

## Students' Perceptions of Code-switching in EFL Classrooms

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### Abstract

This study is about students' perceptions of code-switching in EFL classrooms. Only English specialization students from Mandalay university have been chosen as a case study. The aim of this study is to investigate students' perceptions of code-switching in EFL classrooms. There are two objectives to pursue the aim. They are (i) to identify the students' attitudes of code-switching in EFL classrooms and (ii) to examine the functions and procedures of code-switching done by the students in EFL classrooms. This study undertakes descriptive qualitative research approach. The questionnaire is designed and send out to the 60 English specialization students from Mandalay University to do the analysis. The findings of this study show that 69% of the students' responses for their perceptions on code-switching means that they are willing to code-switch to maintain rapport and interpersonal relationships, to avoid misunderstanding on respective lessons & lectures and to keep the line of communication without interruption. It is found that 71% of the students are aligned with the function and procedure of the code-switching. Overall, most of the students tend to code-switch. Moreover, the students' perceptions of code-switching have wide ranges and it is difficult to adjust because of its high deviations. In this study, it can be concluded that code-switching and EFL classroom have strong relationship and it can also help the students' demands. Hopefully, this study might be a support for conducting more researches in the fields of code-switching.

**Key words:** Perception, Code-switching, EFL classroom

### Introduction

Teaching and learning language process is a vital one for all human beings as the normal phenomena of various societies. Influences of many foreign languages could also be found in different contexts of different countries. In Myanmar, the most significant foreign language is English and English language teaching (ELT) contexts are very popular than the other foreign languages. The role English as a medium of instruction (EMI) has also been flourishing in ELT as well as in other studied fields.

At university level, English has been used as a classroom language and all the prescribed text books are published in English such as sciences, history, law and others studied areas. Therefore, use of English language might be found in the classrooms than before and especially in English specialization classes. However, using only one language does

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not mean that it would be effective and efficient all the time. It leads to the rise of bilingual method which means using the mother tongue plus English. It is also called code-switching.

Code-switching occurs not only at the interlingual level when bilingual speakers alternate between two or more languages. It may also occur at the intralingual level when monolingual speakers in a diglossia situation use the low (L) variety and the high (H) variety (Ferguson, 1959). The low variety is the language of home, the family, the streets and market places, friendship, and solidarity while the high variety is usually taught in school and used for public speaking, formal lectures and television broadcasts, and writing. In using the high variety, educated people sometimes code-switch to the colloquial or low variety (Ferguson, 1959). People can also code-switch between formal and informal styles depending on several variables such as education, social class, age, gender, setting, and participants.

Bilingual speakers code-switch mostly from their native language (L1) to the target language (L2) in multiple social contexts such as restaurants, coffee shops, the office, on the bus, at the market place, and with strangers and opposite sex. In the classroom setting, however, code-switching occurs mostly in a different direction that is from L2 to L1, where students code-switch for many reasons; namely, social, pragmatic, communicative, personal, and affective (Gulzar, 2010; Peregoy, Boyle, & Martinez, 2011; Söderberg Arnfast & Jørgensen, 2003).

In the sociocultural context of bilingualism, EFL (English as Foreign Language) or ESL (English as Second Language) is sometimes no need to account for EMI whether L1 or L2 because the target language is all about English. The theme of this study concerning code-switching is to be effective teaching and facilitate the stages of acquiring language. In doing so, perceptions on code-switching by learners are investigated. So as to advocate this aim, there are two objectives. They are (i) to identify the students' attitudes of code-switching in EFL classrooms through the questionnaire and (ii) to examine functions and procedures of code-switching done by the students in EFL classrooms through the questionnaire. This study also might be a support to become a better ELT context in accordance with the intention of using classroom languages in alternative ways.

## **Literature Reviews**

### **Sociolinguistics & Code-switching**

Code-switching is a highly purposeful activity that is no longer viewed as a random phenomenon (Chen, 2004; Enama, 2015). Myanmar society is not very far from using English language and it might be assumed that there may not be found any big obstacles in ELT classrooms. However, there are also some limitations and challenges based on the diverse ethnic

groups and geographical features of the country. Different students might have different perceptions on code-switching through their different social backgrounds and competences.

In this study, code-switching which happens in the context of English specialization classrooms in Mandalay university is focused and these university students' perceptions on code-switching are analysed. This study is built on the perceptions and functions of their code-switching; how and why they code-switch to their mother tongue, Myanmar.

### **EFL classrooms & Code-switching**

Myanmar used to be ESL country and later changed into EFL cause of the rise of national education system. Simultaneously, the ways of teaching and learning have also been changing into accordance with the demands of the education system. Especially, most EFL classrooms in Myanmar are not very authentic cause of weak supports and resources. Many public EFL classrooms are facing like these barriers but, in supportive ways, teachers and students in this context are able to handle these situations in their strategic and pedagogic ways.

As the nature of EFL classrooms, English language is priority to use in classrooms. However, it is a bit challenging for developing country like Myanmar. In doing so, code-switching is needed as an effective and efficient bridge for language learning. In this study, only students' perceptions on code-switching is emphasized and how they switch and why they switch to their mother tongue, Myanmar. These students are English specialization from Mandalay university. According to Ministry of Education, there are some rules and regulations that need to follow and complete. For instance, respective curriculum and syllabus for every level are also described by the ministry. In English specialization, language-focused, literature-focused and linguistics-focused can also be found as three main approaches through the ministry policy. So as to cover all these three foci, only monolingual approach is in fact challenging for the teachers and the students. Therefore, bilingual approach or code-switching to Myanmar is not ignorable and aims to accomplish the respective objectives.

### **Research questions**

- (1) What are the main functions of code-switching among EFL university students in Mandalay University, Myanmar?
- (2) Are they willing to follow the functions of code-switching and why?

### **Related Research**

In this section, there are three related researches are described and the different backgrounds, contexts and perhaps same or different results with this present study would be discussed in the later sections.

*An Investigation of the Use of Code-Switching in EFL Classroom: Attitudes and Perceptions*, by Andi Patmasari, Agussatriana, Abdul Kamaruddin (2022). This research sought to investigate not only the teachers' perceptions but also the students' attitudes and perceptions towards the use of code-switching in EFL classroom of Indonesia. This research employed mixed methods research. The participants were two teachers and forty students. Data collection instruments were the questionnaire and semi-structured interview. Findings from the teachers' interview showed that the teachers use code-switching for certain situations and specific reasons. They emphasized that it is important to speak English as much as possible in EFL classroom because the target language is English. Furthermore, findings from the students' questionnaire and semi-structured interview showed that most of the students have positive attitudes and perceptions towards the use of code-switching in EFL classroom. They assumed that the teacher should be allowed to use code-switching in EFL classroom since it is used for assisting students and maintaining a good communication between teacher and students.

*Code-Switching in an EFL Classroom: A study of language choice* by Dr. IjazAsghar (2021). The study focuses on highlighting the attitudes of teachers and students towards the patterns, functions, factors and influence of code-switching in a foreign language classroom. The main purpose of this study is to identify the significance of each function of code-switching and the specific pedagogical functions code-switching serves in the classrooms. The subjects were selected by simple random sampling technique from among the BS students and teachers from English, Education and Economics Departments of University of Sargodha. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were integrated to analyse teachers' code switching through questionnaires and classroom observation. Questionnaires were used to collect the opinion of the teachers and the students. The lectures were also recorded and analysed using Gumperz' Model of Code-switching. It was noticed that the code switching was prevalent in the English class in all departments at University of Sargodha. It was concluded that it would play a constructive, positive and pivotal role in the process of teaching and learning of English language.

*Teachers and Students Code-Switching: The Inevitable Evil in EFL Classrooms* by Riyad F Hussein (2020). This study aims to find out the main functions and roles of code-switching among EFL high school teachers and students in Jordan. For this purpose, classroom observation and a questionnaire were used as instruments. Two EFL teachers were regularly observed, and notes of their code-switching behaviour over four weeks were taken, examined, classified, and finally analysed. A questionnaire was used for 330 students from two secondary schools in Jordan. The students were asked to fill in a Likert-type questionnaire. From the classroom observation, the results showed that teachers codeswitch for several reasons including affective function, giving instructions and directions, and linguistic incompetence. The questionnaire administered to students showed that students codeswitch for non-linguistic purposes such as maintaining rapport

and interpersonal relationships as well as keeping the line of communication without interruption to avoid any sort of conflict or misunderstanding. This study concludes by recommending that teachers should improve students' English language skills in non-linguistic domains such as the affective and interpersonal ones.

### **Research Methodology**

This study is a descriptive qualitative research and students were asked to fill in a questionnaire. The total number of sample student are 60 students. 40 students are undergraduate and 20 students are graduated level. 10 students are male and 50 are female. All of them are English specialization students of 2023-2024 academic year from Mandalay university.

The questionnaire is adapted and it is to elicit the students' responses on code-switching patterns and functions. The questionnaire consisted of two sections; the first section described three questions for collecting data on age, gender and year. The second section consisted of fifteen items and aimed to collect data on students' perceptions of their code-switching functions and code-switching as related to classroom procedures and processes. In this section, students are asked to fill out a Likert-type questionnaire ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. Then, all the data are calculated and analysed by means of each item from the questionnaire, percentages and standard deviation based on the final results with the help of IBM SPSS statistics 2022 version.

The questionnaire had already passed out by a jury of five TEFL and language instructors. In addition to it, the questionnaire was used as a sample in a test-retest on 30 students who did not participate in this research. When Cronbach Alpha was computed, the result shown was 0.83. All final results are discussed and concluded in the last section.

### **Data Processing and Interpretation**

In this section, students' responses to items 1 to 8 are to elicit students' perception of code-switching functions. According to table 1, in item 1, the most frequent one is 33 occurrences for agree column, the second most one is 25 for strongly agree. Only 2 occurrences can be found for uncertain. There is no response for both disagree and strongly disagree columns. In item 2, 36 occurrences can be seen as the most frequent one for agree and 16 for strongly agree. 4 for each uncertain and disagree columns can also be found. There is no response for strongly disagree. In item 3, there are 36 occurrences for agree as the most frequent one, 14 for strongly agree, 8 for uncertain, 2 for disagree and no response for strongly agree. In item 4, 23 responses for agree column as the most frequent one, 20 for uncertain, 13 for disagree, 3 for strongly agree and only 1 for strongly disagree can also be found respectively. In item 5, the most frequent one is 24 occurrences for agree column, 17 responses for uncertain, 15 for strongly agree, 3 for strongly

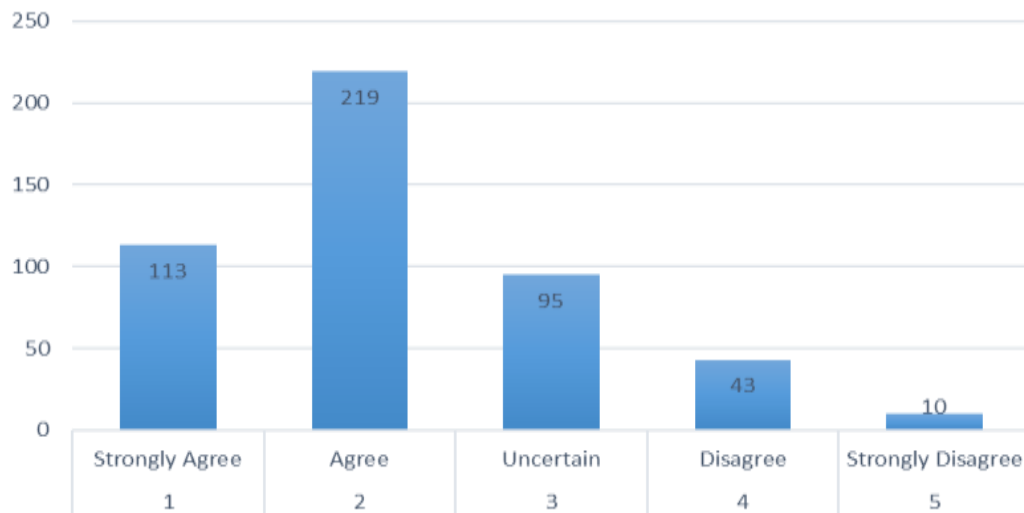
disagree and only 1 for disagree can be found. In item 6, there are 32 responses for strongly agree as the most frequent one, 14 for agree, 7 for disagree, 5 for uncertain and only 2 for strongly disagree column. In item 7, 22 is the highest frequent occurrence for agree column and 15 for uncertain, 12 for disagree, 7 for strongly agree and only 4 for strongly disagree can also be seen. In item 8, 31 responses for agree column and 24 for uncertain can be found. 4 for disagree and only 1 for strongly agree have been found and there is no response for strongly disagree.

Overall, 219 responses for agree column can be found as the most occurrence one. 113 responses for strongly agree, 95 for uncertain, 43 for disagree and only 10 for strongly agree can be observed respectively in the figure 1. All these above data are concerned with the students' perceptions of code-switching functions in the classroom.

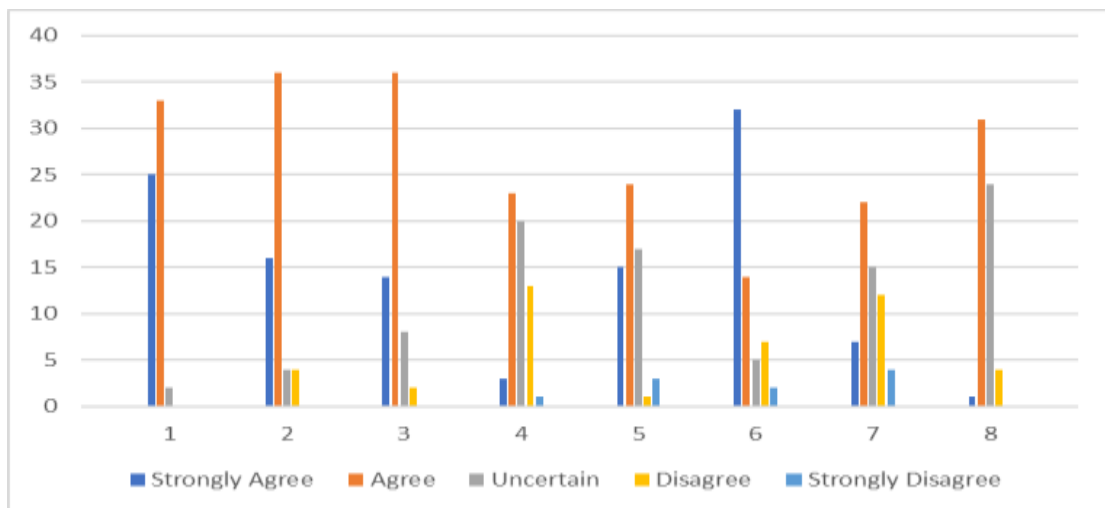
According to the above data, it is clear that most of the students are willing to code-switch for various purposes. It is because most of the students' responses are dealing with agree and strongly agree columns throughout the all items from the questionnaire. Therefore, it can also be assumed that they might have fully understanding about the functions of code-switching.

**Table 1: Students' perceptions of code-switching functions in the classroom**

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
1	Code-switching enables me to say what I want to say more	25	33	2	-	-
2	I switch to repeat what may not have been understood by the teacher or students	16	36	4	4	-
3	I code-switch to avoid any sort of conflict or misunderstanding	14	36	8	2	-
4	I switch to keep the line of communication without interruption	3	23	20	13	1
5	Code-switching makes it easier for learners to acquire knowledge and master language	15	24	17	1	3
6	Code-switching helps me to understand new vocabulary and master language	32	14	5	7	2
7	I code-switch because of my low proficiency in English	7	22	15	12	4
8	I switch to maintain rapport and interpersonal relationships	1	31	24	4	-



**Figure 1: Students’ perceptions of code-switching functions in the classroom**



**Figure 2: Students’ perceptions of code-switching functions in the classroom**

In the table 2, students’ responses to item 9 to 15 are matters with the functions and procedures of code-switching in the classroom. In item 9, the most frequent one is 37 occurrences for agree column, the second most one is 11 for uncertain. 9 occurrences can be found for strongly agree and 3 for disagree respectively. There is no response for strongly disagree column. In item 10, 18 occurrences can be seen as the most frequent one for agree and 17 for uncertain. 15 for strongly agree and 10 for disagree can also be found. There is no response for strongly disagree. In item 11, there are 21 occurrences for uncertain as the most frequent one, 18 for agree, 11 for strongly agree, 10 for disagree and no response for strongly disagree. In item 12, 29 responses for agree column as the most frequent one, 18 for strongly agree, 12 for uncertain, 1 for disagree and no response for strongly disagree can also be found respectively. In item 13, the most frequent one is 47 occurrences for agree column, 10 responses for uncertain, 3 for strongly agree and no responses for both disagree and strongly disagree can be found. In item 14, there are 21 responses

for agree as the most frequent one, 20 for uncertain, 10 for strongly agree, 7 for disagree and only 2 for strongly disagree column. In item 15, 23 is the highest frequent occurrence for uncertain and 15 for both agree and disagree, 4 for strongly agree and 3 for strongly disagree can also be seen.

Overall, 185 responses for agree column can be found as the most occurrence one. 114 responses for uncertain, 70 for strongly agree, 46 for disagree and only 5 for strongly agree can be observed respectively in the figure 3. All these above data are concerned with the functions and procedures of code-switching in the classroom.

Based on the above data, it can be considered that most of the students are familiar with the nature of code-switching and its functions and procedures in the classroom. Throughout the whole items, students' opinions on occurring code-switching in the classroom show that they are with the intention of alignment for constructive reasons because it is about social and academic interaction in the classroom in terms of bilingual. It can also be proved that item 15 shows the status and opinion of the most students' uncertainties and probably code-switching is able to help the students in the classroom.

**Table 2: Code-switching functions and procedures in the classroom**

	Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
9	It provides tools and ways for structuring questions & comments	9	37	11	3	-
10	Because code- switching to Myanmar is used by everyone in the classroom	15	18	17	10	-
11	It is a central feature of language learning	11	18	21	10	-
12	It builds a bridge from the known to the unknown	18	29	12	1	-
13	It enhances social and academic interaction in the classroom	3	47	10	-	-
14	Because constant use of English makes the class more formal	10	21	20	7	2
15	Because constant use of English makes the class monotonous	4	15	23	15	3

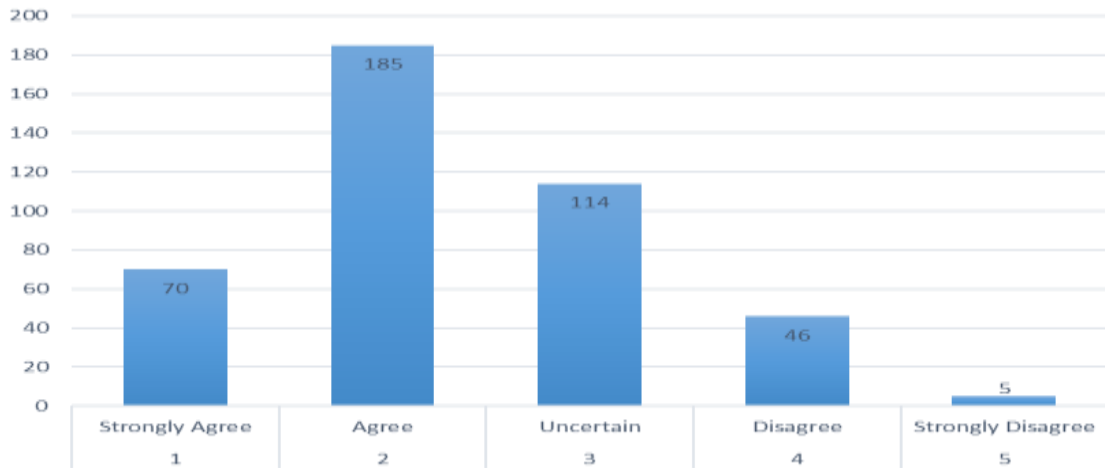


Figure 3: Code-switching functions and procedures in the classroom

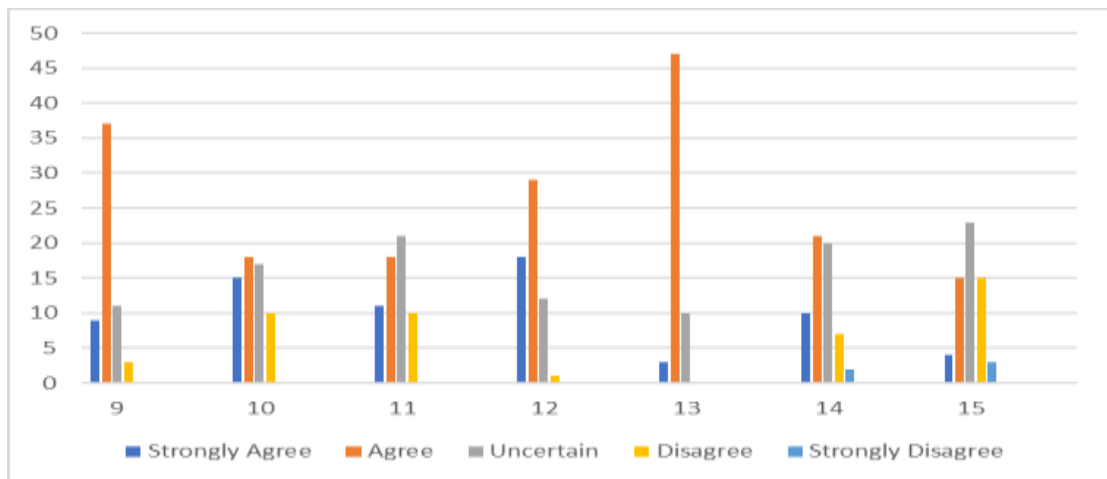
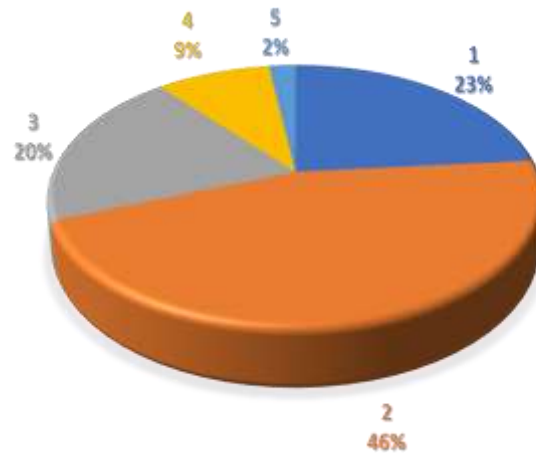


Figure 4: Code-switching functions and procedures in the classroom

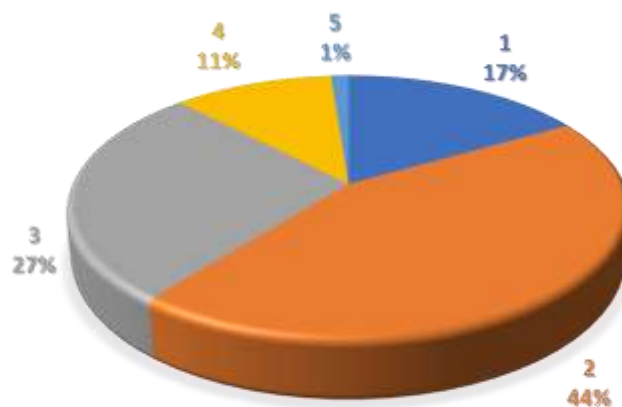
### Discussion

According to figure 5, it can be clearly seen that 46% and 23% of the student stand for agree and strongly agree respectively. 20% is for uncertain, 9% for disagree and only 2% for strongly disagree can also be found and over half of the students are willing to code-switch for reasonable purposes. The most frequent occurrence is that 219 (46%) for agree while the least one is only 10 (2%) for strongly disagree. The dominant gap between agree and disagree can be apparently observed too.



**Figure 5: Students' perceptions of code-switching functions in the classroom**

In the figure 6, it can also be found that 44% and 17% of the student stand for agree and strongly agree respectively. 27% is for uncertain, 11% for disagree and only 1% for strongly disagree can be seen and over half of the students also have strong relationship to classroom procedures and code-switching functions. The most frequent occurrence is that 185 (44%) for agree while the least one is only 5 (1%) for strongly disagree. It means that there is a huge gap between agree and strongly disagree.



**Figure 6: Code-switching functions and procedures in the classroom**

In the table 3, it can be observed that items 5, 10, 11, 14, 15 have the least standard deviation so that the role of code-switching might have a bit barrier to adjust these deviations between them; especially, in terms of perceptions and functions of code-switching found in this study. Moreover, it can also be seen that items 1, 8, 12, 13 also have the most standard deviation and it leads to some opportunities to be able to adjust these deviations easily for the purpose of being effective EFL classroom procedures. The rest items are neither too less nor too much. Therefore, it might be a challenging one to find out a common ground between them and it means that the students' different perceptions on code-switching have wide range to adjust or in other

words; it has high deviations. According to such index of deviation, although it is difficult to create a common ground among them for using only target language in EFL classrooms, it also has some benefits for the students by means of code-switching such as comparative and analytical views on respective two languages and their structures, functions and uses can also be learned comfortably and more effectively.

**Table 3: Total Statistics of all Items for Code-switching**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
N Valid	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Std. Deviation	.55515	.77824	.71228	.90884	1.00998	1.18023	1.11791	.85073	.72408	1.04097	.98290	.75614	.45442	1.01681	.99092

According to the three mentioned related researches, it can be found that even though these studies were built on different backgrounds from the different societies, all the results are surprisingly almost same with this present study. Different students from different backgrounds have same perceptions on code-switching in the context of EFL classrooms. This is because most of the students are learning English as a Foreign language and all of them might have huge influences of their mother tongue. For instance, Myanmar is a first language for students from this study and it is also an official language in the context of this study. In addition to that fact, total number of students is 60 and 40 students are undergraduate. Only 20 of them are graduate. It can also be concluded that 66.67 % of the students is young learners and they might need more exposure on using only target language.

Nevertheless, some issues in the context of this study concerning EFL context can also be found, too. Firstly, it might have some risks to do code-switching in EFL classroom all the time. This is because the nature of EFL classroom is about emphasis on language-oriented processes and at least it is to give foreign language exposure. Therefore, code-switching functions and procedures might be a little harmful for these purposes of EFL contexts. Secondly, despite the first issue, the role of code-switching is also standing as a requirement to convey the significant values of literature or in other words; some kinds of aesthetic value; especially, in the context of this study. Lastly, this present study has some limitations. Only one university and one specialization: only English, have been chosen as the study area. It means that all the results from this study might have more accuracy for only focal scope of this study and it might not be easy to cover the whole context of EFL classrooms in Myanmar.

On the whole, most of the student are in favour of code-switching for various purposes: such as mainly to maintain rapport and interpersonal relationships, to keep the line of communication without interruption and to avoid any conflict or misunderstanding. It is all about social and academic interactions or in other words; code-switching serves non-linguistics functions rather than linguistics features in the context of this study.

### **Conclusion**

This study is built on the perceptions of English specialization students concerned with the functions and roles of code switching in EFL classrooms of Mandalay University. Many scholars have already conducted several studies on this field of code-switching. Most of them investigated both perspectives of teachers and students on code-switching but this present study is only on the students' perceptions with the purpose of student-centred approach as well as promoting their language proficiency.

In the beginning of this study, two research questions are mentioned. The first one is (1) What are the main functions of code-switching among EFL university students in Mandalay University, Myanmar? These functions of code-switching can mostly be found according to this study. They are (1) clarification, (2) repetition, (3) explanation, (4) asking, (5) translation, (6) checking for understanding, (7) emphasizing of a language element, (8) making inferences, (9) developing vocabulary. The second one is (2) Are they willing to follow the functions of code-switching and why? They are willing to follow them because of the above functions. The dominant findings of this study have shown that students code-switch for various purposes. According to the context of this study, many EFL classrooms are dealing with not only language but also literature. The components of the current syllabuses are more than one specific purpose. It is a kind of multi-purposes. It also means that the role of code-switching is not ignorable in this current context of this study.

Generally, most of the students' perceptions are intangible and changeable in accordance with their levels of competences and different social backgrounds. Even the nature of code-switching itself also depends on various status of language users. In this study, some of the students are willing to code-switch while some are not. According to the protocols of respective pedagogies in EFL classrooms, it is vividly crucial to create effective and efficient atmospheres in teaching and learning. In doing so, it is also important to find out the needs as well as the preferences of the students in order to meet the objectives of what we are conveying in the EFL classrooms of Myanmar. This present study might hopefully be able to provide at least one insight about code-switching and utmost adjusting the students' demands and the needed supplies in the EFL classrooms of Myanmar.

### **Acknowledgements**

This study has been accomplished with the support of many remarkable persons. First of all, I wish to express my deep appreciation and thanks to Dr. Tint Moe Thuzar, Rector of Yadanabon University, for her permission to conduct this research. Next, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Ei Ei Soe Min, Professor, Head of English Department, Yadanabon University and Dr. Mon Mon Wai, Professor, Head of English Department, Mandalay University. I would like to

extend my thanks to all my teachers who taught me throughout my university days to gain more experiences and knowledge as well as my colleagues and students for their valuable supports and participations.

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