

## DIGITAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION

# Code-Switching Communication and Cross-Cultural Identity among Urban Adolescents in Post-Colonial Jakarta: A Phenomenological Study

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### Abstract

This research aims to analyze the use of code-switching in the daily communications of urban adolescents in Jakarta's post-colonial urban environment and its impact on forming their cross-cultural identities. The study focuses on adolescents aged 18-20 years living in Jakarta, a post-colonial urban setting with diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The research subjects include their daily interactions and social media usage, which are the primary arenas for code-switching. A qualitative approach, utilizing phenomenological methods, participatory observation, and in-depth interviews, was employed. Five teenagers were selected through purposive sampling for in-depth interviews to understand their personal experiences with code-switching and its impact on their identities. These individuals are of mixed heritage residing in Indonesia. Data was thematically analyzed to identify key patterns and themes. The findings suggest that code-switching in communication serves not only as a practical communication tool but also as a crucial means of negotiating identity and group membership. Adolescents often use code-switching to adapt to different social contexts. These findings have implications for education and social policy, particularly in designing programs that support cultural and linguistic diversity in urban environments.

**Keywords:** Cross-Cultural Communication, Urban Adolescents, Post-Colonial, Code-Switching, Phenomenology

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### Introduction

Indonesia, an archipelagic country with a rich colonial history, presents a unique and diverse urban landscape (Nurhadi et al., 2011). In the post-colonial era, Indonesian cities, as explained by

(Kusno, 2000), have undergone drastic changes, marking the transition from colonial legacies to modern aspirations. Taking Jakarta as a concrete example, (Bramandito et al., 2018) describe it as not only the governmental hub but also a reflection of the blend between the past and the present. An interesting case study in urban development is the revitalization of Jakarta's Kota Tua. This project focuses not only on restoring historical buildings but also on integrating modern elements like metropolitan areas, pedestrian interactions, and green spaces. The transformation of Indonesia's post-colonial urban environments, as illustrated by this case study, mirrors how a nation strides towards modernity while preserving its historical roots.

On one hand, there is the Kota Tua with its historic colonial buildings; on the other, modern skyscrapers dominate the skyline. This creates a dynamic social and cultural interaction, forging a unique urban identity for Jakarta. In post-colonial countries, adolescents often face the complex legacy of colonialism (Laeni et al., 2020), where colonial languages and cultures have a significant impact. In this context, code-switching becomes a means to negotiate and deconstruct identities influenced by colonial legacies, seeking ways to merge local heritage and colonial influences (Poplack, 2015). Since Indonesia's independence in 1945, the nation has faced significant challenges in uniting diverse ethnic and cultural groups and building a national identity. Indonesia, a country with a long history of colonialism, has undergone various social and cultural transformations during and after the colonial era (Reid, 2010).

This legacy influences how adolescents view their identities today. In the age of globalization, teenagers are exposed to various cultural influences, from social media to pop culture, all of which contribute to new forms of identity and expression (Appadurai, 2008). This creates a complex dynamic between local traditions and global influences. Post-colonial teenagers navigate between traditional values and modern influences, often creating hybrid identities (Weaver et al., 2014). This poses challenges in maintaining local cultures while adapting to global influences. In Indonesia's era of democracy and reform, Indonesian teenagers face increasingly complex identity politics, often creating tension between modernity and tradition (Dethier, 2018). Research conducted in several high schools in Jakarta found that teenagers often engage in code-switching between Bahasa Indonesia, English, and various local dialects in their communication. This occurs not only in everyday conversations but also in the use of social media.

Teenagers in Jakarta often switch to English when discussing topics related to technology, education, or entertainment. The use of English is frequently perceived as a marker of social status and openness to globalization (Valdés Kroff et al., 2017). In more relaxed situations or within certain groups, teenagers tend to revert to local dialects or regional languages, such as Betawi, to express intimacy, solidarity, or a stronger local identity. Code-switching is also very common in online communication. Adolescents often switch languages based on the audience and context of their posts. For instance, they might use Bahasa Indonesia for more formal or national content, and English or slang in contexts that are more global or informal (Dewaele & Wei, 2014). These reasons illustrate that code-switching among Jakarta's youth is a complex practice, influenced by factors like globalization, education, and local identity. It's not just a linguistic phenomenon but also a social and cultural one, reflecting how teenagers navigate various identities and social groups in a dynamic urban life.

This complex phenomenon, reflecting the dynamics of identity, showcases the cross-cultural communication of adolescents. It demands linguistic abilities that impact their social and cultural intelligence in diverse environments. In cross-cultural contexts, code-switching is often used to facilitate understanding and intercultural empathy (Hoffmann, 1991). This becomes particularly important among teenagers interacting with friends from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Code-switching, the practice of switching between two languages or dialects in communication, is common among teenagers growing up in multilingual environments. In the era of globalization, code-switching has become an important communication tool, especially for teenagers frequently engaging in cross-cultural interactions. Factors causing teenagers to engage in code-switching include the context of communication, expressive purposes, and the need for cultural adaptation (Grosjean, 1982). Code-switching can also be a strategy to overcome language barriers or to express concepts not easily translated linguistically. A common phenomenon of code-switching is the use of slang and language mixing in digital communication among teenage (Androutsopoulos, 2017).

Code-switching among teenagers in the postmodern and post-colonial era is a phenomenon rich in social, cultural, and political implications. It reflects how teenagers navigate and express their layered

and often contradictory identities in a constantly changing and diverse context. Code-switching often reflects teenagers' efforts to negotiate their identity between colonial heritage and native culture. For example, teenagers in Indonesia might switch between Bahasa Indonesia, local languages, and Dutch or English, showing the interaction between colonial heritage and national identity (Hair et al., 2010). Code-switching allows individuals to negotiate their identities in social interactions. Through language choice, they can adjust their identities according to the situation and audience (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). This research explores the phenomenon of 'code-switching' in the context of cross-cultural communication among teenagers. With increasing globalization and cultural interaction, teenagers often use code-switching as a communication strategy to navigate cross-cultural identities (Nurhadi et al., 2011). This study investigates how, why, and with what impact teenagers engage in code-switching in their daily interactions.

### Theoretical Framework

Appadurai (2008) discusses how post-colonial legacies influence cross-cultural communication practices, particularly in countries with a history of colonialism. Martin & Nakayama (2010) emphasize the crucial role of cultural identity in cross-cultural communication, where diverse cultural backgrounds shape how people communicate and understand each other. (Garcia, 2009) observes that teenagers often use code-switching as a means to express their multicultural identities, which becomes especially significant in urban environments where language and cultural diversity are more evident. Heller (2007) explores how teenagers in major cities frequently engage in code-switching to adapt to various social groups, asserting their identities in diverse social contexts. Bhatia & Ram (2009) highlight how teenagers in post-colonial countries navigate between colonial heritage and local culture in forming their identities, often using code-switching as a communication tool.

### Material and Methodology

This study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach to deeply understand the phenomena of code-switching communication and the formation of cross-cultural identity among adolescents in Jakarta, particularly within the context of a post-colonial urban environment. The phenomenological qualitative approach was chosen for its ability to capture the subjective experiences and personal interpretations of adolescents related to the studied phenomena, allowing researchers to delve into how these teenagers interpret and attribute meaning to their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Observations were conducted at several universities and popular hangout spots in major cities with colonial histories. This participatory observation approach enables researchers to directly understand the social context and interactions of teenagers, providing rich insights into how they interact in multilingual and multicultural environments (Angrosino, 2007). Five teenagers were selected through purposive sampling for in-depth interviews, allowing researchers to explore their individual experiences in greater detail and gain a more holistic understanding of their perspectives (Van Manen, 1990). This phenomenological approach underscores the importance of understanding the subjective experiences of teenagers within their social and cultural contexts, offering in-depth insights into the dynamics of identity and communication in post-colonial urban environments.

**Table 1.**

Informants of the Study on Code-Switching Communication and Cross-Cultural Identity Among Urban Teenagers in Post-Colonial Urban Jakarta: A Phenomenological Study by Geofakta Razali

No	Name	Age	Descendant
1	Shindu Whaseny	19 Years Old	Indian, Tamil - Indonesian
2	Fiorella Zita Nicolin	19 Years Old	Italian - Chinese - Indonesian
3	Axel Eljah	19 Years Old	American - Indonesian
4	Angel Belgraver	20 Years Old	Dutch - Indonesian
5	Melati Rouge	18 Years Old	French - Indonesian

The selection criteria included the active use of code-switching and a diversity of cultural backgrounds. The purpose of the in-depth interviews was to explore teenagers' personal experiences with code-switching and its impact on their identities (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The data collected from observations and interviews were thematically analyzed. This step involved coding the data, searching

for themes, and organizing the data to identify key patterns and themes related to the use of code-switching and the formation of cross-cultural identities (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This research followed strict ethical guidelines, including obtaining consent and informed consent from the teenage participants. Confidentiality and anonymity of the data were ensured to protect the participants' privacy (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Cross-Cultural Identity and Code-Switching in Social Contexts**

Code-switching, the practice of alternating languages in communication, is often seen as merely a communicative strategy. However, this study delves deeper into code-switching as a means of affirming cross-cultural identity among teenagers, while understanding their experiences of using code-switching in daily life. The collected data was analyzed to draw conclusions about the relationship between code-switching and cross-cultural identity.

*"Back in school, I would speak Bahasa Indonesia with friends but switch to English. Sometimes, I even use the Indian dialect at home." – Shindu*

Shindu describes how he uses Bahasa Indonesia for social interactions, switches to English in the school environment, and speaks in an Indian dialect at home. For Shindu, code-switching is not just about ease of communication but also a way to navigate his multicultural identity. His use of the Indian dialect at home shows his desire to maintain a connection with his cultural heritage, while using English at school reflects his adaptation to a global context.

*"At home, we speak Italian. But with friends, I often use Bahasa Indonesia or English." - Fiorella*

Fiorella uses Italian at home, reflecting her family's strong ties to Italian culture. Outside, she switches to Bahasa Indonesia or English, demonstrating her ability to adapt to a broader social environment. For Fiorella, code-switching is a tool to bridge her personal and social identities. The study findings indicate that code-switching is more than just a communication strategy; it is a reflection of the complexity of teenagers' cross-cultural identities.

Analysis of the social context in Jakarta shows that the multicultural environment influences teenagers' use of code-switching. Observations in educational settings and popular hangout spots reveal that teenagers tend to use code-switching depending on the social group they interact with. For instance, in cafes and shopping centers, a consistent pattern of code-switching among teenagers is observed. During observations at High School A, it was noted that students tend to use Bahasa Indonesia in everyday interactions but switch to English or a mix of Bahasa Indonesia and English ('Indo-English') when discussing topics like technology, Western entertainment, or in English class discussions.

Melati, a 12th-grade student with French-Indonesian family background, explains that she often uses French when communicating with her family but switches to Bahasa Indonesia or English at school or on social media. She feels this helps her to be more accepted across different social groups.

In hangout places, like a cafe in the Sudirman area, observations show that teenagers often use code-switching in culturally diverse groups. For example, in a group consisting of Betawi, Javanese, and some international backgrounds, English is often used as the primary language, but they occasionally switch to Bahasa Indonesia or even local dialects when discussing more personal or specific topics.

These results affirm that Jakarta's multicultural environment influences teenagers' use of code-switching, with factors such as social context, peer groups, and communication situations playing a crucial role in their language choice. It reflects teenagers' flexible adaptation in navigating social and cultural diversity in the post-colonial urban environment. English is often used in formal contexts or when discussing global topics, while Bahasa Indonesia and local dialects are used in relaxed situations or more personal conversations.

Through code-switching, they demonstrate their ability to adapt to various social and cultural contexts while maintaining connections to their cultural heritage. This phenomenon highlights how cross-cultural teenagers use code-switching as a means to negotiate their identities in a diverse environment. It confirms that code-switching among cross-cultural teenagers is a meaningful practice, functioning not only linguistically but also in forming and expressing social and cultural identities. This understanding paves the way for further research into how linguistic and cultural diversity influences identity formation in the current era of globalization.

## **Impact and Perception of Code-Switching Communication in Social Interactions: Language as Expression**

Code-switching plays a significant role in the social lives of teenagers, especially in multilingual and multicultural contexts. This practice affects not only how teenagers communicate but also how they perceive themselves and others in broader social contexts. Code-switching significantly impacts social interactions among teenagers, particularly in multilingual and multicultural settings. Teenagers use code-switching not just as a communication tool but also as a means to navigate and express their multicultural identities. However, it's also evident that code-switching can create pressure and identity dilemmas, especially when linked to social and cultural expectations. This underscores the complexity of code-switching as a sociolinguistic phenomenon in the context of teenage social interactions. Analysis shows that code-switching influences how teenagers form and maintain social relationships. "Sometimes, I find it easier to connect with friends who also frequently code-switch. It's like there's an unspoken understanding between us." – Axel.

"I feel that code-switching helps me show different sides of my identity, depending on who I'm talking to." - Angel "Sometimes, I feel pressured to speak English to be seen as more modern or educated." - Melati.

Perceptions of code-switching vary, with some teenagers viewing it as a valued skill, while others feel pressured to adapt. Axel indicates that code-switching makes it easier for him to connect with friends who have similar backgrounds, suggesting an implicit understanding and a stronger connection among individuals sharing multilingual and multicultural experiences. Angel demonstrates that code-switching allows her to explore and display different aspects of her identity, depending on the context and the people she interacts with, indicating code-switching as a tool for flexible and adaptive identity navigation. Melati notes pressure in using a particular language, like English, to be considered modern or educated. This reflects how code-switching can be associated with power dynamics and social status within a society.

This variety of perceptions shows that code-switching is seen not only as a communicative skill but also closely linked to issues of social, cultural, and even class identity. Data from respondents indicate that code-switching is often used as a strategy to strengthen social relationships with people who share similar linguistic or cultural backgrounds. On the other hand, this practice can also create a sense of separation or alienation for those who do not participate or are not proficient in code-switching, highlighting the complexity of this phenomenon. Data suggests that code-switching is influenced not only by social context but also by teenagers' preferences and personal choices. This asserts that individuals often use language as a means to express themselves and their personal identities.

## **The Complexity of Identity and Communication Among Teenagers in Post-Colonial Urban Contexts**

Major cities in post-colonial countries like Jakarta present a unique social landscape where teenagers engage in a complex mosaic of cultural and linguistic interactions. This article aims to explore how teenagers in these cities navigate identity and communication within this context. Shindu discusses his frequent practice of code-switching between Bahasa Indonesia, Sunda, and Jakarta slang when interacting with friends. For him, this is a way to stay connected with various aspects of his identity. "At school, I mainly use Bahasa Indonesia. But at home, I switched to Indonesian. With friends, we often mix everything up. It makes communication more fun and personal," says Shindu.

This interview highlights how teenagers in major postcolonial cities like Jakarta navigate their multicultural identities. They often use code-switching as a communication tool to maintain connections with various aspects of their identities. However, they also face challenges in balancing tradition and modernity, as well as responding to social pressures to conform. Fiorella describes how she combines elements of Indonesian, Italian, and Chinese culture in her social interactions. She feels this gives her a unique perspective and helps her understand people from diverse backgrounds.

"I feel lucky to have grown up in two cultures, and then to live in Indonesia. Sometimes there are challenges in expressing myself, but that's also what makes me unique," - Fiorella.

Axel talks about the challenge of maintaining a balance between preserving traditions and adapting to urban lifestyles. He feels there is sometimes pressure to conform to the dominant social norms in Indonesia.

"On one hand, I want to maintain American traditions. On the other hand, I want to be accepted in my social environment. Sometimes it's hard to find a balance," - Axel.

Teenagers in major postcolonial cities face unique complexities in navigating identity and communication. They demonstrate flexibility and adaptability in using language and expressing culture, but also face challenges in maintaining a balance between various aspects of their identities. This understanding provides important insights into the social dynamics of post-colonial cities and how teenagers adapt to these constantly changing environments.

## Conclusion

The findings of the study show that code-switching among Jakarta's youth is a complex phenomenon influenced by various factors including cultural background, social context, and personal identity. This phenomenon not only reflects the linguistic diversity of the city but also the complexity of teenagers' identities in a post-colonial urban context. In the multicultural urban context of post-colonial Jakarta, the practice of code-switching by teenagers is not just a reflection of linguistic diversity, but also serves as a dynamic mechanism in negotiating cross-cultural identities, where language becomes a key medium to express and adjust their personal identities within a diverse and evolving social context.

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