

Teacher Code-Switching in CET-4/6-Oriented College English Reading Instruction: A Case Study of Its Functions, Rationales, and Pedagogical Implications



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Abstract: Although teacher code-switching (CS) has been widely examined in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms, relatively limited research has focused on its role in examination-oriented instructional settings. This study investigates teacher CS practices in College English Test Band 4/6 (CET-4/6) reading classes at a Chinese university. Drawing on Ferguson's (2003) framework, the study adopts a qualitative approach, collecting classroom recordings, observation notes, and stimulated recall interviews from three College English teachers. The findings reveal three primary functions of teacher CS: curriculum access, classroom management, and interpersonal relations, with curriculum access being the most dominant. Within this function, teachers frequently used Chinese to explain vocabulary, analyze sentence structures, clarify concepts, and provide test-taking strategies. Notably, examination strategy instruction emerged as a distinct subtype of curriculum access specific to CET-4/6 reading instruction. Data from stimulated recall interviews indicate that teacher CS is influenced by multiple factors, including students' language proficiency, time constraints, task difficulty, teachers' habitual practices, and student feedback. These findings suggest that CS in examination-oriented classrooms functions not as a substitute for English, but as a deliberate teaching resource shaped by institutional demands and classroom realities. This study contributes to a more contextualized and nuanced understanding of classroom CS and offers practical implications for College English teaching.

Keywords: teacher code-switching, CET-4/6, college English teaching, EFL, examination-oriented instruction

1. Introduction

1.1 Research background

English has become an indispensable tool for academic exchange, international cooperation, and cross-cultural communication in contemporary society (Crystal, 2003). In China, the growing demand for international engagement has further strengthened the role of English education in higher education. For college students, English proficiency is important not only for academic success but also for future careers and global engagement.

College English is a compulsory course for most non-English major undergraduates in Chinese universities. Among various English proficiency assessments, the CET remains one of the most influential, serving not only as an indicator of students' language ability but also as a key reference for employment and career development. Given that reading comprehension accounts for a substantial portion of the overall CET score, CET-focused reading instruction has become a critical component of College English curricula.

Unlike general reading classes that primarily emphasize language development and text

comprehension, CET-4/6 reading instruction entails additional teaching demands. Teachers are often expected to explain question types, analyze answer choices, introduce test-taking strategies, and complete classroom tasks efficiently within limited time. These exam-oriented requirements create a distinctive teaching context in which teachers must constantly adjust their language use to meet pedagogical and administrative demands.

1.2 Research gap

In multilingual classrooms, teachers' alternation between two or more languages is commonly referred to as code-switching (CS), formally defined as the systematic use of multiple linguistic codes within a single communicative event (Gumperz, 1982). In the EFL context, teacher CS has traditionally been viewed from two contrasting perspectives. On the one hand, excessive L1 use may be seen as an impediment to target language exposure and acquisition. On the other hand, a growing body of research indicates that strategic CS can serve important pedagogical functions, such as explaining difficult concepts, managing classroom activities, and establishing interpersonal rapport (Cahyani et al., 2018; Adriosh & Razi, 2019; Khan et al., 2025).

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Existing research has provided valuable insights into the functions of classroom CS (Wang & Abd Rahman, 2025; Aprilianti & Baa, 2024). However, most of these studies have focused on general EFL classrooms or intensive reading courses, with considerably less attention paid to examination-oriented reading instruction. In such contexts, teachers' language choices are likely shaped not only by students' linguistic needs but also by institutional assessment requirements and the demand for classroom efficiency.

In Chinese universities, CET-4 and CET-6 reading instruction offers a particularly relevant site for exploring this issue, as teachers are expected to facilitate both text comprehension and examination preparation. CS in this context may thus function not merely as a comprehension aid but also as a strategy for navigating competing pedagogical objectives in an examination-driven educational environment.

Furthermore, previous research has tended to focus on what functions CS serves, while paying less attention to how teachers themselves understand and explain their language choices in authentic classroom practice. The combination of classroom observation and stimulated recall interviews employed in the present study may therefore offer a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between teachers' classroom behaviour and their pedagogical rationales.

1.3 Research objectives

Building on the foregoing discussion, the present study aims to investigate teachers' CS practices in CET-4/6 reading instruction within Chinese university EFL classrooms. Rather than treating CS as a frequency-based phenomenon, the study conceptualizes it as a context-sensitive pedagogical practice shaped by instructional purposes and specific classroom conditions.

Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. *What are the functions of teacher CS in CET-4/6 reading instruction?*
2. *What factors influence teachers' language choices during CET-4/6 reading instruction?*

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualizing CS in EFL classrooms

CS refers to the alternating use of two or more languages within the same communicative event. Early studies primarily examined CS from linguistic and sociolinguistic perspectives, focusing on structural patterns and the social meanings underlying speakers' language choices (Poplack, 1980; Romaine, 1989; Adder & Bagui, 2020; Lomotey, 2020; Riyanti, 2017; Linh & Loan, 2025).

In the field of second language acquisition, early research tended to view L1 use with caution, as excessive reliance on the learners' first language was

thought to reduce exposure to the target language (Krashen, 1985). However, subsequent studies have suggested that, when used judiciously and appropriately, L1 instruction does not necessarily hinder foreign language learning and may even facilitate comprehension.

Within the classroom context, CS has gradually been reframed as a positive pedagogical strategy rather than a deviation from target-language-only instruction. In EFL classrooms, teachers may strategically employ CS to explain complex concepts, support student understanding, and promote classroom interaction (Ferguson, 2003; Üstünel, 2016).

Accordingly, the present study conceptualizes teacher CS as a contextualized teaching resource—one that enables teachers to organize classroom communication effectively while flexibly responding to diverse instructional demands.

2.2 Ferguson's teacher CS functions

Studies have shown that teacher CS serves various pedagogical functions in foreign language classrooms, and that such switching is not random but is closely related to instructional purposes, classroom interaction, and learners' needs (Rolin-Ianziti & Brownlie, 2002; Sali, 2014).

Among the existing frameworks, Ferguson's (2003) three-category typology—curriculum access, classroom management, and interpersonal relations—has been widely adopted. Curriculum access refers to the use of CS to help students understand content, including explaining vocabulary, clarifying meaning, and simplifying complex information. Classroom management involves using CS to organize activities, give instructions, and maintain classroom efficiency. Interpersonal relations concern the social and emotional functions of CS, such as building rapport and creating a supportive learning atmosphere (Ferguson, 2003).

Recent studies have further confirmed that CS practices are shaped by multiple factors, including teachers' beliefs, students' proficiency levels, task characteristics, and instructional objectives (Temesgen & Hailu, 2022; Murtiningsih et al., 2022).

While these studies have contributed valuable insights, most have focused on general EFL classroom settings, with insufficient attention to how specific educational contexts—such as examination-oriented instruction—may influence teachers' CS decisions.

2.3 Teacher CS in the Chinese university EFL contexts

In Chinese College English classrooms, the coexistence of English teaching objectives and practical instructional constraints makes teacher CS a common phenomenon. Research has shown that teachers frequently use Chinese to explain language points, clarify difficulties, and accommodate students

at different proficiency levels (Chen, 2004; Shi, 2011).

Studies on College English classrooms have further indicated that CS is closely associated with teaching efficiency and classroom communication. For instance, Lyu et al. (2015) found that CS was primarily used to explain content and facilitate learning outcomes.

However, most existing research in China has concentrated on general College English instruction or intensive reading courses (Yang, 2015; Yu, 2023), while the influence of examination requirements on CS practices has received comparatively little attention.

2.4 Examination-oriented instruction, washback, and research gap

In Chinese higher education, the CET-4 and CET-6 are among the most influential English proficiency tests for college students. As high-stakes assessments, they not only evaluate students' language abilities but also shape teaching priorities and classroom practices (Zhu & Yu, 2017).

The influence of examinations on teaching can be understood through the concept of washback effects, which refer to the impact of tests on teaching and learning (Alderson & Wall, 1993). Washback can be positive when it encourages beneficial pedagogies, or negative when it narrows the curriculum and promotes "teaching to the test" (Salmani Nodoushan, 2021).

From this perspective, CET-4/6 reading instruction may create a unique instructional context in which teachers must balance language development, reading comprehension, and examination preparation. In such settings, CS functions not merely as a comprehension aid but also as a resource for addressing examination-related instructional demands.

Building on the foregoing discussion, this study identifies three research gaps. First, while teacher CS has been extensively studied, examination-oriented EFL classrooms remain underexplored. Second, previous research has tended to focus on the functions of CS rather than on how institutional assessment requirements influence teachers' language choices. Third, studies that combine classroom observation with stimulated recall interviews to examine the relationship between CS practices and pedagogical reasoning are still limited.

To address these gaps, this study investigates CS as a contextualized resource in CET-4/6 reading instruction. By integrating Ferguson's (2003) functional framework with an examination-oriented perspective, the study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how College English teachers manage language resources in test-driven classroom settings.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study adopts a qualitative case study design to investigate teacher CS in CET-4/6 reading instruction at a Chinese university. A qualitative approach is appropriate given the study's aim to explore how and why teachers use CS in a specific examination-oriented context.

As noted earlier, teacher CS is context-sensitive and shaped by instructional objectives, classroom interaction, learner characteristics, and institutional requirements. A comprehensive understanding of CS in examination-oriented EFL classrooms thus requires the integration of observable classroom practices with teachers' own pedagogical reasoning.

Accordingly, the study employs classroom observation, audio-recorded classroom data, and stimulated recall interviews to examine both the observable patterns of CS and the underlying reasons for teachers' language choices.

3.2 Research context and participants

The study was conducted at a public university in China, where compulsory College English courses are offered to non-English major undergraduates. Like most Chinese universities, this institution integrates CET-4 and CET-6 preparation into regular College English instruction, particularly through reading activities.

Three College English teachers participated in the study, all of whom were responsible for CET-4/6 reading instruction. Their teaching experience ranged from 5 to 15 years (5, 7, and 15 years respectively), with two holding lecturer positions and one serving as an associate professor. This variation in experience provides diverse perspectives for examining CS practices.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling. Prior to data collection, the researcher explained the study purpose and procedures and confirmed their voluntary participation. The study adhered strictly to ethical principles of confidentiality and anonymity; all identifiable information was replaced with pseudonyms.

3.3 Data collection

Three types of data were collected: classroom audio recordings, observation notes, and stimulated recall interviews.

First, approximately nine hours of classroom interaction were audio-recorded across CET-4/6 reading classes, covering vocabulary explanation, text analysis, question discussion, and test-taking strategy instruction.

Second, observation notes were taken during each lesson, focusing on instances of language switching, the instructional contexts in which CS occurred, and the interactional effects of CS use.

Third, stimulated recall interviews were conducted following classroom observations. During

these sessions, selected classroom episodes containing CS were played back, and teachers were invited to explain their language choices at specific moments. This method provided access to teachers' pedagogical intentions and decision-making processes that could not be directly observed.

3.4 Data analysis

Following transcription of the classroom recordings, the data were analyzed using both deductive and inductive approaches.

First, drawing on Ferguson's (2003) framework, teacher CS instances were categorized into three types: curriculum access, classroom management, and interpersonal relations. This allowed for systematic comparison with the established classification.

Second, the analysis examined contextual features related to CET-4/6 test preparation, with particular attention to CS use in explaining test-taking strategies, analyzing question types, and managing task completion—practices that directly reflect the influence of examination requirements on teachers' language choices.

Third, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was applied to the interview data, focusing on three dimensions: how teachers explained their language choices, what constraints they perceived in their teaching, and their views on the role of CS in the classroom.

The triangulation of classroom recordings, observation notes, and interview data strengthened the credibility of the findings.

3.5 Research quality and ethical considerations

To ensure research quality, the study employed methodological triangulation by cross-validating findings from classroom recordings, observation notes, and stimulated recall interviews. The coding and classification procedures were reviewed iteratively to ensure alignment between the theoretical framework and the empirical data. Participants were also given opportunities to clarify and elaborate on their responses during the interviews.

Regarding ethical considerations, all participants signed informed consent forms prior to data collection. The data collected were used solely for this study, and all personal information was anonymized throughout the research process.

4. Results

4.1 Functions of teacher CS

According to the framework of Ferguson (2003), this study classifies all CS instances into three categories: curriculum access, classroom management and interpersonal relations. The distribution of three functions is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Teacher CS Functions

Function	Frequency	Percentage
Curriculum access	286	74.1%
Classroom management	65	16.8%
Interpersonal relations	35	9.1%
Total	386	100%

As shown in Table 1, curriculum access accounted for the highest proportion, reaching 74.1%. This shows that the main purpose of teacher CS is to help students understand reading materials and address the learning demands of CET-4 and CET-6.

(1) CS for curriculum access: supporting comprehension and test preparation

Curriculum access is the most dominant function in teacher CS. There are three main contexts: vocabulary explanation, sentence structure analysis, and reading strategy instruction.

First, teachers often use Chinese to explain unfamiliar words, complex expressions and abstract meanings, rather than simply offering direct translations, to help students better understand the function of specific words in reading passage.

For example:

Excerpt 1 (Teacher A):

Intriguing—let's look at the board. This word, right here.

非常有趣的，引人入胜的。

Ok? So here the author says the idea is intriguing—so it's like, very interesting.

Second, teachers used Chinese to analyze and explain sentence structures, especially in dealing with long and complex sentences that often appear in CET-4 / 6 reading passages. Chinese explanations helped students to identify grammatical relations and understand the logical structure of sentences.

For example:

Excerpt 2 (Teacher B):

The main clause

也就是句子的主干。

是 'the study suggests' Right?

Then we have 'that'

这个 'that' 是连词，对不对？

引导的是？引导的是什么？

Yes! object clause! 宾语从句。

Third, teachers often used CS when explaining reading strategies and test-taking techniques. This was particularly common in reading exercises discussions. Teachers guided students to locate key information, identify paraphrases, and eliminate distractors.

For example:

Excerpt 3 (Teacher C):

For this kind of detail question

先定位，再找同义替换。

Don't just rely on your memory, Ok?

These examples showed that teachers used CS not only to help students understand, but also to address the teaching demands brought by the examination. In CET-4/6 classrooms, CS connected language knowledge with test-taking strategies, reflecting the influence of exam-oriented instruction on classroom language use.

(2) CS for classroom management

Classroom management accounted for 16.8 % of all CS instances. Teachers mainly used CS to organize classroom activities, give instructions, and move between different teaching activities.

For example:

Excerpt 4 (Teacher A):

Now, I would like to give you 3 minutes to finish these exercises.

来，我们现在给大家三分钟时间做这道题。

Teachers also used CS when moving from one classroom activity to another:

好，同学们，咱们时间到了啊。

let's check the answers together.

The above examples showed that CS helped teachers deliver instructions more efficiently and maintain classroom pace. In the CET-4/6 reading classes with limited time, the use of Chinese helped reduce possible misunderstandings and ensure smooth classroom activities.

(3) CS for interpersonal relations:

The proportion of interpersonal relations was the lowest, accounting for 9.1 %. Although not as frequently as instructional uses, CS also helped create a positive classroom atmosphere.

Teachers used Chinese expressions to lighten the atmosphere, reduce psychological distance between teachers and students, and encourage student participation.

For example:

Excerpt 5 (Teacher C):

这道题选A的同学举个手，……

哎呀，这么多啊，原来大家都有同感。

Ok, let's see why.

Although these situations are not common, they show that CS is not only a teaching method, but also a resource to manage the interaction between teachers and students.

4.2 Teachers' pedagogical rationales for CS use

Thematic analysis of stimulated recall interviews revealed several factors shaping teachers' CS decisions during CET-4/6 reading instruction. The major factors identified are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Factors Influencing Teachers' CS Decisions

Factor	Teachers Mentioning
Students' English proficiency	3
Time pressure	3
Task difficulty	3
Teacher habits and beliefs	2
Student feedback	2

(1) Students' English proficiency

Students' English proficiency is one of the most influential factors mentioned by teachers. All three teachers said that when students have insufficient vocabulary, weak grammatical awareness or lack of reading ability, they are more inclined to use Chinese.

Teacher B explained:

我们学校的学生英语基础普遍一般，全英授课的话很多人根本跟不上，尤其是在讲阅读理解的时候，不用中文他们连题目都看不懂。

This suggests that teachers viewed CS as a supportive measure to accommodate students' actual

learning conditions rather than simply as a replacement for English instruction.

(2) Time pressure

All three teachers mentioned time pressure as another important factor. They said that it was more efficient to explain complex content in Chinese, especially when dealing with difficult sentences or explaining reading strategies with limited classroom time.

Teacher C stated:

课堂时间有限，一个长难句用英文讲可能要绕半天，中文一句话就解释清楚了，学生也听得明白。

This finding reflects the practical impact of exam-oriented teaching. In the classroom, teachers

need to not only explain content in detail, but also complete the required teaching tasks.

(3) Task difficulty

Teachers also emphasized the role of task difficulty in their CS decisions. When reading passages involved unfamiliar cultural knowledge or complicated concepts, teachers were more likely to use Chinese to support students' understanding.

Teacher A commented:

这篇文章讲的是西方陪审团制度，
学生完全不了解这个背景，不讲中文
他们根本不知道在说什么。

The use of CS in such situations demonstrates that teachers employed Chinese strategically to bridge gaps between students' existing knowledge and the demands of CET-4/6 reading materials.

(4) Teacher habits and student feedback

In addition to instructional factors, teachers' personal habits and students' classroom feedback also affected the use of CS. Two teachers mentioned that sometimes CS occurred naturally and had become part of their teaching routine.

Teacher B explained:

说实话，讲阅读题用中文有时候是
习惯，没有特别去想过为什么要在那
里切换。

Teachers also reported paying attention to students' verbal and non-verbal feedback. When students appeared confused or failed to respond, teachers tended to provide additional explanations in Chinese.

4.3 Variation among three teachers' CS practices

A comparison of the three teachers revealed differences in CS frequency and functional distribution (see Table 3).

Table 3. Comparison of CS Use among Three Teachers

Teacher	Total CS Instances	Curriculum Access	Classroom Management	Interpersonal Relations
Teacher A	145	78.6%	14.5%	6.9%
Teacher B	132	70.5%	18.2%	11.3%
Teacher C	109	72.5%	17.4%	10.1%

Teacher A used CS most frequently, mainly for content explanation and sentence analysis. Teacher B's CS use was evenly distributed across the three functions. Teacher C used CS least, but the proportion of interpersonal function was slightly higher.

These differences suggest that although the three teachers worked within the same examination-oriented educational context, individual teaching styles and classroom interaction patterns influenced how CS was employed.

5. Discussion

This section discusses the findings in relation to Ferguson's (2003) framework and previous research on classroom CS. It first examines how teacher CS functioned in CET-4/6 reading instruction and considers the contextual characteristics of examination-oriented teaching. It then analyzes the factors shaping teachers' CS decisions based on stimulated recall interviews. Finally, the theoretical and pedagogical implications of the findings are discussed.

5.1 Functions of teacher CS: contextual refinement of ferguson's framework (RQ1)

Ferguson's (2003) three functional categories—curriculum access, classroom management, and interpersonal relations—provide a useful lens for interpreting teacher CS in CET-4/6 reading classrooms. Among these, curriculum access emerged as the most prominent function. Teachers fr

equently used Chinese to explain unfamiliar vocabulary, analyze complex sentence structures, clarify complicated concepts, and guide students through reading tasks. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that instructional purposes represent a primary motivation for teacher CS in EFL classrooms (Temesgen & Hailu, 2022; Üstünel, 2016).

However, the present study also reveals a context-specific extension of curriculum access: examination strategy instruction. In the observed classrooms, teachers used Chinese not only to explain linguistic content but also to guide students in applying test-taking techniques—such as locating key information, identifying paraphrases, and eliminating distractors. In this sense, CS served as a bridge between language learning and examination preparation.

This finding extends earlier conceptualizations of curriculum access, suggesting that in examination-oriented settings, accessing content involves not only understanding textual meaning but also acquiring strategies for successful task completion. While Ferguson's (2003) framework offers a broad explanatory structure, the present study demonstrates that specific instructional contexts can shape how curriculum access is operationalized in practice.

The prominence of examination strategy instruction can be understood through the lens of washback effects in language education (Alderson & Wall, 1993). In Chinese College English contexts,

CET-4/6 requirements continue to shape classroom practices, particularly in reading instruction. Teachers must balance broader language learning objectives with students' immediate examination needs. Consequently, assessment demands influence not only what teachers teach but also how they organize classroom discourse and select linguistic resources.

From this perspective, teacher CS in CET-4/6-oriented classrooms should not be viewed solely as a response to students' limited English proficiency. Rather, it reflects a negotiation between institutional expectations, pedagogical efficiency, and learners' needs.

5.2 Factors influencing teachers' language choices: interactions between examination demands and classroom realities (RQ2)

The findings indicate that teachers' CS decisions were shaped by multiple interrelated factors, including students' English proficiency, time pressure, task difficulty, teaching habits, and student feedback. These factors did not operate in isolation but interacted to influence classroom language choices.

Students' English proficiency was the most frequently mentioned factor. All three teachers reported that they were more likely to switch to Chinese when students faced difficulties with vocabulary, grammar, or reading comprehension. From their perspective, CS served as an effective strategy for providing support and preventing communication breakdowns.

This finding can be related to Krashen's (1985) concept of comprehensible input. When exclusive English use hinders comprehension, teachers may draw on the L1 as a scaffolding resource. However, the present study suggests that teachers' use of Chinese is not determined solely by students' proficiency levels but is also mediated by instructional objectives and classroom conditions.

Time pressure emerged as another significant factor. Interview data revealed that teachers frequently resorted to Chinese when explaining long or syntactically complex sentences and reading strategies, as it proved more time-efficient. This was particularly evident in CET-4/6 reading classes, where teachers were expected to cover both textbook content and examination practice within limited time.

Task difficulty also played a critical role. Teachers reported that when reading materials involved unfamiliar cultural references or abstract concepts, they were more inclined to use Chinese to bridge the gap between new information and students' existing knowledge, thereby reducing comprehension barriers.

In addition to these instructional factors, teaching habits and student feedback also influenced CS use. Some teachers acknowledged that certain switching patterns had become routine. At the same time, they adjusted their language choices in

response to students' immediate reactions—such as signs of confusion, silence, or lack of response—indicating that CS was partly shaped by moment-to-moment classroom interaction.

Stimulated recall interviews proved particularly valuable in uncovering these dynamics. Several CS instances that had not been consciously noticed during teaching became apparent upon reviewing the recordings. This underscores the value of combining classroom observation with teacher reflection to gain a more complete understanding of the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their actual language practices.

5.3 Theoretical and pedagogical implications

By focusing on the underexplored context of CET-4/6-oriented reading instruction in Chinese higher education, this study extends current understandings of teacher CS practices.

Theoretically, the findings suggest that the curriculum access category should be interpreted with sensitivity to local teaching demands. In examination-oriented environments, helping students access course content involves more than linguistic explanation—it also entails equipping them with strategies to handle assessment tasks. Future research on teacher CS should therefore pay closer attention to how institutional and assessment contexts shape classroom language practices.

Pedagogically, CS should not be dismissed as a limitation on target-language use. When deployed purposefully, it can function as an effective instructional resource. Teachers may benefit from developing greater awareness of when and why they switch languages, particularly when addressing complex concepts, long and difficult sentences, and test-taking strategies.

That said, the findings do not suggest that more CS is always preferable. Its effectiveness depends on whether it serves a clear instructional purpose. Accordingly, teacher education programs could incorporate discussions on the strategic use of CS, equipping educators to make more informed and principled decisions about classroom language use.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to examine teacher code-switching practices in CET-4/6-oriented College English reading instruction, with particular attention to its pedagogical functions and the factors shaping teachers' language choices. While previous research has largely treated CS as a comprehension-support mechanism in general EFL classrooms, the present investigation reveals a more contextually nuanced role for CS in examination-driven instructional settings.

Theoretically, the findings suggest that in high-stakes assessment contexts, teacher CS operates not merely as a linguistic scaffold but as a mediating

tool that connects language comprehension with task completion and examination performance. When teachers use Chinese to explain test-taking strategies, analyze question types, or guide students through reading tasks, they are not simply substituting English with Chinese; rather, they are strategically mobilizing the L1 to bridge the gap between learners' current proficiency and the cognitive demands of examination-oriented tasks. This mediating function, while implicit in Ferguson's (2003) curriculum access category, has not been explicitly theorized in the literature on classroom CS. The present study thus extends Ferguson's framework by foregrounding the role of institutional assessment requirements in shaping how curriculum access is operationalized in practice.

Pedagogically, the findings underscore the value of viewing CS not as a deficiency in target-language use but as a deliberate and context-sensitive instructional resource. Teachers in examination-oriented contexts may benefit from greater reflexive awareness of their CS practices, particularly when using L1 to support students' strategic engagement with test materials.

In sum, this study contributes to a more contextualized understanding of teacher CS by demonstrating how examination demands recontextualize classroom language practices, transforming CS from a mere comprehension aid into a strategic tool for navigating the competing demands of language learning and test preparation.

7. Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study involved only three teachers from a single university, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research could include teachers from diverse institutions and regions to further examine how contextual factors shape CS practices.

Second, the study focused specifically on CET-4/6 reading instruction. While this focus provides insights into examination-oriented classroom discourse, CS practices in other skill areas—such as writing, listening, and translation—remain to be explored.

Third, the study primarily examined teachers' perspectives and classroom behaviours. Students' perceptions of teacher CS and its potential effects on learning outcomes represent important directions for future inquiry.

Future research could also investigate whether examination strategy instruction emerges as a CS-related function in other high-stakes testing contexts. In addition, incorporating both teacher and student perspectives would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the pedagogical role of classroom CS.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to this work.

Declarations

This Research was Supported by Project of the Tianjin Undergraduate Teaching Quality and Teaching Reform Research Program (2025) (Project No. A251006902).

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How to Cite: Huang, Y. & Li, Z. (2026). Teacher Code-Switching in CET-4/6-Oriented College English Reading Instruction: A Case Study of Its Functions, Rationales, and Pedagogical Implications. *Contemporary Education and Teaching Research*, 07(09), 294–302. <https://doi.org/10.61360/BoniCETR262020670904>