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Investigating English Language as a Tool of Cultural Manipulation in English Medium Schools and Universities in Khulna City, Bangladesh

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Abstract

This study follows a quantitative research design to investigate the perception of students from English medium schools and universities towards English language learning and cultural manipulation in Bangladesh. A total of 300 students from three English medium schools, two private universities and two public universities participate in the survey. A simple random sampling technique is followed to define the sample size. Further, the study uses a questionnaire as a tool for collecting data. Then, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 21.0 software is used for analyzing the data. The findings reveal that majority of the respondents are practicing western culture, and therefore, our Bangladeshi culture is gradually being replaced. Though English language has been playing a great role for the communication, it has become a threat to our own culture. The students are much more attracted to western culture and lifestyle neglecting Bangladeshi ones. They start adopting western culture to the detriment of Bangladeshi tradition and culture. Finally, the paper concludes confirming that such kind of excessive indulgence in western culture undermines Bangladeshi traditional values and ways of life. The government along with the language policy makers should emphasize how the native culture and the target culture can be represented in a more sensible and balanced way.

Keywords

English language, tool, cultural manipulation, Bangladesh

Introduction

With the rising importance of English, an index as well as an instrument of global domination, it curtails the expansions of other languages by downgrading local needs, cultures, and beliefs. It is recognized that the culture of any country or nation is closely integrated with its language.

Thus, the deliberate use of English in the peripheral countries marginalizes native cultures and traditions. The same thing happens here in Bangladesh, a South-Asian country with a long colonial past, as it is welcomed here with a warm-hearted greeting. In Bangladesh children start to learn English from their home. Then after getting admitted into a school, learning English becomes compulsory. In our country, English is the medium of instruction in all programs at all private universities and some public universities. So, in order to achieve higher education, one must learn English from the very beginning of their academic journey. That is why parents choose to send their children to English medium schools, where they can begin learning English from the start. Nowadays, students prefer to study abroad for higher education, and the development of English has a significant impact on their learning. In order to get a standard job or to obtain a higher degree, learning English is a must. Apart from that students are using English to show their smartness. "As a consequence, language acquisition results in a certain level of cultural 'imperialism' as knowledge from one culture is transferred to another" (Penny, 2002, p. 4).

Every year with great intensity we celebrate our "Mother Language Day" which has got international recognition by UNESCO in 1999. People celebrate this day in order to commemorate those students who had been killed on 21st February because they wanted Bengali as their state language of the then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). When Pakistan was created in 1947 it was divided into two parts namely East Pakistan and West Pakistan. These two parts were very different to each other in terms of language and culture. In that particular period of time people fought for their language in order to preserve their own cultural identity. They knew that through the language, West Pakistan would take away their cultural identity. Coluzzi (2012) thinks in the same way that overemphasis on it can stifle the growth of indigenous cultural products and lead to the extinction of local culture and language. People of that time knew that language and culture were so much interconnected.

But now, when it is about English language, people start to think very positively. People think that they are learning English for a very noble cause and fail to realize that there can be a hidden purpose behind this. The English-speaking nations are making us learn their language for their own benefits. So, by learning English we are simply serving their purpose in the name of globalization and internationalization.

Modiano (2001) believes that the promotion of English undercuts cultural differences. Johnson (2009) says that English continues to grow in popularity and it seems that its image of modernity, power and internationalism is becoming ever more rooted. He adds that people often connect themselves with modernity through language, especially English; therefore, sometimes they embrace modernity by abandoning their native

culture. They only think about the affairs of global world. Alfarhan (2016) speaks in similar way: "The effects of this globalization have affected the society in various ways; loss of cultural identity is one of the major effects that are associated with the globalization of English" (p. 1).

Background of the Study

Imperialism is indeed a system wherein one country rules over other countries from a remote region in terms of language, politics, culture, economics, and so on. People's culture is defined by their habits, tastes, and choices. It is a distinct way of life. The cultural aspect is concerned with geographical, ideological, financial, and ideological views.

Colonialism has long passed in small countries like ours, and the age of imperialism has arrived. Language, culture, and politics are used by the ruling nations to dominate us. The ruling nation takes away one's culture as well as its language through linguistic imperialism. Cultural imperialism is difficult to define in a single sentence. To gain a thorough understanding of cultural imperialism, we must first learn about 'imperialism' and 'culture'.

Merriam Webster dictionary defines culture as "the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group" or "the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization" and imperialism is "the policy, practice, or advocacy of extending the power and dominion of a nation especially by direct territorial acquisitions or by gaining indirect control over the political or economic life of other areas". Said (1993) describes culture in his book *Culture and Imperialism* as "all those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation that have relative autonomy from the economic, social, and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure" (p. xii). He also mentions culture as a "source of identity" (p. xiii). Therefore, by losing our culture as a result of imperialism, we are also losing our identity, which we inherited from our forefathers.

According to Phillipson (1992), 'imperialism' is primarily economic, but this theory also includes the political, social, and intellectual dimensions of exploitations. Imperialism is concerned with politics, along with culture, and it occurs in our daily lives. To Canagarajah & Said (2011), this is a transnational exercise of power with geopolitical implications.

Cultural imperialism is defined by the term 'anglocentricity', which means that other languages and cultures are measured in terms of the English language and culture; as a result, other cultures are considered to be inferior (Phillipson, 1992). According to Canagarajah (1999), less developed nations rely on developed countries (i.e., western countries) for educational resources, practice, expertise, and so forth; all of which propagate western cultural ideologies. According to Phillipson (1992), linguistic imperialism is the foundation of cultural imperialism; thus, if a language is ignored, the culture of its native speakers is also neglected (p. 53).

A language is more than just a language; it is intertwined with culture. Cultural imperialism happens invisibly through the exploration of thoughts, theories, and perspectives, as well as through publication (Phillipson, 1992). Phillipson (1992) cites the British Council's Director General as saying, "Britain's real black gold is not north sea oil but the English language". Iredale's words provide an explanation for this statement (as cited in Phillipson, 1992):

... when people learn English, for whatever purpose and by whatever method, they acquire something of the flavour of our culture, our institutions, our ways of thinking and communication. (p. 11)

Phillipson (1992) argues that the promotion of British books-trade is a remarkable cultural imperialism. He thinks that English language teaching could have hidden agendas, as it would have helped spread the ideology and culture of the native speakers.

In many ways, the dominant language marginalizes the inferiors' language and culture. Students in English medium schools use English in all curricular activities and their mother tongue only when they return home. Because they spend the majority of their time in school, the dominant culture is gradually displacing the native culture (Alfarhan, 2016). Rezaeifard & Chalak (2017) declare, "It is generally accepted that learning a foreign language necessarily involves becoming familiar with the culture of the countries where that language is spoken" (p. 125). Modiano (2001) also declares, "English is such a dominant force in world affair, there is a danger that its spread dilutes (and 'corrupts') the distinguishing characteristics of other languages and cultures" (p. 340).

It is close to impossible to learn a foreign language without first accepting the culture of the country and Modiano (2001) is of the same opinion: "it is impossible to learn a foreign language without being influenced ideologically, politically and culturally" (p. 344). As a result, most people, particularly teenagers, prefer listening to western songs or its copycats sung in their native language, despite the fact that English is spreading everywhere (Coluzzi, 2012). For this reason, our teenagers are losing their values, beliefs and traditional culture. They are not only accepting the language and culture of the west but also embracing it positively. We may call it cultural hegemony. Hegemony is the dominance that the dominant social group holds over others. The dominated people accept the culture, beliefs and attitudes of the superior as a part of the reality. Thus in this way people are following the cultural trend of the dominant group. They do not force to follow their culture; rather it is being followed willingly. They dominate us in a subtler way that we do not consider this as domination. Lull (1995) thinks that it is a method for gaining and maintaining power. Through this method the center maintains its power without letting us to become aware of it.

Phillipson (1992) states that the center may be attempting to impose their own culture while ignoring local cultures that are related to the principles, beliefs, ideologies, and practices of local communities. He makes the distinction between the center and periphery. In center there is English speaking countries, they are the native English speakers who dominate the peripheral English-speaking countries (Bisong, 1995). In these countries English is being used as a means of internationalization. However, the use of one language means the declination of another, though it is not necessary

(Phillipson, 1992). So, it is obvious that if we use the English language, we will follow its culture as well.

The Context of Bangladesh

Following independence in 1971, the government banned English medium schools, and they were totally removed from Bangladesh in 1972, inspired by the idea of national identity and love for mother tongue (Banu & Sussex, 2001). As class lectures had to be given in English and all books and journals were written in English, English could not be excluded from universities. Conversely, the wealthy group of society began to recognize the importance of English, and as a result, English medium schools began to reappear (Ainy, 2001). Because English was not highlighted in Bangla medium schools, EMSs began to grow step by step in response to the growing demand for English in all sectors (Rahman et al., 2010). And since 1980s EMSs, all of which are privately funded, have proliferated in Bangladesh, particularly in Dhaka and other major cities (Banu and Sussex, 2001).

Students in such schools directly follow the British curriculum and syllabus (Haque, 2009). They read books imported from the west and written based on the western setting (Al-Quaderi & Al Mahmud, 2010). Students become acquainted with western landscape, heritage, literature, mode of living, and ideology after reading these books. Consequently, they do not learn regarding Bangladeshi culture; for instance, Shakespeare or Milton are far more familiar to them than Robindronath Tagore or Kazi Nazrul. The British Council's books and curriculum explore Western ideologies and values, and there is no room for Bangladeshi culture or resources (Al-Quaderi & Al Mahmud, 2010).

Thus, the Center is continuing linguistic and cultural imperialism through English Language Teaching (ELT) with all of its forms. The extensive sale of American and British textbooks in periphery countries fuels this control or hegemony (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994; Canagarajah, 1999).

By marginalizing local cultures in this way, countries in the 'Center' attempt to impose their own cultures that are unrelated to Bangladeshi people's values, beliefs, rituals, and activities. "The tenets of ELT have ideological and structural ramifications. They serve to strengthen the hold of the center over the periphery (p. 192)." writes Phillipson (1992), arguing that ELT might be understood as a facilitator of linguistic imperialism. Through textbooks used in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, the 'Center' is engineering cultural imperialism in peripheral countries such as Bangladesh.

A language's culture is an essential component. So, learning a language always involves learning the culture, belief, and values of persons of that particular language. In today's global context, cultural imperialism occurs when English language and culture are used to compare and contrast other languages and cultures. Modiano (2001) declares that "English virtually Anglo-Americanizes the non-native speaker" (p. 340). In Bangladesh, pupils in English medium schools, especially at the tertiary level, are commonly exposed

to western culture rather than Bangladeshi culture (Al-Quaderi & Al Mahmud, 2010). The link of Bangladeshi traditional ways of life with western culture in the form of life styles, attitudes, and ideologies denigrates Bangladeshi traditional ways of life. As a result, pupils at these levels use less Bangla and grow further isolated from Bangladeshi culture (Haque, as cited in Haque & Akter, 2012).

Literature Review

Learners are taught the values of foreign culture in English medium schools and universities where English is taught. Our young generations blindly follow all of the western trends, from food and clothing to music and literature tastes. In Bangladesh, English is regarded as a stepping stone to success and a mark of sophistication (Hossain, 2013). When learners begin to learn English, they may begin to accept the dominant group's cultural, political, and economic values in order to master the target language (TL). This level of acceptance is possible because learning and teaching always involve the "transfer and negotiation" of values and interests (Canagrajah, 1999, p.17). This transmission in various ELT contexts has the potential to lead to cultural assimilation, and acts as a catalyst for cultural imperialism (Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

Johnson (2009) discovers through interviews that accomplishing English proficiency has become a commodity. As a result, the youth regard English as superior and use their native language with a sense of inferiority. They may believe that learning English will teach them the fundamentals of modern life, such as how to use a computer and drive safely.

Pfeiffer (as cited in Phillipson, 1992) provides an example of Navajos who speak English as a second language. The Navajo children are taught language, values, concepts, and lifestyles which are foreign. The intention behind this policy is to make other people feel that they are not civilized unless they speak English and act according to the capitalistic society. Therefore, some people are following the trend out of inferiority complex.

According to Fishman (as cited in Phillipson, 1992, p. 27), what we are seeing worldwide is that English is substituting other languages. When English is prioritized over one's native language, this displacement takes place. Colonial language is used for high-status work, while local language is used and preserved for lower-status work. The same scenario can be observed in Bangladesh. People in Bangladesh associate English language and culture with high social status.

According to Alfarhan (2016), English is a representation of cultural capitalism. Many other conservative cultures have been influenced by English. According to John (as cited in Alfarhan, 2016), China has a deep sense of cultural identity. They wish to preserve their own culture. However, the introduction of English in the name of internationalization has resulted in some significant changes in Chinese culture. There are some international events that held in China and for that reason it forced the people to improve their English skills only for communication purpose. Thus, in such a way English comes for a noble cause and later it displaces the native language and culture. That is why many raised their voice against the widespread use of English.

Phillipson (1992) reports that leaders such as Gandhi raised voice against English in India because it brought “intoxication, denationalization, and mental slavery” (p. 35) in all aspects of life. He also asserted that English tainted the educational system because students gave more time learning it than other subjects. This leader was well aware of the Englishmen's hidden trick. In his ‘Minute on Indian Education’, Macaulay (as cited in Al-Quaderi & Al Mahmud, 2010) declares that they must prepare a group of people that will act as interpreters between them and those they govern. They wanted to constitute a group of people who should be “Indian in blood and color, but English in taste and intellect” (p. 212). As a result, English continued to grow gradually.

According to Haque and Akter (2012), English medium schools in Bangladesh do not assist students in learning Bangladeshi culture because they primarily study English literature. The students of these schools read books set in a foreign setting. Consequently, the students are learning the western history, tradition, and cultural background and what they are missing out is that Bangladeshi culture. In this regard Phillipson says (1992) that through the use of textbooks in EFL classrooms the center is skillfully arranging the cultural imperialism in nonnative English speaking countries. Moreover, the textbooks of English medium schools are designed in appealing way so that they use English more frequently, and we lose touch with Bangladeshi culture and language. Therefore, the students adopt the western culture with an ease. Another problem is that the English Medium schools are teaching the students whatever they want to teach. There is no monitoring from government towards their teaching policy. So, this can be one of the causes that give rise to cultural imperialism among the students (Haque & Akter, 2012).

Phillipson believes the term “lingua franca” to be “ambivalent” because it is used to describe a dominant language that was formerly a colonial language (Phillipson 1992, p. 41). People use English to bridge cultural divides and form new communities in which they may share their thoughts and cultures with a wider audience. However, English poses a threat to other civilizations since it prevents them from developing (Alfarhan, 2016). Currently, upper-class children are growing up without learning their mother tongue. Their parents only teach them English at their home because they want to admit their kids in English medium school, and it is important to be fluent before admitting into the school in order to cope with others students. These children are also denied learning their native language because in school it is forbidden to use their mother tongue which is a common scenario in most of third world countries. In school they also practice the western cultural norms and thus they become introduced with the foreign culture.

Teaching and learning English is a prevalent phenomenon in Bangladesh, according to Shanta (2017), and we have given this language a distinctive role. The English language is designed to be utilized in academic and professional settings. It is not necessary to use English in our daily conversation but still code switching is happening in day-to-day conversation, and this has become a trend among the young generation. Another cultural trend of speaking English started through the media industry. People are being influenced by the excessive use of English in television and radio programs. In reality, speaking ‘Banglish’ and adhering to English cultural standards has become the new vogue.

Askari (2010) says that colonization is a double-edged weapon. One edge is now blunt but another one is still sharp. With the imperialistic power it is slaying the language and culture of the natives. Nazer (2018) thinks that Bangladesh is an independent country but it has not gained “intellectual independence”. He says that we mimic the voice of others, borrow the tongue and tact of the west, and entirely forget our root and originality. As a result, while English medium schools and universities may contribute to the rise of English and the excellence of English medium education, they also appear to be steadily encouraging western culture, which undermines Bangladeshi culture and tradition. Phenomenon like this one needs to be investigated which has not yet been done considering the contexts of EMSs and universities at Khulna city. In connection to the fact, this study serves the purpose and intends to fill the research gap.

Method

The study is conducted on students of three (03) English-medium schools and four (04) universities (two private and two public) situated in Khulna city. The respondents of this study are Bangla-English bilinguals.

Method & Procedure

A questionnaire is used as a data collection tool. As a part of research ethics, a consent form is also used for the participants. For interpreting and analyzing the data, SPSS (version 24.0) is used. In the data analysis section, tables, bars, and charts are used to display the results.

Sampling

A simple random sampling technique is followed in this study. Creswell (2009) recommends this sampling technique for a study that aims to be generalizable. Creswell (2009) declares “with randomization, a representative sample from a population provides the ability to generalize to the population” (p. 148).

Table 1. Showing details of student participants for questionnaire

Participant Details				
Name of Institution	English Medium School	Rosedale International English School	40	100
		South Herald English School	30	
		Islamabad English School	30	
University (Public)	University (Public)	Khulna University (KU)	50	100
		Khulna University of Science and Technology (KUET)	50	

Participant Details

University (Private)	Northern University of Business and Technology Khulna (NUBTK)	50	100
	North Western University (NWU)	50	
Total			300

Results & Data Analysis

This section describes and analyzes questionnaire responses and displays the results in percentages by charts, bars, and tables.

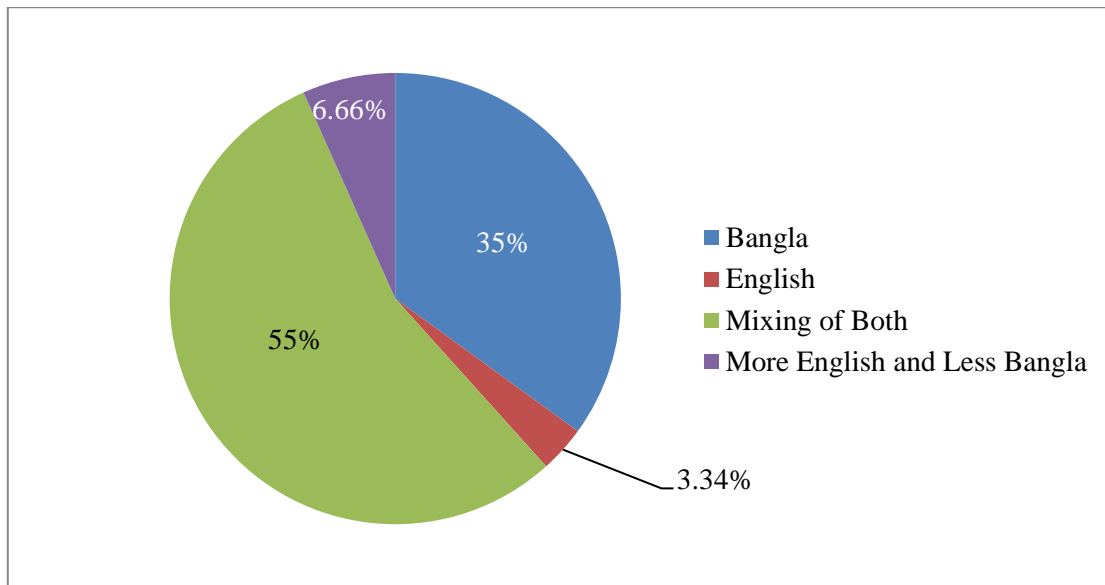


Figure 1. Demonstration of the percentage of responses to statement of "Which language do you prefer to use in your daily life?"

Figure 1 reveals that the language that more than half of the participants (55%) use in their daily life is the mixing of both Bangla and English. And, one third of them (35%) prefer to use Bangla language while 6.66% participants tend to use more English and less Bangla in daily conversation.

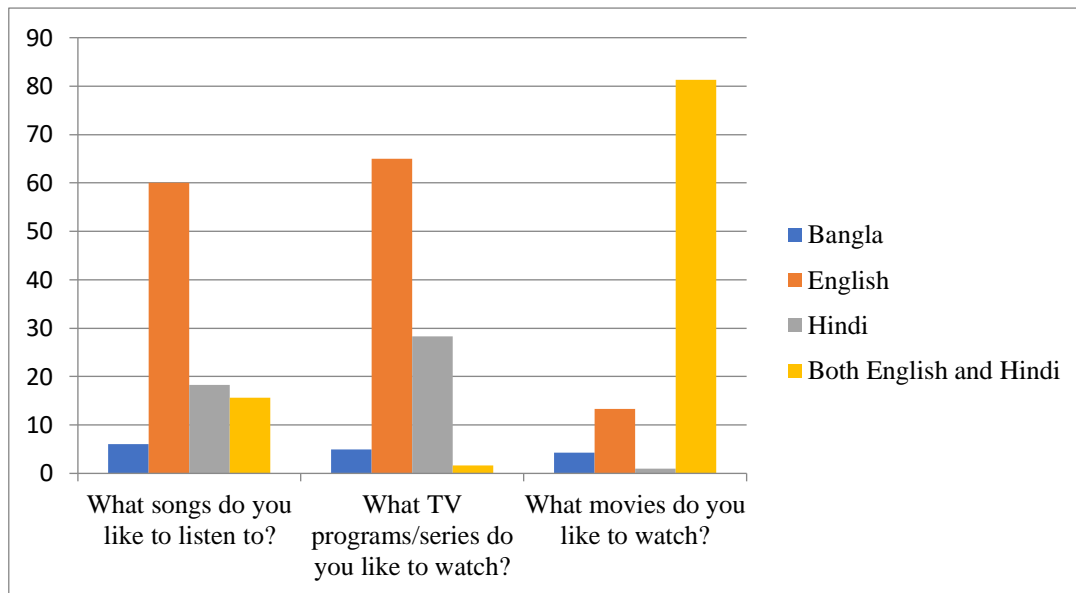


Figure 2. Demonstration of the percentage of responses to statements

The second figure demonstrates that the preferences of Bangla songs, TV programs/series, and movies to the participants are very poor which are 6%, 5%, and 4.33% respectively. In case of English songs and TV programs/series, it is very high in percentages (60% and 65% respectively). The percentage of “both English and Hindi movies” exceeds 80% in the case of what kind of movies the participants like to watch.

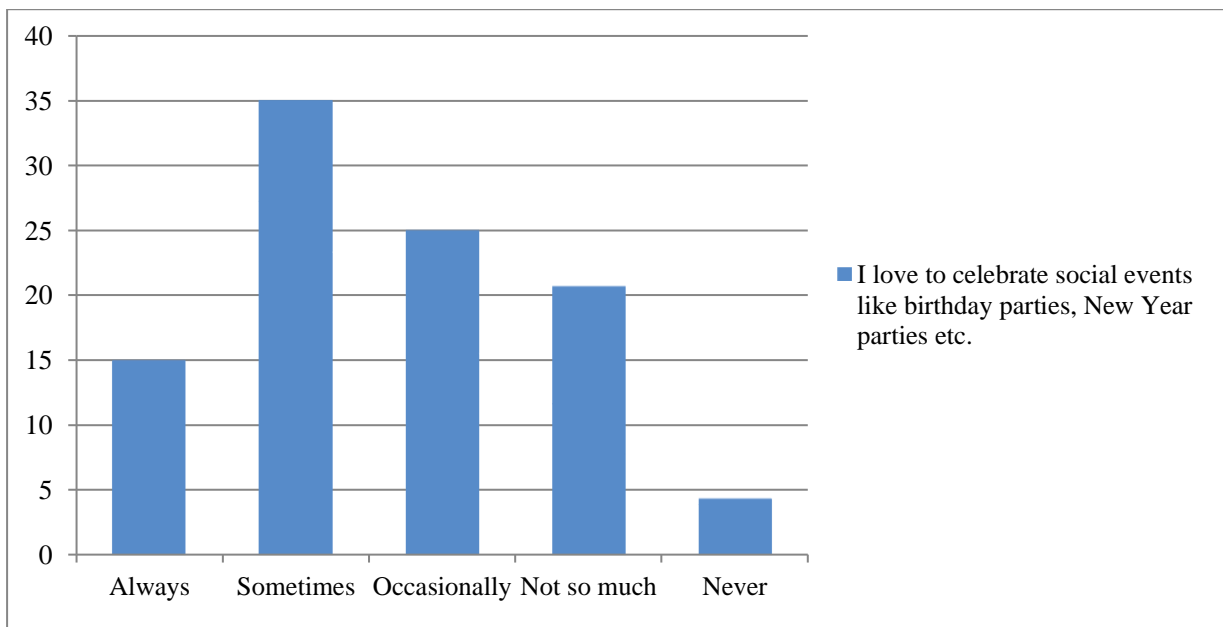


Figure 3. Demonstration of the percentage of response—I love to celebrate social events like birthday parties, New Year parties etc.

Figure three tells us to what extent the participants love to celebrate social events like birthday parties, New Year parties etc. It shows that three quarter of them are in the habit of celebrating these events in different degrees. A very small number (4.33%) respond negatively that they never celebrate these events.

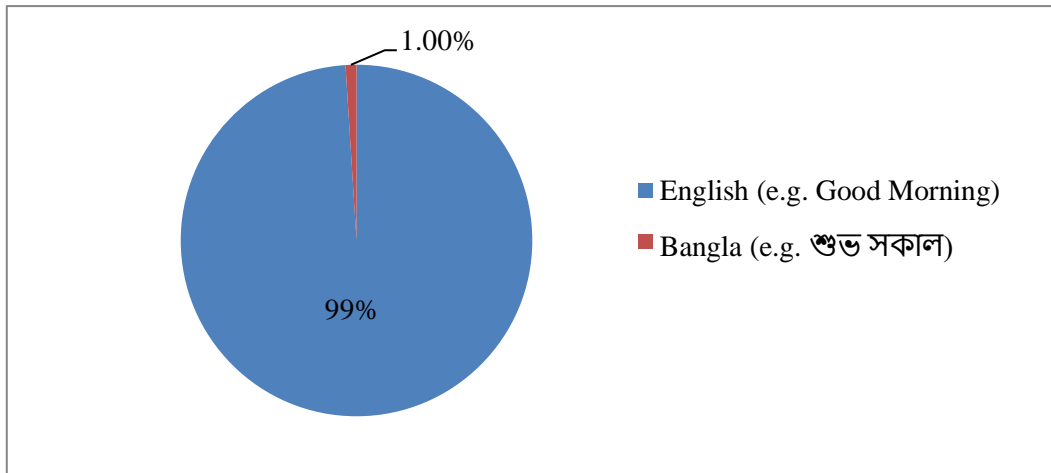


Figure 4. Demonstration of the percentage of responses to statement of “Which language do you use while greeting?”

Figure four provides a surprising data that almost all the participants (99%) use English language when they greet someone where only 1% respondents opine that they love to greet others in Bangla.

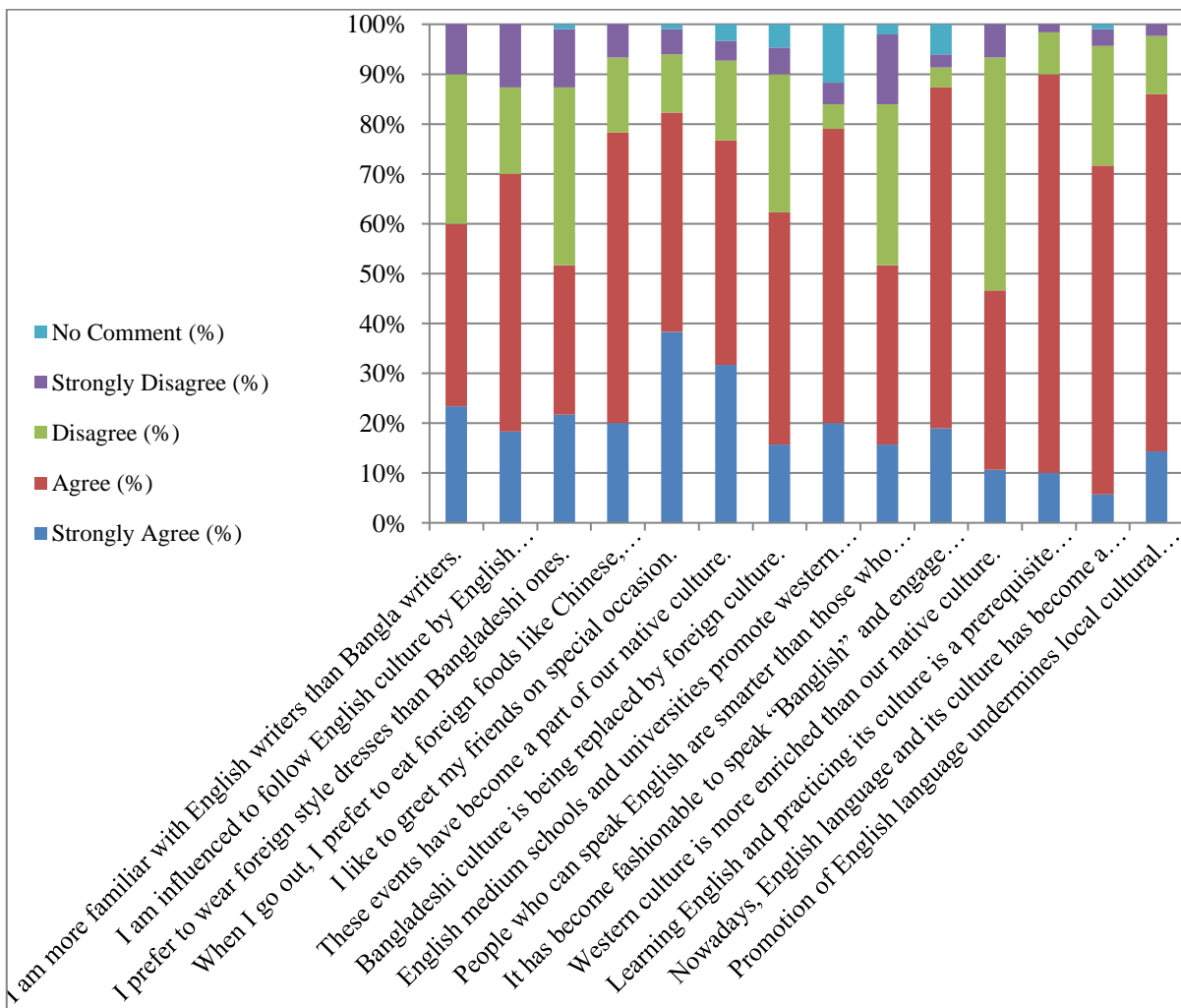


Figure 5. Demonstration of the percentage of responses to statement.

Figure 5 shows that 60% of the participants acknowledge that they are more familiar with English writers than Bangla writers, and almost three-quarters of respondents agree and believe that English novels, dramas, poems, and writings encourage or motivate them to adhere to English culture. More than fifty percent (51.66%) of them acknowledge that they prefer foreign style dresses to Bangladeshi ones, and more than three quarter (78.33%) of them state that they like to have foreign foods like Chinese, Italian etc. in a restaurant while outing with friends and family.

More than eighty percent (82.33%) respondents like to greet their friends on special occasions. And, it surprising that major portions (76.67%) of the samples believe and declare that these events have become a part of our native culture. About two third (62.33%) of the students admit that Bangladeshi culture is being replaced by foreign culture.

Almost eighty percent (79%) confess that English medium schools and universities promote western culture among the students. Interestingly, more than half of the participants associate English language with smartness that they think people who can speak English are smarter than those who cannot.

A very high number of respondents (87.33%) report that to speak “Banglish” is a fashion nowadays. and practice western culture though more than half (53.33%) of the total participants do not think that western culture is more enriched than our native culture.

To 90% of the total participants, learning English and practicing its culture is a prerequisite to enter into the realm of First world countries, and a large amount (71.67%) of them declares that in recent days English language and its culture has become a sign of aristocracy. Finally, majorities (86%) of the respondents admit and confirm that promotion of English language undermines local cultural diversity.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that majority of the respondents prefer English language and culture. When asked if they are influenced to follow Western culture when they read English writings, they answered positively. Code-mixing is a common phenomenon among most of the participants and they tend to follow Western culture in their daily life.

Watching English and Hindi movies and TV series and listening to English and Hindi songs are very much common among majority of the respondents. Even they do not prefer having our Bangladeshi foods when they go for an outing. In other words, from music to movie, and from food to clothing, the participants like to follow the western cultural trend.

The findings of the study further reveal that the participants like to celebrate events of western culture. They prefer Banglish tongue and think that western culture is more enriched. They even consider English speaking persons smarter than Bangla speakers. To them, English language and its culture is a sign of aristocracy.

The findings also expose that western culture undermines Bangladeshi local culture and our native culture is being replaced by the practice of western culture. And, thus promotion of English language undermines local cultural diversity.

The study could give more comprehensive results if it covered more schools and universities from different geographical areas. Results based on gender, age, type of institution are not considered in this study. Further studies are welcome to address them.

Conclusion

Language represents the culture and tradition of its speakers. We are the only nation that sacrificed lives for its language. But, it is a matter of sorrow that, in the face of globalization (westernization), we do not take pride in our language Bangla anymore. English has paralyzed it and we, as a nation, fail to maintain our own tradition and culture. We all know that cultural imperialism and linguistic imperialism go together, and these are well-known terms among ELT professionals and specialists in our country. However, very little attention is paid to these concurrent issues which lead English to replace our mother tongue and downgrade our culture. Students are strongly advised to use only English in both settings (English-medium schools and tertiary level). Students study literature or books authored by foreign writers and get familiarized with western setting and gain a better understanding of the culture. As a result, they are less likely to utilize Bangla and are becoming increasingly alienated from Bangladeshi culture (Haque, 2009). At the expense of their native culture, they begin to adopt western culture. This tendency to adopt western culture in all of its forms denigrates Bangladeshi traditional ways of life and leads to globalization which is defined by Chang (2004) as a disguised name for westernization.

Acknowledgments

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