J-Shelves of Indragiri (JSI)
https://ejournal-fkip.unisi.ac.id/shelves
Email: jsipbifkipunisi@gmail.com
DOI: https://doi.org/10.61672/jsi.v8i2.3826

November 2026. Vol.8, No.2
e-ISSN. 2721-205X
pp. 153-171

TYPING IN TWO TONGUES: DIGITAL SOCIOLINGUISTICS AND THE RISE OF CODE MIXING IN INDONESIA

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Article Info

Article History:
Received:29-09-2026
Revised:04-10-2026
Accepted:20-10-2026
Published:12-11-2026

Keywords:
Digital sociolinguistics;
Language mixing;
Indonesia;
Social media

Abstract

Social media has become a dynamic space where linguistic boundaries are continuously negotiated, and Indonesian–English code-mixing is increasingly visible in everyday online communication. However, research on multilingualism in Indonesia has largely focused on offline, face-to-face settings, leaving limited empirical understanding of how code-mixing operates in digital environments and how it is connected to identity construction. This study addresses that gap by examining Indonesian–English code-mixing on TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp through the lens of digital sociolinguistics and digital translanguaging. It aims to (1) identify the linguistic patterns of code-mixing, (2) examine its social and cultural functions, and (3) interpret how it constructs online identity. A qualitative design combining content analysis and discourse analysis was employed, drawing on public posts, comments, and WhatsApp excerpts, supported by interviews with users. The data were analyzed using Muysken's typology of code-mixing and thematic analysis. The findings reveal three recurring patterns: insertion of English lexical items into Indonesian sentences, alternation between Indonesian and English, and incorporation of regional languages for humor or emphasis. These practices are motivated by the desire to signal modernity and global awareness, enhance humor and creativity, and strengthen in-group identity, and users demonstrate clear awareness of their language choices. The study concludes that online code-mixing is not a sign of limited proficiency but a strategic form of identity performance that reflects shifting language norms among younger generations. These findings have implications for language education, digital literacy, and language policy in multilingual Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's linguistic landscape is characterized by extraordinary diversity. With more than 700 local languages coexisting alongside Indonesian and English, multilingualism has long been a defining feature of the nation's sociolinguistic identity (Zein, 2020). The phenomenon of code-mixing alternating elements from different languages within a single discourse has been widely recognized as a common communicative strategy in Indonesia (Aziz et al., 2019; Nasrullah et al.,

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2023; Rosmiaty et al., 2020). Such hybrid practices reflect not only linguistic proficiency but also the social, cultural, and affective dimensions of interaction in a multilingual society (Fleischmann et al., 2020; Lankiewicz, 2021)

While these foundational studies have provided valuable groundwork for understanding bilingual and multilingual practices, recent developments in communication technologies have significantly reshaped how language is used and displayed in public. Digital spaces such as TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp have emerged as arenas where multilingualism is not only practiced but performed, negotiated, and contested (Yousif, 2025). (Hasan & Benny, 2025) notes, the study of online language use calls for a shift from traditional code-mixing frameworks to approaches that capture the dynamic, multimodal, and socially mediated nature of digital discourse. Similarly, (Biró, 2019) emphasize that multilingual practices in digital contexts function as acts of identity and agency users mobilize diverse linguistic and semiotic resources to position themselves within algorithmic publics.

Despite the proliferation of studies on multilingualism in Indonesia, most research has concentrated on offline, face-to-face settings such as classrooms, workplaces, and community interactions(Yusoff & Melati, 2019). Relatively little is known about how Indonesians engage in multilingual practices within digital environments, where textual, visual, and algorithmic dimensions interact to shape linguistic behavior. This gap is particularly salient given that Indonesia ranks among the world's most active social media users, with online communication serving as a key site for linguistic creativity and identity performance among youth.

Building upon this recent turn in digital sociolinguistics, the present study focuses on how Indonesian users employ multiple languages across social media platforms to construct identity, express stance, and negotiate belonging. In doing so, it adopts the perspective of digital translanguaging a view of language as fluid, multimodal, and socially situated rather than bounded by structural or national norms (Kim, 2018; Wei, 2018). From this perspective, code-mixing online is understood as a creative, agentive practice that both reflects and shapes users' participation in digitally mediated communities.

Despite growing scholarly attention to global digital multilingualism

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(Androutsopoulos, 2021; Tagg, 2023), studies focusing specifically on Indonesian contexts remain limited. Few have examined how linguistic hybridity operates within algorithmically mediated platforms, or how these practices reflect broader sociocultural dynamics such as modernity, humor, or local identity. This study therefore responds to that gap by providing an empirically grounded account of Indonesian users' digital translanguaging, highlighting how multilingual repertoires are enacted and reinterpreted through social media interaction.

Therefore, this research aims to: (1) identify and categorize the linguistic patterns of Indonesian English code-mixing across TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp; (2) examine the social and cultural functions of these multilingual practices; and (3) interpret how such practices construct online identity and reflect digital translanguaging dynamics in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Code-Mixing in Multilingual Contexts

Code-mixing is a common linguistic practice in multilingual communities in which speakers incorporate elements from more than one language within the same discourse. Rather than being understood solely as a consequence of insufficient proficiency in one language, code-mixing can reflect speakers' communicative choices, linguistic resources, and social contexts. In Indonesia, the interaction between Indonesian and English has created a particularly visible form of code-mixing, especially among younger speakers and social media users. Previous research has shown that Indonesian-English code-mixing occurs in different linguistic forms and may be influenced by communicative purposes, social relationships, and users' familiarity with English (Zebua et al., 2025).

The Indonesian context is particularly relevant because multilingual practices are embedded in everyday communication. Code-mixing may involve the insertion of English words, phrases, or expressions into Indonesian discourse, allowing speakers to utilize resources from both languages. Recent research on Indonesian social media has demonstrated that such practices are not random but occur as part of users' regular communicative behavior. Shoolihah (2024), for

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example, examined code-mixing on Instagram and Twitter and found Indonesian-English code-mixing in social media posts and interactions. These findings indicate that digital platforms provide important spaces for observing contemporary multilingual practices.

Code-Mixing in Digital Communication

The expansion of social media has transformed the way multilingual speakers communicate. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and X provide users with opportunities to combine languages in captions, comments, videos, and other forms of digital content. Consequently, code-mixing has become increasingly visible in digitally mediated communication. Zebua et al. (2025) found that Indonesian-English code-mixing on Instagram served several purposes, including emphasizing messages, expressing identity, and engaging broader audiences. Their findings suggest that code-mixing in digital communication is influenced by both linguistic and social considerations.

Other studies have examined the linguistic patterns of code-mixing among Indonesian social media users. Sakina and Haryanto (2026), for instance, analyzed Indonesian-English code-mixing in the captions and comments of Indonesian content creators using Muysken's (2000) categories of insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalization. Their study demonstrates that social media can provide naturally occurring data for examining the structural characteristics of multilingual communication. Similarly, recent research on Indonesian social media has examined code-mixing and code-switching across platforms and identified the importance of considering the digital context in understanding contemporary language practices (Manuhutu et al., 2024).

Digital Sociolinguistics and Online Language Practices

The emergence of digital communication has also encouraged sociolinguistic research to examine how language practices are shaped by online environments. Digital spaces are not simply alternative locations for conventional communication; they provide users with new opportunities to construct meanings, interact with audiences, and present themselves through linguistic and multimodal resources. From this perspective, code-mixing can be examined as part of broader

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digital sociolinguistic practices in which language choices are connected to social identities and communicative purposes.

Recent Indonesian studies have increasingly connected multilingual practices on social media with identity construction. Rosmaria (2024), for example, investigated Indonesian students' use of code-mixing in Instagram captions and examined the phenomenon from a digital sociolinguistic perspective. The study demonstrates that code-mixing can become part of the way users construct and express linguistic identities in digital spaces. More recent research has similarly examined bilingual identity construction through English-influenced code-mixing and found that social and psychological factors contribute to users' language choices on social media (Rahman et al., 2025).

Code-Mixing, Identity, and Social Meaning

Language choice can also function as a resource for constructing and negotiating identity. In digital communication, users have considerable control over how they represent themselves to an audience, including through the selection of particular linguistic forms. Indonesian-English code-mixing may therefore carry social meanings beyond the literal information communicated. English expressions may be used to signal familiarity with global culture, contemporary digital practices, or particular social groups, while Indonesian expressions may maintain connections with local linguistic and cultural identities.

This relationship between multilingual practices and identity has received increasing attention in Indonesian digital sociolinguistic research. Rahman et al. (2025) argue that English-influenced code-mixing on social media is connected to bilingual identity construction rather than being explained simply by language proficiency. Similarly, recent research on Generation Z has examined code-mixing and code-switching on Instagram as resources for self-presentation and identity construction in digital environments (Suci et al., 2026). These studies indicate that multilingual practices can provide users with flexible linguistic resources for expressing identity, social affiliation, and communicative stance.

RESEARCH METHOD

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This study employed a qualitative design combining discourse analysis and content analysis to examine code-mixing in Indonesian digital communication (Lim, 2025). Discourse analysis was used to explore how language reflected identity and communication practices, while content analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and themes (Carbaugh, 2007; Kleinheksel et al., 2020). The data consisted of Indonesian-English mixed-language content from TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp, complemented by semi-structured interviews with social media users. Purposive sampling was used to select public TikTok and Instagram posts and comments containing Indonesian-English code-mixing and at least one of the hashtags #BahasaCampur, #BilingualLife, or #JakselTalk. Since hashtags are not used in private messaging, WhatsApp data were obtained from three bilingual student community groups, resulting in 60 text excerpts. Interview participants were also purposively selected based on their experience using mixed Indonesian-English language in digital communication (Campbell et al., 2020; Zebua et al., 2025). Data were collected from January to March 2025 through screenshots and written records of eligible public content, WhatsApp excerpts collected with group members' written consent, and semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 30–45 minutes. The interview guide and coding scheme served as the main research instruments. Interview data were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed together with the digital texts to identify patterns of code-mixing and their communicative and identity-related meanings (Schreier, 2012). Ethical procedures followed online research guidelines (AOIR, 2019); only publicly accessible content was analyzed, informed consent was obtained from interview participants, and usernames, profile pictures, and other identifying information were anonymized.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Patterns of Language Mixing on Social Media

The analysis identified three recurring patterns of code-mixing: insertion of English lexical items into Indonesian sentences, alternation between Indonesian and English across clauses or sentences, and incorporation of regional-language expressions for humor or emphasis.

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Insertion refers to English elements embedded in Indonesian utterances without altering their syntactic structure. Typical items were *deadline*, *tight*, *all out*, *good*, and *professional*, mostly in talk about work and education.

Figure 1: Example of insertion of English words into Indonesian sentences



Alternation involves shifting between languages across clauses or sentences. In Figure 2, the speaker expresses exhaustion in Indonesian ("eh sumpah, w capek banget tadi gila, kerjaan gak selesai2"), shifts to English to describe an unending stream of tasks ("after finish one, then come another one"), and returns to Indonesian with an embedded English phrase ("we already got the deadline"). English is used for ideas associated with professional and globalized contexts, while Indonesian carries emotional expression. Alternation therefore reflects a flexible, strategic use of language tailored to emotional and contextual needs, and signals affiliation with a globalized professional sphere.

Figure 2: Example of insertion of English words into Indonesian sentences



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1) Alternation Between Indonesian and English Across Sentences or Clauses

The alternation pattern refers to the use of two languages within a larger conversational unit, in which speakers shift between languages either within a single sentence or across multiple sentences.

Figure 3. Example of Alternation between Indonesian and English across sentences



In the conversational example shown in Figure 3, we can observe how social media users engage in language alternation by switching between Indonesian and English across sentences. The first sentence, *"eh sumpah, w capek banget tadi gila, kerjaan gak selesai2,"* is expressed in Indonesian and conveys the speaker's exhaustion and frustration in relation to work. .The speaker then switches back to Indonesian in the sentence *"parah memang ih padahal kan baru di suruh ni ya, msa we already got the deadline,"* incorporating the English phrase *"we already got the deadline"* to highlight an awareness of professional expectations and time constraints. This illustrates how English is strategically employed to underscore concepts associated with global and professional standards.

2) Use of Regional Languages for Humorous Purposes or Expressive Emphasis

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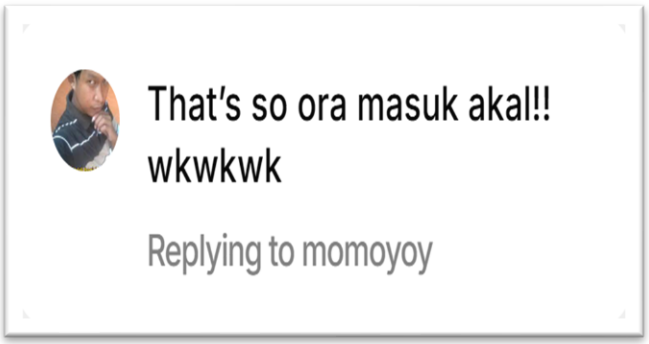
The use of regional languages on Indonesian social media platforms has become increasingly common, not only in everyday communication but also as a means of adding humorous nuance or emphasizing particular expressions. This phenomenon often appears in the form of *incorporation*, namely the insertion of regional words or expressions into sentences constructed in Indonesian or English.

Figure 4: Example of Incorporation of regional languages for humor or emphasis



In Figure 4, the user inserts the expression *"hati2 di jalan = heart heart on the street,"* which combines Indonesian with a regional-language nuance (likely Javanese). The use of *hati2*, a colloquial form of *hati-hati* ("be careful"), serves not only as a safety reminder but is also written in a lighter, more expressive style by substituting *hati-hati* with *heart*, thereby creating wordplay-based humor. This injects a playful element into the interaction and invites a more relaxed, familiar response from readers.

Figure 5: Example of Incorporation of regional languages for humor or emphasis



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In Figure 5, we encounter the expression *"That's so ora masuk akal!!"*, which combines English with the Javanese phrase *ora masuk akal* ("nonsensical," "does not make sense"). This expression is commonly used in humorous contexts or to convey surprise at something considered absurd. Its use creates a more expressive effect and enriches the interaction with a distinctive cultural nuance unavailable in standard Indonesian alone. The inclusion of *wkwkwk* at the end further signals laughter and reinforces the casual, humorous tone of the conversation.

Socio-Cultural Motivations Underlying Language-Mixing Practices on Social Media

The phenomenon of language mixing on social media is not solely tied to structural aspects of linguistics; it is also shaped by socio-cultural motivations that guide users' language choices in digital interactions. Analysis of interview data reveals that this practice is influenced by a range of social drivers, including the desire to signal modernity and global awareness, enhance humor and creativity, strengthen group identity, project a professional self-image, and adapt to communication norms that are increasingly global-oriented.

3) Signaling Modernity and Global Awareness

The insertion of English elements in digital communication functions not only as a linguistic choice but also as a self-representational strategy associated with modernity and global orientation.

Extract 1:

"When I post on Instagram, I usually add English vocabulary like professional, progress, or update. Not because I'm trying to sound English, but it just feels more modern. My friends also say that captions with English look cleaner, cooler. It feels like we're part of this global lifestyle that urban people use." (Interview: FSH)

Extract 2 (YL):

"I think English has its own prestige. For example, when I write 'lagi banyak deadline' instead of 'lagi banyak tenggat waktu,' the vibe is completely different.

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English feels cleaner and fits better with today's digital atmosphere. So I use it to show that I'm up-to-date with the global world, not just the local one." (Interview: YL)

English is used deliberately as an aesthetic and symbolic resource, reinforced by peer validation. It also functions as self-branding, helping users build a competitive digital identity.

Enhancing humor and creativity. Mixing languages lets users heighten dramatic effect and shape punchlines in ways a single language cannot.

Extract 3 (RH):

"I often use English because all platforms now are international. Sometimes I think, maybe some of my followers are from abroad. But more than that, English makes me look more educated. Like it gives an extra value if we can switch to English, even if it's just one or two words. So it's kind of self-branding." (Interview: RH)

Extract 4

"Jokes in Indonesian alone sometimes feel bland. But when I add English like 'aku capek banget, I literally can't,' it instantly becomes funnier. My friends often say, 'anjay, relate banget.' So the combination of two languages makes the punchline hit harder." (Interview: ANA)

In both cases the English element adds a dramatic, internet-humor tone that makes the joke more relatable and creative.

Strengthening in-group identity. Mixed language operates as an "internal code" that marks membership and separates insiders from outsiders.

Extract 5

"I often make memes or joke posts, and using only one language feels less 'gercep.' For example, 'gue anaknya chaotic good' or 'tolong jangan judge kehidupanku.' If those were in pure Indonesian, it would sound weird. But when mixed, people instantly get the tone and the humor." (Interview: SL)

Extract 6

"I think internet humor has its own style. We can experiment with mixing languages. Like saying 'udah cukup hidup, aku mau uninstall.' My friends crack up

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because the English element makes it more dramatic. So code-mixing makes our content more creative and fun." (Interview: RH)

Terms such as *update*, *supervisor*, and *deadline* belong to a shared academic register, so mixing signals common background and sustains group cohesion rather than any inability to use Indonesian.

Awareness of linguistic practice. Informants showed clear awareness that their choices are purposeful and platform-sensitive.

4) Strengthening In-Group Identity

Language mixing on social media also functions as a marker of membership within particular groups. In this context, code-mixing does not merely arise from individual linguistic habits; it becomes part of a collective communication style that reinforces a sense of belonging within the community.

Extract 7

"In the LPDP group, our language is automatically mixed. Like saying 'Ada update dari supervisor belum?' or 'Deadline laporan kapan nih?'. If someone suddenly uses pure Indonesian, it sounds stiff. So mixing languages is part of our identity as awardees." (Interview: FSH)

Extract 8

"For me, mixed language is like a secret code. LPDP people immediately get the context and the vibe. But if outsiders read it, they might think we're trying to sound English. But it's just our daily habit. That's what makes us feel like one community." (Interview: RH)

Language selection is a strategic decision tied to communicative goals, and digital platforms are perceived as having their own, more flexible norms.

Implications. Informants expected mixing to become more normal and urged educators to understand it.

Extract 9

"When talking with fellow LPDP students, the English terms come out automatically. Like 'meeting', 'progress', 'revision'. It's not because we can't

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speak Indonesian, but because those terms are commonly used in the academic world. So the mixing becomes a symbol that we are in the same environment." (Interview: WN)

This points to a mismatch between users' practices and how mixed language is judged in education, where it is still often read as a sign of limited proficiency.

5) Toward a Theoretical Framework (awareness of linguistic practice)

Awareness of linguistic practice is a crucial component in understanding how individuals select and combine languages in digital communication. Social media users often make deliberate language choices based on context, communicative goals, and the social norms that govern the platform.

Extract 10

"I'm aware that I use different languages depending on the context. If I want to sound serious, I use English, but if I'm joking, I mix it with Indonesian. So my language choices have a purpose, it's not random." (Interview: YL)

Extract 11

"I think social media has its own unwritten rules. Mixing languages isn't strange it's actually the norm. So sometimes I switch languages to emphasize something. It's a very flexible form of communication." (Interview: RM)

Extract 12

"In offline settings, I probably wouldn't mix languages that much. But online, mixing is common and often considered cool. So I think digital platforms have their own culture that makes language mixing feel natural." (Interview: SN)

6) Implications and Future Directions

Language mixing on Indonesian social media is increasingly showing potential to become a more widely accepted communication norm. With the growing dominance of English in digital spaces, particularly among younger generations exposed to global platforms like YouTube and TikTok, this practice is seen as an integral part of daily communication styles.

Extract 13

"I think language mixing will become even more normal in the future. Kids today

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have grown up watching YouTube, TikTok, all in English. So, it's only natural that their language style mixes too." (Interview: SL)

Extract 14

"Sometimes, teachers or professors misunderstand. They think that when we mix languages, it means we can't speak Indonesian well. But we're just adapting to the communication style of today. So, in the future, the education sector should understand this better." (Interview: RH)

Extract 15

"It would be interesting if there's more research on this. Because everyone uses language mixing for different reasons. Some do it to look cool, some do it for humor, and some do it because they're in an academic environment. So, this phenomenon is really broad." (Interview: RM)

Overall, the findings indicate that language mixing on social media functions as a complex socio-cultural strategy, which not only reflects the desire to connect with global trends and display modernity but also enriches humor and creativity. Language mixing becomes a means of reinforcing group identity, where certain communities develop internal linguistic codes that strengthen bonds among members. Furthermore, social media users demonstrate full awareness of their language choices, recognizing that language mixing allows for more flexible communication that aligns with the unwritten norms of the digital world. This phenomenon signals the normalization of language mixing, both in everyday life and professional contexts, with further implications for education and society at large. These findings pave the way for further analysis of the motivations and impacts of language mixing, which we will explore in more detail in the next section,

The present study identifies and categorizes patterns of Indonesian–English language mixing on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp. The findings indicate two dominant mixing patterns: insertion and alternation, both of which function to express modernity, reinforce group identity, and enhance creativity and humor in digital communication. Additionally, the presence of regional languages in online interactions shows that code-mixing also

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serves to strengthen social bonds and enrich self-expression. Overall, the results suggest that language mixing practices not only reflect users' linguistic abilities but also reveal deeper social and cultural functions within Indonesia's multilingual society, particularly in digital contexts.

Language mixing in Indonesian social media emerges as a dynamic communication strategy that not only facilitates interaction among users but also reflects broader social identities and cultural contexts. These findings support the view that code-mixing is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but also a tool used to construct a more modern, global, and digitally connected self. English insertions, for example, function as markers of prestige and professionalism, while regional languages often foster social intimacy and amplify expressive nuance. Taken together, these insights show that language mixing operates as more than a communicative medium it is a form of identity performance that draws on diverse linguistic and semiotic resources.

These results align with previous research demonstrating that multilingualism has long been part of Indonesia's sociolinguistic identity, where more than 700 regional languages coexist alongside Indonesian and English (Irvan, 2024). However, scholarship on digital language mixing in Indonesia remains limited, particularly within the context of social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp (Ibrahim et al., 2025; Karimah & Wijayanti, 2023). This study expands the current body of literature by adopting a digital translanguaging perspective, which conceptualizes language as fluid, multimodal, and socially situated, in contrast to traditional structural views that treat languages as discrete entities (Ng & Lee, 2019; Wei, 2022). Digital environments enable the blending of visual, textual, and algorithmic elements that shape linguistic behavior dimensions that have not been extensively examined in Indonesian contexts.

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that language mixing on Indonesian social media is likely to become increasingly normalized and fully integrated into everyday communication, especially as global digital platforms continue to influence younger generations. This trend carries significant implications, particularly for the education sector, where misunderstandings still

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arise regarding the use of mixed language. Educational institutions must adapt to these emerging communication norms to avoid negatively judging students' Indonesian proficiency. Moving forward, schools and universities should adopt multilingual perspectives in language and digital literacy instruction, ensuring that learners are not only proficient in the national language but also capable of communicating effectively in global contexts.

This study aligns with broader research on multilingualism in digital spaces for example, Ibrahim et al.(2025 and Mirzoyeva & Syurmen (2020) which shows that code-mixing functions as both an identity marker and a social mechanism through which individuals negotiate their position within a globalized society. The findings on English as a symbol of modernity and prestige also resonate with Lee(2015), who argues that language choice in digital environments often aligns with social aspirations and self-presentation. However, the present results diverge from Sahib(2019), whose work on offline interactions suggests that code-mixing is often perceived as informal or inappropriate. This contrast becomes clearer when compared with recent research on translanguaging in virtual learning in Papua Sahib et al.(2024), which shows that language mixing can serve as a crucial pedagogical resource for non-EFL students, helping them access content, practice English, and reduce language anxiety. In this context, translanguaging functions not only as an identity strategy but also as a learning tool. The current study therefore demonstrates that linguistic norms in digital spaces are more fluid and widely accepted compared to offline practices, highlighting a sociolinguistic gap between online and face-to-face interactions that warrants deeper investigation.

CONCLUSION

This study examined Indonesian–English code-mixing on TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Three patterns emerged: insertion of English items, alternation between Indonesian and English, and incorporation of regional-language expressions, with insertion the most frequent. These practices signal modernity, enhance humor, and mark group membership, and users are aware of their strategic value. Code-mixing in digital spaces is therefore a form of identity

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performance, not a sign of limited proficiency. Educators should recognize it as a legitimate communicative resource and avoid judging students' Indonesian proficiency by their online language use. Limited to three platforms and a small interview sample, the findings may not generalize; future research could include other languages and platforms and compare online and offline practices.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to the Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education (LPDP), Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia, for providing financial support through the LPDP Scholarship. The support provided by LPDP has contributed significantly to the author's graduate education and the completion of this research.

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