), which is English, and the native language, Vietnamese, in EFL classrooms by Vietnamese teachers for the purpose of addressing specific pedagogical and affective functions.

2.2. *Functions of teachers' CS in language classrooms*

Ferguson (2009) identifies three primary functions of CS in the classroom, highlighting its multifaceted role as a communicative and pedagogical tool. The first function is knowledge construction, where teachers use CS to clarify concepts, reinforce vocabulary, and explain complex ideas. For instance, it serves as a bridge to facilitate understanding of technical terms or abstract concepts, making the lesson content more accessible to students. The second function is classroom management, where CS helps teachers give instructions, transition between tasks, and maintain discipline. CS ensures smooth classroom operations by providing clarity and focusing attention, particularly in multilingual settings. The third function is interpersonal relations, where switching to the L1 fosters rapport between teachers and students, reduces anxiety, and creates a supportive learning environment. This use of CS strengthens connections and encourages active participation, enhancing the overall classroom dynamic. These functions collectively underscore the importance of CS in fostering effective teaching and learning and reflect the communicative needs of teachers managing varying language proficiencies. The present study adopts Ferguson's (2009) framework as a theoretical basis for investigating the dominant CS's functions in GE classes.

2.3. *Teachers' perceptions*

Perception refers to how individuals interpret and make sense of sensory stimuli, such as what they see, hear, or understand. In education, perception is closely linked to cognition and involves higher-order processes where individuals adapt their perceptual systems to meet cognitive needs (Goldstone, 2010). Specifically, teacher perception includes the thoughts, beliefs, and opinions shaped by both personal experiences and teaching practice (Oikonomou & Patsala, 2021). For this study, "*teachers' perceptions*" refers to their thoughts, beliefs, and views, particularly regarding code-switching between English and Vietnamese in general English classes.

2.4. *General English Education at the Tertiary Level in Vietnam*

General English (GE) aims to lay the foundation for students by teaching essential grammar and communication skills necessary for interacting in everyday situations. According to Chang et.al. (2011), GE is designed to "cultivate students' interest and habits in learning English, enhance their general language competence for more accurate and fluent production and reception of English in dealing with everyday situations" (p. 271).

At the tertiary level in Vietnam, GE focuses on developing the basic language skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, alongside vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. This curriculum builds upon the English as a EFL program students encounter in high school and serves as a precursor to their specialized English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses later in their academic career.

Since the introduction of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), Vietnamese state-run universities have been tasked with revising their GE curricula, teaching materials, methodologies, and assessment practices to help non-English major students achieve at least the CEFR B1 level. This level, regarded as the "Threshold" level, indicates an independent user of the language capable of performing fundamental tasks in the language. It aligns with level 3 in Vietnam's Six-level framework for foreign language proficiency (Pham Thi Hong Nhung, 2015).

Although specific curricula vary across institutions, GE programs generally aim to achieve similar goals. At the university where this study is conducted, the GE curriculum consists of two phases: GE and ESP. GE is a compulsory course worth seven credits, which is equivalent to 105 teacher-led hours. Typically, students need between 350 to 400 contact hours of instruction to reach the CEFR B1 level. The program spans the first three semesters of a university degree, with the distribution of credits as follows: 2 credits for Level 1 (CEFR A1) in the first semester, 2 credits for Level 2 (CEFR A2) in the second semester, and 3 credits for Level 3 (CEFR B1) in the third semester. Upon completion of GE, students can continue with a 30- or 45-hour ESP course, depending on their major, to further develop their language proficiency in their specialized field.

2.5. *Related studies*

This study focuses on exploring teachers' perceptions of how CS is used for pedagogical purposes and its effects in tertiary-level EFL classrooms. Accordingly, the literature review is organized around themes that align with the study's aims: (1) teachers' perceptions of the pedagogical functions of CS in language instruction, and (2) teachers' perceptions of the effects of CS on student learning.

2.5.1. *Studies concerning teachers' perceptions of CS*

Teachers' positive perceptions of CS

CS has been found to be an indispensable tool in language classrooms across contexts (Keong et.al, 2016; Macaro, 2009; Sondang et.al, 2018). These studies emphasize teachers' positive perceptions of CS, particularly its role in facilitating teaching, especially when working with students who have limited language proficiency in the TL. Macaro (2009) found that novice teachers in secondary schools used CS between their first language (L1), English, and French. They relied on L1 for procedural instructions, seeing it as necessary to facilitate classroom activities. Macaro (2009) concluded that CS is both a cognitive and experiential concept, deeply embedded in teachers' interactions and adjustments to teaching processes. Similarly, in Iraq's Kurdish region, Keong et.al. (2016) found that primary school teachers positively perceived CS as a pedagogical tool that enhanced curriculum access, student engagement, and classroom management. However, they cautioned against overreliance on CS, stressing its potential impact on the effectiveness of language learning. Sondang and Bonik (2018) found that EFL teachers in Indonesia employed CS to explain complex words and manage classrooms, believing the benefits outweighed any potential drawbacks. In general, teachers' positive perceptions stem from CS's ability to aid content coverage, help students with lower language proficiency, and enhance pedagogical efficacy. Teachers also use CS to translate difficult concepts and navigate their own challenges with English proficiency in teaching.

Teachers' negative perceptions of CS

Several studies have reported negative perceptions of CS, suggesting that it limits TL practice, demotivates students, and negatively impacts language learning (Adriosh & Razi, 2019; Cheng, 2013; Nurhamidah, 2018). Adriosh and Razi (2019) studied EFL teachers in Kuwait and found that although teachers used Arabic in classrooms, they generally had negative attitudes toward this practice. They reported that while CS helped with teaching and classroom management, it could undermine students' TL practice. Nurhamidah (2018) cautioned against overreliance on CS, particularly Persian, as it demotivated students and led them to expect the L1 to be used extensively in the classroom. Cheng (2013) echoed these concerns, noting that although teachers acknowledged the role of L1 in language learning, most were reluctant to use it extensively due to its potential negative impact on TL acquisition. In summary, the studies reviewed present mixed perceptions of CS. While many teachers view CS as a valuable pedagogical tool that aids teaching, others express negative views, primarily due to concerns about limiting TL practice and demotivating students. The findings suggest that CS can be beneficial when used strategically but can have detrimental effects when overused or misapplied.

2.5.2. *Studies concerning functions of CS*

Studies on the function of CS in language classrooms suggest that CS serves various purposes, including aiding knowledge construction, classroom management, and establishing personal relationships between teachers and students. Many studies have shown that CS is multifunctional and can be employed in different contexts. For example, Adriossh and Razi (2019) focused on the use of CS in teaching grammar, emphasizing its pedagogical benefits. Other studies, such as those by Keong et al. (2016) and Nurhamidah (2018) highlight that CS addresses students' limited language proficiency, manages the classroom, and assesses students' understanding. Similarly, Temesgen and Hailu (2022) categorized the functions of CS into three main groups: academic, management, and social. They found that CS not only helps with understanding lessons and managing the classroom but also fosters social relationships and creates a lively atmosphere in the classroom.

In Vietnamese context, research on CS in EFL education has gained attention in recent years. Nguyen Quang Tien (2012) found that CS was more frequent in public universities where students had lower proficiency levels. This study highlighted that teachers use CS to explain grammar and ensure students' understanding, while other studies found that CS serves both pedagogical and emotional purposes (Luong Quynh Huong, 2022). Nguyen Cam Nhung and Vu Van Duy. (2019) emphasized that CS is essential for explaining complex concepts and supporting student comprehension. Luong Quynh Huong (2022) found that both teachers and students had positive attitudes toward CS, using it to manage test anxiety and explain difficult content.

Although a substantial body of research has explored teachers' perceptions and the pedagogical functions of CS in EFL contexts, the majority of studies have primarily focused on secondary education rather than the tertiary level. Furthermore, while positive and negative attitudes toward CS have been well-documented, there remains limited research examining how tertiary-level teachers strategically employ CS to serve specific pedagogical purposes in Vietnamese EFL classrooms. Notably, studies in Vietnam often highlight CS usage frequency or attitudes, yet offer insufficient insight into how teachers consciously integrate CS to meet learners' diverse proficiency levels and instructional goals. This gap highlights the need for further investigation into tertiary EFL teachers' perspectives regarding the frequency of CS use, the specific functions CS serves in GE classes, and its perceived effects on students' learning.

3. Methodology

3.1. *Research design*

This study adopted a mixed-methods design, grounded in Creswell's (2009) framework, which integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The combination of these

methods allows for a comprehensive comparison, synthesis, and interpretation of the data (Şahin & Öztürk, 2019). In this study, the mixed-methods approach was applied to explore teachers' perceptions toward the effects of CS on students' learning and functions of CS in GE classrooms. By incorporating data from two sources, this design enhanced the validity of the findings and strengthened the overall reliability of the study's conclusions, offering a rich understanding of the teachers' experiences with CS.

3.2. *Research participants*

The study involved 34 EFL teachers from the university, consisting of 31 female and 3 male teachers, who taught GE courses at various proficiency levels, from A1 to B1. All teachers participated in a questionnaire survey, and five teachers were selected for in-depth interviews after completing the survey. These teachers, referred to as Teacher A (TA), Teacher B (TB), Teacher C (TC), Teacher D (TD), and Teacher E (TE), were selected based on their willingness to participate and their consent to the confidentiality of their identities. Besides, their backgrounds in teaching GE could help the study to collect data which focused on EFL teachers' perceptions of using CS in teaching English to non-English major students at the pre-intermediate proficiency level. These EFL teachers have at least two-year experience teaching GE classes at university.

3.3. *Data collection instruments and procedures*

The study employed a mixed-methods design, using questionnaires, and in-depth interviews to collect data across different phases.

3.3.1. *Questionnaire*

The questionnaire collected data from a large group of participants and was designed to quantitatively examine teachers' perceptions. It consisted of two main sections: the first section gathered demographic data, such as gender, age, teaching experience, and proficiency levels taught. The second section focused on teachers' views on code-switching (CS) in their GE classes. This section was divided into 3 parts: Section A explored general attitudes towards CS, Section B examined the functions of CS, and Section C covered the effects of CS, the questionnaire was based on frameworks from previous studies (Keong et al., 2016; Sondang & Bonik, 2018) and Ferguson's (2009) functions of CS, adapted to the specific context of the study, where both teachers and students share Vietnamese as their first language. The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms to allow participants to respond at their convenience after a pilot study.

- **3.3.2. *In-depth interview***

In-depth interviews were conducted after analyzing the questionnaire data to obtain qualitative insights (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). These interviews aimed to acquire qualitative

data that could better comprehend the statistical findings. Structured with predefined questions, the interviews focused on teachers' backgrounds, their perceptions of CS use, and the purposes behind it. The interviews were conducted in Vietnamese to ensure clarity and ease for the participants. The five teachers who agreed to participate in the interviews were selected from the initial survey group. The interview protocol, based on previous research (Keong et.al., 2016; Sondang & Bonik, 2018), aimed to capture detailed responses and were supplemented with prompts to encourage full responses.

3.4. Data analysis

In the data analysis stage, quantitative data was analyzed from the questionnaire dataset, while qualitative data was analyzed from in-depth interviews. The data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS (version 22), with a Cronbach's Alpha (α) of 0.855, indicating good reliability for the entire questionnaire. Three main tests were applied: Reliability Coefficient Test, Descriptive Statistics Test, and One-Sample T-test. The mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) of each item were calculated, and satisfaction levels were assessed based on a five-point Likert scale. The One-Sample T-test was used to compare the mean score of each item to the test value of 3.0, representing the average level of the five-point Likert scale. The functions of CS in GE classes were analyzed using a scale from "Never" to "Always." The data from the questionnaire were categorized into three main functions: CS for Knowledge Construction, CS for Classroom Management, and CS for Interpersonal Relations. For the interpretation of participants' perceptions, the researcher used Moidunny's scale (2009), where a mean score between 1.00–1.800 was categorized as "very low," 1.81–2.60 as "low," 2.61–3.20 as "medium," 3.21–4.20 as "high," and 4.21–5.0 as "very high." Regarding the frequency of functions of CS, the researcher used the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) developed by Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995). A mean score between 1.0 and 2.4 was categorized as "low" usage, scores between 2.5 and 3.4 indicated "medium" usage, and scores between 3.5 and 5.0 represented "high" usage. For qualitative data, thematic analysis was applied to identify common themes and relationships across data from in-depth interviews.

4. Findings and discussions

4.1. Perceived frequency of CS employment

The data reveals that 57% of surveyed teachers reported frequent use of Vietnamese during teaching, while 31% occasionally employed CS. Only 9% indicated rare use, and none completely abstained from CS. Notably, 3% stated they never used CS consistently, suggesting its near-universal presence in GE classes. Thematic analysis of interviews highlighted strategic use of CS for pedagogical purposes. Teacher E stated, *"I resort to CS when I discern a genuine pedagogical need,"*, emphasizing its utility in enhancing student comprehension. Teacher D

added, “I use CS judiciously, particularly for explaining intricate grammatical structures or vocabulary.”

In this study, teachers are likely to perceive the use of CS as necessary for their own communication and for the sake of students’ understanding and engagement in the lessons. In the in-depth interviews, all teachers emphasized their regular use of CS in GE classes, underscoring the intentional and strategic nature of their CS. Jingxia (2001) consider that CS takes place as a means of communication by language teachers when the need arises; this notion indicates CS is used either intentionally or just naturally as part of communication. The perceptions of the interviewed teachers in the current study, however, associate CS with a way or method serving pedagogical purposes. Thus, none of the responses from the questionnaire revealed the level of never using CS in the GE classes. This aligns with the findings of Sondang and Bonik (2018), which also showed very low percentages of teachers who claimed never to use CS in their classrooms.

4.2. Reported functions of CS

4.2.1. Reported use CS for knowledge construction

Table 4.1. below presents the descriptive statistics and the results of One-Sample T-tests regarding teachers’ reported frequency of CS for knowledge construction.

Table 4.1. Descriptive Statistics of Teachers’ Reported Use of CS for knowledge construction

No.	In GE classes, I switch to Vietnamese to...	Min	Max	Mean	SD	P-value
1.	explain complex grammatical points.	3	5	4.21	.69	.00
2.	explain pronunciation aspects.	2	5	3.76	.70	.00
3.	explain new vocabulary	3	5	3.85	.56	.00
4	give Vietnamese equivalents during tasks.	2	5	3.62	.70	.00
5	introduce unfamiliar materials/topics.	2	5	3.74	.79	.00
6	scaffold the learners in unexpected situations.	2	5	3.32	.84	.32
7	provide prompts for English use in productive skill classes.	2	5	3.29	1.00	.96
8	clarify difficult language in receptive skill classes.	2	5	3.76	.82	.00
9	emphasize the pedagogical focus of the lesson.	2	4	3.15	.74	2.57
10	activate students’ long-term memory.	2	5	3.56	.71	.00

The data on teachers’ use of code-switching (CS) for knowledge construction in GE classes shows frequent use for various teaching functions. The most common uses include explaining complex grammatical points ($M = 4.21$; $SD = .69$), explaining pronunciation ($M = 3.76$;

SD=.70), and clarifying new vocabulary ($M = 3.85$; $SD=.56$), with all showing statistically significant results. However, some functions, such as scaffolding students in unexpected situations and providing prompts in productive skill classes, were used less frequently, with responses varying significantly among teachers. These findings are supported by interviews, where teachers emphasized CS's effectiveness in clarifying complex concepts. Teacher D stated, "I often switch to Vietnamese to ensure students grasp grammatical structures." Similarly, Teacher C reported frequent CS during vocabulary instruction, particularly for low-proficiency students. However, there was less emphasis on CS for providing prompts or focusing on the pedagogical aspects of lessons, with these areas showing weaker alignment between survey and interview data. These results contrast somewhat with previous research. For instance, Keong et.al. (2016) reported lower frequencies for functions such as explaining grammar (40%), introducing vocabulary (20%), and clarifying difficult language (25%). Similarly, Sondang and Bonik (2018), found frequencies of 57.5%, 62.5%, and 50%, respectively, for the same functions. The higher frequency found in the current study may be attributed to differences in classroom contexts and student proficiency levels.

4.2.2. Reported use CS for classroom management

Table 4.2 presents the descriptive statistics and the results of One-Sample T-tests regarding teachers' reported frequency of CS for classroom management.

Table 4.2. Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Reported Use of CS for CM

No.	In GE classes, I switch to Vietnamese to...	Min	Max	Mean	SD	P-value
1.	organize classroom tasks and activities.	2	5	3.32	.73	.01
2.	maintain classroom discipline	1	5	2.91	.97	.598
3.	encourage students' participation in classroom activities.	3	5	3.65	.60	.00
4	remind students of lessons/learning focuses	1	5	3.00	.95	1.00
5	provide instructions and commands	3	5	3.56	.61	.00

Survey data revealed maintaining classroom discipline and reminding students of lessons/learning focuses had mean values of 2.91 and 3.00, respectively, indicating a medium frequency level of usage by EFL teachers for these 2 functions. Organizing classroom tasks and activities received a mean score of 3.32, also suggesting medium-frequency usage. On the other hand, encouraging students' participation in classroom activities obtained a mean score of 3.65, and providing instructions and prompts had a mean score of 3.56. Both of these functions were reported to be used at a high frequency. Furthermore, the data showed low SD values for all statements, indicating minimal variance in agreement levels among the teachers regarding these functions. In addition, the results of One Sample T-test indicate that the p-values of statements regarding encouraging students' participation in classroom activities and providing instructions

and prompts are less than 0.5 ($p=.00$) whereas those of organizing classroom tasks and activities, maintaining classroom discipline and reminding students of lessons/learning focuses are greater than .05 ($p=.00$).

Classroom management is one of the key functions for which teachers may rely on code-switching (Ferguson, 2009). In the current study, all of the EFL teachers reported that they frequently employed Vietnamese to facilitate various aspects of classroom management. In other words, EFL teachers expressed that CS serves as an effective tool for classroom management, particularly for engaging students with lower English proficiency. For example, Teacher A stated, *"Many of my students are shy and don't respond in English. When I switch to Vietnamese, they feel more confident to join the activities."* Similarly, Teacher D explained, *"I often use Vietnamese to give clear instructions for group tasks. If I speak only English, some students just sit there confused."* These responses reflect the context of the study, where mostly non-English majors tend to be passive and are more familiar with Vietnamese-based instruction. Teacher B added, *"Sometimes I use Vietnamese to remind students of the rules. It helps manage the class better without making them feel anxious."* These comments support the survey data, indicating that CS is viewed as a useful strategy to maintain order, give instructions, and encourage participation in the EFL classroom.

4.2.3. Reported use of CS for interpersonal relations

Table 4.3 displays the descriptive statistics and the results of One-Sample T-test regarding teachers' reported frequency of CS to Vietnamese for the affective reasons.

Table 4.3. Descriptive statistics of teachers' reported use of CS for interpersonal relations

No.	In GE classes, I switch to Vietnamese to...	Min	Max	Mean	SD	P-value
1.	build a friendly atmosphere.	2	5	3.29	1.00	.09
2.	provide praise, remarks on students' performance.	2	5	3.62	.74	.00
3.	build interpersonal relationships between the teacher and students.	1	5	3.26	1.02	.14
4	create a comfortable learning environment.	2	5	3.85	.74	.00
5	facilitate interaction.	2	5	3.71	.83	.00

In Table 4.3, data on the five functions within the third sub-category of interpersonal relations, ranged from medium to high usage among teachers (mean score of 3.26 and mean score of 3.85). The most frequently used function of CS was to create a comfortable learning environment ($M= 3.85$, $SD= .74$), followed by facilitating interaction ($M= 3.71$, $SD= .83$) as the second most frequently used function, and providing praise and remarks on students' performance ($M= 3.62$, $SD= .74$) as the third. Conversely, the use of CS for building interpersonal relationships between the teacher and students and for building a friendly

atmosphere respectively had mean scores of 3.26 and 3.29, indicating medium usage levels. The p-values for these two functions were greater than .05 ($M=3.26$, $p=.14$; $M=3.29$, $p=.09$), indicating a neutral agreement among EFL teachers regarding the frequency of CS for building interpersonal relationships and creating a friendly atmosphere. In contrast, the p-values for the remaining functions were .00, signifying a statistically significant difference from the test value of 3 ($p=.00 < .05$). This suggests a high agreement among EFL teachers regarding the frequency of CS usage for creating a comfortable learning environment, facilitating interaction, and providing praise and remarks on students' performance. Survey data findings were confirmed by interviewed teachers who believed CS reduced cognitive loads for students, fostering a more comfortable and conducive learning environment. For example, Teacher E highlighted that her students learn better when comfortable, so they switch to Vietnamese for challenging content to avoid demotivating them. Similarly, Teacher C insisted that the code switched to establish warm relationships with her students as local EFL teachers with shared cultural backgrounds.

These findings are consistent with previous research, such as the study by Sondang and Bonik (2018), which reported that creating a comfortable learning environment (47.5%) was the most common function, followed by facilitating interaction (45%) and providing praise and remarks on students' performance (42.5%). Similarly, in the study by Keong et al. (2016), creating a comfortable learning environment (60%) and providing praise and remarks on students' performance (45%) were frequently reported functions.

4.3. Perceived effects of CS' use on students' learning experiences

4.3.1. Vietnamese EFL teachers' general attitude towards CS

Table 4.4. below shows a mean score of 3.82 ($SD = 0.72$) for the statement "CS is an integral part of GE classes," and 3.47 ($SD = 0.66$) for "CS should be a common practice." Both results were statistically significant ($p < .05$). This suggests that EFL teachers strongly believe that CS is a firm part of GE classes, and it should become common practice. The insights into the teachers' perceptions regarding the utilization of Vietnamese within GE classes were drawn from the follow-up interview data. Teachers expressed that CS facilitates comprehension, particularly in mixed-proficiency classrooms. Teacher A noted, "Without CS, low-proficiency students may struggle to follow the lessons." (TA-II-6 August 2022). Similarly, Teacher C viewed CS as indispensable for addressing complex concepts.

Table 4.4. Descriptive Statistics of Two Sub-Clusters of Teachers' General Attitude Towards CS

No.	Statements	Min	Max	Mean	SD	P-value
1.	CS is an integral part of the GE classes	3	5	3.82	.72	.00
2.	CS should be a common practice in GE classes	2	5	3.47	.66	.00

These quantitative findings align with the qualitative results, which strongly indicate that EFL teachers maintain a consistently positive attitude towards the use of CS in GE classes. They view CS as an inevitable phenomenon and a valuable instructional tool in these classes. It could be the similarities of previous studies done in the context of TEFL (Adriosh & Razi, 2019; Keong et al., 2016; Sondang & Bonik, 2018).

4.3.2. Perceived effects of integrating CS on students' learning experiences

This section delves into the perceived effects of incorporating CS on students' learning experiences, drawing from questionnaire data, in-depth interviews. The results illustrate both the positive and negative consequences of using CS in GE classes.

Perceived Positive Effects

Table 4.5 presents a descriptive statistical summary and the results of the one-sample t-test analysis on teachers' perceived positive effects of integrating CS.

Table 4.5. Descriptive statistics of teachers' perceived positive effects of CS

No.	Statements	Min	Max	Mean	SD	p-value
1.	CS can foster a friendly atmosphere in GE classes.	2	5	3.53	.93	.00
2.	CS can facilitate students' learning in GE classes.	3	5	3.88	.59	.00

As shown in Table 4.5., survey data highlighted CS's benefits in creating a friendly classroom atmosphere ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.93$) and facilitating student learning ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.59$), both significant at $p < .05$. Teachers' responses in in-depth interview highlight the benefits of using CS in teaching. Specifically, Teacher C emphasized how using Vietnamese alongside English enhanced student comprehension of complex concepts. CS helped convey nuances of Vietnamese culture, aiding students in understanding difficult concepts. Similarly, Teacher A stated that CS improved student comprehension, created a friendly classroom atmosphere, and boosted student confidence in communication.

Studies have consistently shown that teachers have positive perceptions of CS due to its effectiveness in facilitating teaching, especially in contexts with students who have limited proficiency in the TL (Adriosh & Razi, 2019). In the current study, both survey data and interviews reinforced that teachers generally view CS as a valuable tool for instructional clarity, fostering a positive learning environment, and alleviating students' anxiety. Teachers emphasized that switching to the students' L1 ensures that instructions are clear and understood, which is crucial in maintaining student engagement. However, the study also revealed that a few teachers viewed excessive CS as detrimental to high-proficiency students, believing it may lower standards of English. Despite this, most teachers asserted that they use CS only when necessary, underscoring its strategic role rather than as a default mode of

communication. In comparison with studies in the Vietnamese EFL context (Luong Quynh Huong, 2022); Nguyen Cam Nhung & Vu Van Duy, 2019), the teachers in this study emphasized that CS is especially beneficial in clarifying difficult grammar, explaining vocabulary, and ensuring that students, particularly those with low proficiency, grasp essential lesson content.

Perceived negative effects

Table 4.6 showcases the summary of the descriptive statistical data and that of One-sample T-test concerning the teachers' perceived negative affirmative effects of integrating CS.

Table 4.6. *Descriptive statistics of teachers' perceptions of the negative effects of CS*

No.	Statements	Min	Max	Mean	SD	P-value
1.	CS can reduce the opportunities for EFL learners to listen and to understand English.	2	5	3.47	.83	.00
2.	CS can limit students' exposure to English use in GE classes.	2	5	3.59	.74	.00
3.	CS can increase the students' dependency on the teacher	3	5	3.53	.66	.00

Survey results indicate that CS is perceived to reduce students' opportunities to practice listening and be exposed to English ($M = 3.59$ and 3.47), while also increasing their dependence on teachers ($M = 3.53$). The one-sample t-test showed a statistically significant difference from the test value of 3 ($p = .00 < .05$), confirming teachers' clear awareness of the disadvantages of integrating CS in GE classes. Comments in the in-depth interviews corroborate the survey findings. Teacher C pointed out, "*Students tend to be lazy and hesitant to contribute in the target language, impeding their progress.*" Teacher A added, "*excessive switching to Vietnamese can hinder language skill development, as students tend to rely on translation.*" Teacher E justified their views by explaining that shifting from English to Vietnamese would hinder students' English practice, especially for those with high proficiency levels who would miss opportunities to practice English.

Despite the perceived benefits of code-switching (CS), concerns about its overuse remain significant in the EFL context. Prior studies (Adriosh & Razi, 2019; Cheng, 2013; Nurhamidah et.al., 2018) have pointed out that frequent CS may reduce students' opportunities to practice the TL, contribute to learner demotivation, and negatively affect TL acquisition. The present study indicates that excessive CS may hinder students' language development. Additionally, this study offers new insights beyond previous work. Interviews revealed that repeated instructions in L1 could create confusion among learners, as they might stop paying attention to initial English explanations. Some teachers shared concerns that habitual switching may discourage students from making adequate efforts to engage with English, potentially impeding

language proficiency gains. This contrasts with findings from earlier studies (Adriosh & Razi, 2019; Nurhamidah et.al., 2018) where such psychological and cognitive impacts were less emphasized.

Although earlier research identified teacher discomfort or guilt as negative outcomes of CS (Cheng, 2013; Luong Quynh Huong, 2022; Nguyen Cam Nhung & Vu Van Duy, 2019), the current participants did not report these feelings. This difference may stem from the Vietnamese educational context, where there are no official policies restricting CS, allowing teachers to prioritize learners' comprehension over adherence to language-only rules.

Overall, the current study's findings confirm the multidimensional role of CS in EFL tertiary classrooms, consistent with Ferguson's (2009) framework that outlines three primary functions of CS: knowledge construction, classroom management, and interpersonal relations. Among these, CS for knowledge construction emerged as the most frequent and positively perceived function. Teachers frequently employed Vietnamese to explain grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, especially for low proficiency learners, highlighting CS as a practical tool for ensuring comprehension. These results are in line with Keong et al. (2016), but the frequency of CS use reported in this study were notably higher. This suggests that in the Vietnamese tertiary context, where non-English majors often lack language confidence, the need for CS is more evident.

In terms of classroom management, teachers in this study acknowledged using CS to organize tasks, provide instructions, and encourage student participation. However, its use for maintaining discipline and reminding students about learning content was less common. Compared to previous research, such as that by Sondang and Bonik (2018), the Vietnamese teachers placed slightly less emphasis on using CS to manage student behavior and instead focused more on its role in supporting and motivating learners. This shows that teachers prioritize helping students feel comfortable and confident, rather than strictly controlling the classroom.

Regarding interpersonal relations, CS was reported to foster a comfortable learning environment, facilitate interaction, and encourage student engagement. These functions were rated more highly than those involving building personal relationships or a friendly atmosphere, possibly due to cultural expectations of teacher–student distance in Vietnamese classrooms. While consistent with findings from Keong et al. (2016) and Sondang and Bonik (2018), the current study adds nuance by showing that emotional support through CS is used strategically, not excessively.

In terms of perceived effects, teachers viewed CS as having clear positive instructional value—particularly in clarifying content and creating a supportive classroom atmosphere. However, they were also aware of potential drawbacks, such as students' increased dependency

on L1 and reduced exposure to English. These mixed attitudes echo previous findings (Adriosh & Razi, 2019; Nurhamidah et al., 2018), but the current study contributes further by revealing that Vietnamese teachers rarely expressed guilt or conflict about using CS. This may reflect the absence of restrictive language policies in Vietnam, giving teachers more autonomy to balance pedagogical effectiveness and language exposure.

In summary, this study highlights the strategic and context-sensitive use of CS in Vietnamese tertiary EFL classrooms. While teachers overwhelmingly support its pedagogical functions, they remain cautious about its excessive use, striving to balance comprehension support with opportunities for English language development. These findings not only reinforce existing research but also provide context-specific insights into how CS is integrated into teaching practices in response to learners' needs and institutional realities in Vietnam.

5. Conclusions and Implications

This study investigated Vietnamese EFL teachers' perceptions of the frequency of CS employment, the function of CS, and the effects of CS on students' learning in tertiary GE classes. The findings show that teachers widely recognize CS as a strategic pedagogical tool, used most frequently for knowledge construction, especially for explaining grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, followed by classroom management and interpersonal purposes. This highlights the intentional and purposeful use of CS to support students' understanding, particularly those with lower English proficiency.

Teachers generally held positive attitudes toward CS, noting its role in creating a supportive learning environment and improving classroom interaction. However, they also acknowledged potential drawbacks, such as reduced TL exposure and increased student dependence when CS is overused. These findings contribute context-specific insights from Vietnamese tertiary EFL classrooms, emphasizing that CS is often a practical response to learner needs rather than a sign of ineffective teaching. They also highlight the importance of using CS judiciously to balance comprehension support with meaningful TL exposure.

Pedagogically, the results suggest that CS can be effectively integrated into classroom practice when applied thoughtfully. Teachers should continue using CS to scaffold low-proficiency learners, while gradually encouraging more TL use as students gain confidence. Gathering student feedback on CS use can help teachers better balance support with language immersion.

In terms of teacher development, training programs should go beyond promoting TL-only instruction and instead offer guidance on when and how to use CS strategically. Practical resources such as sample scenarios, reflective activities, and classroom observation tools can help teachers refine their use of CS to improve learning outcomes.

Future research should explore students' perspectives on CS across different disciplines and proficiency levels. Longitudinal studies could also assess how continued exposure to CS influences language development over time, offering a more complete understanding of its impact on EFL teaching and learning.

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