

# The dark side of learning languages. Results of a pilot study on polyglots

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## INTRODUCTION

The pilot study on polyglots' opinions on learning obstacles presents the results of the discussion panel held on the world's biggest international event for polyglots and language lovers: Polyglot Gathering (1) 2021. This poster calls into question whether polyglots have problems learning foreign languages, and if so, what kind of problems they may have, and how they manage to overcome them. According to the results of the pilot study polyglots are widely considered to be doubt- and frustration-free while learning languages. Probably the joy of learning languages drowns out the frustrations, so they are invisible to observers' eyes. As a result, it seems that a multilingual person does not face problems at all. However, the passion for languages does not imply that they do not get frustrated which will be demonstrated in the paper.

## METHODS

In order to investigate polyglots' opinions on learning challenges, a quantitative study was conducted. Numerical data was gathered and analyzed. The group of about 80 participants answered questions via an online questionnaire using the latest advances of online tools. Open and close type questions were shown to respondents during the discussion panel during the Polyglot Gathering 2021. Due to the fact that everyone could join the discussion and answer questions that were voluntary (and we could see answers in real-time) the total amount of respondents vary among questions. After the discussion, the data was combined with commercially available software and analyzed. It was decided that the best representation of the results for this investigation was to provide statistical results.

## RESULTS

At the beginning of the study, all of the participants were asked about a number of languages they speak at level at least B1, independent user according to Common European Framework (2). Of the 64 subjects who answered the first question, almost half replied that they speak four to six foreign languages at level at least B1. Polyglots who speak two to three foreign languages comprise 33% of the respondents. The percentage of monolingual speakers is only 3%, and those who speak the highest number of foreign languages among participants i.e. seven to ten comprise 16%. None of participants speak more than ten languages.

Further questions and results are presented in the figures below. For the sake of space only crucial comments are added in conclusion. More detailed data has been presented in another article of the Author (3).

Fig. 1. Answers to the closed question: do you encounter problems learning languages (79 respondents in total)

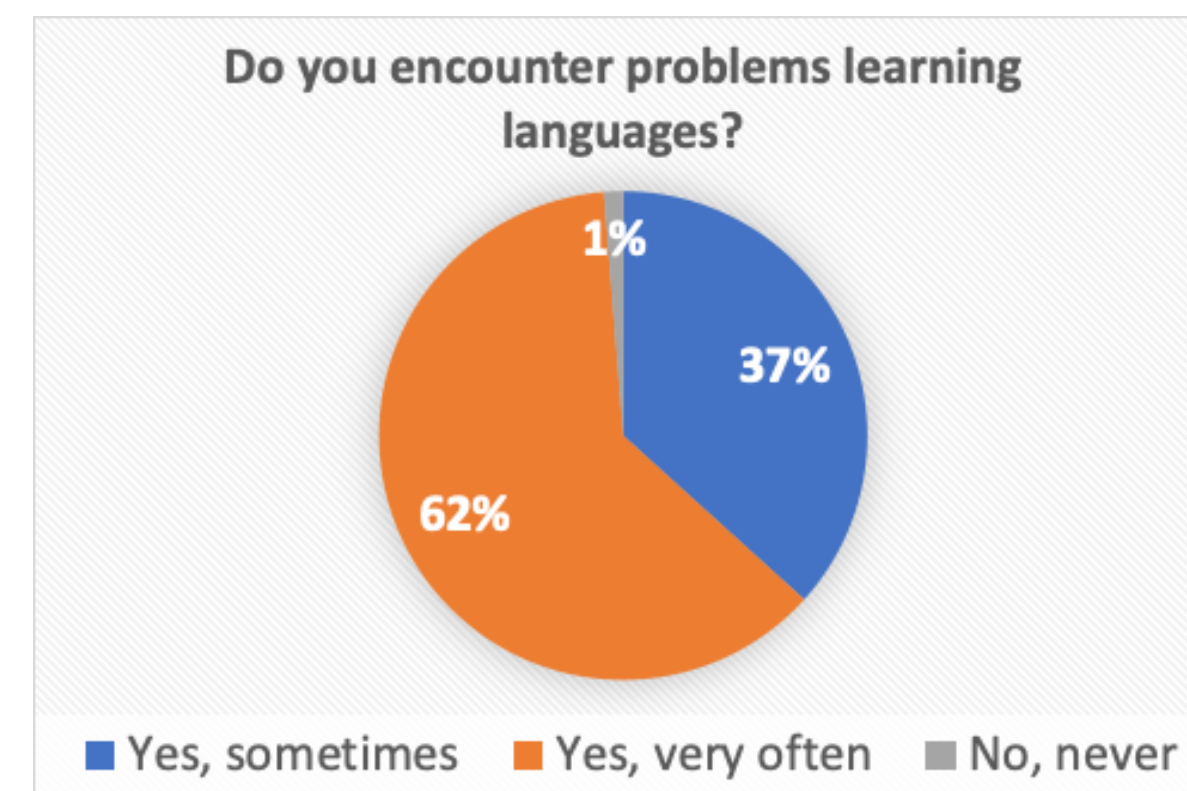


Fig. 2. Answer to the open question: what kind of problems do you encounter learning languages (139 answers in total)

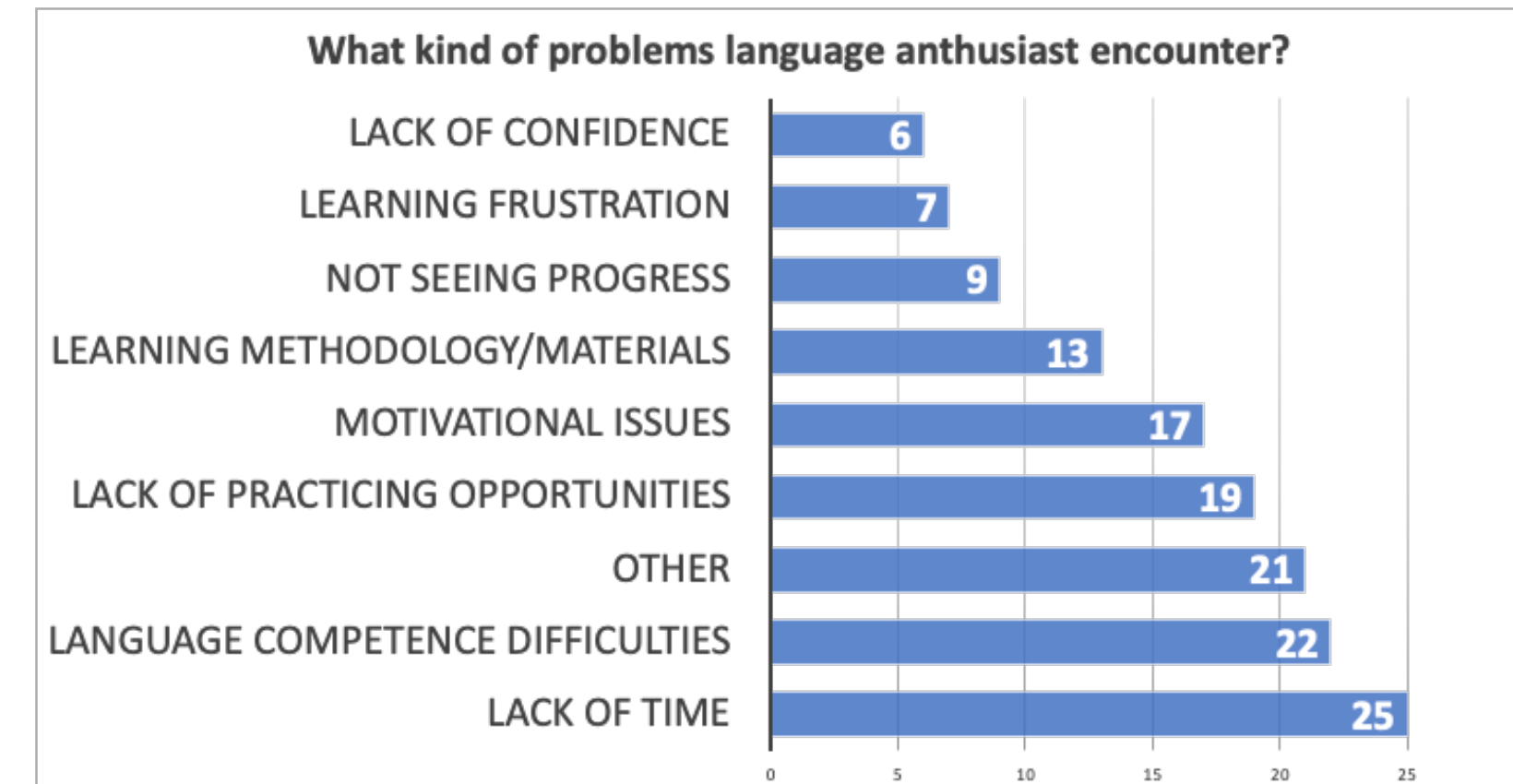


Fig. 3. Selected answers to the open question: how do you overcome your problems (82 answers in total)

- be patient, slow down, take a break
- practice on many occasions, interact with people
- learn with materials you like: books, movies, podcasts, etc.
- know the root of frustration
- define a schedule
- accept a fact that learning takes long and it is a journey

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, the study highlighted that polyglots encounter problems learning languages. As seen from Fig 1. just fewer than two-thirds of participants (62%) claimed that they **encounter problems very often**. While 37% of those interviewed find it sometimes. Only one person is doubt-free.

It is interesting to determine the types of problems polyglots may encounter. A list of categories is shown in Fig. 2. The most common responses were: **lack of time** (18%), difficulties with some of **the language competencies** (16%, i.e. issues regarding vocabulary and/or grammar, speaking, pronunciation, among others), and **lack of practicing opportunities** (14%). Moreover, participants mentioned **motivational issues** (12%), problems finding appropriate methods to learn or/and materials (9%), frustration connected to plateau or not seeing the progress (7%) or learning frustration in general (5%), and lack of confidence (4%). Not to mention less common responses (15%) gathered in the category *other* (further reading in Illukiewicz).

Only selected responses are presented in Fig. 3. to the question of how polyglots overcome problems. Generally speaking, polyglots' tips were connected to the pace of learning, attitude, methodology, or perceiving learning a language as a life-long task.

Although there was some inconsistency in the total amount of respondents the pilot study on polyglots reveals general tendencies regarding obstacles connected to learning languages.

## REFERENCES

- (1) Retrieved August 9, 2021 from <https://www.polyglotgathering.com/2021/pl/> Polyglot Gathering
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- (3) Illukiewicz, E. (to be presented) *Multilinguists' challenges in learning languages*. [in] *X Międzynarodowa naukowo-praktyczna konferencja «Naukowe poszukiwania: aktualne badania, teoria i praktyka»*, National Pedagogical Dragomanov University, Kiev.

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