

## Code-switching as a didactic tool? Voices of students and teachers from multilingual classrooms

**Beata Katarzyna JĘDRYKA**

University of Warsaw

E-mail: [beata.jedryka@uw.edu.pl](mailto:beata.jedryka@uw.edu.pl), 

**Abstract:** This article investigates code-switching practices in multilingual classrooms, focusing on the linguistic strategies used by migrant-background students and their teachers. The study is based on interviews and surveys conducted with 20 students and 20 teachers, both in-person and via Zoom. The paper aims to explore the communicative and pedagogical functions of code-switching in the educational context and to examine how this phenomenon is perceived by both learners and educators.

**Keywords:** code-switching, Polish, education, teachers, students, home language

### Introduction

Contemporary schools in Poland, as in many other European countries, increasingly operate in conditions of multilingualism and multiculturalism (see Głowiak 2021; Jędryka 2021). This trend has intensified in recent years due to labour migration, the return of Polish families from abroad, and the influx of refugees and immigrants, including a large group of children from Ukraine after 2022 (see Ciupińska 2022; Walczak/ Wielecki 2024). In many classrooms today, students with different first (home) languages learn together. They acquire Polish as a second or foreign language, or as the language of schooling. Such a situation creates new communicative challenges for both teachers and learners, while at the same time opening opportunities for innovative didactic practices.

One of the most characteristic phenomena observed in such classrooms is code-switching, understood as the alternating use of two or more languages in communication. In Polish glottodidactics, as in other research traditions, this phenomenon has long attracted the attention of scholars and educational practitioners. Two approaches can be distinguished in the literature. The first emphasises a restrictive model of teaching and treats code-switching as an obstacle to mastering the target language (see Ezeh/ Umeh/ Anyanwu 2022; Hazaymeh 2022). The second highlights its functional character and recognises code-switching as a natural and useful element of the learning process (see Mushtaq/ Rabbani 2016). From the perspective of classroom practice, code-switching is therefore perceived in two ways: either as a sign of insufficient language competence or as a strategy that supports communication, comprehension, and

the bridging of the learner's home language with the language of education (see Seabel/ Ncanywa 2024).

International studies point to the multifunctionality of code-switching in education, particularly in English–Spanish and English–French contexts. It is analysed in terms of communicative, didactic, and identity-related functions. Research by Cahyani, de Courcy and Barnett (2018), Estremera and Gilbas (2022), and Farah (2023) provides evidence of its diverse pedagogical roles. In Polish glottodidactics, however, this topic appears much less frequently and usually in the context of general reflections on teaching Polish as a foreign or second language. Młyński and Majewska-Tworek (2024) point out that there is a lack of empirical studies on code-switching practices in multilingual classrooms involving Polish. The perspectives of students and teachers – their experiences, communicative strategies, and interpretations of code-switching in everyday school practice – remain particularly underexplored. This research gap justifies the need for an empirical analysis that situates the Polish context within the broader international discussion on the role of code-switching in didactics.

The aim of this article is to investigate code-switching practices in multilingual classrooms, with particular attention to their communicative and didactic functions. In this text, multilingual classes are understood as groups of students in which, alongside native speakers of Polish, there are children and adolescents who use other linguistic codes at home. In Poland, such situations increasingly concern children from families returning from migration, children of labour migrants, and refugee students, including a large number from Ukraine. In these classrooms, code-switching emerges as a natural practice, rooted in the students' everyday linguistic experiences, but at the same time raises questions about its role in the teaching and learning process. The phenomenon needs to be considered from two perspectives – that of the learner and that of the teacher – since it is their experiences, needs, and communicative strategies that determine whether code-switching is regarded as an obstacle or as a resource that supports learning.

The study focuses on how code-switching functions in classroom practice and how it is perceived and used by both students and teachers in multilingual settings. Its aim was to capture the communicative and didactic functions of code-switching, as well as to compare the views of these two groups. The research questions, discussed in detail in the methodological section, refer to the contexts in which code-switching occurs, the strategies employed by students and teachers, and the meanings they attribute to this phenomenon.

This article consists of six parts. Following the introduction, the theoretical framework of code-switching and previous studies on this phenomenon in glottodidactic contexts are presented. The next section discusses the methodology, including the nature of the study, the selection of participants, and the research tools. The fourth section presents the results of the empirical analyses and their interpretation considering the literature. The article concludes with a summary of the main findings, the limitations of the study, and possible directions for further research.

## 1. Definitions and Typologies of Code-Switching

### 1.1 Code-Switching – Definitions and Typologies

Code-switching is one of the fundamental phenomena characterising the functioning of bilingualism. It differs from borrowing, which leads to the permanent incorporation of lexical items into the language system, as well as from interference, which involves the transfer of phonological, syntactic, or lexical features from one language to another. In contrast to these processes, code-switching is situational and contextual in nature – it consists of the alternating use of two or more languages within a single utterance (see Edwards 2007: 18–19). This phenomenon has been analysed not only from a linguistic perspective but also in educational contexts, where it has become the subject of discussions regarding its functions in teaching and learning.

Various typologies of code-switching are presented in the literature. Scholars point, for instance, to inter-sentential switching, intra-sentential switching, and short insertions in the form of phrases, often referred to as tag-switching (see Edwards 2007). Another classification distinguishes three types of switching: within a single word, within a sentence (e.g., *Please go to the mercado and buy some leche y queso*), and between sentences (e.g., *Come to the table. Bwyd yn barod*) (see Baker & Wright 2017: 98–99).

Code-switching is often evaluated ambivalently: on the one hand, as a symptom of linguistic deficiency, and on the other, as a complex communicative strategy that enables interaction to be sustained and meanings to be effectively conveyed (see Edwards 2007: 18–19). Research into the structure of code-switching emphasises that it is not a random mixture of two systems but a rule-governed and systematic process operating within grammatical constraints. The Matrix Language Frame model assumes that the dominant language provides the grammatical framework, while insertions from the other language are adjusted to it. It is worth noting that scholarly reflection on code-switching has a long tradition – from the classical studies of Poplack and Meechan in the 1980s to contemporary analyses that consider diverse communicative contexts (see Baker/ Wright 2017: 98–99).

Importantly, code-switching is not only a linguistic but also a social phenomenon. It can signal group affiliation, mark differences from other participants in communication, or reinforce a sense of closeness in conversation (see Edwards 2007: 18–19).

### 1.2 Code-Meshing – Combining Codes as a Communicative and Educational Strategy

In the literature, it is emphasised that code-meshing differs from the traditional model of code-switching. While code-switching assumes a separate treatment of languages and their alternating use in communication, code-meshing is based on their integration within a single, coherent repertoire. Languages function here as resources that can be combined in hybrid texts, encompassing elements of the standard language as well as those of minority or local languages (see Kafle/ Canagarajah 2016).

Such a practice has educational significance, as it allows students to simultaneously develop academic competences while maintaining their own linguistic voice.

Unlike deficit-oriented approaches, which perceive the home language as an obstacle to learning, code-meshing enables the creative use of the full linguistic repertoire in writing and communication. In this way, students can connect their cultural and linguistic experiences with the demands of school discourse.

Comparative accounts indicate that code-switching relies on clearly distinct morphosyntactic systems and a balance between languages, whereas code-meshing highlights the integration of codes, their rhetorical and discursive blending, and the conceptualisation of bilingualism as a continuum (see Kafle/ Canagarajah 2016). Importantly, this practice is not reduced to language alternation but consists of the conscious and strategic combination of languages within a single utterance.

In educational contexts, code-meshing supports not only the acquisition of the language of schooling but also the maintenance of students' linguistic repertoires. Research suggests that such an approach can facilitate processes of academic socialisation while simultaneously fostering identity construction within the multilingual school environment.

### **1.3 Translanguaging – A New Perspective on Multilingual Practices**

In recent years, the concept of translanguaging has gained increasing prominence in research on multilingualism. Although the term is relatively new and its definitions and scope of use are still evolving, many scholars argue that it encompasses much more than traditionally understood code-switching. Whereas code-switching focuses on the alternating use of distinct languages, translanguaging assumes that all available linguistic resources constitute a single, fluid communicative repertoire, which speakers employ in an integrated manner (see Baker/ Wright 2017: 99–101).

In this sense, translanguaging describes the practices of bilingual and multilingual students who draw on their entire linguistic experience to construct meaning and communicate effectively in new situations. Languages are not perceived here as separate systems, but as components of one dynamic process. In bi- and multilingual communication, translanguaging emerges as a flexible and creative practice, enabling the fluid combination of linguistic resources depending on the needs of the interaction, topic, or interlocutor (see Creese 2017).

Scholars emphasise that translanguaging not only reshapes perspectives on bilingualism but also has significant pedagogical implications. In educational contexts, it can serve as a tool for learning by allowing students to fully mobilise their linguistic repertoires. The phenomenon supports identity formation, facilitates the building of relationships, and foregrounds learner agency: rather than being confined to a single linguistic norm, students can creatively combine all their codes. From this perspective, translanguaging differs from code-switching not so much externally as internally: instead of mechanical alternation, it entails fluid use of the entire linguistic repertoire available to the bilingual learner (see Baker/ Wright 2017: 99–101).

The evolution of approaches to multilingual practices reflects a shift from the restrictive model of code-switching – which treats languages as separate systems used alternately – towards more flexible frameworks. Code-meshing highlights the possibility of creatively integrating linguistic resources within a single text, particularly in

educational and academic discourse. An even broader perspective is offered by translanguaging, which assumes that all a speaker's languages form part of one fluid repertoire employed in communication and learning. This shift reflects a growing recognition of multilingualism as a resource in education rather than an obstacle in the learning process.

## **2. The Status and Functions of Code-Switching**

### **2.1 Overview of International Research**

Research on code-switching in education has developed particularly in countries with a long tradition of bilingualism and multiculturalism. Studies conducted in the United States and Latin America have focused primarily on English–Spanish classrooms, where code-switching is both a daily practice and a source of controversy. On the one hand, concerns are raised about difficulties in mastering the language of schooling; on the other hand, code-switching is recognized as a functional phenomenon that supports communication and comprehension of lesson content (see Cahyani/ de Courcy/ Barnett 2018).

Similar observations have been made in Canadian research in English–French classrooms, which has shown that code-switching fulfils important communicative and pedagogical functions and also serves as a tool for reinforcing students' bilingual identity. Estremera and Gilbas (2022) note that learners employ code-switching not only to facilitate comprehension but also as a strategy for building peer relationships.

An important area of investigation concerns dual language immersion programs in the United States. These programs aim to develop competence in both English and a minority language – most often Spanish, Chinese, Korean, or Polish. Research indicates that in such programs, code-switching occurs naturally as a tool for supporting understanding and organising classroom activities (see Howard et al. 2018). Analyses of bilingual schools demonstrate that code-switching serves both pedagogical and identity-related functions: it facilitates the integration of students from different linguistic backgrounds and supports their academic development (see Tedick/ Lyster 2020). In this context, code-switching is not perceived as an obstacle but rather as part of constructive teaching strategies.

In African and Asian contexts, scholars emphasise the role of code-switching in situations where the language of schooling is not the first language of the majority of students. Farah (2023) argues that in such cases, code-switching functions as a bridge between the local language and the language of schooling, while also serving as a strategy of identity construction. Research conducted in Wales, where Welsh coexists with English, interprets code-switching as a cultural practice and a tool for maintaining societal bilingualism.

In sum, international scholarship consistently confirms that code-switching is multifunctional: it can support communication, facilitate comprehension, and contribute to the construction of student and teacher identities (see Gumperz 1982; García/ Li Wei 2014). Although local educational and political contexts shape its use, the phenomenon is generally described as a natural practice of multilingual classrooms.

In the Polish context, however, research remains limited, underscoring the need for empirical studies to address this gap.

## 2.2 Debates on the Status of Code-Switching

The status of code-switching in education has long been the subject of debate and diverging interpretations. Within restrictive approaches, it was considered undesirable or even prohibited. A prominent example is the English only policy adopted in many American schools, based on the assumption that the use of students' home languages delayed the acquisition of the language of schooling. Similar positions can be found in research on foreign language teaching in Europe, where the prevailing belief is that excessive reliance on the first language limits exposure to the target language (see Ferguson 2003).

As research and pedagogical practice developed, a more tolerant approach emerged, viewing code-switching as a "necessary evil". From this perspective, the use of the first language was permitted only in exceptional circumstances – for example, when explaining complex grammatical issues, giving organisational instructions, or working with lower-proficiency students (see Macaro 2009). Although not fully endorsed, the practical benefits of code-switching began to be acknowledged.

The most flexible and contemporary perspective integrates code-switching into the teaching process. Closely aligned with the concepts of translanguaging and code-meshing, this approach emphasises that learners' full linguistic repertoires are resources rather than obstacles. Teachers employ code-switching to support comprehension, foster relationships, and develop metalinguistic awareness (see Dailey-O'Cain, Liebscher 2009; Cook 2001). In this integrative framework, code-switching is not treated as a deviation from the norm but as a natural practice of multilingual classrooms.

## 2.3 Functions of Code-Switching

Code-switching fulfils multiple functions in education, which can be categorised as follows. First, it serves a communicative function: it enables interaction to continue, helps overcome linguistic barriers, and allows conversational goals to be reached more efficiently. Gumperz's (1982) research shows that language alternation may be used to emphasize important content, introduce a new topic, or signal a shift in social relations among participants. Although Gumperz (1982) is a classic reference, contemporary research confirms the continued relevance of his functional categorisation of code-switching.

Second, code-switching plays a metalinguistic role. Teachers use it to explain grammatical rules, contrast linguistic structures, or clarify difficult concepts. Learners, in turn, may switch codes to check the accuracy of language forms or request clarification. Studies in foreign language instruction indicate that such use of the first language enhances comprehension and supports learning processes (see Macaro 2009).

Another important category is its identity-related function. Code-switching serves to signal membership in a social or cultural group and to build solidarity and closeness

among peers. In multilingual environments, it constitutes a key element of identity negotiation and is often regarded as evidence of bilingual competence rather than a deficit (see García/ Li Wei 2014).

Finally, in the school context, code-switching has significant pedagogical functions. It facilitates classroom organisation, supports the understanding of instructions, and enables teachers to adjust the level of difficulty to students' needs. It can be used to activate learners, create a safe linguistic environment, and gradually introduce them to the language of schooling (see Dailey-O'Cain/ Liebscher 2009).

A review of international studies demonstrates that code-switching in education serves a wide range of functions and is interpreted in diverse ways – from a prohibited practice, to a tolerated one, to an intentionally integrated pedagogical strategy. The shift from restrictive to more flexible perspectives reflects a growing recognition of multilingualism as a resource for learning and identity development. In the Polish context, however, in-depth empirical research is lacking, which highlights the need to examine the experiences of both students and teachers in multilingual classrooms.

### **3. Methodology**

The study was conducted between June and August 2025. It was qualitative in nature and situated at the intersection of applied linguistics (glottodidactics) and pedagogy, focusing on the experiences of students and teachers with regard to code-switching in multilingual classrooms. The aim of the research was to capture situations in which code-switching occurs during lessons, to identify the functions it serves, and to collect perspectives on its pedagogical and social significance.

The method applied was the in-depth individual interview, conducted both face-to-face and via the Zoom platform. Each interview lasted between 40 and 50 minutes and was carried out in Polish. For organisational and ethical reasons, the conversations were not recorded; instead, the data were collected in the form of detailed field notes taken by the researcher. This approach made it possible to preserve the authenticity and openness of participants' statements while minimising potential discomfort associated with audio recording.

The study involved 20 students attending multilingual classes in Polish schools and 20 teachers working with linguistically diverse groups. Participants were selected purposively to allow comparison of both perspectives. Metadata were collected regarding respondents' first and additional languages, and for teachers, information was also gathered on the subject they taught and their subjective assessment of students' proficiency in Polish. Particular attention was paid to situations in which teachers, lacking knowledge of a student's home language (e.g., Chinese, Vietnamese, or Arabic), resorted to a foreign language – most often English – as a *lingua franca*.

Two working hypotheses guided the study. The first assumed that students perceive code-switching primarily as a strategy that facilitates communication and comprehension of lesson content rather than as evidence of limited linguistic competence. The second concerned teachers' perspectives, positing that their evaluation of code-switching is ambivalent: on the one hand, they recognise it as a practical didactic tool,

while on the other, they regard it as a phenomenon that may hinder the development of the language of schooling.

The research questions focused on three main areas:

- In what situations does code-switching occur in the classroom?
- What functions (communicative, didactic, metalinguistic, identity-related) are attributed to this phenomenon?
- How do teachers and students evaluate its role – as an obstacle or as a resource supporting teaching and learning?

Additionally, in order to complement the qualitative data, a short questionnaire was administered, consisting of four closed-ended questions and one open-ended question. This instrument enabled the collection of quantitative data reflecting respondents' attitudes towards code-switching. The combination of both tools made it possible to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon and to situate the findings more firmly within the context of international research on multilingual education. The questionnaire was designed as a supplementary tool, intended to capture general attitudes rather than to provide statistically representative results. For this reason, the quantitative data are presented descriptively and interpreted in relation to the qualitative findings.

## 4. Research Findings

### 4.1 Description of the Research Sample

In accordance with ethical procedures for research involving human participants, full anonymity and data security were ensured. All data used in the analysis were anonymised to protect participants' privacy. For the presentation of results, coded identifiers were applied: N1–N20 for teachers and U1–U20 for students. Interviews with students were conducted with parental consent.

The study involved 20 students attending multilingual classes in Polish schools in the Mazovian region. The group consisted of 10 girls and 10 boys. Most of the students were between 13 and 15 years of age (14 participants – 70%), while the remaining six (30%) were under 12 years old. About home languages, the respondents represented diverse linguistic backgrounds: 6 students (30%) spoke Chinese, 5 (25%) Ukrainian, 4 (20%) Vietnamese, 3 (15%) Armenian, and 2 (10%) Turkish. In many cases, the home language coexisted with other codes: students reported using Russian (8 participants – 40%), Polish (2 participants – 10%), and English (2 participants – 10%) at home. Their educational experience in the Polish school system also varied: 5 students had been in Poland for 3 years (25%), 6 for 4 years (30%), 4 for 5 years (20%), 3 for 6 years (15%), and 2 for 7 years (10%). All respondents reported knowledge of English at levels A1–A2, and 9 (45%) additionally knew German at the same level. Most students attended urban schools (12 participants), while the remaining 8 attended rural schools.

The second part of the sample consisted of 20 teachers (N1–N20) employed in schools in the Mazovian region, most of them in urban institutions (14 participants, 70%), with 6 (30%) working in rural areas. The group was diverse in terms of age:

most were 36–45 years old (8 participants, 40%) or 25–35 years old (7 participants, 35%), while the smallest subgroup consisted of those over 45 years old (5 participants, 25%). Women predominated among participants (13–65%), with men forming the minority. Teachers' professional experience with migrant-background students ranged from 3 to 7 years: the largest group reported 4 years (6 participants, 30%) or 3 years (5 participants, 25%) of experience, followed by smaller groups with 7 years (4 participants, 20%), 6 years (3 participants, 15%), and 5 years (2 participants, 10%).

The subjects taught reflected the diversity of the school curriculum: mathematics – 5 participants (25%), Polish language – 4 (20%), science – 4 (20%), history – 3 (15%), geography – 2 (10%), and biology – 2 (10%). In terms of language knowledge, the teachers demonstrated a broad yet uneven repertoire. English was the most known foreign language (20 participants, 100%), with proficiency levels ranging from A2 to B2. Slavic languages occupied the next positions: Russian (9 participants, 45%) and Ukrainian (4 participants, 20%), alongside German (4 participants, 20%). The proficiency levels of these languages were most often basic (A1–A2), which indicates that, in practice, teachers most frequently rely on English as a lingua franca in communication with multilingual students.

Teachers' self-assessment of their students' Polish proficiency was highly varied. Some described it as very poor (6 participants, 30%) or poor (3 participants, 15%), others as average (6 participants, 30%) or good (4 participants, 20%). Only one teacher (5%) rated their students' competence as very good.

## 4.2 Student Perspectives

Understanding code-switching from the perspective of students is particularly significant, as they are the direct participants in the educational process and are best positioned to indicate how this practice affects their comprehension, sense of linguistic security, and identity in school. International studies show that most students perceive code-switching positively. In the context of English language education, Torres (2025) demonstrated that nearly 70% of students considered this strategy helpful in better understanding instructional content. Similar results were reported by Yana and Nugraha (2019) in Indonesia, where between approximately 75% and 95% of students declared that code-switching increased their confidence, facilitated vocabulary retention, and supported learning.

In Poland, one of the first studies to highlight the voices of migrant-background students was the publication “Jesteśmy wśród was. Polska szkoła oczami uczniów z doświadczeniem migracji oraz ich rodziców” [*We Are Among You. The Polish School through the Eyes of Migrant Students and Their Parents*] (Jędryka 2021). The findings indicated that students viewed language barriers as the most significant educational challenge, while also emphasising the importance of teacher and peer support in the process of integration into the school community. Although this study did not directly address code-switching, it serves as an important point of reference, as it was the first in Poland to provide migrant-background students with an opportunity to articulate their reflections and needs regarding learning in Polish. Including the student perspective in research on code-switching, therefore, makes it possible not only to

capture its communicative functions but also to better understand its role in educational and social adaptation.

All students in the present study confirmed the occurrence of code-switching during their schooling. Respondents who had been in Poland for a shorter period reported that they still relied on this communicative strategy, whereas those with longer residence used it primarily in the initial stages of learning. Switching to the home language in interactions with teachers occurred mainly when students were certain that the teacher knew their language – this was particularly the case among Ukrainian students. For others, the most chosen auxiliary code was English. It is noteworthy that some respondents also relied on technological tools, such as online translators – this was the case for students from China, Vietnam, Turkey, and Armenia, reflecting the fact that Polish teachers generally did not speak these languages.

Switching to the home language most often concerned translating instructions, task content, or extended textbook passages. Occasionally, however, it also occurred in extracurricular situations, such as conflict resolution, organisational issues, or pastoral matters. If there was another student of the same nationality in the class (six cases), home-language communication occurred more frequently, with more proficient Polish users acting as translators for their peers.

Students emphasised that being able to use a language other than Polish was crucial, particularly for understanding lessons and preparing for classes. It allowed them to avoid failing grades and to cope more effectively with school demands. Eleven respondents also reported using their home language or English in conversations with teachers about school-related problems. Such practices made it easier for them to take their first steps in the new educational environment. In peer relations during the initial stage of schooling, English was the dominant language, accelerating integration within the class.

Switching to the home language was evaluated by students as unequivocally positive. Respondents indicated that it enabled them to express their thoughts more freely, fostered a sense of authenticity, and created greater communicative comfort. Some admitted, however, that they initially felt embarrassed, uncertain whether the teacher would understand them. Four students noted that, for this reason, they had to simplify their language to facilitate comprehension. At the same time, they observed that teachers employed similar strategies, using simplified Polish to enhance students' understanding during lessons.

Particular attention was paid to the use of English as a mediating language to grasp lesson content. More than half of the students (60%) acknowledged that their proficiency in English was not sufficient to feel fully confident about what and how they were expected to do in class. Nevertheless, they appreciated this possibility. For six respondents, reliance on English was even motivating, encouraging them to study the language more intensively.

### **4.3 Teacher Perspectives**

The teachers who participated in the study observed that code-switching most frequently occurred in situations related to the comprehension of educational content.

Students relied on their home language or on English when asking for clarification of instructions, translation of textbook passages, or explanations of homework assignments. Less frequently, they used their home language in matters related to pastoral care, which may occur during meetings with homeroom teachers or school counsellors. None of the respondents, however, were homeroom teachers of multilingual classes.

Teachers' attitudes toward students' code-switching in class proved particularly noteworthy. The majority (80% – 16 participants) initially struggled to accept this practice. This stemmed from the belief that students would acquire the language more quickly if fully immersed in it. Their subsequent observations, however, indicated that maintaining communication exclusively in Polish did not facilitate progress in language acquisition – nor in subject learning – and, in fact, often slowed the process.

Half of the participants admitted they were concerned that their knowledge of students' home languages or of English might not be sufficient for effective communication. They also feared exposing their linguistic shortcomings, which they believed could undermine their authority in the classroom. Over time, however, respondents came to appreciate code-switching and began to regard it as a support rather than an obstacle to learning. At present, all of the teachers surveyed reported using this strategy freely and without hesitation as one of the basic tools in working with multilingual students. They typically employed it when introducing new lesson topics. As many as 35% (7 teachers) declared that they prepared for code-switching already at the lesson-planning stage, anticipating the use of either students' home languages (6 teachers) or English (14 teachers). Some developed glossaries or even entire phrases for use in class. Students, in turn, valued this effort, which they found motivating.

Teachers perceived the functions of code-switching in varied ways. All respondents pointed to communicative and didactic functions as dominant. Only 25% recognised its identity-related function, and none identified a metalinguistic function. Teachers tended to interpret code-switching primarily through the lens of their didactic role, which explains why they most often emphasised its communicative and instructional functions as directly supporting the transmission of knowledge and facilitating comprehension. They were less likely to perceive its identity-related function, which requires viewing language not merely as a working tool but also as a carrier of emotion and cultural belonging. The absence of recognition of a metalinguistic function may be explained by the fact that teachers did not associate reflection on language or the comparison of systems with code-switching, instead treating these as part of routine explanations of lesson content. The absence of recognition of the metalinguistic function may reflect the strong focus of teachers on their instructional role, where code-switching is viewed primarily as a tool for clarifying content rather than as a means of developing language awareness. This suggests that teachers may not always conceptualize reflection on language and cross-linguistic comparisons as instances of code-switching, but rather as routine elements of explanation. A more explicit integration of metalinguistic strategies into teacher training could therefore enhance their ability to recognise and exploit this function of code-switching for pedagogical purposes.

Teachers assessed their current students' proficiency in Polish as weak (11 participants), good (5 participants), or very good (4 participants). The difference in categorisation results from data aggregation: the category "weak" in this section includes assessments previously described as very poor, poor, and average, allowing for a more synthetic presentation of teachers' evaluations. According to respondents, students' proficiency levels significantly influenced both student and teacher code-switching practices. The lower the students' linguistic competence, the more frequently they and their teachers resorted to the home language or English. The difficulty of the subject matter also shaped this tendency.

Teachers unanimously emphasised that code-switching in education should be employed more consciously and purposefully. In their view, spontaneous or uncontrolled use of this strategy may lead to excessive deviation from the target language and the reinforcement of errors, whereas thoughtful application allows it to become a valuable pedagogical tool. In this perspective, code-switching is no longer treated as a temporary solution but rather as a methodologically justified practice that supports content comprehension, the introduction of new vocabulary, and the comparison of linguistic structures.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

This section integrates the discussion of findings with the study's overall conclusions. The results are interpreted considering international research on code-switching and situated within the specific context of Polish multilingual classrooms. The discussion highlights both areas of convergence with global trends and divergences that reflect local conditions, before turning to the study's limitations and directions for future research.

The study allowed for the verification of both research hypotheses. From the students' perspective, code-switching was confirmed to be perceived as a strategy that supports communication and comprehension of lesson content rather than as a sign of linguistic deficiency. Teachers, on the other hand, revealed an ambivalent attitude toward the phenomenon – initially regarding it as a threat to language immersion, but over time appreciating its functionality and treating it as a practical pedagogical tool. The findings, therefore, confirm that code-switching serves multiple functions – communicative, didactic, and identity-related – while its metalinguistic function remains marginalised.

The research questions made it possible to identify typical situations in which code-switching occurs in multilingual classrooms: clarifying instructions, explaining assignments and textbook passages, resolving organisational issues, and supporting students in pastoral contexts. Respondents emphasised that this practice not only facilitates comprehension of content but also fosters integration processes and contributes to a sense of security within the school environment. At the same time, it is important to note that the metalinguistic function of code-switching was not recognised by the teachers. This marginalisation may stem from their strong focus on code-switching as an immediate didactic aid rather than as a resource for developing language awareness. While international research points to the value of cross-linguistic

comparisons in fostering metalinguistic reflection, this potential remains underutilised in Polish classrooms. Addressing this gap in teacher training could enhance the role of code-switching as a tool not only for communication and comprehension but also for cultivating deeper linguistic awareness among students.

Additional questionnaire data confirmed high acceptance of code-switching. All respondents (100%) agreed that this strategy helps in understanding lesson content, and 70% strongly disagreed with the claim that it hinders the acquisition of the language of schooling. Moreover, all participants (100%) recognised code-switching as a natural practice of multilingual classrooms, while 60% of teachers strongly agreed that it should be deliberately employed as a teaching strategy.

The findings also open avenues for further research. First, greater attention should be devoted to the metalinguistic function, which remains underexplored in school practice but is considered in international literature an important element of developing students' language awareness. Second, research should be expanded to include other regions of Poland and compared with data from countries with longer traditions of multilingual education, which would allow for a more precise understanding of the Polish context. Third, future studies could involve quantitative analyses with larger samples and longitudinal designs to trace how the role of code-switching evolves with the length of students' participation in the educational system. An important direction of development is also the exploration of code-meshing and translanguaging practices, which are increasingly shaping international didactic discourse and may serve as valuable inspiration for Polish schools.

The findings resonate with international research highlighting the communicative and pedagogical functions of code-switching (Cahyani et al. 2018; Tedick/ Lyster 2020), while also reflecting the ambivalence reported in studies of European foreign language classrooms (Macaro 2009). At the same time, the marginalisation of the metalinguistic function contrasts with the emphasis placed on cross-linguistic reflection in the broader literature (García/ Li Wei 2014). This suggests that Polish classrooms mirror global tendencies but also reveal context-specific gaps that require further pedagogical attention.

A limitation of the present study is that the quantitative data from the supplementary questionnaire were analysed descriptively rather than statistically. While this approach aligns with the qualitative character of the research, future studies could benefit from including graphical presentations or more advanced statistical analyses with larger samples to increase comparability and generalizability.

A key limitation of this study is the relatively small research sample – 20 students and 20 teachers – which provides valuable qualitative insights but restricts the generalizability of the findings. The results should therefore be interpreted with caution, as they reflect the perspectives of a specific group of participants rather than broader statistical trends. Future studies should employ larger and more diverse samples, ideally complemented by quantitative methods, to enable broader generalisation and to capture regional differences more systematically.

## References

- Baker, C./ W.E. Wright (2017), *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 6th Edition*. Bristol.
- Cahyani, H./ M. de Courcy/ J. Barnett (2018), *Teachers' code-switching in bilingual classrooms: exploring pedagogical and sociocultural functions*, (in:) "International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism" 21:4, 465–479.
- Ciupińska, B. (2022), *Uczniowie uchodźcy wojenni z Ukrainy w polskim systemie edukacji w percepcji nauczycieli*, (in:) „Humanitas. Pedagogika i Psychologia” 25, 155–169.
- Cook, G. (2001), *Using the First Language in the Classroom*. Oxford.
- Creese, A. (2017), *Translanguaging as an Everyday Practice*, (in:) B. Paulsrud/ J. Rosén/ B. Straszer/ A. Wedin (eds.) *New Perspectives on Translanguaging and Education*. Bristol, 1–9.
- Dailey-O’Cain, J./ Liebscher, G. (2009), *Teacher and student use of the first language in foreign language classroom interaction: Functions and applications*, (in:) M. Turnbull/J. Dailey-O’Cain (eds.), *First language use in second and foreign language learning*. Bristol, 131–144
- Edwards, J. (2007), *Foundations of Bilingualism*, (in:) T.K. Bhatia/ W.C. Ritchie (eds.), *The Handbook of Bilingualism*. Malden, 7–31.
- Estremera, M.L./ S. Gilbas (2022), *Written and oral codeswitching prevalence: functions and didactic implications in ESL context*, (in:) “Advanced Education” 9(20), 97–107.
- Ezeh, N.G./ I.A. Umeh/ E.C. Anyanwu (2022), *Code Switching and Code Mixing in Teaching and Learning of English as a Second Language: Building on Knowledge*, (in:) “English Language Teaching” Vol. 15 (9), 106–113.
- Farah, A. (2023), *Code-switching among heritage learners of Spanish: Attitudes, practices, and pedagogical implications*, (w:) “Critical Multilingualism Studies” 10(1), 1–35.
- Ferguson, A. (2003), *Classroom Code-Switching in Post-Colonial Contexts: Functions, Attitudes and Policies*, (in:) “AILA Review” 16, 38–51.
- García, O./ Li Wei (2014), *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*. London.
- Głowiak, K. (2021), *Wielokulturowość w polskiej szkole*, (in:) „Zeszyty Naukowe Ostrołęckiego Towarzystwa Naukowego” XXXV, 25–40.
- Gumperz, J. (1982), *Discourse Strategies*. Cambridge.
- Hazaymeh, W.A. (2022), *Teachers' Perceptions of Code-Switching Functions and Effects in English as a Foreign Language Classroom*, (in:) “European Journal of Educational Research” 11(3), 1839–1849.
- Howard, E.R./ K.J. Lindholm-Leary/ J. Sugarman/ D. Christian (2018), *Guiding Principles for Dual Language Education (3rd ed.)*. Washington DC.
- Jędryka, B.K. (2021), *Jesteśmy wśród was. Polska szkoła oczami uczniów z doświadczeniem migracji oraz ich rodziców*. Warszawa.

- Kafle, M./ S. Canagarajah (2016), *Multiliteracies, Pedagogies and Academic Literacy*, (in:) W.E. Wright/ S. Boun/ O. García (eds.), *The Handbook of Bilingual and Multilingual Education*. Malden, 241–252.
- Macaro, E. (2009), *Teacher Use of Codeswitching in the Second Language Classroom: Exploring 'Optimal' Use*, (w:) M. Turnbull/ J. Dailey-O'Cain (eds.), *First Language Use in Second and Foreign Language Learning*. Bristol, 35–49.
- Młyński, R./ A. Majewska–Tworek (2024), *Typy i funkcje przełączania kodu językowego (code-switching) w wywiadzie z dzieckiem bilingwalnym*, (in:) „Prace Językoznawcze” 26(2), 271–286.
- Mushtaq H./ R. Rabbani (2016), *Code-Switching as a Pedagogical Tool in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Classrooms*, (in:) “NUST Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities” 2(2), 193–211.
- Seabela, M.M./ T. Ncanywa (2024), *Code-switching as a pedagogical practice for senior phase teachers teaching content subjects in OR-Tambo district*, (in:) “African Journal of Teacher Education and Development” 3(1), 1–10.
- Tedick, D.J./ R. Lyster (2020), *Scaffolding Language Development in Immersion and Dual Language Classrooms*. New York.
- Torres, T.G.C. (2025), *Students' perspectives on code-switching in English instruction*, (in:) “Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives” 3(5), 631–643.
- Turnbull, M./ J. Dailey-O'Cain (eds.) (2009), *First Language Use in Second and Foreign Language Learning*. Bristol.
- Walczak, B./ K.M. Wielecki (2024), *„My z wami” – uczniowie uchodźczy z Ukrainy w polskich szkołach w świetle badań jakościowych*, (w:) „Dziecko Krzywdzone. Teoria, Badania, Praktyka” 23(2), 148–170.
- Yana, Y./ I.F. Nugraha (2019), *Students' perception on the use of code-switching in English classroom*, (in:) “PROJECT (Professional Journal of English Education)” 2(2), 67–73.