



Code-Switching and Code-Mixing in Students' Short Stories: A Sociolinguistic Approach to Literary Learning Materials in the Merdeka Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

Multilingualism has become an integral feature of contemporary educational contexts, shaping how students use language in both spoken and written communication. This study examines code-switching and code-mixing in student-authored short stories from a sociolinguistic perspective and explores their pedagogical relevance within the Indonesian Merdeka Curriculum. Using a qualitative sociolinguistic text analysis, the study analyzes a corpus of student-produced narratives to identify patterns and functions of multilingual language use in written discourse. The findings suggest that students employ intersentential and intrasentential code-switching, as well as lexical code-mixing, in systematic and context-sensitive ways. These practices appear to serve key sociolinguistic functions, including identity construction, emotional expression, cultural indexing, and the enhancement of narrative authenticity. The study argues that code-switching and code-mixing in student writing should not be viewed as linguistic deficiency, but as strategic and meaningful resources for narrative meaning-making. By extending sociolinguistic analysis into the domain of written creative texts, this study contributes to multilingual literacy research and demonstrates the potential of students' multilingual narratives as contextual and inclusive literary learning materials aligned with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum.

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Submitted/Received 28 Dec 2025

First Revised 12 Feb 2026

Accepted 27 Apr 2026

Publication Date 30 Apr 2026

Keyword:

Code-switching, Code-mixing,
Merdeka Curriculum,
Multilingual Literacy, Short
Stories

1. INTRODUCTION

Multilingualism has become a defining characteristic of contemporary educational contexts, including in Indonesia, where students routinely draw on multiple languages as part of their communicative repertoires. In writing classrooms, research has shown that multilingual learners use their full linguistic resources not only as compensatory strategies but also as cognitive and rhetorical tools to support meaning-making and communication (Zheng & Drybrough, 2023; Styati & Irawati, 2023). Within this context, code-switching and code-mixing have been widely recognized as systematic and meaningful sociolinguistic practices through which speakers organize meaning, express stance, and negotiate identity (Gross & Castilla-Earls, 2023).

Existing studies have predominantly examined code-switching in spoken discourse and classroom interaction, highlighting its functions in facilitating comprehension, managing interaction, and supporting pedagogical processes (Fort et al., 2024; Lauti & Estremera, 2025). In writing research, multilingual practices have often been conceptualized through translanguaging and code-meshing frameworks, emphasizing their role in supporting composing processes and challenging monolingual norms (Canagarajah, 2011; Sun & Lan, 2021). These studies collectively demonstrate that multilingual language use is a structured and purposeful practice rather than a sign of linguistic deficiency.

However, previous studies have not systematically examined how code-switching and code-mixing operate in student-authored short stories as written creative texts, nor have they explored how such multilingual practices can be utilized as pedagogical resources within specific curricular frameworks such as the Merdeka Curriculum. This gap limits our understanding of the role of multilingual narrative writing in both sociolinguistic analysis and curriculum-based literary learning.

This gap can be further understood through two key limitations in existing research. Despite these advances, existing research exhibits two notable limitations. First, sociolinguistic investigations continue to prioritize spoken discourse and classroom interaction, leaving students' written creative texts—particularly short stories—relatively underexplored as sources of sociolinguistic data. Student-authored literary narratives constitute a distinctive site for examining how young writers stylize voices, construct characters, and index social identities through language choice. Second, although translanguaging and code-meshing frameworks provide strong theoretical justification for legitimizing multilingual writing, they have seldom been operationalized through analyses of student-authored short stories as pedagogical resources aligned with specific curricular frameworks. In the Indonesian context, this gap is particularly salient given the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes learner agency, contextualized learning, and differentiated instruction.

To address these gaps, this study proposes a sociolinguistic analysis of code-switching and code-mixing in student-authored short stories, focusing on how multilingual language use operates as a structured and functional resource in written narrative discourse. By examining both the structural patterns and sociolinguistic functions of language alternation, this study aims to extend existing research beyond spoken and academic contexts into the domain of creative writing. Furthermore, it seeks to demonstrate how students' multilingual narratives can be systematically utilized as contextual, differentiated, and linguistically inclusive literary learning materials within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine code-switching and code-mixing in student-authored short stories by identifying their structural patterns and analyzing their sociolinguistic functions in written narrative discourse, with particular attention to their relevance for multilingual literary learning within the Merdeka Curriculum.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative sociolinguistic research design with a naturalistic, text-based observational orientation to examine code-switching and code-mixing in students' short stories as manifestations of multilingual literacy practices in formal educational settings. The research did not involve experimental manipulation or instructional intervention; instead, it analyzed learner-produced written texts as naturally occurring artifacts generated through routine literary learning activities. This design allowed language choice to be examined as a socially embedded and context-dependent practice, situating multilingual language use within the curricular, institutional, and pedagogical environment of the Merdeka Curriculum. All selected texts were analyzed using the same procedures, constituting a within-corpus qualitative design appropriate for discourse-level sociolinguistic inquiry.

The participants consisted of 30 secondary-level students enrolled in language and literature classes at a public secondary school in Depok, East Java, Indonesia implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The students were in Grade 11, representing a typical cohort of multilingual learners in Indonesian educational settings. Participants were selected based on their involvement in regular classroom writing activities that required the production of individual short stories as part of the curriculum. Eligibility criteria required that students produced an original individual short story as part of regular classroom instruction and consented to the use of their work for research purposes. No restrictions were imposed based on demographic characteristics, reflecting the inclusive orientation of the curriculum and the study's focus on linguistic practices rather than participant variables. Texts that had undergone extensive teacher correction or collaborative rewriting were excluded to ensure that the linguistic choices analyzed authentically represented students' own multilingual repertoires. The writing tasks were completed in authentic instructional contexts, thereby enhancing ecological validity and ensuring that the data reflected actual classroom literacy practices.

The primary data consisted of 30 student-authored short stories written predominantly in Indonesian, with embedded use of English and, in some cases, local languages. The texts varied in length, with an average of approximately 300–500 words per story, reflecting typical classroom writing outputs in secondary-level literary tasks. Texts were selected through purposive sampling based on analytical relevance rather than statistical representativeness. Texts were selected through purposive sampling based on analytical relevance rather than statistical representativeness. Inclusion criteria required that each text conformed to the narrative conventions of the short story genre and contained identifiable instances of code-switching or code-mixing at any linguistic level. This sampling strategy aligns with established qualitative research principles that prioritize information-rich cases capable of illuminating the phenomena under investigation, while enabling in-depth discourse analysis across a coherent corpus of texts.

Data were collected through documentation of student-authored short stories produced during regular classroom writing activities. All texts were obtained with institutional permission and informed consent, and were anonymized to ensure participant confidentiality. The collected narratives were subsequently digitized and organized into a structured corpus to facilitate systematic analysis. This procedure ensured that the data reflected authentic classroom literacy practices while adhering to ethical research standards.

Data analysis proceeded through multiple iterative stages. First, all texts were read holistically to identify general narrative structures, thematic patterns, and distributions of multilingual language use. Instances of code-switching and code-mixing were then systematically identified and segmented at the levels of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. Structural classification followed established sociolinguistic typologies

distinguishing intersentential switching, intrasentential switching, and tag-switching, as well as forms of code-mixing such as lexical insertion and alternation, drawing on widely recognized frameworks without modification. Structural identification functioned as an initial analytical step rather than an endpoint.

Subsequently, each instance of language alternation was examined for its sociolinguistic function within the narrative context. Functional analysis focused on how code-switching and code-mixing contributed to meaning-making processes such as character construction, stance expression, emotional intensification, cultural indexing, pragmatic emphasis, and the creation of narrative authenticity. Particular attention was paid to multilingual practices in character dialogue, internal monologue, evaluative narration, and culturally marked expressions, allowing analysis to capture how language alternation operated at discourse and genre levels within creative writing.

To ensure analytical rigor and trustworthiness, the study employed several strategies consistent with qualitative research standards. Credibility was enhanced through repeated cycles of coding and recoding across the corpus, enabling analytical categories to stabilize over time. Peer debriefing with researchers in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics was conducted to review coding decisions and interpretive claims. Dependability was supported through the maintenance of an audit trail documenting analytical procedures and category development, while confirmability was ensured by grounding interpretations in explicit textual evidence and engaging reflexively with the researcher's analytical positioning. Collectively, this methodological approach provides a transparent and reproducible foundation for examining multilingual literacy practices in students' short stories and their pedagogical implications within the Merdeka Curriculum.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis is based on a corpus of 30 student-authored short stories, each produced as part of regular classroom writing activities and varying in length from approximately 300 to 500 words. This corpus provides the empirical basis for identifying structural patterns and sociolinguistic functions of code-switching and code-mixing in written narrative discourse.

The analysis indicates that code-switching and code-mixing in student-authored short stories are systematic and functionally integrated within written narrative discourse. Across the corpus, multilingual language use appears in consistent structural forms and serves distinct narrative purposes.

Structural Patterns of Code-Switching and Code-Mixing

Students employ multiple types of language alternation, including intersentential switching, intrasentential switching, tag-switching, and lexical code-mixing. Intersentential switching typically occurs at discourse boundaries, such as transitions between narration and dialogue, while intrasentential switching and lexical insertions are more frequent within clauses, particularly in dialogue and emotionally salient passages. These patterns indicate that language alternation is closely aligned with narrative structure and discourse organization.

These patterns are summarized in Table 1, which presents the main types of language alternation, their structural characteristics, relative frequency, and associated sociolinguistic functions.

Table 1. Structural Patterns and Sociolinguistics Patterns

Type of Language Alternation	Structural Description	Frequency	Sociolinguistic Function
Intersentential Switching	Switching between sentences or clauses at discourse boundaries	Frequent	Organizing narrative flow; marking shifts between narration and dialogue

Intrasentential Switching	Switching within a sentence or clause	Frequent	Expressing emotion; emphasizing meaning; character voice construction
Tag-switching	Insertion of tags or fixed expressions	Occasional	Pragmatic emphasis; conversational tone
Lexical Code-mixing	Insertion of single words or phrases from another language	Frequent	Cultural indexing; signaling identity and modernity
Phrasal Code-mixing	Mixing at phrase level within sentences	Moderate	Enhancing narrative authenticity; stylistic variation

Sociolinguistic Functions of Multilingual Language Use

Code-switching and code-mixing serve several key sociolinguistic functions, including identity construction, emotional intensification, pragmatic emphasis, cultural indexing, and the enhancement of narrative authenticity. Indonesian functions as the primary narrative frame, while English and local-language elements are selectively used to signal social meanings such as youth identity, intimacy, and modernity. These functions are most evident in character dialogue, internal monologue, and evaluative narration.

Written Creative Texts as a Sociolinguistic Domain

The findings show that student-authored short stories constitute a distinct domain in which multilingual practices are shaped by narrative conventions such as characterization, dialogue realism, and emotional expression. Language alternation is embedded within storytelling practices and reflects students' ability to integrate linguistic resources in contextually appropriate ways.

Implications for Multilingual Literacy

The findings indicate that students' multilingual narratives align with the principles of contextualization and differentiation in the Merdeka Curriculum. These texts provide authentic material for literary learning and demonstrate how multilingual practices can function as pedagogical resources in classroom contexts.

Discussion

This study set out to examine how code-switching and code-mixing operate in student-authored short stories and to explore their sociolinguistic and pedagogical implications within the Merdeka Curriculum. Overall, the findings suggest that multilingual language use in written creative texts constitutes a systematic and meaning-oriented practice that is closely aligned with narrative structure, communicative intent, and sociocultural representation.

In relation to the structural dimension, the findings indicate that students employ a range of patterned language alternation strategies, including intersentential and intrasentential switching, tag-switching, and lexical code-mixing, in ways that are sensitive to discourse organization and narrative flow. This observation appears to contrast with earlier studies that primarily document code-switching in spoken classroom interaction as a tool for pedagogical management, clarification, or comprehension support (Fort et al., 2024; Lautá & Estremera, 2025). While previous research emphasizes the interactional and instructional functions of switching in teacher–student discourse, the present findings suggest that, within this dataset, multilingual practices in written narratives are shaped less by immediate communicative necessity and more by narrative logic and genre conventions. This interpretation is further supported by comparisons with spoken classroom data (Liando et al., 2023), where language alternation is often contingent upon interactional dynamics, whereas in the analyzed short stories, multilingual elements appear to be deliberately positioned to support narrative

coherence and aesthetic effect. In this respect, the findings also extend prior research on bilingual narrative production (Gross & Castilla-Earls, 2023) by demonstrating that, in naturally occurring school texts, students' multilingual practices may involve a broader range of structurally complex and stylistically motivated alternations.

From a functional perspective, the findings suggest that code-switching and code-mixing in student-authored narratives serve multiple sociolinguistic purposes, including identity construction, emotional intensification, pragmatic emphasis, cultural indexing, and the enhancement of narrative authenticity. These results are broadly consistent with previous writing research that conceptualizes translanguaging as a cognitive and metacognitive resource in composing processes (Zheng & Drybrough, 2023; Styati & Irawati, 2023). However, the present study extends this line of inquiry by indicating that multilingual resources are not only mobilized during the process of writing but are also strategically embedded in the final textual product to achieve specific narrative effects. In contrast to reader-response studies that emphasize how mixed-language narratives influence readers' perceptions (Patterson & Schumacher, 2021; Agustin et al., 2025), the findings here foreground the agency of student writers, suggesting that multilingual elements are selectively deployed to construct character voice, convey affective meaning, and index sociocultural contexts relevant to their lived experiences.

Taken together, these findings point to the emergence of student-authored short stories as a distinct sociolinguistic domain in which multilingual practices operate differently from both spoken classroom discourse and conventional academic writing. Unlike the functional code-switching observed in instructional interaction (Hill & Shooshanian, 2023), or the ideologically oriented code-meshing practices discussed in academic writing pedagogy (Canagarajah, 2011; Daly, 2019), the multilingual practices identified in this study appear to be embedded within genre-specific conventions of storytelling, such as characterization, dialogue realism, and emotional pacing. This observation addresses a gap in existing research, which has largely overlooked written creative texts as a site of sociolinguistic inquiry. While translanguaging and code-meshing studies have predominantly focused on argumentative or expository genres (Hindi, 2020; Liu, 2021; Sun & Lan, 2021), the present findings suggest that short stories may provide greater semiotic flexibility for multilingual expression, allowing students to integrate linguistic resources in ways that are both contextually meaningful and narratively effective.

Theoretically, these findings contribute to ongoing discussions in sociolinguistics and multilingual literacy by challenging the implicit privileging of spoken data over written texts in the study of code-switching. The analysis suggests that written narratives can serve as rich sites for examining how multilingual practices are shaped by genre, audience, and institutional context. Furthermore, the findings extend translanguaging theory by indicating that multilingual practices are not confined to fluid, process-oriented composing stages but may also be stabilized in final textual forms as deliberate and visible meaning-making strategies.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings indicate that students' multilingual short stories align with the principles of learner agency, contextualization, and differentiation emphasized in the Merdeka Curriculum. In contrast to previous curriculum-focused studies that highlight challenges in implementing differentiated instruction due to institutional and assessment constraints (Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019; Niemi et al., 2023), the present study suggests that differentiation may emerge organically through students' own linguistic choices in creative writing. This interpretation is also consistent with Indonesian studies on translanguaging practices in classrooms (Liando et al., 2023), while extending them by demonstrating that students' texts themselves can function as pedagogical resources. The multilingual features embedded in these narratives may provide authentic material for literary analysis, sociolinguistic reflection, and the development of critical language awareness.

These findings also carry implications for assessment practices. If multilingual language use constitutes an integral component of students' narrative competence, monolingual evaluation criteria may not fully capture the range of students' linguistic and rhetorical abilities. A sociolinguistically informed approach to assessment would therefore consider how effectively students mobilize diverse linguistic resources to achieve narrative purposes, rather than focusing exclusively on conformity to standardized language norms.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study is based on a purposively selected qualitative corpus, which limits the generalizability of the findings beyond the specific context analyzed. In addition, the interpretive nature of the analysis means that alternative readings of particular linguistic choices remain possible, despite efforts to ensure analytical rigor. Furthermore, as the study does not involve an instructional intervention, it does not allow for causal claims regarding the impact of multilingual writing practices on learning outcomes.

Despite these limitations, the findings suggest that students' multilingual narratives represent a meaningful and underutilized resource for both sociolinguistic research and pedagogical innovation. By foregrounding written creative texts as sites of multilingual meaning-making, this study contributes to a broader rethinking of how language practices are conceptualized, analyzed, and valued in multilingual educational contexts.

4. CONCLUSION

This study suggests that code-switching and code-mixing in student-authored short stories function as systematic and meaningful resources in written narrative discourse. Within this dataset, multilingual language use appears to be strategically employed to organize narrative structure, construct character identity, express emotion, and index sociocultural meanings, rather than reflecting linguistic deficiency.

The study contributes to applied sociolinguistics by extending the analysis of code-switching and code-mixing into the domain of written creative texts, which remains relatively underexplored. It also highlights the potential of students' multilingual narratives as pedagogical resources for developing contextual and inclusive literary learning materials within the Merdeka Curriculum. Pedagogically, these findings indicate that multilingual student writing can be meaningfully integrated into literary instruction to support language awareness and narrative competence.

This study is limited by its qualitative design and the scope of the corpus, which may not be generalizable to all educational contexts. Future research could expand the dataset across different regions and educational levels or examine the impact of multilingual literary practices on learning outcomes through experimental or longitudinal approaches.

5. AUTHOR'S NOTE

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Author confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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