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Ethnography of Code-Switching: A Classroom-Based Study in Bilingual (English–Arabic) Islamic Boarding Schools

Ahmadi Ahmadi*

Institut Studi Islam Muhammadiyah Pacitan, Pacitan – Indonesia
ahmadi@isimupacitan.ac.id

Abstract

This research explores the phenomenon of code-switching in bilingual (English–Arabic) classrooms within Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Indonesia. Utilizing a classroom ethnography approach, the study investigates how language alternation occurs during daily instructional activities and how it serves various pedagogical, religious, and sociocultural purposes. Data were collected through classroom observations, audio recordings, and in-depth interviews with teachers and students at two pesantren that implement both international (English-based) and Islamic (Arabic-based) curricula. The findings demonstrate that code-switching is systematically employed by teachers and learners as a strategic tool to clarify concepts, manage classroom discourse, and reinforce religious identity. Rather than being perceived as linguistic interference, it functions as an intentional and context-sensitive practice shaped by the multilingual and multicultural nature of pesantren education.

In this setting, Arabic often marks moments of religious significance, such as quoting Qur'anic verses or conveying Islamic values, while English is used to navigate academic content, instructions, and modern discourse. This interplay reflects a hybrid identity cultivated in pesantren students one that harmonizes Islamic tradition with global engagement. The study highlights the value of code-switching as a communicative and pedagogical asset in Islamic bilingual education, challenging deficit views of language mixing. It offers practical implications for teacher training, bilingual curriculum design, and sociolinguistic

awareness in religious schooling. These findings encourage educators and policymakers to view code-switching not as a challenge, but as a resource that enriches the learning process in multilingual Islamic contexts.

Keywords: *Ethnography, Code-Switching, A Classroom-Based Study, Bilingual (English–Arabic), Islamic Boarding Schools*

Introduction

The study of code-switching in multilingual classrooms has undergone a profound transformation from being viewed as a linguistic deficiency to being recognized as a strategic and purposeful communicative tool. No longer dismissed as a sign of confusion or incompetence, code-switching is now appreciated for its role in enhancing classroom interaction, scaffolding student understanding, and fostering more inclusive and responsive learning environments. Recent studies highlight how this practice increases student engagement, boosts confidence, and enables learners to articulate complex ideas with greater ease (Nguyen et al., 2022). Teachers, in turn, strategically employ code-switching to bridge linguistic gaps, clarify abstract concepts, and tailor instruction to students' varying levels of language proficiency (Zhou & Mann, 2021). In culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms, code-switching resonates with students' lived experiences and promotes a stronger sense of belonging and cultural identity.

Beyond its pedagogical advantages, code-switching also operates within social and ideological frameworks that shape how languages are perceived and practiced. For instance, language policy plays a significant role in regulating or restricting code-switching practices as evidenced in Timor-Leste, where teachers navigate between official languages and local dialects in response to national mandates (Cabral, 2021). Student attitudes toward language use are also shifting, with many showing a clear preference for translanguaging approaches over rigid monolingual

models (Zhou & Mann, 2021). Yet despite these emerging insights, the use of code-switching in religious or faith-based educational settings remains significantly underexplored. Given the layered meanings of language in these environments where Arabic may symbolize sacred authority and English may represent modern global knowledge this gap in the literature underscores a critical need for research that unpacks the linguistic, spiritual, and sociocultural dimensions of code-switching in such contexts.

In Indonesia, the transformation of pesantren from purely religious institutions into bilingual educational environments reflects a broader movement toward integrating Islamic tradition with modern global competencies. This shift involves not only curricular expansion but also linguistic innovation, particularly the strategic incorporation of both Arabic and English in classroom discourse. Within this bilingual framework, language functions as more than just a medium of instruction it becomes a tool for identity negotiation, spiritual development, and academic advancement. The practice of alternating languages in classroom settings aligns with holistic-integrative educational reforms, which seek to bridge the long-standing dichotomy between traditional Islamic knowledge and contemporary educational paradigms (Hamami & Nuryana, 2022).

The bilingual models adopted in pesantren typically aim to develop students' proficiency in both Arabic and English, each language carrying distinct epistemological and symbolic significance. Arabic is closely associated with religious authority, sacred texts, and scholarly tradition, while English symbolizes modernity, international connectivity, and access to global knowledge. The curriculum often merges Islamic sciences with general education, creating a learning environment that fosters both theological understanding and worldly competence. In this context, code-switching becomes a pedagogical strategy through which educators guide students across linguistic and epistemic boundaries. Moreover, such

bilingual practices strengthen students' religious and cultural identities, enabling them to confidently navigate between local Islamic norms and global academic expectations (Saada, 2022).

Despite the advantages of this bilingual approach, challenges persist—particularly in terms of linguistic accessibility and educational equity. Students with limited proficiency in either language may experience exclusion or marginalization, potentially leading to unequal participation and learning outcomes. These disparities raise important concerns about the extent to which bilingual instruction accommodates diverse linguistic backgrounds within the pesantren system. Thus, there is a pressing need for further research into how language choices are negotiated in bilingual Islamic classrooms, and how these choices impact student identity formation, engagement, and academic success. Understanding the nuanced interplay between pedagogy, language, and identity in pesantren contexts is essential for developing more inclusive and responsive models of Islamic education (Saada, 2022).

The exploration of code-switching within bilingual Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) reveals a rich and complex interaction between language, culture, and pedagogy. Unlike mainstream bilingual institutions, pesantren offer a distinctive linguistic environment shaped by religious expectations and global aspirations. Arabic is often mandated as a language of daily communication and religious instruction, supported by leadership policies and structured immersion programs—as seen at Daruttauhid Islamic Boarding School, which cultivates an Arabic-speaking culture through institutional reinforcement (Aresy, 2020). At the same time, the integration of English into the curriculum reflects the institution's responsiveness to global educational demands. While English instruction enhances students' general knowledge and international exposure, challenges such as curriculum overload, inconsistent teacher competencies,

and lack of pedagogical support remain barriers to optimal implementation (Habiburrahim et al., 2022). This study seeks to fill a notable gap in existing literature by examining how Arabic and English are deployed interactively in pesantren classrooms and how these practices influence students' identity and learning experiences.

Ethnographic observations in pesantren classrooms reveal that students engage in context-sensitive code-switching, alternating between English and Arabic depending on audience, purpose, and subject matter (Baidowi et al., 2021). These linguistic shifts are not merely functional, but also symbolic-signaling the speaker's alignment with religious identity, intellectual authority, or emotional resonance. For example, Arabic may be used to convey spiritual concepts or quote scripture, while English may be employed for technical or worldly discourse. However, despite this fluid bilingualism, students often report feelings of anxiety when expected to perform in both languages, particularly when language use is strictly regulated or socially policed (Selim, 2023). This tension highlights the duality of bilingual education in pesantren: on one hand, it opens up valuable competencies in both local and global arenas; on the other, it risks diluting depth of mastery in either language if not balanced effectively. As some critics argue, the pursuit of bilingualism must be carefully moderated to avoid superficial fluency and ensure meaningful linguistic and cognitive development. Therefore, a more reflective and research-informed approach to bilingual pedagogy in pesantren is urgently needed.

Method

This study employed a classroom ethnography approach, which is part of qualitative research traditions designed to investigate language practices in naturalistic educational settings. Classroom ethnography is well-suited for exploring authentic language use, particularly in multilingual contexts

where interactional dynamics are complex and context-sensitive. By immersing in the learning environment, the researcher can observe how participants use language as a social and pedagogical tool. This approach is especially effective in examining code-switching practices as they unfold in real time, enabling a deep understanding of their functions in teaching, learning, and identity negotiation (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). In this study, the focus is placed on the bilingual use of English and Arabic in pesantren classrooms, with attention to how language choices reflect pedagogical intentions, cultural values, and social structures.

The fieldwork was conducted over a two-month period at two modern Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) located in East Java, Indonesia. These pesantren were selected using purposive sampling based on three criteria: (1) the presence of formal bilingual policies integrating both Arabic and English into daily instruction; (2) institutional support for language immersion through structured programs and extracurricular activities; and (3) openness to research access and classroom observation. The participants included four language teachers (two English teachers and two Arabic teachers) and thirty final-year students. The researcher obtained formal permissions from school administrators and provided informed consent to all participants, in accordance with ethical standards for educational research (Silverman David, 2011). These pesantren represented a unique context where linguistic, religious, and global aspirations converge, providing a rich site for examining bilingual practices in Islamic education.

Data collection was carried out using three main techniques: (1) participant observation, to capture natural classroom interaction and language use; (2) audio recordings of classroom sessions, to identify types and frequencies of code-switching in detail; and (3) semi-structured interviews with teachers and students, to explore their perceptions, strategies, and challenges related to bilingualism. Additional institutional documents

such as syllabi, language policy handbooks, and timetables were collected to provide contextual background. The data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, focusing on the types of code-switching (intra-sentential, inter-sentential, and tag-switching), their pragmatic functions (pedagogical, religious, and social), and the situational triggers behind language shifts. To ensure validity and reliability, the study applied methodological triangulation and peer debriefing (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This ethnographic design provided rich, nuanced insights into how language functions within bilingual pesantren classrooms, shedding light on the intersection of faith, language, and pedagogy.

Results

This study revealed three central themes related to code-switching practices in bilingual pesantren classrooms: (1) linguistic patterns of code-switching, (2) functional motivations behind language shifts, and (3) the socio-cultural meanings attached to bilingual classroom discourse. These themes emerged from the triangulated analysis of classroom observations, audio recordings, and interview transcripts, providing a nuanced understanding of how English and Arabic are used pedagogically and symbolically in a religious schooling context.

1. Linguistic Patterns of Code-Switching

Code-switching in classroom interactions is a structured linguistic phenomenon that serves specific pedagogical functions. The three main types of code-switching identified are intra-sentential, inter-sentential, and tag-switching. These patterns are not random but are strategically used to enhance comprehension, engagement, and bilingual competence among students. The structured nature of code-switching in classrooms reflects its role in facilitating communication and learning in multilingual settings.

a. Intra-sentential Switching

Intra-sentential code-switching refers to the insertion or blending of lexical or grammatical elements from two languages within a single sentence or utterance. This type of switching was frequently observed in bilingual pesantren classrooms, particularly in the explanation of grammatical structures and religious concepts. For example, a teacher explaining Arabic grammar might say, “Al-jumlah al-ismiyyah is a nominal sentence, right?” blending the Arabic term with an English explanation and an English discourse marker. Such patterns appeared consistently in both English and Arabic subject lessons, especially when teachers aimed to introduce unfamiliar terminology or bridge complex material with students' existing knowledge (Salah, 2023).

The pedagogical function of intra-sentential switching is significant. By integrating elements from both languages within a single unit of meaning, teachers were able to reduce cognitive overload and facilitate smoother comprehension. Rather than requiring students to mentally translate or interpret content, intra-sentential switches acted as scaffolding—providing immediate contextual support. This technique proved particularly useful in classes where abstract religious or linguistic concepts were being discussed, such as the use of Arabic morphology or tafsir (Qur’anic interpretation). Students reported that these mixed-language explanations helped them “think in both languages at once”, promoting not just comprehension but long-term retention of bilingual academic content (Zhou & Mann, 2021).

Beyond its cognitive and pedagogical benefits, intra-sentential code-switching also served a sociolinguistic purpose in affirming students' bilingual identity. Rather than being confined to one language, students and teachers fluidly negotiated meaning through blended linguistic structures, reflecting the lived reality of a multilingual learning environment. This flexibility mirrors the hybrid identity construction observed in faith-based

bilingual schools, where Arabic symbolizes sacred authority and English represents academic and global competence (Baidowi et al., 2021). Thus, intra-sentential switching was not merely a teaching technique, but also a reflection of how pesantren learners inhabit and enact multiple cultural-linguistic worlds simultaneously.

b. Inter-sentential Switching

Inter-sentential code-switching refers to the alternation between two distinct languages at sentence boundaries, often employed to facilitate clarity and reinforce comprehension. In bilingual pesantren classrooms, this form of code-switching was commonly observed when teachers transitioned from Arabic religious discourse to English instructional explanation. For instance, a grammar rule might be introduced in Arabic "Al-fa'il huwa al-ism al-ladzi ya'ti qabla al-fi'l..." and then followed by an English summary such as, "Now, let's remember this: the subject comes first" (Saou, 2022). These shifts serve not only to scaffold learning but also to differentiate between the sacred content delivered in Arabic and the pedagogical facilitation provided in English (Harisca et al., 2023). Teachers strategically used this method to clarify abstract concepts, manage classroom transitions, and engage learners with diverse linguistic proficiencies.

The practice supports bilingual cognition and deeper knowledge retention, as learners are prompted to process and internalize content across two linguistic frameworks. This aligns with recent studies emphasizing the cognitive benefits of flexible language use in multilingual learning environments (Zhou & Mann, 2021). In pesantren contexts, Arabic often signals religiosity and textual authority, while English reflects academic access and modern relevance, thereby reinforcing the dual identity formation among students (Habiburrahim et al., 2022). Inter-sentential switching, therefore, is more than a pragmatic communication tool—it becomes a pedagogical and ideological device that allows students to engage with

Islamic epistemology while cultivating global literacies. This strategic code alternation legitimizes both languages as instructional assets and promotes a holistic bilingual experience rooted in faith-based education.

c. Tag-switching

Tag-switching refers to the insertion of short, often formulaic expressions or discourse markers such as “okay?”, “understood?”, or “mufhim?” at the beginning or end of utterances. In bilingual pesantren classrooms, these linguistic tags appeared frequently in both Arabic and English, often serving as interactional cues that facilitated classroom control and teacher–student rapport. Teachers typically employed them after explaining a concept or giving an instruction, using expressions like “let’s continue, mufhim?” or “done with this part, okay?” Such markers required minimal cognitive effort from students but served high communicative value by eliciting feedback, checking understanding, and maintaining attention during instruction (Nguyen et al., 2022). These brief yet purposeful language shifts were often unconsciously used by both teachers and students, indicating their natural integration into bilingual classroom discourse.

The strategic use of tag-switching highlights its pragmatic and affective dimensions. Unlike full-sentence code-switching, tag-switching functions on the interpersonal level, helping to soften teacher authority, encourage participation, and create a rhythm in bilingual communication. Moreover, in pesantren settings where language serves both spiritual and instructional purposes, such tags often acted as a bridge between formal content and student comprehension, especially when delivered with culturally familiar tones. Research shows that these tags support classroom inclusivity by validating multilingual identities and reducing anxiety in complex linguistic environments (Cholik et al., 2021). In essence, tag-switching becomes a

relational tool, signaling not just linguistic transition, but also pedagogical care, emotional attentiveness, and mutual respect in the bilingual learning space.

While code-switching is beneficial in educational contexts, it also presents challenges, particularly in the development of educational technologies. Current NLP tools struggle with code-switching data due to inadequate training data and evaluation benchmarks, limiting their application outside classroom settings (Doğruöz et al., 2021). Despite these challenges, code-switching remains a valuable strategy for enhancing bilingual education and language learning.

2. Functional Purposes of Code-Switching

Code-switching in educational settings, such as pesantren classrooms, serves multiple functional purposes, including pedagogical, religious, and social functions. These functions are crucial in enhancing comprehension, maintaining cultural and religious integrity, and fostering a supportive learning environment. The use of both English and Arabic in these contexts is not merely a linguistic necessity but a strategic tool embedded in teaching methodologies and classroom dynamics.

a. Pedagogical Function

In bilingual pesantren classrooms, code-switching serves as an intentional pedagogical strategy to clarify abstract or linguistically dense material. Teachers frequently shift into English when explaining complex Arabic grammar structures, such as the rules of *al-mubtada' wal-khabar*, or during lessons in *tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis), where nuanced theological terms require interpretation in simpler language. For example, after presenting an Arabic concept, a teacher may immediately switch to English to ensure that the content is both comprehensible and relatable. This scaffolding technique supports cognitive processing and prevents

students from disengaging due to linguistic overload, especially for those still developing their Arabic proficiency (Cancino & Díaz, 2020). Rather than seeing code-switching as a deficiency, this approach reframes it as a pedagogically sound tool for differentiated instruction within multilingual classrooms.

Code-switching boosts student confidence, motivation, and active participation, particularly when learners feel empowered to engage in a language they perceive as more accessible. In classroom observations, students were more likely to respond to questions, ask for clarification, or elaborate on their answers when English was used alongside Arabic. This reduction of linguistic anxiety plays a key role in creating a psychologically safe learning environment where students can take intellectual risks without fear of judgment (Nguyen et al., 2022). From a broader perspective, this practice also cultivates inclusive pedagogy, acknowledging that learners arrive with diverse language backgrounds and proficiencies. Thus, code-switching not only facilitates understanding but also democratizes classroom discourse, fostering equitable participation and supporting bilingual competence as a shared asset in the learning process.

b. Religious Function

One of the most distinct features of code-switching in bilingual Islamic boarding schools is its religious-functional dimension, where Arabic is reserved for the recitation of Qur'anic verses, hadith, and classical Islamic texts, while English serves as the medium for instructional explanation and classroom management. This linguistic compartmentalization is not incidental; it reflects an embedded ideological structure that honors Arabic as the language of revelation (*lughat al-wahy*), endowing it with sacred authority. In classroom practice, teachers often introduce or close a lesson with verses in Arabic, followed by English elaboration or application, such as explaining the social relevance of a hadith in contemporary life. This

dual use not only delineates functional roles between the two languages but also signals a shift in epistemic register—from divine knowledge to practical interpretation. The practice reinforces Arabic's role as a carrier of spiritual weight while utilizing English to ensure pedagogical accessibility (Habiburrahim et al., 2022).

This dual-language approach constructs the classroom as both a sacred and academic space, shaping a hybrid learning environment where students engage with religious knowledge without detaching from modern pedagogical methods. Arabic elevates the spiritual atmosphere, often accompanied by formal posture and reverence, whereas English facilitates dialogic interaction, critical thinking, and contemporary application. This arrangement safeguards the religious integrity of Islamic education while embracing the demands of global literacies and academic rigor. Students gradually internalize this division, associating Arabic with moments of reflection and sanctity, and English with analysis and inquiry. Ultimately, code-switching in this context does not merely serve communication; it becomes a performative act of balancing tradition and transformation, nurturing a generation of learners who are both spiritually grounded and intellectually agile.

c. Social Function

Beyond its instructional and religious purposes, code-switching in pesantren classrooms also plays a vital social role in shaping interpersonal dynamics and reinforcing communal values. Teachers frequently use informal English phrases such as “you got this,” “let’s go,” or “nice try” to encourage participation and reduce hierarchical distance, fostering a relaxed and supportive classroom environment. Conversely, Arabic phrases like “jazakumullahu khayran” or “ya ikhwan” are often used to express respect, solidarity, and shared religious identity. This dual register enables educators to navigate between being approachable mentors and authoritative moral

guides, helping them build rapport while maintaining the moral seriousness of religious education (Salah, 2023). In this context, code-switching becomes a socially symbolic resource, signaling the teacher's alignment with both the affective needs and the spiritual aspirations of their students.

Additionally, code-switching reflects and reinforces the multilingual and multicultural identity of pesantren students, many of whom inhabit linguistic spaces that extend beyond their local vernacular. By shifting between Arabic and English in response to social cues and group dynamics, students learn to perform flexible identities suited to religious, academic, and global settings (Forbes & Rutgers, 2021). This linguistic agility equips them not only with communication skills but also with a sense of belonging across cultural domains—from the global ummah to the English-speaking digital world. The everyday normalization of switching between sacred and secular codes helps students internalize the idea that Islam and modernity are not mutually exclusive, but can be harmonized through intentional language use. In this way, code-switching functions as a tool of identity negotiation, empowering students to act as confident, context-sensitive communicators in pluralistic environments.

Despite its many pedagogical and sociocultural advantages, code-switching presents significant challenges, particularly in the context of integrating educational technology into bilingual classrooms. Most digital learning platforms and language learning applications are built upon monolingual assumptions, lacking the capability to effectively support dynamic multilingual input and output. The absence of robust, context-sensitive training datasets and standardized benchmarks for evaluating bilingual or code-switched language use results in limited adaptability of AI-driven language tools in real classroom settings. This gap restricts the use of automated assessment, adaptive learning, and real-time feedback systems in pesantren environments where English–Arabic code-switching

is a daily norm. In parallel, recent neurological research underscores the cognitive complexity of code-switching, revealing that bilinguals engage distinct neural mechanisms depending on language direction, familiarity, and conceptual load (Blackburn & Wicha, 2022). These findings suggest that the pedagogical use of code-switching, while beneficial for engagement and comprehension, also imposes mental processing demands that vary by student and context. As such, educational designers, curriculum developers, and teacher trainers must balance the benefits of bilingual instruction with these underlying constraints, ensuring that innovations in pedagogy and technology are sensitive to the intricacies of multilingual cognition and learning environments.

3. Code-Switching and Socio-Cultural Identity

The phenomenon of code-switching plays a significant role in shaping students' socio-cultural identities, particularly in contexts where Arabic and English are used. For many students, the ability to switch to Arabic is not merely a linguistic skill but a profound marker of their religious identity and cultural heritage. This duality is evident in various educational settings, where Arabic is associated with religious competence, while English signifies modernity and academic progress. The following sections elaborate on these aspects.

a. Code-Switching as a Marker of Religious Identity

In bilingual pesantren contexts, code-switching especially the use of Arabic in religious discussions is often perceived by students as a symbolic expression of their Islamic identity. Speaking Arabic during lessons on Qur'an, fiqh, or Islamic civilization is not merely about comprehension, but about aligning oneself with the intellectual and spiritual heritage of classical Islam. Students frequently articulate a sense of pride when using Arabic terminologies like *al-iman*, *al-akhlaq*, or *usul fiqh*, as these words represent their religious learning and moral formation (Muhajir & Jainudin,

2020). The use of Arabic in these moments becomes performative; it affirms one's commitment to faith, displays cultural capital, and distinguishes the speaker within the pesantren's social hierarchy. Even in casual peer interactions, Arabic is selectively invoked to evoke piety or to emphasize the sacredness of certain discussions, signaling membership in a religiously literate community (King & Hermes, 2014).

Interestingly, this identity-marking function of Arabic is evident even beyond formal educational settings. Among Islamic student organizations such as KAMMI (Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Muslim Indonesia), Arabic expressions are often used in public speeches, mottos, or written communications to reinforce collective religious identity, even though many members have limited conversational fluency. In such cases, the use of Arabic serves more as a symbolic resource than a communicative tool, reflecting what sociolinguists call indexicality—where language points to social meaning beyond its literal function (Blommaert, 2018). This selective and strategic code-switching reinforces religious solidarity, builds group cohesion, and serves as a linguistic boundary that differentiates members from secular student groups. The pesantren thus becomes a microcosm of broader Islamic identity formation, where Arabic operates as a badge of authenticity and religiosity, regardless of the speaker's fluency level.

b. English as a Symbol of Modernity

In many pesantren that adopt bilingual education models, English occupies a symbolic space as the language of modernity, science, and global relevance. Its frequent use in subjects like information and communication technology (ICT), mathematics, and science-based instruction signals not just pedagogical necessity but also an aspirational alignment with global academic norms. For both students and teachers, using English represents participation in a broader intellectual community beyond the pesantren, one that is often associated with progress, innovation, and international

competitiveness (Muhajir & Jainudin, 2020). The incorporation of English into classroom discourse is thus more than functional it reflects a deliberate effort to reframe Islamic education as compatible with contemporary global knowledge systems. In this light, English is not merely an instructional tool, but a cultural marker that positions the pesantren and its students as modern, forward-looking, and globally literate.

Research suggests that students perceive code-switching to English as a means of elevating academic discourse. When shifting from Arabic or Indonesian into English, students often associate the language change with analytical thinking, critical engagement, and intellectual authority. For example, during classroom debates or written tasks, learners may deliberately switch to English to signal the start of a formal argument or to express abstract concepts more effectively (Alkhaldeh, 2019). This reflects not only their awareness of language functions but also their desire to cultivate a hybrid academic identity one rooted in Islamic values yet open to global modes of thought. English, in this sense, becomes a bridge between tradition and innovation, offering students a linguistic pathway to articulate their faith-based perspectives within modern academic and technological contexts. Such symbolic value deepens the significance of bilingualism in pesantren education, positioning it as a strategic asset in shaping globally competent, yet religiously grounded learners.

c. Classroom Dynamics and Code-Switching

In multilingual educational settings such as bilingual Islamic boarding schools, code-switching plays a critical role in shaping effective classroom dynamics. It serves as a communicative bridge that allows both teachers and students to manage the complexities of instruction across different linguistic repertoires. When students encounter limitations in articulating complex ideas in Arabic or English, code-switching provides an immediate and intuitive strategy to maintain interactional flow and ensure conceptual

clarity. For teachers, shifting between languages is not arbitrary it is a deliberate pedagogical move to reinforce meaning, check understanding, and scaffold difficult concepts (Yudita, 2019). In diverse classrooms, code-switching reduces cognitive load, minimizes misunderstandings, and creates an inclusive linguistic environment that values students' multilingual resources (Hafid & Margana, 2022).

From the learners' perspective, code-switching enhances metalinguistic awareness and vocabulary expansion, especially when students use it to clarify, emphasize, or question academic content. This practice reflects their ability to draw upon both Arabic and English strategically depending on the topic, audience, and context. For example, while discussing grammar, a student might use Arabic for structure but switch to English to provide a definition or give an example. Such linguistic fluidity promotes deeper cognitive engagement and reinforces bilingual competence (Cahyani et al., 2018). It also encourages peer-to-peer interaction in ways that align with both academic and social goals, contributing to a more participatory and student-centered learning environment. In this way, code-switching is not a fallback, but a sophisticated discourse strategy that reflects students' evolving identity as bilingual speakers and autonomous learners.

While code-switching is often celebrated as a flexible and empowering linguistic strategy, it is important to recognize that not all students perceive it positively. For some, the practice may be associated with a sense of cultural or religious dilution, particularly when the dominant use of English is seen to overshadow the sanctity of Arabic or the authenticity of local languages. This ambivalence is especially evident among students who view code-switching as a marker of linguistic inadequacy rather than a resource, believing that switching languages implies a lack of mastery or commitment to either code. Such perceptions are shaped by broader social ideologies that associate linguistic purity with cultural pride and religious

fidelity. In multicultural and multilingual educational environments like pesantren, these tensions reflect the complex intersection of language, identity, and power, where students negotiate not only how they learn but also who they are becoming through language (Alkhaldeh, 2019). Addressing this ambivalence requires a nuanced pedagogical approach that validates multilingual practices while also acknowledging the emotional and ideological weight language carries for different learners.

Discussion

The role of code-switching in bilingual Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Indonesia is highly multifaceted, functioning beyond a mere compensatory linguistic mechanism. It operates as a strategic pedagogical tool that enhances comprehension, supports student engagement, and bridges language gaps in complex multilingual learning environments. Teachers utilize code-switching to scaffold content, manage classroom discourse, and adjust instruction to the diverse language proficiencies of their students. These practices align with broader pedagogical functions: facilitating the construction of knowledge by clarifying abstract concepts, maintaining student attention and classroom discipline, and offering personalized instruction that nurtures a more inclusive and responsive learning atmosphere (Hafid & Margana, 2022). Rather than disrupting the flow of instruction, code-switching reinforces students' ability to access curricular material, particularly in subjects like Arabic grammar, tafsir, or science delivered in English.

Beyond pedagogy, code-switching also fulfills important social and symbolic roles within the pesantren context. It acts as a linguistic bridge between religious and modern academic identities, allowing students to express their cultural backgrounds while remaining rooted in Islamic values (Soliha et al., 2020). In peer interactions, students use code-switching to

build rapport, express solidarity, and navigate shared meanings, fostering a cooperative classroom culture (Khairunnisa & Izzah, 2022). Despite these benefits, some scholars caution that excessive reliance on code-switching may impede full acquisition of the target language, particularly when it substitutes rather than supports language development. This concern highlights the importance of implementing code-switching judiciously, ensuring that it enhances - rather than undermines - bilingual proficiency and long-term linguistic competence.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the religious and symbolic dimensions of language choice are particularly salient in the pesantren context. Arabic functions as a sacred code that signifies religious knowledge and spiritual authority, while English symbolizes modernity, innovation, and global participation. The fluid alternation between these languages reflects students' negotiation of multiple identities: as members of the ummah, as Indonesian citizens, and as emerging global learners. This resonates with the concept of translanguaging space, where multilingual speakers draw upon their entire linguistic repertoire to construct meaning, affirm identity, and navigate institutional norms (Wei, 2018). The symbolic hierarchy between Arabic and English - sacred versus modern - also introduces ideological tension. While both languages are embraced, their meanings and status are not equal; Arabic is revered but limited to religious contexts, whereas English is privileged in academic and technological domains.

Despite the generally positive effects of code-switching, this study also uncovers its ambivalent reception among students. Some learners view the practice as a sign of linguistic deficiency or cultural dilution, particularly when English dominates religious discourse. These perceptions reveal the ideological undercurrents within bilingual pedagogy, where language choice carries not only communicative value but also cultural and religious significance (Alkhaldeh, 2019). The technological infrastructure of

pesantren education often fails to support multilingual practices effectively, as most educational platforms are not designed for code-switched input or bilingual assessments (Nguyen et al., 2022). This underscores the need for context-sensitive teacher training and technology development that accommodate the realities of bilingual religious education.

In sum, this study reaffirms that code-switching in pesantren is a purposeful and context-bound linguistic strategy that simultaneously facilitates learning and constructs identity. It functions not only to bridge linguistic gaps but also to integrate spiritual and secular worldviews, enabling students to become culturally grounded and globally literate individuals. Moving forward, there is a pressing need to integrate critical language awareness into teacher education programs in pesantren, so that educators can better navigate the pedagogical, symbolic, and ideological dimensions of multilingual instruction (Ahmadi, 2024).

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that code-switching in bilingual (English–Arabic) Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Indonesia is a dynamic and context-sensitive practice that transcends mere linguistic alternation. It serves multiple functions pedagogical, social, religious, and symbolic that collectively enhance the quality of classroom discourse and students' learning experiences. Teachers strategically use code-switching to scaffold complex content, manage classroom interaction, and cater to diverse linguistic proficiencies. Meanwhile, students engage in code-switching to articulate complex ideas, clarify understanding, and construct meaning across cultural and religious domains. The practice reflects and reinforces their hybrid identities as both devout Muslims and global learners, capable of navigating sacred and secular knowledge systems simultaneously.

The findings also reveal that code-switching is not without challenges. Its overuse may lead to language dependency that hinders full mastery of the target language, and its symbolic associations can provoke ambivalence among students who perceive it as diluting cultural or religious authenticity. These complexities highlight the need for a balanced and reflective language policy in pesantren that values multilingualism while also fostering language development. Educators must be equipped with critical language awareness and culturally responsive pedagogical strategies to use code-switching effectively without undermining long-term linguistic goals. Ultimately, this study calls for a reimagining of code-switching as not merely a linguistic phenomenon but as an educational, cultural, and ideological practice central to the formation of 21st-century Islamic education.

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