

Influence of Social media on Code-Switching and Code-Mixing Behaviour Among the Young Generation of Bangladesh

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Abstract

Codes refer to the different language varieties or dialects used for meaningful communication. Code-switching and mixing behaviours that refer to blending of two or more languages or codes are common among bilingual and multilingual individuals. Communication practices in recent times have changed significantly due to the diversified technological advancements. Social media have made communication around the world quick and convenient. The youth who acquire various foreign languages and engage in social interactions become accustomed to code-switching and code-mixing behaviour. The research reported in this paper followed a qualitative approach to identify any possible influence of social media on code-switching and code-mixing behaviour among the Bangladeshi youth. It examined if the mother tongue is endangered due to the over-switching and over-mixing of codes in regular communication. The findings indicate that social media served to mould their language varieties and influenced them to switch and mix their language codes. Moreover, it was evident from the findings that the switching and mixing of codes have significant consequences for the vitality of their mother tongue. The findings have implications for multilingual practices involving social media and language use among the youth.

Keywords: Social media, young generation, code-switching, code-mixing, mother tongue

INTRODUCTION

Language is the vital means for communication and technology has made this communication smoother nowadays regardless of geographical barriers of the users. Hence, it is important to get acquainted with new technologies for better communication (Nordin et al. 2022). There are multiple technological channels through which people communicate across the country as well as across the borders. Social media sites are prominent among them. It is no longer a wish but a need to use social media every day regardless of how technophobe one is (Nordin, 2023).

Bangladesh is a multilingual country where around 40 languages are spoken among different communities. Due to this linguistic diversity, Bangladesh's smaller ethnic groups have already developed a fondness for blending or switching between their native tongue and Bangla when necessary (Arna, & Sultana, 2022). Apart from this, the use of social media during and after the pandemic era has also given the learners opportunity to practice bilingualism or multilingualism while communicating online. Moreover, this mixing and switching of languages or codes has been a sign of smartness to a few young people in Bangladesh (Hossain & Bar, 2015). Hence, the bilingual and multilingual community of Bangladesh tends to be influenced by social media.

Due to the diversified language usage in Bangladesh, code-mixing and code-switching are regular phenomena, especially among young generations (Rafi, 2017). Code-mixing refers to the use of words from different languages in a conversation and code-switching refers to the use of sentences from different languages in a conversation. The mixture of languages is very natural, but it becomes alarming when it is overused (Johanes, 2017). Similarly, Faruk (2016) also shared in a press release that, mixed or switched languages create messy conversation, and reduce the melody of a language.

This study attempted to dig out the influences of social media on the code-switching and code-mixing behaviour among the young generation of Bangladesh along with its effect on their mother tongue. To do so, two major focuses were specified. These are –

1. What are the factors that influence the young generation of Bangladesh to switch and mix codes on social media?
2. What is the perceived impact of code-switching and code-mixing in social media communication on the vitality of the local languages that the young generation speak as their mother tongues?

By addressing the above issues, it was hoped that the study would generate insights regarding the possible negative impact of code-switching and code-mixing practices on social media.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The nature of multilingualism is concurrently social and individual. Besides, there are several factors like language competency, social identity, and interpersonal relationships among the speech community and intersecting community, that influence the multilingual speaker's language choice (Afzal et al., 2022). Again, according to Cenoz (2013), this common phenomenon of multilingualism was a consequence of “globalization, transnational mobility of the population, and the spread of new technologies”. People can be multilingual either being speakers of different languages inside the state or they can acquire the competency of multilingualism by the spread of international relationships for economic and political advancements (Cenoz, 2013, p.3). Again, Fishman (1972) talked about five language use

domains where people use, switch, and mix the languages according to their convenience. These domains include “family, friendship, education, religion, and employment” (see in Afzal et al. 2022, p. 3183). Though the official language of Bangladesh is Bangla, Arna & Sultana (2022) point out that a good number of people, especially the Gen Z group, speak Bangla, English, Urdu, Hindi, Marma, Arabic, and to some extent Korean while communicating both inside and outside the country. They also argue that it is a prerequisite to inspire multilingualism in Bangladesh and to attain the desirable socio-cultural, political, and economic development of the country.

Like multilingualism, code-switching and code-mixing is also an old phenomenon. Code-switching refers to the transferring of one language to another while communicating in spoken discourse whereas code-mixing refers to the mixing of multiple languages in a single sentence (Ezeh et al., 2022). Similarly, Ahmad (2023) in his article mentioned that code-mixing is the blending of the grammatical structures and vocabulary of two or more languages inside a single phrase, whereas code-switching is the alternative employment of two or more languages to the same amount of conversation. Gardner-Cloros (2009) focused on the young group of the population for code-switching and mixing and mentioned that “socio-linguistic factors like language proficiency, social identity, and the linguistics environment” play a vital role in influencing the young generation to switch and mix their codes (see in Jabeen et al., 2023, p.251).

The fourth industrial revolution is based on technology which is being used by the youth of the world in their regular life activities. They use technology for their study, entertainment, so on and so forth. In the Corona pandemic situation, online classes took over on-site classes. For this reason, many students had to be online staying in touch with technology for the rest of their day. It has been reported that 70% of people spend more than 1 hour and 35% of people spend more than 5 hours a day on screen (The Daily Star, 2021). Most of them are students.

Young adults' language practices are styled in their own ways, which give individuals a method to break through barriers and lessen the social marginalization they encounter daily due to their socioeconomic, linguistic, and demographic backgrounds (Sultana, 2019). When communication takes place between two persons using technological devices on both ends, it is known as computer-mediated communication (CMC) (Roberts, 2009). Communication through social media is an example of CMC that has enormous significance in code-switching and code-mixing (Stella & Claros, 2009, p.76). According to Riaz, “Media is a vital source of influencing not only the mindsets of people but also their behavior and linguistic patterns” (2019, p.1). According to Hasan and Akhand, code-switching and code-mixing help the young population to express their thoughts comfortably and they also mentioned code-switching and code mixing to be more beneficial for bilingual students (2009, p. 8). Using mixed language makes it easier for the learners to express their thoughts rather than sticking to one single language code. Similarly, a study by Jakob (2020) reflected that code-switching and mixing happen consciously among the youth community group depending on the situation or topic change. Besides, research conducted by Gad (2019) revealed that code-switching and mixing in social media is a “time-saving strategy” while expressing “complex feelings, deep emotions, and decisions”. Ahmed Abousoud (2019) pointed out that while communicating on Facebook, educated people, due to their greater exposure to different codes, tend to switch codes more than mix them compared to less educated people.

Code-mixing and code-switching through social media offer great opportunities to learn new words and languages and enrich vocabulary. Students get introduced to new words and language while they switch and mix codes, allowing the teacher to understand the language backgrounds of the students (Waris, 2012). They use mixed language easily in informal situations. Moreover, code-switching, and code-mixing help to improve fluency and confidence. Furthermore, Moetia et al. (2018) stated that the students use code-switching and mixing for multiple reasons such as vocabulary limitations, and talking with friends in an informal situation, to improve their fluency and confidence, for better understanding. When students face the problem of vocabulary limitation, they take the help of code-switching and code-mixing. When a student has a limitation of vocabulary, they feel shy to express their thoughts. So, this becomes a big barrier to communication for them but when they can use code-switching and code-mixing while speaking, they can express their thoughts without any hesitation. As a result, code-switching, and code-mixing contribute to better understanding. Gumperz and Hymes (1972) claimed that code-switching and code-mixing make a mess out of the conversation for those who cannot speak the desired language properly. When people use mixed languages, sometimes it becomes awkward. The mixture of languages is a usual matter, however; the overuse of it creates undesirable situations. Some people are even using this mixture in a problematic way. For example, the youth of Bangladesh frequently utter the word “Joss” which comes from Hindi language, while they are communicating in Bangla. Although this word "Joss" is used informally, it is occasionally used in formal settings. Because it is difficult to understand terminology unique to a given field, it can hinder academic communication and may be deemed inappropriate in formal writing assignments or examinations. Code-mixing thus can have a negative effect on academic performance. These factors could have an impact on students' grades and academic success (Jabeen et al., 2023). Additionally, Basu (2016) reported the perceived detrimental effects of excessive mixing and switching when he highlighted in one of his studies that excessive mixing of English and Bangla by FM Radio caused consternation among the listeners. The language itself may become tainted as the paper shows if the Radio Jocke presentation is heavily Englishized.

This research adopts Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism theory and Edwin Hutchins's (1995) distributed cognition theory as its conceptual framework. Constructivist theory refers to an individual's environment and social interactions that play a crucial role in shaping his/her understanding and acquisition of new knowledge. This theory suggests that people actively construct knowledge through interactions with others and their surroundings, rather than passively absorbing it. It emphasizes the importance of social factors in the learning process (Akpan et al., 2020). Again, distributed cognition theory, also known as distributed cognition, is a framework used to study how information processing is distributed across people, tools, technologies, and the environment. It emphasizes that cognitive processes are not confined to an individual's mind but are distributed across various elements in their surroundings (Hollan et al., 2000).

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a descriptive qualitative method, and it is analytical in nature. It investigates two fundamental factors - firstly, the factors that influence the young generation of Bangladesh to switch and mix codes on social media. Secondly, whether and how the code-switching and code-mixing on social media communication endangers the mother tongue of the young generation of Bangladesh.

There were 50 students from 4 private colleges in Dhaka metropolitan city who were selected to collect data from. For selecting colleges, convenient sampling was used and for selecting participants, purposive sampling was utilized to choose the participants—first and second year intermediate level participants, regardless of gender—if they met the research's requirements. The interview occurred in semi-formal Settings.

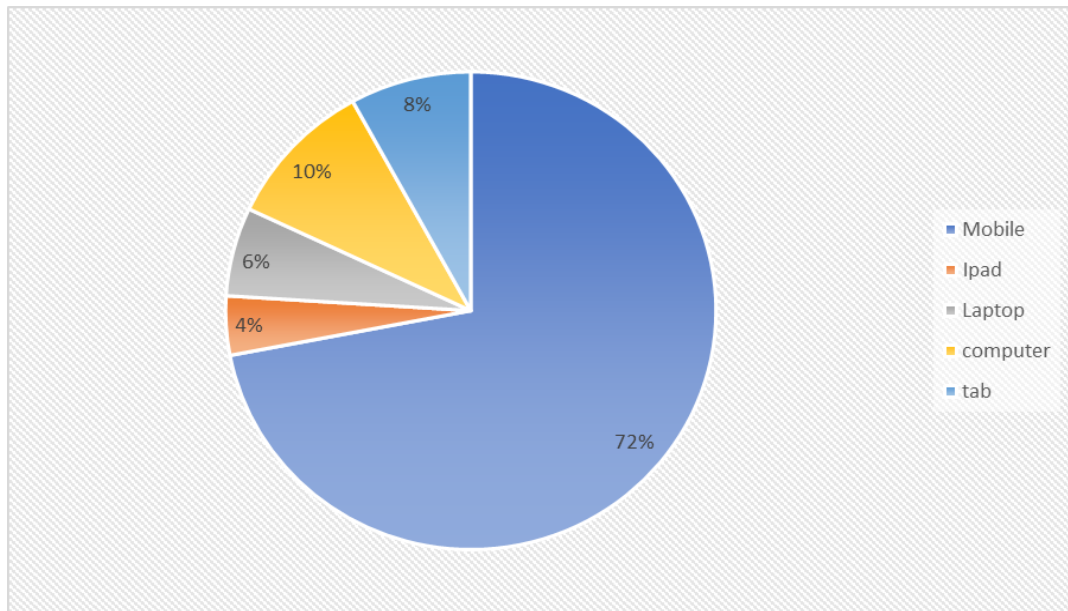
Interview questions were used as instruments to collect data from college students. There were 15 open-ended questions which were relevant to the study. A mobile voice recorder was used to record the answers and make further process easier.

At first the researchers asked permission from the higher authorities of selected colleges. After listening to details about the research, the authorities gave the permission. Then the researcher discussed the details of the research with the participants. After that, the participants were interviewed on a one-to-one basis. They had to answer some relevant questions, and all the questions were open-ended. The interview sessions were recorded with the permission of the participants. The consent of the students was properly taken before collecting data. To make sure that the collected data are not biased or influenced by the circumstances, the interviews of the students were conducted individually. To do so, researchers had to meet the students several times and form friendly relationships. The collected data from the interviews were qualitatively analysed. After that the results were shown in a descriptive manner. There were a few obstacles which created some challenges during the data collection. First, it took a lot of work to obtain authorization from those colleges' higher authorities. Secondly, some students were uncomfortable and declined to participate. Thirdly, we had to wait for a long time to collect data. Moreover, they had to visit these colleges for several times. Good ethical practices were maintained throughout the research process.

FINDINGS

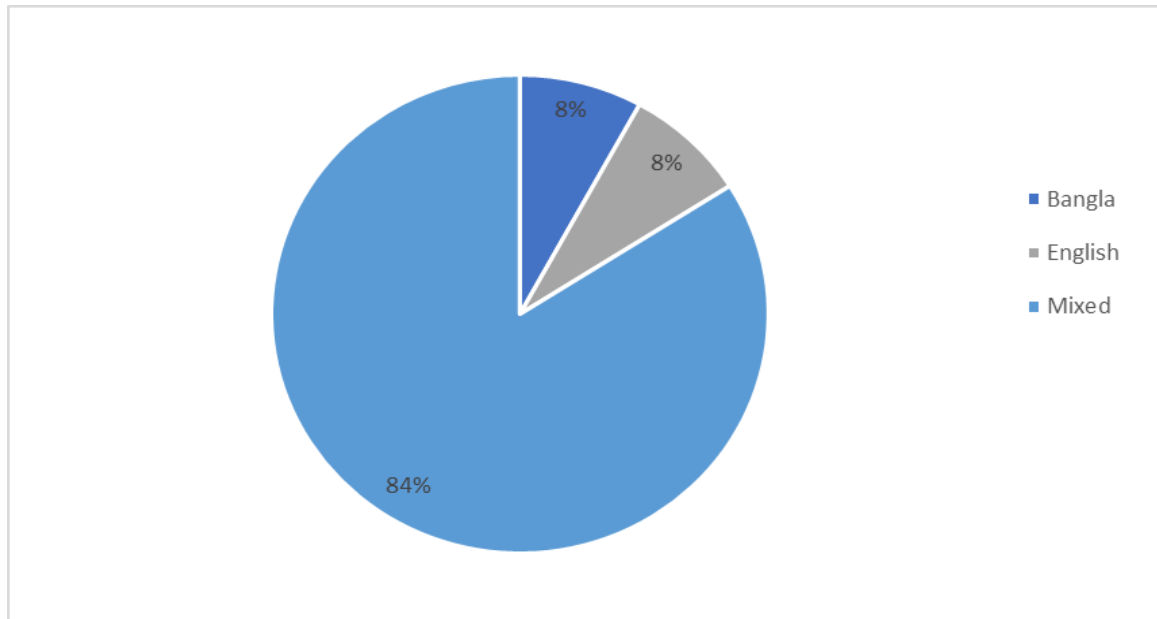
In this section the findings of the study are presented in terms of the primary objectives of this study based on the analysis of interview data. The primary objectives of this study are to shed lights on the factors that influence the young generation to switch and mix codes on social media and the way code-switching and code-mixing on social media communication possibly endangers the mother tongue of the young generation. The students are closely involved with technological devices. The Corona pandemic has played a crucial role in intensifying the attachment. They are using various technological devices such as mobile phones, tabs, computers, and iPads. According to the study, many students have more than one technological device. Almost every student has a mobile phone. Some of them have tabs, laptops, or computers. A few of them have iPads. The mobile phone is a very popular technological device among the students because of its easy-to-use attribute and it is also cost efficient. Moreover, the features of mobile phone are updating continually. Many companies provide various offers on different occasions which can help to increase the sale of mobile phones.

As shown in the Figure 1 below, most of the students prefer mobile phone over all other devices for communication. To be specific, a participant expressed that “it is convenient for them to carry the mobile phone anywhere and everywhere. Besides, it is cheaper to afford a mobile phone that gives a basic feature to learn a language”. However, some of them prefer iPads, laptops, or computers. They use various social media platforms for communication in their devices. Various social media platforms have made communication easier such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Imo, Twitter and Instagram. Almost 82% of these higher secondary students have

Figure 1: Preferred Technological Devices by the Participants (Students)

Facebook account, some of them also have WhatsApp, Instagram EMP account, and Telegram account. Findings confirm that Facebook is the most comfortable social media platform among the young people of Bangladesh. When asked about their interests on social networking sites, young people expressed varying opinions about what they preferred. For example, some of them prefer Facebook, whereas some of them prefer WhatsApp, Instagram, or Emo. People can easily share their thoughts, ideas, images through these platforms. By updating new features regularly Facebook keeps its demand at the peak. These days, a popular social media network for having frequent chats with friends, family, and other people is WhatsApp. The participants concurred that using WhatsApp instead of Facebook makes it simpler for them to interact with their friends and teachers. Furthermore, the acceptance of Instagram is also increasing eventually. Through these social media platforms, young people can stay in touch with one another for extended periods of time each day.

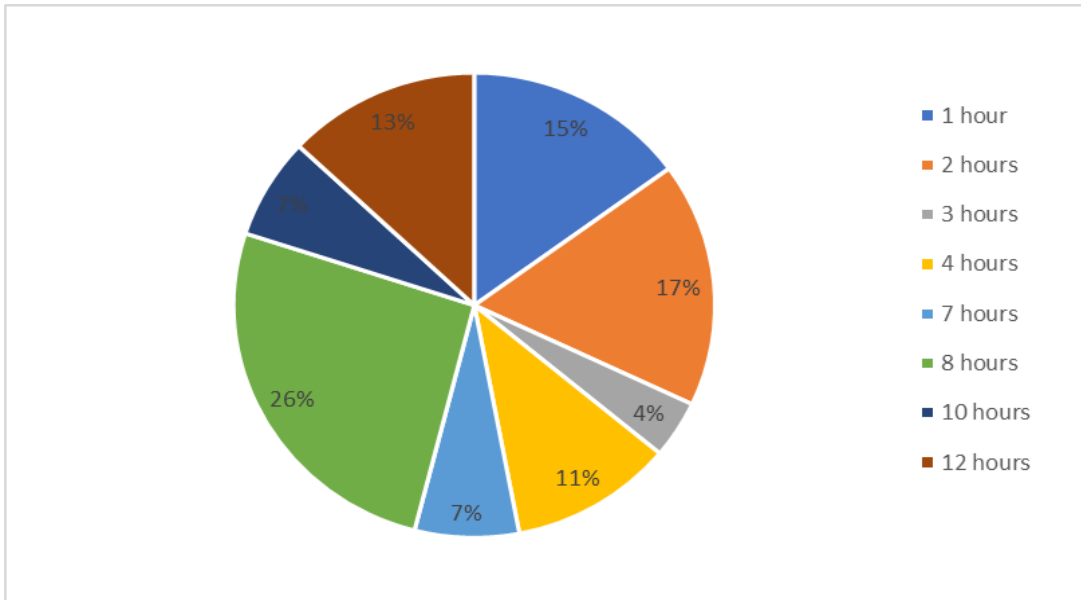
Most of the students (84%) expressed that they mix and switch their language codes while communicating in social media, as shown in Figure 2. A participant said that “Because of code-switching and code-mixing, they could communicate any notion that occurred to them without encountering a linguistic barrier”. They stated that they changed the codes to get exposed to bilingual and multilingual environments and to take use of technology's ability to reduce distances between them. They use mixed language to convey their opinions easily and confidently. Furthermore, they were learning new words. However, there were a few students (16%), who reportedly stick to one language while communicating with others on social media, either English or Bangla. They never mix or switch their codes. One of the students said that “I don't like being informal in the social media and hence, I did never feel the need of switching or mixing codes. To me it is informal to switch and mix codes”. The findings propose some factors

Figure 2: Proportion of Language Use in Social Media

that influence the young generation of Bangladesh to switch and mix codes on social media. Firstly, as they stay connected with various devices to communicate through different social media platforms, technology has great impact on their communication. Secondly, the use of code-switching and code-mixing help them to build up communication easily. Furthermore, code-switching and code-mixing are easy to use. Thirdly, the young generation can disclose their thoughts confidently using code-switching and code-mixing. Besides, the students are also learning new words with the help of code-switching and code-mixing in the social media platform. For instance, these children learned the words "start-up," "viral," "hassle," "digital," and "potential" by combining codes in their everyday Bangla conversations. As the young generation are attached with technology very strongly, they engage in code-switching and code-mixing extensively. Moreover, the young generation found that those uses are beneficial for them. Eventually, these are the predominant factors which regulate the young generation to switch and mix code in social media platforms.

When it comes to the amount of time spent using technology, the study discovered that students would sooner forego going outside for any kind of social event than give up screen time. The findings showed that highest amount of screentime by the students (26%) is 8 hours a day but there are some students (13%) who opined to have the screentime of 12 hours a day and expressed their dependency on the technological devices for regular life activities. While using technology for different communication purposes, especially in social media platforms, the participants of higher secondary level use Bangla, English and a mixed variety involving Bangla and English. Figure 3 demonstrates clearly how much time the younger generation spends on technology. They spend their time in different social media platforms. They do chat and video conferences. In both ways, they are using code-switching and code-mixing. But unfortunately,

Figure 3: Screenshot by the Participants (Students)



the young generation use those in many situations where their uses are inappropriate. The students who mix their codes while communication, expressed that they believe social media's informal communication style—which involves code-switching and code-mixing—has reduced the formality of their speech, even in real-world settings. They also added that they find it difficult to talk in a formal manner with their parents and teachers as their casual tone of code-switching and code-mixing takes over the control and they believe the overuse of social media communication is responsible for this messy conversation. It was evident that the students use screens a lot of the time every day. They make extensive use of code-switching and code-mixing at that period that eventually becomes their habit. They therefore utilize such on the spur of the moment in a variety of official settings, including exam scripts and formal speeches. In these circumstances, it is proved that the young generation are overusing it. In fact, they are using those in formal situations unconsciously. Moreover, the melody of language is hampered. As a result, the mother tongue faces endangered situation.

Hence, it was evident from the findings that code-switching and code-mixing promotes both positive and negative impacts on the young learners of Bangladesh. The findings of the study agree with the previous literatures that the students feel confident while using mixed languages. They can smoothly deliver their speech. 90% of the students feel confident while using mixed languages. They said that they could enrich their vocabulary list by mixing and switching their languages while communication. However, the students (68%) mentioned that their formal writing is getting affected due to the mixing and switching of languages in their regular life. They became so spontaneous in code-switching and code-mixing that their exam scripts showed the severity of informal languages that led to poor grades as well. This according to them, does not happen intentionally. Sometimes they unconsciously use mixed languages in formal situation where the use of informal language is totally prohibited and unacceptable. For these reasons, many problems are arising. Sometimes, overusing of mixed language creates messy conversation and it also decreases the delicacy of language. Even after having serious impacts of code-switching and code-mixing, interestingly, 60% of the students opined that it is the most natural way to get acquainted with new languages and thus overuse of code-switching and code-mixing

does not bring much harm for them. As the students are taking those serious factors lightly, it also creates strong evidence of mother language endangerment.

DISCUSSION

The study sheds light on the influence of social media on code-switching and code-mixing among the young generation of Bangladesh, particularly focusing on its impact on their mother tongue. The findings reveal a significant relationship between the use of social media and the prevalence of code-switching and code-mixing among the youth. This discussion explores the implications of these findings and offer insights into the potential consequences for language preservation.

Influence of Social Media on Code-Switching and Code-Mixing

The study highlights the role of social media in shaping language behaviors, especially among the youth. The nature of social media platforms provides a unique environment where users are exposed to diverse linguistic expressions. The findings indicate that the extensive use of social media has led to a higher frequency of code-switching and code-mixing among the young generation in Bangladesh. The ease of communication, facilitated by various technological devices, has contributed to the normalization of blending different language codes during online interactions.

The literature review establishes the connection between social media, technology, and language use (Cenoz, 2013). The study corroborates these connections by illustrating that students, who are deeply immersed in the digital realm, prefer mobile phones as their primary device for communication. The popularity of social media platforms such as Facebook among the youth further lend strength to the argument that technology plays a pivotal role in influencing language choices.

Factors Influencing Code-Switching and Code-Mixing

The research identifies several factors influencing the young generation's propensity to engage in code-switching and code-mixing on social media. The exposure to a multilingual environment, the convenience of communication through code-switching, and the acquisition of new words are highlighted as key factors. These findings align with the suggestion that language proficiency, social identity, and linguistic environment are critical influencers of code-switching behavior (Gardner-Cloros, 2009; Cenoz, 2013). Given that learning is shaped by social interactions and is impacted by technology use and environmental factors, this also supports the theories of social constructivism and cognitive distribution.

Moreover, the study reveals that the students feel confident and find it easier to express their thoughts through code-switching and code-mixing. This positive impact on confidence is consistent with literature that suggests linguistic phenomena can enhance fluency and improve communication in certain contexts (Moetia et al., 2018).

Negative Impacts on Mother Tongue

While the positive aspects of code-switching and code-mixing are acknowledged, the study also reveals the negative consequences, especially in the context of formal language use. The overuse of these linguistic practices, influenced by extensive screentime and habitual usage, has led to a

decline in formality in speech and writing. Students reported difficulties in maintaining a formal tone, especially in academic settings, which has affected their grades (Jabeen et al., 2023).

This study brings to light the possible drawbacks of utilizing hybrid languages excessively, and the findings of this study provide empirical evidence to support these concerns. The study suggests that informal language use in social media, if not regulated, can seep into formal contexts, endangering the delicacy of language and, consequently, the mother tongue.

Implications for Language Preservation and Education

The research underscores the need for awareness among the youth regarding the potential negative impacts of excessive code-switching and code-mixing, especially in formal settings. Educators and policymakers must recognize the role of social media in shaping language behaviors and develop strategies to guide students on appropriate language use (Arna & Sultana, 2022).

The findings also suggest a potential threat to the mother tongue of Bangladesh due to the overuse of mixed languages. Efforts should be directed toward promoting language diversity and encouraging the preservation of native languages, particularly in the face of increasing digitalization.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study generates valuable insights into the intricate relationship between social media, code-switching, code-mixing, and language preservation among the young generation in Bangladesh. While social media provides a platform for linguistic diversity and communication convenience, the overuse of mixed languages poses challenges to the formality of language use and, consequently, the preservation of the mother tongue. The findings emphasize the importance of striking a balance between embracing linguistic diversity and maintaining the integrity of formal language, particularly in educational settings.

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