



Polyglots in the Digital Age: Strategies and Hurdles in Learning Foreign Languages

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Abstract: This research aims to uncover how polyglots learn foreign languages, identifying both supporting and hindering factors in this learning process. The research method employed is a qualitative approach. The findings reveal that the model polyglots use to learn foreign languages involves studying one book in several languages. This method is the most effective and easiest way to enhance reading skills in various languages. Additionally, polyglots use several other strategies: they are unafraid to try, do not always rely on formal education, are persistent, seek productive habits, listen a lot, believe it is never too late to learn, seek communities or partners, find interconnections between languages, and adapt to their environment. Supporting factors for polyglots in learning foreign languages include having the talent for language acquisition, being motivated, and having the opportunity to learn. In contrast, hindering factors include an unsupportive environment, restrictive grammar, laziness, limited vocabulary, lack of focus, lack of commitment, and absence of clear goals in language learning.

Keywords: Model, polyglot, foreign Language learning

A. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era of globalization and technological advancement, mastering foreign languages has become more essential than ever (Genç et al., 2015). Effective communication across diverse cultures and regions is a key component in navigating the global landscape, where barriers of distance and time have diminished (Bullock et al., 2019). While English remains a dominant global language, proficiency in additional languages, such as Arabic and Chinese, has become increasingly valuable (Pan & Block, 2011). Arabic, for instance, offers access to a wealth of scientific literature across various fields, from engineering to arts, while Chinese, known for its complexity, presents significant intellectual and economic opportunities (Kielman, 2019).

The challenge of mastering foreign languages is not insurmountable. The world's greatest polyglots demonstrate that achieving fluency in multiple languages (Arnold & Al-Lisan: Jurnal Bahasa (e-Journal), Volume 7, No.2, August 2022

Fonseca, 2004; Liu & Gan, 2019) is within reach. For instance, a polyglot from Lebanon, impressively learned Chinese within just two months, despite its reputation as a particularly challenging language (Fazah, n.d.). Similarly, historical figures like Harrold Williams, who mastered 58 languages, and Cardinal Giuseppe Mezzofanti, fluent in 34 languages, underscore that extensive multilingual proficiency is possible with dedication and effective strategies (Mezzofanti). In Indonesia, Raden Mas Pandji Sostrokartono, a notable figure who mastered 37 languages, further exemplifies the potential for multilingualism (Sostrokartono, n.d.).

This phenomenon extends beyond historical figures to contemporary individuals in Indonesia and beyond. Polyglots often embody an exceptional ability to acquire and utilize multiple languages (Kazakov, 2021; Nikulicheva, 2021), yet their methodologies for achieving this proficiency are not always well-documented. This lack of comprehensive documentation can be a significant barrier for learners who seek to emulate their success. By exploring the practices of polyglots, particularly those from Gorontalo, this research aims to uncover and disseminate effective methods for learning foreign languages.

Despite the wealth of knowledge and resources available today, such as online platforms like Google and YouTube, many people still perceive language learning as a daunting task (Becker, 2017; Chun et al., 2016; Poole, 2019; Schmid & Whyte, 2014). This perception is often rooted in the traditional language education systems, which focus heavily on grammar and vocabulary while neglecting practical communication skills. As a result, students may struggle with speaking proficiency despite having a solid grammatical foundation. This disconnect highlights the need for alternative approaches that emphasize practical application and immersive learning techniques.

The imitation technique, widely used by polyglots, provides a promising approach to language acquisition (Noprival et al., 2019; Noprival, Rafli, Nuruddin, et al., 2021). Similar to the way children learn their first language, this method focuses on mimicking native speakers to develop fluency and naturalness in communication. This contrasts with conventional language education, which often prioritizes rote learning over conversational practice. By adopting more engaging and interactive learning methods, learners can overcome the barriers that contribute to the belief that foreign languages are inherently difficult to master.

The primary aim of this research is to investigate the methods employed by polyglots in Gorontalo to learn foreign languages. By examining their experiences and strategies, the research seeks to challenge the prevailing notion that learning foreign languages is inherently difficult. The goal is to identify practical, enjoyable, and efficient techniques

that can be applied by language learners to enhance their proficiency and overcome common obstacles.

This study is motivated by the need to bridge the gap between the perceived difficulty of learning foreign languages and the practical experiences of successful polyglots (Muth'im & Sutiono, 2021). By providing insights into effective learning methods, the research aims to enrich the academic literature on language acquisition and offer valuable guidance for individuals seeking to expand their linguistic abilities. The findings are expected to contribute to a more positive and productive approach to language learning, ultimately facilitating better communication and cultural understanding in a globalized world.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach using a case study. According to Bogdan in Moleong, a case study is a research strategy that examines in detail a particular setting, subject, document storage, or specific event. Arikunto identifies three types of research based on the scope of data sources used as research subjects: (1) population research, (2) sample research, and (3) case study research (Arikunto, 2019, 2002). Based on its typology, case study research can be categorized into three types: first, a single case study, which has one subject, setting, or event; second, a multi-case study, which combines two or more single case studies; and third, a comparative case study, which conducts two or more case studies for comparison.

This research falls into the single case study category because it is conducted intensively, in detail, and in-depth on a specific issue, namely Polyglots in Gorontalo in Learning Foreign Languages." Case study research is often considered to have a weakness because its results cannot be generalized. This opinion has some merit, as case studies are not intended to be generalized. However, due to the depth and comprehensiveness of the analysis, case study results can be transferred to other cases with similar characteristics. Therefore, case study results cannot be generalized statistically but can be transferred analytically/theoretically.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This study reveals various methods and supporting factors for polyglots in Gorontalo in learning foreign languages. Based on interviews (Fadli, n.d.; Fajrin Hulawa, n.d.) and observations conducted, it was found that strong motivation is the primary key in their learning process. These polyglots exhibit high perseverance and dedication in learning new languages, often through informal means such as reading books, listening to songs,

and watching movies in the target language. Additionally, they tend to be more open to trying to speak the new language even if they have not fully mastered it, which helps accelerate the learning process.

Besides motivation, social and psychological factors also play a significant role in supporting them to become polyglots. These polyglots often build a supportive learning environment by joining communities or groups with similar interests ([Jouravlev et al., 2021](#)). They also utilize technology such as podcasts and language learning applications to practice listening and speaking skills. Experiences of adaptation and opportunities to interact directly with native speakers of the target language also help them improve their language skills. Overall, this study shows that a combination of motivation, varied learning methods, and social environmental support are key factors in the successful foreign language learning of polyglots in Gorontalo.

Table 1. Description of Methods and Challenges of Polyglots

No	Key Points	Description
1	Strong Motivation	Polyglots are highly motivated to learn new languages and often travel to immerse themselves in the local languages.
2	Use of Small Notes	Making small notes helps in interacting with people using simple conversations.
3	Social and Psychological Factors	These factors play a significant role in becoming proficient in multiple languages.
4	Persistence and Practice	Polyglots persist in practicing new languages despite challenges.
5	Non-formal Education	Polyglots often learn languages through non-formal means like media rather than traditional classroom settings.
6	Productive Habits	Making language learning a part of daily routine, such as listening to podcasts, helps in better language acquisition.
7	Listening Skills	Extensive listening helps in language absorption and improvement of listening skills.
8	No Age Limit	Language learning is effective at any age, including older adults.
9	Community and Partner Interaction	Engaging with communities or partners who speak the language aids in learning.
10	Finding Connections Between Languages	Recognizing similarities between languages can facilitate learning.
11	Adaptation to Environment	Creating a supportive environment, like changing phone language settings, aids in learning.

12	Talent	Language talent can help in easier acquisition of languages.
13	Motivation	Strong motivation driven by specific goals aids in learning languages.
14	Opportunities	Availability of opportunities like technology and exposure to native speakers enhances language learning.
15	Environmental Constraints	Unsupportive environments can hinder language learning.
16	Grammar Challenges	Learning correct grammar is crucial, and differences between native and target languages can pose challenges.
17	Lack of Target	Absence of clear learning targets can impede progress.
18	External Learning Challenges	External factors like class size, frequency of lessons, and qualified teachers impact language learning.

Discussion

The findings indicate that polyglots employ a variety of strategies to master multiple languages. Strong motivation (Noprival, Rafli, & Nuruddin, 2021; Noprival et al., 2019; Tan & Joty, 2021) is identified as a crucial element that drives individuals to persist despite challenges. This motivation often stems from the desire to communicate while traveling or for personal achievement. The use of small notes for interaction and reliance on non-formal education methods, such as consuming media in the target language, are practical approaches that polyglots use to learn languages effectively.

The importance of social and psychological factors is highlighted, showing that having a community or a partner to practice with can significantly enhance language learning. Moreover, polyglots develop productive habits, such as integrating language learning into their daily routines, which helps in consistent practice and improvement (Sharma & Prasanna, 2017; Zdepski et al., 2018).

Listening skills are particularly emphasized, with strategies like listening to podcasts and engaging in conversations to improve comprehension and pronunciation. The adaptability of the brain to learn new languages at any age is also noted, encouraging learners not to feel constrained by their age (Vijayalakshmi et al., 2018).

Recognizing connections between languages and adapting to a supportive environment are also effective strategies for learning multiple languages. The study identifies that talent can aid language acquisition, but motivation and opportunities are equally, if not more, important. Exposure to the language, whether through technology or

direct interaction with native speakers, is essential for practical language learning (Hyltenstam, 2021; Sobanski, 2016).

However, the study also identifies several challenges. Environmental constraints, such as lack of support and opportunities, can hinder language learning. Poor grammar learning, particularly due to significant differences between the native and target languages, poses a major challenge. Additionally, the absence of clear (Arguelles, 2020; Krashen, 2017; Kulakov, 2021; Nachmani & Wolf, 2019; Szaruga et al., 2021; Troussas & Virvou, 2020) targets can impede progress, highlighting the need for setting specific short-term and long-term goals.

In conclusion, the successful acquisition of multiple languages by polyglots is a complex process influenced by a combination of strong motivation, practical learning strategies, consistent practice, and supportive environments. Addressing the identified challenges, such as setting clear targets and improving grammar understanding, can further enhance language learning outcomes.

D. CONCLUSION

The methods polyglots use to learn foreign languages include various approaches such as: not hesitating to try, not always relying on formal education, being persistent, engaging in productive habits, extensive listening, embracing the belief that it's never too late to learn, seeking communities or partners, finding connections between languages, and adapting to the environment. The factors supporting polyglots in learning foreign languages are: the ability to master a language due to talent, mastering a language due to motivation, and having the opportunity to learn. Conversely, the factors hindering the learning of foreign languages are: unsupportive environments, restrictive grammar rules, lack of motivation, limited vocabulary, lack of focus, lack of commitment to learning, and the absence of clear targets for mastering the language. However, these obstacles can be overcome if one seeks a supportive environment, does not restrict themselves to rigid grammar rules, consistently studies, expands their vocabulary, maintains focus, has a strong commitment to learning multiple languages, and sets clear targets for language acquisition. By addressing these challenges through sincere efforts, one can effectively overcome the barriers to learning foreign languages.

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