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Digital Linguistic Capital and Educational Inclusion: The Case of Generative AI in Bangladesh

Tanjina Jahan

Yangzhou University, China, mail: phdyangzhou@gmail.com

Abstract: Generative artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly promoted as a tool for educational inclusion, but its benefits are unevenly distributed across language, class, geography, and infrastructure. This article examines Bangladesh as a critical Global South case in which Bangla has deep national and cultural authority while English continues as a powerful source of educational, professional, and symbolic advantage. Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital (1991), postcolonial language theory (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 2017), and contemporary AI ethics (Floridi & Cowls, 2019; UNESCO, 2021), the article develops the concept of digital linguistic capital. This concept refers to the capacity to use AI-enabled multilingual tools to access, translate, evaluate, produce, and circulate knowledge across Bangla, English, and other local language repertoires. The article argues that generative AI can lower some barriers faced by Bangla-medium learners by supporting mother-tongue explanation, translation, academic writing, teacher preparation, and bilingual learning. However, it can also reproduce inequality through unequal device access, English-centric training data, premium platform markets, weak AI literacy, unreliable outputs, surveillance, privacy risks, and dependence on foreign technology platforms. Four illustrative case vignettes show how these opportunities and risks appear in rural schooling, public universities, teacher professional practice, and inclusive education. The article proposes a four-pillar governance framework for Bangladesh and comparable Global South contexts. The pillars are inclusion, linguistic justice, accountability, and capacity building. It concludes that AI will not automatically democratize education. Its encompassing potential depends on public governance, local language investment, data protection, teacher preparation, assessment reform, and participatory design with learners, teachers, and communities.

Keywords: artificial intelligence; AI ethics; linguistic capital; Bangla; Bangladesh; Global South; education policy; linguistic justice; digital inclusion.

Introduction

AI has been touted as a general-purpose educational technology. A dual framing: various policy documents and commercial narratives document how AI tutors, chatbots, automated feedback systems, translation tools etc. are technologies that could personalize learning, offload teacher workload and widen access to knowledge. These claims are at least partially true, but they often hide what is the societal context in relation to who stands to actually benefit. AI is not entered in a vacuum. This ends its way into classrooms, universities and homes pre-configured by language hierarchy, income inequality, gendered access to devices, urban-rural infrastructural inequities and colonial education histories (Bourdieu 1991; Phillipson 1992; van Dijk 2020). Thus, the primary policy issue is not if AI can be exploited for good in education more generally. The far deeper question is whether the data cooking of AI enables value-subordinate people (who have been historically devalued by social, linguistic and institutional means) to access knowledge-steeped markets in ways that were previously unavailable.

A compelling case to answer this question is Bangladesh. Language was a fundamental element of national identity from which the nation shared its roots deep in their history. But the events of 1952 surrounding the use and preservation of Bangla, namely the Bangla Language Movement, both as a phenomenon and symbolic status upon which was woven national liberation struggle lends to Bangla, in return, rightful respectability and contextual religiosity within crucial values such as honor – represented by filled stomachs citizenship symbolized with directed pens & literates that hollowed paper also supplied soul electric duplicates of our hearts for all who welcomed salutation dignity like shiny stars snuggling our internal compass;

not merely text amongst texts alone for its own sake but pervasive impetus behind collective efforts steering toward self-determination. Naturalized high market worth to English still prevails in the postcolonial education system (Rahman, 2005; Hamid, 2016). Thus, Bangla is the language of citizenship; however, English retains its state-level prestige associated with elite schooling, international scholarships and job opportunities (especially in corporations), international research and mobility (Chaudhury, 2011; Hamid & Honan, 2012).

As a result, students also leave English-medium or resource-rich urban schools with kinds of linguistic capital few Bangla-medium, rural (under-serving), madrasa and first-generation learners possess when they negotiate entry to the academic and labor market (Karim et al., 2023; Islam & Stapa, 2021).

Generative AI intensifies this tension. On one end of the spectrum, multilingual AI tools can provide a Bangla-medium student the possibility to understand an English-academic article, get prepared for university admission, feedback on writing, translate technical words in non-English languages or ask questions which will usually not have been entertained in their classroom (Sarkar 2022; Chakrabarty 2021). For instance, a teacher in a rural community could access AI-generated bilingual lesson plans, examples of local context, and even formative assessment tasks (Holmes et al., 2022). On the contrary, AI systems are continually trained on English and other high-resource languages; they are operated via commercial platforms that collect data from users and provide outputs that may be false, socially biased or fabricated evidence (Bender et al., 2021; Ji et al., 2023). For example, if AI tools perform better on English prompts than Bangla ones, and if affordability only allows the urban middle-class or elites to use premium versions, while schools respond to AI either with bans or panic mode in resisting students being able to write anything original (Kasneci et al., 2023; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019), then AI may well reinforce rather than resist the hierarchies of language and class that it appears like it would disrupt.

This paper tackles three research questions as follows:

1. Like any other brand, language brings with it the advantage of social capital: why does English remain a dominant form of linguistic capital in Bangladeshi education even after the nationhood of Bangla?
2. So how could generative AI be a new digital linguistic capital for Bangla learners and change basic access to educational knowledge?
3. What sort of governance framework is needed to ensure that AI achieves linguistic justice?

Perhaps your research has a conceptual and/or policy orientation where you tackle these questions without them being the main focus of fieldwork. Informed by sociological perspectives, the postcolonial language studies literature, AI ethics texts, policy discussions of education in Bangladesh and between global frameworks for debating efficacy on AI and education.

The article makes three contributions. Theoretical Contribution: The Concept of Digital Linguistic Capital; a conceptual extension of Bourdieu's account of linguistic capital to AI mediated multilingual learning environments. It orients discussions around AI education in Bangladesh, at the same time as it continues to frame our learners from the Global South as vessels ready to be filled by those further developed elsewhere. The title indicates that: Contribution to Policy; A Governance framework grounded in inclusion, linguistic justice, accountability and capacity-building is structured around four pillars.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Colonial Legacies and Linguistic Capital

This draws on Bourdieu's (1991) notion of linguistic capital as a theory that analyzes language as a resource with historical ties to power structures whereby postcolonial oral fluency in

English has long been associated with social advantage. In British India, English was institutionalized as the language of administration and governance in addition to elite education in Bangladesh. Using Bangladesh as a backdrop, Rahman (2005) has traced the trajectory of how English developed to become a symbol of social identity and an access point to privilege. This colonial legacy left in place what Phillipson (1992) labelled "linguistic imperialism," where English remains a vehicle of neocolonial domination. The national language is Bengali, but English has continued to dominate in higher education, the judiciary and corporate domains (Chaudhury, 2011). Bangladesh was classified as part of the Outer Circle or regions in which English is an additional language and has a significant presence in institutions (Kachru, 1983). In these contexts, the mastery of English serves as symbolic capital that can be traded for more advantageous social and academic memberships (Pennycook 2017).

Language, AI, and Postcolonial Societies

The emergence of generative AI tools marks a paradigm shift in how language is accessed and used. Initially designed primarily for English, these technologies now support regional languages such as Bengali, making them more inclusive. Sarkar (2022) argues that AI tools are contributing to the democratization of language in South Asia by providing platforms where users can engage in their native languages.

Chakrabarty (2021) further notes that AI tools in regional languages can empower marginalized communities by giving them access to global knowledge without English proficiency. This is particularly significant in Bangladesh, where English has historically served as a barrier to educational and professional advancement for non-English speakers (Hamid, 2016).

However, Dasgupta (2019) cautions that while AI can bridge linguistic gaps, it cannot solve the digital divide between urban and rural populations in Bangladesh. Access to high-speed internet, smartphones, and digital literacy remains unevenly distributed (van Dijk, 2020; Lythreath et al., 2022). Nonetheless, the integration of Bengali into AI technologies presents a unique opportunity to challenge the postcolonial dominance of English and potentially reshape linguistic hierarchies across generations.

Generational Shifts in Language Use

Research has shown that younger generations, who are more likely to adopt new technologies, may show different language preferences compared to older generations. Miller (2015) explores how younger generations in postcolonial societies increasingly shift their language preferences as they engage with digital technologies.

Zhou and Tseng (2017) found that online platforms encourage younger people to embrace code-switching between languages. Giddens (1990) argues that digital technologies, including AI, act as catalysts for social change by shifting power dynamics between languages. In Bangladesh, this suggests that Gen Z, who are digital natives, may increasingly view Bengali as a practical and efficient language for AI-mediated tasks, while Gen X, who invested heavily in English proficiency under postcolonial education systems, may retain English as a marker of distinction (Twenge, 2017).

Gaps in the Literature

While there is rich scholarship on colonial legacies, language policy, and educational inequality in South Asia, the intersection of generative AI, generational language shift, and linguistic capital remains underexplored. Existing research focuses primarily on English dominance or on AI's technical capabilities, without examining how these technologies might disrupt established language hierarchies across different age groups. This paper addresses this gap by applying Bourdieu's framework to analyze the potential generational reconfiguration of linguistic capital in the age of AI.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Bourdieu's Linguistic Capital and Symbolic Power

Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital explains how certain ways of speaking acquire value while others are devalued. In postcolonial contexts, colonial languages have historically functioned as dominant capital (Phillipson, 1992). Bourdieu also introduces symbolic violence, the process by which dominated groups accept their own domination as natural. When a person is told that their accent is 'illegitimate,' they may internalize this judgment (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

In Bangladesh, English has historically functioned as a symbol of social distinction and elite status (Rahman, 2005). Bengali, in contrast, has often been relegated to more informal and local settings. This paper extends Bourdieu's insight: symbolic violence operates not only within societies but also across linguistic hierarchies, where language difference becomes grounds for exclusion.

Postcolonial Theory and Language

Postcolonial theory examines how colonial rule continues to shape social structures in former colonies. Fanon's (1967) writings on colonial language as a tool of cultural domination are relevant: English became not only a means of communication but also a marker of superiority. Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity explains how postcolonial subjects both resist and adopt elements of the colonizer's culture, including language. In Bangladesh, while Bengali remains the symbol of national identity, English continues to dominate formal domains (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986).

Digital Linguistic Capital: A Proposed Extension

This article proposes the concept of digital linguistic capital as an extension of Bourdieu's original framework. Digital linguistic capital refers to the ability to use AI-enabled digital tools to access, translate, evaluate, produce, and circulate knowledge across languages in ways that generate educational, social, and economic value.

Digital linguistic capital has five interrelated components:

1. Prompting ability: The capacity to ask useful questions in Bangla, English, or mixed language forms.
2. Translational ability: The capacity to move between Bangla and English without losing conceptual meaning.
3. Evaluative ability: The capacity to judge whether an AI output is accurate, biased, incomplete, or fabricated.
4. Productive ability: The capacity to use AI support for summaries, lesson plans, essays, applications, and professional documents.
5. Critical ability: The capacity to understand ethical limits, citation norms, privacy risks, and the difference between learning support and academic misconduct.

These five skills were identified through the integrative review of literature on AI literacy (Holmes et al., 2022; Kasneci et al., 2023), multilingual education (García & Li Wei, 2014), and digital competence frameworks (van Dijk, 2020; Lythreath et al., 2022). The concept differs from traditional linguistic capital in that it is language-neutral, accessible through guided digital practice, and potentially more democratic.

METHODOLOGY

This article adopts a qualitative, non-empirical methodology. It is a theoretical and conceptual study grounded in Bourdieu's framework of linguistic capital, postcolonial theory, and AI ethics. No primary fieldwork such as interviews, surveys, or field visits was conducted.

The study draws on two types of secondary data:

First, existing reports on AI adoption in South Asia from Google, UNESCO, and Bangladesh government digital literacy surveys are critically examined. These provide contextual insights

into AI accessibility and language support in Bangladesh, including data on internet penetration, smartphone usage, and digital literacy rates across urban and rural areas.

Second, a discourse analysis of publicly available online discussions among Bengali AI users across different age groups is conducted. Sources include social media forums (Reddit), Facebook groups dedicated to ChatGPT users in Bangladesh, and YouTube comment threads where users discuss their experiences with AI tools. These discussions illustrate generational attitudes toward language choice in AI interaction, revealing patterns of code-switching, expressions of linguistic anxiety, and pragmatic language use.

LITERATURE SEARCH STRATEGY

The literature search was conducted using academic databases relevant to linguistics, education, international studies, and artificial intelligence. The primary databases included Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar, and JSTOR. Additional evidence was obtained from international organizations and policy institutions, including UNESCO, OECD, World Bank, UNICEF, and Bangladesh government sources.

Search period: 2010–2026

Languages: English and Bangla

Keywords: "linguistic capital," "Bourdieu," "Bangladesh language policy," "AI education," "digital divide," "Global South AI ethics"

Inclusion criteria:

- Studies examining language, education, AI, or digital inequality
- Studies discussing linguistic power, language hierarchy, or educational access
- Studies focusing on Bangladesh or providing relevant Global South perspectives
- Peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings, and recognized institutional reports

Exclusion criteria:

- Studies unrelated to language, education, or AI
- Duplicate publications
- Commercial opinions or non-academic commentary
- Studies discussing AI applications without considering educational or social implications

Screening and Thematic Synthesis

The literature selection involved three stages. First, relevant publications were identified through database searches using predefined keywords. Additional sources were identified through reference lists of key publications. Second, titles and abstracts were examined to determine relevance. Third, selected publications were analyzed according to recurring themes: language as social power, educational reproduction of linguistic inequality, digital inequality and AI accessibility, opportunities and risks of generative AI, and governance approaches for equitable AI adoption.

A total of 45 peer-reviewed articles and 12 policy documents were included in the final synthesis. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and relationships across sources. The findings were then synthesized to develop the concept of digital linguistic capital and the four-pillar governance framework.

Findings

The integrative review yielded five thematic findings, each supported by the reviewed literature.

Theme 1: English as Dominant Linguistic Capital in Bangladesh

The review confirms that English continues to function as dominant linguistic capital in Bangladesh's education system (Rahman, 2005; Hamid, 2016). Students from English-medium

schools and privileged urban institutions develop early exposure to English academic practices and digital resources (Karim et al., 2023; Islam & Stapa, 2021). In contrast, many Bangla-medium students, rural learners, and first-generation university students have fewer opportunities to acquire advanced English skills (Chaudhury, 2011; Hamid & Honan, 2012).

Theme 2: Generative AI as a Potential Equalizer

The review identifies that AI tools can support Bangla-speaking learners through multilingual explanation, translation, writing assistance, and access to previously inaccessible knowledge resources (Sarkar, 2022; Chakrabarty, 2021). Generative AI may lower barriers by enabling multilingual interaction, translation, and explanation (Kasneci et al., 2023). A Bangla-speaking learner who previously struggled to access English academic resources may now interact with knowledge systems through AI-assisted translation and explanation.

Theme 3: Risks of AI-Mediated Inequality

Despite its potential, AI may reinforce existing inequalities (Bender et al., 2021; Ji et al., 2023). Unequal access to digital infrastructure, limited Bangla-language AI resources, commercial inequalities, algorithmic bias, hallucination, and privacy concerns may reinforce existing educational disparities (Dasgupta, 2019; van Dijk, 2020). Premium AI services may create a new educational divide where wealthy students gain access to advanced AI support while disadvantaged learners remain dependent on limited resources (Zuboff, 2019).

Theme 4: The Digital Divide and AI Readiness

Digital inequality in Bangladesh exists across multiple dimensions: access to devices, internet connectivity, digital literacy, quality of digital resources, and ability to use advanced technologies (Lythreatis et al., 2022). Rural students are more likely to depend on shared devices, limited mobile data, and restricted access to technology (Dasgupta, 2019). Gender, rurality, and disability also influence digital access (UNESCO, 2021).

Theme 5: Governance Frameworks for Equitable AI

The review identifies that AI governance in education requires frameworks that address inclusion, linguistic justice, accountability, and capacity building (UNESCO, 2021; Floridi & Cowls, 2019; Holmes et al., 2022). Without appropriate governance, AI risks becoming another mechanism through which privileged groups accumulate educational advantages (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019).

Table 1: Summary of Thematic Findings

	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Key Finding</i>	<i>Supporting Sources</i>
1	English as dominant capital	English continues to shape educational opportunity in Bangladesh	Rahman (2005); Hamid (2016); Chaudhury (2011)
2	AI as potential equalizer	AI can support Bangla-speaking learners through multilingual access	Sarkar (2022); Chakrabarty (2021); Kasneci et al. (2023)
3	Risks of AI-mediated inequality	AI may reinforce inequality through unequal access and bias	Bender et al. (2021); Ji et al. (2023); Zuboff (2019)
4	Digital divide	Digital inequality exists across devices, connectivity, and literacy	Dasgupta (2019); van Dijk (2020); Lythreatis et al. (2022)
5	Governance frameworks	Equitable AI requires inclusion, linguistic justice, accountability, capacity building	UNESCO (2021); Floridi & Cowls (2019); Holmes et al. (2022)

Source: Author's compilation based on literature review

DISCUSSION

This section addresses three research questions based on the findings.

Research Question 1: English as Dominant Linguistic Capital

The findings confirm that English continues to function as dominant linguistic capital in Bangladeshi education. This is evident in the unequal distribution of English-medium schooling, private tutoring, and digital resources (Rahman, 2005; Hamid, 2016; Chaudhury, 2011). Students from privileged backgrounds acquire English capital through schooling, family resources, urban location, and private spending (Karim et al., 2023). In contrast, many Bangla-medium students, rural learners, and first-generation university students face barriers to acquiring advanced English skills (Hamid & Honan, 2012; Islam & Stapa, 2021).

Research Question 2: Generative AI and Digital Linguistic Capital

The findings suggest that generative AI may reshape access to educational knowledge for Bangla-speaking learners through the development of digital linguistic capital (Sarkar, 2022; Chakrabarty, 2021). AI can support mother-tongue learning by allowing students to understand complex concepts through familiar languages (Kasneci et al., 2023). However, digital linguistic capital is not automatically democratic. It can become another class-bound asset if only privileged students receive AI literacy training and paid platform access (Zuboff, 2019; van Dijk, 2020).

Research Question 3: Governance Framework

The findings indicate that equitable AI governance requires a framework based on inclusion, linguistic justice, accountability, and capacity building (UNESCO, 2021; Floridi & Cows, 2019; Holmes et al., 2022). Without appropriate governance, AI may reproduce the same inequalities that exist within traditional education systems (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019).

Four-Pillar Governance Framework

Based on the review findings, this article proposes a four-pillar governance framework:

Pillar 1: Inclusion

AI tools used in education must be accessible across class, gender, region, and disability. Policy actions should include subsidized student data packages, rural school device-sharing schemes, AI learning corners in libraries, and accessibility requirements for disabled learners (Dasgupta, 2019; van Dijk, 2020; UNESCO, 2021).

Pillar 2: Linguistic Justice

AI should support Bangla and other local languages rather than reinforcing English dominance. Policy actions should include public funding for Bangla educational datasets, evaluation benchmarks for Bangla AI outputs, and partnerships among Bangla Academy, universities, and local developers (Sarkar, 2022; Chakrabarty, 2021; Pennycook, 2017).

Pillar 3: Accountability

Responsibility for AI harm must be clear. Policy actions should include algorithmic impact assessments for AI tools used in public education, child-safe consent standards, school-level complaint mechanisms, and independent review of high-risk uses (Floridi & Cows, 2019; Holmes et al., 2022; Zuboff, 2019).

Pillar 4: Capacity Building

AI inclusion requires human capacity. Policy actions should include AI literacy modules in Grades 6-12, teacher training on prompt design and output verification, university-level AI ethics courses, and community workshops for parents (Kasneci et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2021; Holmes et al., 2022).

Table 2: Four-Pillar Governance Framework

<i>Pillar</i>	<i>Key Actions</i>	<i>Expected Outcome</i>
<i>Inclusion</i>	Affordable devices, connectivity, accessibility	Equal participation
<i>Linguistic Justice</i>	Bangla AI resources, multilingual support	Language equality
<i>Accountability</i>	Transparency, privacy, evaluation	Responsible AI use
<i>Capacity Building</i>	AI literacy and teacher training	Effective human-AI collaboration

Source: Author's compilation based on literature review

Policy Recommendations

Based on the analysis, the following policy recommendations are proposed for Bangladesh:

Immediate Actions (2026-2027)

1. Create national guidelines for GenAI in education
 2. Develop Bengali-language AI literacy resources
 3. Pilot AI learning support in selected rural schools
 4. Create school-level rules on ethical AI use
 5. Issue child data protection guidance for AI platforms
- Responsible actors: Ministry of Education, ICT Division, NCTB, DSHE, UGC, teacher training colleges, Bangla Academy

Short-Term Actions (2027-2029)

1. Integrate AI literacy into Grades 6-12
2. Train secondary teachers in AI-supported pedagogy
3. Develop Bengali AI evaluation benchmarks
4. Support public-private partnerships for Bengali educational AI
5. Create open educational resources in Bengali using AI assistance

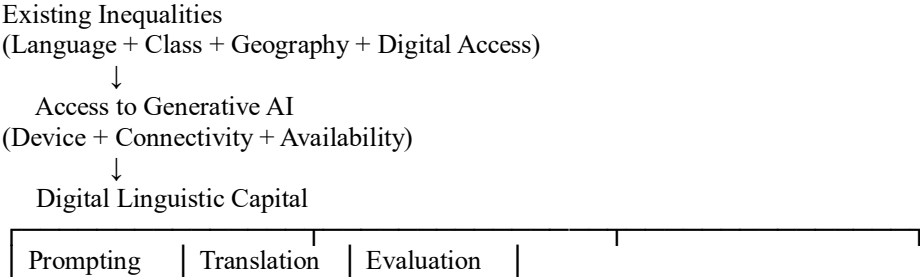
Medium-Term Actions (2029-2032)

1. Establish an independent AI and Education Ethics Council
2. Require AI impact assessments for public education tools
3. Create a national Bengali educational corpus
4. Build local AI research capacity in public universities
5. Support AI tools for minority-language learners

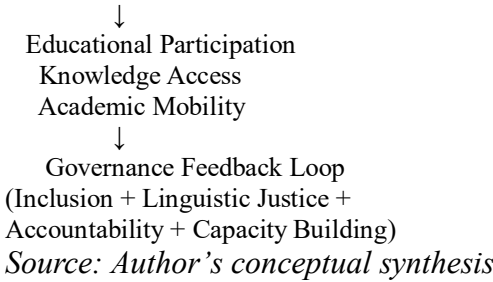
Assessment Reform

AI-generated essays require new assessment approaches. Recommendations include oral defence, in-class writing, reflective AI-use statements, process-based assessment, AI-supported but teacher-verified learning tasks, and clear citation rules for AI use (Perkins, 2023; Cotton et al., 2024).

Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Digital Linguistic Capital Development



Ability	Ability	Ability	
Productive Ability	Critical Ability		



CONCLUSION

This article has examined how generative AI may influence language-based educational inequality in Bangladesh, where Bangla represents national identity and cultural recognition, while English continues to function as a dominant language of academic advancement, employment, and global mobility. Through an integrative literature review, the study has identified both the transformative possibilities and potential risks of GenAI in the Bangladeshi education system.

The article has introduced the concept of digital linguistic capital as a new form of educational resource that combines linguistic ability, AI competence, critical evaluation, and responsible technological use. Like traditional linguistic capital, digital linguistic capital is shaped by social structures and institutional recognition (Bourdieu, 1991). Students with greater access to devices, digital education, and AI resources may accumulate greater digital linguistic capital. The proposed four-pillar governance framework—inclusion, linguistic justice, accountability, and capacity building—offers a route forward for Bangladesh and comparable Global South contexts. These pillars require concrete actions: subsidized access, Bangla benchmarks, child-safe data rules, teacher training, assessment reform, public educational corpora, and participatory design.

The future of AI in Bangladeshi education will not be determined by technology alone. It will depend on whether policymakers, educators, developers, and communities can transform AI from a market-driven tool into a public resource for linguistic justice, educational inclusion, and democratic participation.

Limitations and Future Research

This article has several limitations. It is a theoretical paper without primary fieldwork, so its claims remain hypotheses to be empirically tested. The rapid pace of AI development means that specific tools and platforms discussed may change quickly. The article focuses on Bangladesh as a case study; findings may not be directly generalizable to other Global South contexts, though the framework may be adaptable.

Future research should conduct surveys and interviews with Bengali-speaking AI users across different generations, regions, and educational backgrounds to test the concept of digital linguistic capital. Comparative studies across multiple Global South countries would test the generalizability of these findings. Longitudinal studies tracking changes in language attitudes and educational outcomes as AI tools become more widely available in Bengali are also needed.

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AI Declaration: During manuscript preparation, artificial intelligence tools were used only for language improvement, organization, and editorial assistance. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, interpretation, and final content of the manuscript.

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