





The Multilingual Amalgamation of Interacting International Students in Indonesia

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Abstract. Code-mixing practices are common among international students who participated in an English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) Study Abroad Program at BINUS University in Jakarta, Indonesia. This paper aims to discover the linguistic behavior of international students while they navigate their study abroad experience. The research specifically explores the students' acknowledged proficiency in their native languages, English as lingua franca and Indonesian as the host country language; the code-mixing practice among those languages; and how this practice affects their intercultural communication. The participants for this study were eleven international students with various English proficiency levels from seven different countries, such as Rumania, Korea, and Pakistan. The research used open-ended survey questions to gather responses about how the intersection of their native languages, English, and Indonesian affected their speech habits and communication abilities. The results show that international students admitted having a high proficiency in English but low in Indonesian. Code mixing often occurs for two or even three languages in their communication. Moreover, code-mixing is considered beneficial for the students to convey meanings and expand their linguistic ability.

Keywords: code-mixing, ELF, Indonesia, intercultural communication, international students.

1 Introduction

English is the first truly global lingua franca as it is the most studied and spoken language worldwide. It is well known that the English language has become a global lingua franca. (Holmes J. &, 2022) define lingua franca as a language serving as a regular means of communication between different linguistic groups in a multilingual speech community. Similarly, Seidlhofer (2011) defines English as a lingua franca (ELF) as 'any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option'.

As a lingua franca, English is used as a medium of instruction throughout various educational institutions, particularly at higher or university levels. Because of this,

many universities around the world provide international study abroad programs to attract new international students from various countries. Goldoni (2015) reported that study abroad (SA) students in America took up different courses such as STEM, social sciences, business courses, humanities, arts, and others. They did not only take courses in world languages (English) in English-speaking countries. This trend indicates an automatic assumption that English will be used as the medium of communication.

The countries where international students want to study become the primary consideration for taking the study abroad program. The local language of the host country will affect the student's ability to succeed in their education and daily living. Unsurprisingly, the top four preferred countries are the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia, all are English-speaking countries. The other non-English countries, such as France, Russia, Germany, and China follow in the fifth to eighth position.

Even though Indonesia has not become a popular destination for studying abroad, some universities in Indonesia have initiated the programs. At Binus University, the program is called English as Lingua Franca (EFL) Study Abroad Program, as all the courses provided are delivered in English. This program invites university students from all over the world to study for one semester in its campus in Jakarta. Students can choose the courses that they want to take for one semester. They can drop the course after joining the class for the first two weeks if the course is not suitable for them.

As of 2023, approximately 1.5 billion people worldwide use English either natively or as a second or foreign language. Therefore, English speakers can roughly be divided into native speakers (NS) or non-native speakers (NNS) of English. In Indonesia, English is used as a Foreign Language (EFL). Thus, English speakers in Indonesia are considered NNS. However, all over the world, the number of NNS far exceeds the number of NS of English. There are only 373 million native English speakers, while the majority 1.08 billion are non-native speakers (Statista, 2023). Some countries such as India and the Philippines have a large population of both NS and NNS.

International students who took the EFL study abroad program in Binus also come from NS and NNS countries. There are students from America and Australia but mostly come from other NNS countries such as India, Pakistan, Romania, France, Spain, etc. Thus, besides English, they also have their native languages. When they are studying in Indonesia, is it necessary for them to learn Indonesian, the language of the host country? Although the courses are provided in English, the ability to communicate in the host language will help students gain better academic performance and social integration (Ahmed, 2024).

International students face significant challenges when studying in a country where the native population speaks a language different from the language used for instruction. This scenario implies that overseas students must adeptly manage three languages - their mother tongue, English, and Indonesian - to excel in their academic pursuits and social interactions with their peers. Hence, this study aims to determine the influence of study abroad programs utilizing ELF on their communication pattern. To achieve that aim, we formulated three research questions:

1. How do international students perceive their language proficiency?
2. What code-mixing practices occur in their interactions?
3. How does code-mixing affect their intercultural communication?

The paper is structured as follows. The introduction consists of the background of the study and the research question. The next section, the literature review, discusses the impact of the study abroad program on English proficiency and the code-mixing practices among international students. The methodology section describes the type of research and data collection procedure. The results and discussions present the results based on the three research questions. Finally, the conclusion section summarizes the findings of this study.

2 Literature Review

2.1 The Impact of Study Abroad Program on English Proficiency

Many universities worldwide conduct study abroad (SA) programs to offer international students the opportunity to immerse oneself in the host country's languages and culture. Since most international students want to study English, it is not surprising that English-speaking countries such as the USA and the UK become the primary destinations for international students to study abroad. Similarly, English-speaking students also gained the language proficiency of the host countries while they were studying abroad. (Magnan & Back, 2007) reported that US students gained improvement in the host language skills after studying for one semester in France, although English was used as the medium of instruction. Other studies also confirmed that the host language skills developed during study abroad (Martinsen, 2020). One study that investigated the US students' oral Spanish skills after studying for six weeks in Argentina reported that most of these students achieved considerable improvements in their oral skills in the host language (Baker-Smemoe, 2014).

A different situation occurs when international students come to study in Indonesia. Indonesian universities that conduct study abroad programs also use English as the medium of instruction. Thus, the main aim of this program is to offer international students the experience of studying in Indonesia and to improve their language proficiency by interacting with foreign students. Like Indonesian students, most foreign students also come from NNES countries. Thus, through the English as Lingua Franca program, both the international students and host country students can learn and improve their English language skills.

A study conducted by Situmorang, Nugroho, & Sihombing (2021) revealed how international students' experience while studying in Indonesia influences their English proficiency. This paper focused on how the study abroad program impacted the international English as a Second Language (ESL) and native Indonesian students' experience of speaking and learning English. They found that students "were not intimidated using their various accents and the urgency to speak one true English. English is used as a tool of communication. Though they made mistakes, they supported each other." Moreover, they also revealed that the study abroad context in which both "international students and Indonesians are not native speakers of English," created a safe environment for both groups to communicate imperfectly while still improving and learning from one another. Their discussion highlights the importance of supporting language

learners educationally, emotionally, and financially to create a positive environment that allows their knowledge to thrive.

While their research mainly focuses on the positive impacts of studying abroad, it does mention some students “limiting contacts with only fellow home countries to protect their emotional identity” (Situmorang, Nugroho, & Sihombing, 2021), keeping them in their comfort zone and hindering the advancement of their English knowledge and proficiency. This tendency, however, is not explored or analyzed deeply at all. The researchers seem to be uninterested in discussing cases that fail to support their positive hypothesis, revealing a level of bias present in this research.

On the contrary, Fang & Baker (2017) reported their research on Chinese students who had experienced study abroad programs in majority English-speaking countries. Fang & Baker's study focused on how their programs impacted Chinese English learners studying in countries where the people spoke English as their first language. In this report, Fang & Baker emphasized the struggles faced by the students and highlighted the students' negative experiences. Negative experiences were likely more common among the students interviewed because of the context. “Language learners are unlikely to identify with a language in which they feel inferior to an idealized native speaker” contributing to insecurities and hindering one's ability to improve their language skills.

Furthermore, by studying in English-speaking countries, it is more difficult for the students to dissociate the English language from the cultures of Anglophone countries. Because of this, many students had the impression that to have sufficient knowledge of English, one also requires knowledge of the culture of such English-speaking countries. (Bouchrika, 2024) pointed out that studying abroad presents challenges such as adapting to a new culture, homesickness, and sometimes feeling out of place. Similarly, (Karakaya & Alghamdi, 2024) stated that linguistic challenges are the common hurdles for international students.

However, Fang & Baker (2017) state that the linguistic inferiority towards English is not necessary because “as English language has spread across the globe, it predominantly functions as a lingua franca (ELF) facilitating communication between people from different lingua-cultural backgrounds.” They want to emphasize that English has become global, with “the number of non-native speakers of English (NNSEs) far outnumber native speakers of English (NSEs). By revealing the negative impact of the aforementioned assumption has on English learners' confidence and language learning capabilities, Fang & Baker argue that “NSE no longer control, nor should be arbiters, of the [English] language.”

2.2 Code-Mixing Practice Among International Students

Code mixing is defined as the use of two or more codes in one utterance (Meyerhoff, 2006). Similarly, Ahmad & Jusoff (2009) gave their opinion that code-mixing requires a relative knowledge of both languages and their associated norms. Code mixing or code shifting usually happens when there are language proficiency issues in the second language (Kamal & Roy, 2024). For example, when an Indonesian student does not know certain words in English, he inserts Indonesian words in English sentences or vice versa. When a person's linguistic proficiency is good enough, he can code-switch

or juxtapose two languages in a spoken discourse by transferring from one code to another in communication (Ezeh, Umeh, & Anyanwu, 2022).

Meyerhoff (2006) said, "People who speak more than one language are generally very sensitive to the differences in the varieties of the languages they use, and they are aware that one variety will serve their needs better than another." People who can speak more than one language are called bilingual. The populations in some Asian countries, such as Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Pakistan, and China are naturally bilingual (Kamal & Roy, 2024). They typically have their mother tongue and dialect as their primary language (L1), and English as their second or foreign language (L2). As English is used as a second or foreign language, the speakers are called Non-Native English Speakers (NNES).

A common phenomenon that occurs among NNE speakers is code-switching or code-mixing. For example, a Maori student greets her friend, "*Kia ora* Sarah, how are you?" (Holmes J. &, 2022)). In this sample, the code mix occurs between Maori, the native language (L1) of the speaker, and English, the second language (L2).

Code-mixing typically occurs within two languages. However, a triple language mix might occur in certain situations. For example, a student from Korea who studies in Indonesia with English as a medium of instruction, must listen to the teacher in English, translate them mentally into Korean, and mix English and Indonesian to communicate with their Indonesian classmates. This student must employ all her language skills in three languages to be able to observe the lessons and communicate with the teachers and fellow students. The possibility of this triple code-mixing phenomenon is investigated in this study.

3 Methods

3.1 Type of Research

This research employs a qualitative approach because the goal of the research was to learn the live stories and experiences that the students had during their stay and learning in Indonesia. Qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data (in this case the questionnaire responses) to understand their concepts, opinions, or experiences, which can be used to gather in-depth insight into a problem or generate new ideas (Bhandari, 2020).

3.2 Research Subjects

In this study, the research participants were eleven students from seven countries. They were some members of international students enrolled in the 2024 even-semester EFL Study Abroad Program at Bina Nusantara University, Jakarta, Indonesia. They were studying in Binus for one semester in different departments. The table below shows the students' countries of origin and their native language backgrounds. None of the students' native languages was either English or Indonesian.

Table 1. The students' countries and languages

Country	Languages	No of Students
Pakistan	Urdu	1
Slovakia	Slovak	1
Germany	German	1
Netherlands	Dutch	1
Romania	Romanian	1
India	Kashmiri	1
Korea	Korean	5

3.3 Research Procedure

With regards to a research procedure theorized by Creswell & Creswell (2017), qualitative data collection methods can consist of semi-structured interviews using open ended questionnaire to obtain participants' experience and opinions. The questionnaire was distributed digitally to the participants, through Whatsapp group chat for international students. The questionnaire consists of 8 open-ended questions regarding the students' language background, English, Indonesian and other language proficiency, language used in daily communicative activity, and the code-mixing practice they were experiencing. The questions were intentionally designed to be open-ended enough to give space for the students who volunteered in this study to elicit in-depth responses from them. Their responses were digitally recorded and interpreted by the researchers by comparing the findings with the previous studies.

4 Results and Discussion

The results of this study provide information on how the students' linguistic backgrounds affect their communicative habits in the host country, Indonesia where they were studying for one semester. The results are divided into three sub-sections based on the responses they provided in the questionnaire. The first sub-section discusses the students' acknowledged language proficiency in English, Indonesian, and other languages. The second sub-section discusses the code-mixing practices in their interactions. The last sub-section explores how code-mixing practices affect intercultural communication.

4.1 Acknowledged Language Proficiency

In the questionnaire, questions 2, 3, and 4 asked the students to rank their own proficiency in three languages: English, Indonesian, and their native language. They were asked to give a score of 1 to 5, ranging from least proficient to the most proficient. Language proficiency here is defined loosely as one's competence in speaking a particular language. In a university context, being proficient in one language means being

able to use the language for educational purposes. Thus, it may involve speaking, listening to lectures, reading the texts, and writing (essays, exams, etc.)

The second question asked the participants to rank themselves on their fluency in English. English fluency is important to know since it contributes to the tendency to mix languages while speaking. The students' self-rankings vary, as related to their linguistic backgrounds. The most common ranking was four out of five, with five students considering themselves at this level. The second most common was two out of five, with four students ranking themselves as such. The five out of five and one out of five rankings are tied at one student each. No students ranked themselves at three.

The average proficiency score is 3.09, meaning that all the participants feel that they are confident enough to attend lectures in English as the medium of instruction. This score is understandable as they came from the NNS countries where English is also spoken as a second (ESL) or foreign language (EFL). However, the status of English as ESL or EFL in different countries turns out to impact the students' self-assessed scores of English proficiencies. Students from ESL countries such as the Netherlands, India, and Pakistan scored themselves 4 or 5. On the contrary, Korean students scored themselves 1 or 2. These scores indicate a diverse level of confidence in English proficiency.

The next question asked the participants to rank their proficiency in Indonesian. The participants had been living in Indonesia for several months since the study program took place for six months. Classes offered to foreign exchange students were delivered in English by Indonesian lecturers. However, it was assumed that they could take a bit of Indonesian from their classmates, who are mostly Indonesian, in daily interaction. Yet, as expected, all participants in this study ranked themselves rather low. Seven participants ranked themselves as one out of five and four students ranked themselves as two out of five. Thus, the average score is 1.3, showing a very low proficiency in Indonesian.

Many international students find it challenging to learn Indonesian due to the limited time available during their studies. The constraints of their academic schedules often leave little room for language acquisition, making it difficult to fully grasp a third language. As a result, they struggle to communicate effectively and engage with the local culture, which can hinder their overall experience in Indonesia. A study by Lutfian, Suwartono, & Akter (2020) highlights the challenges faced by Thai international students when learning Indonesian as a foreign language. This study found that academic challenges and technological issues hindered their ability to master the Indonesian language effectively.

Language barriers also significantly impact international students studying in Indonesia, leading to academic stress and reduced participation. A study at Universitas Airlangga found that 68% of international students experienced stress due to difficulties in understanding Bahasa Indonesia, which is often the medium of instruction. This language barrier hinders their ability to engage in class, understand lectures, and complete assignments effectively, resulting in lower academic performance and feelings of isolation (Ali, Yoenanto, & Nurdibyandaru, 2020). Furthermore, interviews with students in Yogyakarta revealed that language challenges contribute to cultural shocks, affecting both their academic success and social integration (Ahmed, 2024).

The next question asked the participants to mention any other languages that they were fluent in or were learning. Apart from their native languages, they admitted that English was the most common second language. However, several other languages were mentioned as being learned by the students, such as Hindi, Czech, Japanese, Chinese, and Spanish. In short, we can conclude that they are multilinguals, who can speak in several languages. Multilingual speakers are said to have honed their linguistic detective skills, allowing easier identification of patterns in languages. This implicit knowledge is supposed to boost their ability to learn new languages (Cabrelli, 2024). However, we did not ask the participants to rank their ability in these languages. The fact that they are multilingual speakers leads to code-mixing practice in their daily interactions

4.2 Code-Mixing Practice in International Students' Interaction

Related to the question regarding the participants' proficiency in Indonesian, another question asked whether the students ever use Indonesian words when no native Indonesian speaker is present. In other words, did they ever use Indonesian among the foreign students themselves? This is the phenomenon that this research seeks to understand. Most of the participants, specifically seven out of eleven, said this was not something they had ever done. The remaining four students admitted they had spoken some Indonesian among themselves without the presence of any Indonesian speakers. These students had some interesting insights to offer for this instance. Participant #5 said, "We do this with some friends because I think it just sounds fun, and some words sound better in Indonesian than English or Dutch." Students #6 answered with, "Yes, it's good because [it's] interesting." Lastly, student #7 said, "I think I use it because I find it fun to learn and use a new language."

Concerning the use of Indonesian in their interaction, the next question asked if the students had adopted any Indonesian words in their daily vocabulary. This question received more positive responses than the previous question because it did not limit the interlocutors or the people they were talking to. The adoption of some keywords is a clear sign of the blending of languages. In other words, the process of code-mixing has already taken place. To this question, two students said that they had not adopted any Indonesian words, while the remaining nine said that they engaged in this practice. Of the words and phrases listed by the students, the most common types were greetings and other politeness devices, such as "*terima kasih*", "*sama-sama*", "*selamat pagi/siang/sore/malam*," which can be rendered as "thank you", "you're welcome", "good morning/day/afternoon/night," respectfully. The next common type was the adjective, which includes "*enak*" (delicious), "*cantik*" (beautiful), "*ganteng*" (handsome), "*pedas*" (spicy), etc. Other word categories included words relating to food, introducing oneself, and simple questions to navigate daily life.

Besides using English, which is the medium of instruction in the university, and Indonesian, the language of the host country, the students admitted using their native languages in daily conversation. While code-switching typically occurs between two languages, the students mix three languages simultaneously. We asked the question: Have you ever used three languages (your native language, English, and Indonesian)

simultaneously in a single sentence? Of the gathered responses, eight out of eleven students said they had not experienced this triple code-switching. Of these responders, however, many revealed that they did, in fact, commonly switch between their native language and English, or between Indonesian and English, but never all three languages together at the same time.

While it was anticipated that this phenomenon would be rare, the remaining three participants (all Korean students) claimed that they had experienced this triple code-switching. They gave the following samples. Participant #5: “Yes, mostly like fill words that slip through. It happened while talking with friends and being excited.” Participant #7 said, “[Yes, this is what I’ve said:] 1. *Masuk* (enter) please. 2. *진짜* (romanized: *jinjja*, meaning: *really*) *suka*, of course. 3. *이거* (romanized: *igo*, translation: *this*) [*really*] *enak*. *진짜* *enak* 5. *민정* (romanized: *Minjeong*, a name) *진짜* *imut*, [of course]. I do this with someone who can speak (some) Korean, Indonesian, and English. Sometimes when it’s hard to explain in English, it feels easier to speak a mixture of three languages”. Participant #8 added: “I mainly talk about daily life and what I like with my Indonesian friend who is fluent in English and speaks a little Korean.”

This study found that the most common instances of students using triple code-mixing was between the Korean exchange students and Indonesian students who were fluent in English and had learned to speak a substantial amount of Korean. The Korean students were learning Indonesian, and the Indonesian students were learning Korean, and since both still needed English to communicate certain things, the perfect environment for triple code-mixing was facilitated. While one example of triple code mixing did occur with a non-Korean student, they said that it happened by accident out of excitement and therefore was not done as an intentional act of communication, and the recipient of the attempted communication likely did not understand one of the languages being spoken.

Korean culture, on the other hand, has become a global phenomenon in recent years due to the wide appeal of its cultural exports. People from around the world watch Korean movies and TV and listen to Korean music. Indonesia is included as one of the places where Korean culture has reached this level of mainstream popularity. In fact, according to an international survey conducted by the Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, when participants were asked if they “generally liked the Korean cultural content they experienced [...] The countries with the highest favorability included Indonesia (86.3%)” (Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism), placing Indonesia at the top of all overseas countries surveyed. Also, according to the same data, in terms of “average monthly consumption of Korean cultural content per person”, Indonesia ranked third with an average monthly consumption of 17.0 hours per month, only falling behind India’s 18.6 hours and Thailand’s 18.4. Furthermore, according to data gathered by (Snapcart, K-everything: Indonesian consumption of Korean culture and entertainment., n.d) for their article “K-Everything: Indonesian consumption of Korean culture and entertainment,” 87% of Indonesian respondents said that their “love for Korean culture and/or entertainment [made them] want to visit South Korea,” showing Indonesia’s affinity for Korean culture and how cultural exportation can significantly expand a country’s potential tourism market. As can be seen in this data, Korean culture has become very popular in Indonesia. When studying abroad in Indonesia, the students

from Korea could experience this firsthand. Because of the popularity of Korean culture in Indonesia, several Indonesian students have studied and developed a working knowledge of the Korean language.

4.3 The Effect of Code-mixing in Communication

The final question asked the participants about their opinion of mixing languages and how it affects communication and language learning ability. Participants were free to answer this question whether they had personally participated in the mixture of languages or not. This question was asked, in part, to understand the students' possible motivations, whether conscious or unconscious, behind their usage of code-mixing. The student responses, again, were varied. All students but Participant #2, however, who said "It makes the communication hard," agreed that mixing languages was helpful when communicating with people who spoke a different language. Despite this, many students made sure to identify the potential drawbacks of communicating in this manner. According to Participant #9, "[The mixture of languages] helps convey more specific meanings but limits the potential audience," pointing out the fact that the number of people who would fully understand the mixed languages is strictly limited to people who understand both languages. Some students thought that mixing languages had an adverse effect on language learning, with Participant #4 saying "When learning new languages, it comes at the cost of another new language you are learning. But if you are mostly fluent then it doesn't affect it." Participant #6 responded with "For me, using a mix of languages is interesting and convenient, but if I want to improve one language ability more fluently, using a mix of languages doesn't seem to help improve my ability," and Participant #10 said, "Since each language has different grammar and expressions, mixing multiple languages in the process of learning one language is likely to cause confusion in learning that language." On the other hand, some students appreciated the mixing of languages to help them expand their linguistic knowledge. Participant #7's response was "If you don't know the word, it may be difficult to understand at first, but it seems that you can increase the breadth of your language by learning the languages of various countries through mixed languages," and Participant #8 responded with "I think I can broaden my language." The most positive response came from Participant #5, which was the following: "I don't think [communication ability comes at the cost of language learning ability when mixing languages]. In my opinion, mixing language creates sentences to understand the context of words better so it helps with learning. In this semester I've developed my English language so much, while also learning some Bahasa, so it can easily be combined in my opinion."

5 Conclusion

Language is something that can be used for many purposes beyond simply communication. It can bring people together from any background and show solidarity with other cultures. International students who joined the English as a lingua franca study program in Indonesia must have a certain level of language proficiency in English as the language of instruction, and in Indonesian, as the language of the host country to be able

to succeed in their study abroad program. This study was set up to answer three research questions regarding the international students' acknowledged language proficiency levels, the code-mixing practice in their interactions, and the effect of code-mixing on their intercultural communication.

This study found that the students admitted having a moderate (3.09) English proficiency level and a low (1.3) Indonesian proficiency level. However, most students admitted to being multilingual, as they do not only speak their native languages but also other languages in their countries of origin. This finding is understandable as English's status as a global lingua franca makes it easier for international students to communicate with other non-native English speakers in Indonesia. However, when living in a foreign country, picking up some basic parts of the host country's language is inevitable. Yet, it is not easy to pick up a third language in a very limited time, hence at the end of the program, the students only have a limited knowledge of Indonesian.

The second finding showed the participants' effort to communicate with their fellow students, particularly Indonesian students. Code mixing commonly occurs between English and their native languages. On some occasions, triple code mixing using their native language, English and Indonesian happens. This phenomenon happens among Korean students who have picked some Indonesian words such as *enak*, *cantik*, *pedas*, etc. This triple code-mixing between Korean, English and Indonesian would likely have occurred because of the strong presence and influence of Korean culture in Indonesia.

The last finding demonstrated that code-mixing practices that the participants do did not hinder their intercultural understanding. Instead, code-mixing languages help them convey their messages and expand their linguistic skills. Indonesian students as well as international students can learn from each other and develop their language and cultural knowledge.

This research discussed the rare phenomenon of triple code-mixing, but for future research, the possibility of quadruple or even quintuple code mixing in a global education setting might be interesting to explore. Moreover, the possibility of the use of other languages that could replace English as the global lingua franca among non-native speakers of English might be another topic to consider.

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