



German Language Maintenance Among German Language Education Alumni of Yogyakarta State University: A Sociolinguistic Study

Lalu Ahmad Rofi¹, Sulistyowati²

^{1,2} Magister Linguistik, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta

Article Info	Abstract
Accepted: 2026-05-07 Revised: 2026-05-24 Accepted: 2026-06-25 Keywords: language maintenance, German language, alumni, language domain, linguistic motivation. DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i1.10479 Corresponding authors: Lalu Ahmad Rofi' laluahmadrofi@mail.ugm.ac.id Magister Linguistik, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta	<i>Language maintenance is a sociolinguistic phenomenon closely related to the sustainability of speakers' linguistic competence in various social domains. This study identifies internal and external factors that influence the success or failure of German language maintenance among alumni of the German Language Education Program at Yogyakarta State University. A quantitative descriptive approach was used with a questionnaire instrument for 43 respondents. The results show that the dominant internal factors include low motivation (16.7%), laziness to practice (19.0%), and limited personal time (19.0%). The main external factors are an environment that does not support language use (33.3%), the absence of a communication partner (19.0%), and work pressure (11.9%). These findings confirm that language maintenance is strongly influenced by individual motivation and the existence of a stable domain of language use. In the Indonesian context, the German language holds strategic value due to its relevance in international education, technological cooperation, and global mobility. Within this sociolinguistic landscape, alumni of German Language Education programs constitute an important speech community because they represent a group with sustained linguistic competence, institutional training, and ongoing engagement with the language after formal schooling.</i>

1. Introduction

Language is a fundamental instrument in the transmission of knowledge, cultural identity, and human cognitive expression. In the context of increasingly intense globalization, the survival of a language depends heavily on the vitality of its use by its speaking community. Languages that are no longer actively used in everyday life are at risk of shifting or even becoming extinct. This phenomenon occurs not only in regional languages but also in foreign languages learned in formal educational contexts, including German in Indonesia. German, as one of the main languages in Europe, plays a vital role in science, technology, and international cooperation. However, the continued use of German outside of formal academic contexts, particularly among German language graduates, faces significant challenges.

The phenomenon of language preservation has been widely studied in various linguistic contexts. Wilian, (2010) stated that several regional languages in Indonesia are experiencing a decline in the number of speakers and are even in critical condition, such as the Panasuan, Talondo, and Napu languages in Sulawesi, which have a limited number of speakers and are at risk of extinction. This phenomenon shows that the survival of a language is highly dependent on active use by its speaking community. This can also occur with foreign languages learned in formal education if they are not used continuously after the learning process is complete.

In the context of German language education alumni, they have strategic potential as agents of language preservation. However, the dominance of global languages such as English and the limited German-speaking communicative environment have led to language attrition, or the gradual erosion of language skills. Fishman, (2012) stated that language preservation is strongly influenced by intergenerational transmission, the domain of language use, and the attitudes and loyalty of speakers toward the language. A language will survive if it is used consistently in life domains such as work, social life, and education. Therefore, the preservation of German among alumni depends heavily on the extent to which they continue to use the language after graduating from formal educational institutions.

Fishman (1964) also emphasized the importance of establishing domains of language use, such as discussion communities, use of target-language media, and social networks that support language practice. In the context of German language education alumni, the formation of alumni communities, the use of digital media, and professional interactions are important strategies for maintaining German after graduating from college. Thus, German language maintenance depends not only on formal education but also on ongoing social practices.

In addition to language use factors, motivation also plays a crucial role in language retention. Intrinsic motivation can arise from an awareness of the cultural and cognitive value of German, while extrinsic motivation relates to academic and professional opportunities such as scholarships, further study, and employment in

German-speaking countries. Opportunities for international collaboration and academic mobility are factors that can increase alumni's motivation to maintain their German language skills.

Advances in information technology also provide opportunities for language preservation. Digital media such as online learning platforms, social media, and virtual communities can be alternative means of preserving German. However, the dominance of global English-language content can also reduce German language exposure for graduates. Therefore, the use of technology in language preservation needs to be adaptive and innovative to increase interest in using German.

Garvin and Mathiot also stated that language attitudes consist of three main components: language loyalty, language pride, and language awareness. These three aspects are important indicators of language retention. As graduates of the German language program at Yogyakarta State University (YSU), graduates with German language competency are expected to have a positive attitude toward the language. This positive attitude can influence the success of German language retention in post-campus life.

The social environment also plays a crucial role in language preservation. The lack of opportunities to practice German outside the classroom can easily lead to language decline. Therefore, establishing language communities, engaging in cultural exchanges, and collaborating with cultural institutions such as the Goethe-Institut are strategies that can support German language preservation. A multidimensional approach involving formal education, social communities, technology, and institutional support is necessary to maintain the continuity of German in Indonesia.

Several previous studies have also demonstrated the importance of language retention in various contexts. Ardi, (2018) examined local language retention in the translation process, while (Romanowski, 2021) examined language retention in the Polish diaspora community in Melbourne. Sunwell, (2019) examined Leya language retention in Zimbabwe, while (P. Veettil, Binu, & Karthikeyan, 2020) examined language retention in the Keralite community in Oman. Other studies have also shown that language retention is influenced by factors such as language loyalty, cultural pride, and language use within the social community (Rahim, Arifuddin, Herman Tahir, & Hasnur Ruslan, 2023), (Alfiah, 2023), (Fajri, 2021), (Gandaresmi & Rohaedi, 2023)

Furthermore, research by (Mpolada, 2020), (Kusyani, 2022), (Niron, Kami, & Usfal, 2025), (Prasasti, 2021), (Taryono dkk., 2025), (Dapubeang & Nahak, 2025) and (Hariyanto dkk., 2023) shows that language maintenance is influenced by globalization, social interaction, and language use in education and the media. These research findings indicate that positive public attitudes toward language and language use in everyday life are key factors in language maintenance.

Based on this description, German language retention among alumni of the German Language Education Program at Yogyakarta State University is an important topic to study. This study aims to identify German language retention strategies employed by alumni, factors influencing language retention, and the relationship between language retention and alumni's professions. Therefore, this research is expected to contribute to the development of sociolinguistic studies, particularly on foreign language retention in Indonesia.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a survey method. The descriptive approach was used to systematically describe the phenomenon of German language maintenance carried out by alumni based on data obtained from a questionnaire. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aimed to understand language maintenance strategies in depth based on alumni experiences.

The subjects of this study were alumni of the German Language Education Program at Yogyakarta State University who had graduated from formal educational institutions. The number of respondents in this study was 43. Data collection was conducted through an online questionnaire containing questions regarding German language use after graduation, language maintenance strategies, media used, motivation, and obstacles faced in maintaining German.

The validity procedures in this study were ensured through several strategies to maintain the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Triangulation was applied by comparing responses across the three categories of alumni to identify consistent patterns of language maintenance. To strengthen accuracy, member checking was conducted by asking selected respondents to review and confirm the interpretations of their answers.

In addition, peer debriefing was carried out by discussing the research process and preliminary results with colleagues in the German Language Education Program to minimize researcher bias. The study also employed thick description to provide detailed accounts of alumni strategies, motivations, and obstacles, allowing readers to judge the transferability of the findings. Finally, an audit trail was maintained by documenting every stage of data collection, reduction, categorization, and analysis to ensure transparency and replicability of the research process.

The data analysis technique was carried out through several stages: data collection by google form, data reduction, data categorization, and drawing conclusions. The data obtained from the questionnaire were then analyzed descriptively to identify the language maintenance strategies employed by the alumni. Furthermore, the results of the data analysis were also linked to Joshua A. Fishman's language maintenance theory to strengthen the interpretation of the research findings.

The criteria of respondent in this study divided into three, which are German Language Education graduates who do not teach German, German Language Education graduates who teach German, and German Language Education graduates who are continuing their studies. To provide a clearer picture of the alumni profile, this study specifically focused on graduates from the years 2022 to 2024, ensuring that the data reflected the most recent experiences of alumni in maintaining German language proficiency after completing their formal education.

Including this graduation period is significant because it captures the transitional phase of alumni entering professional domains or higher education, where language maintenance strategies are tested in real-life contexts. By narrowing the respondent pool to these years, the study highlights contemporary challenges and opportunities faced by alumni in sustaining German, while also allowing for more accurate interpretation of language retention trends in relation to current educational and occupational environments.

Data Analysis

Based on the results of a questionnaire collected from 43 respondents, it was found that German language use decreased after graduation. Twenty-six respondents (60.5%) stated they rarely used German in their daily lives, while 17 respondents (39.5%) still used German regularly. This data indicates that most alumni no longer use German intensively after graduating from formal educational institutions.

This decline in German use is due to changes in the domains in which the language is used. Most alumni work in fields not directly related to German, limiting opportunities to use the language. Furthermore, the alumni's social environment does not support the use of German in everyday life.

Despite this, alumni continue to employ various strategies to maintain their German language skills. Based on data analysis, German language retention strategies can be categorized into several main groups: using digital media, practicing conversation, reading German language materials, teaching German, using entertainment media, and participating in independent language learning.

The respondent criteria in this study are divided into three categories: German Language Education graduates who do not teach German, German Language Education graduates who teach German, and German Language Education graduates who are continuing their studies.

These categories were developed inductively from the alumni profiles, reflecting the most common post-graduation trajectories that influence opportunities for German language use. The categorization process was guided by the principle of occupational and academic relevance, ensuring that each group represented a distinct context of language maintenance.

Percentages were calculated by dividing the number of respondents in each category by the total sample size (43 alumni), then multiplying by 100 to obtain proportional distributions. This allowed the study to identify the relative weight of each group and compare their tendencies in language use, maintenance strategies, and challenges.

Furthermore, thematic coding was employed to analyze open-ended responses from the questionnaire. Codes were developed based on recurring themes such as “motivation,” “media use,” “professional integration,” and “obstacles,” which were then grouped into broader categories aligned with Fishman’s theory of language maintenance. This coding process ensured that qualitative insights complemented the quantitative percentages, providing a more nuanced interpretation of alumni experiences. By combining categorical grouping, percentage calculation, and thematic coding, the analysis achieved both descriptive clarity and interpretive depth in understanding German language retention among alumni.

3. Results and Discussion

Based on the questionnaire analysis of 43 alumni of the German Language Education Program at Yogyakarta State University, it can be further explained that the maintenance of German language competence is not a passive process but rather an active and adaptive effort shaped by personal motivation, professional demands, and social contexts. Alumni employ strategies such as engaging with German media, participating in cultural events, and leveraging digital platforms to ensure continuous exposure to the language.

In addition, the role of peer networks and alumni communities is significant, as they provide informal spaces for practice and mutual encouragement. These efforts highlight that while the frequency of German use may decline outside formal education, the language remains a valuable skill tied to identity, career opportunities, and intercultural engagement. Thus, the alumni’s strategies illustrate a shift from structured academic learning to self-directed, contextualized practices that sustain linguistic competence across diverse domains of use.

a. Frequency of German Language Use by Alumni

Data analysis shows that the frequency of German language use among alumni tends to be low. Of the 43 respondents, 26 (60.5%) stated they rarely use German, while 17 (39.5%) still use it relatively frequently.

Table 1. Frequency of German Language Use by Alumni

No	Frequency	Amount	Percentage
1	Often	17	39,5%
2	Seldom	26	60,5%
	Total	43	100%

Statistically, the 21% difference between the "rarely" and "often" categories indicate a dominant decline in German language use after graduation. This indicates a narrowing of the language's scope, particularly from academic to broader social domains that do not support German use. From (Fishman, 2012) perspective, this condition may reflect early signs of language shift due to limited everyday use. However, given that the sample size in this study is relatively small (43 respondents), this interpretation should be approached with caution.

The percentage difference may indicate a trend, but it cannot be generalized as a definitive pattern of language shift among all alumni. Instead, it should be understood as an indicative tendency that highlights potential vulnerabilities in language maintenance, warranting further investigation with larger and more diverse samples to confirm whether this decline is consistent across broader alumni populations. This cautious stance ensures that the findings remain credible while acknowledging the limitations of the dataset.

b. The Use of Digital Media as a Dominant Strategy

The analysis shows that digital media is a primary strategy for German language maintenance. Quantitatively, media use can be expressed as follows:

Table 2. Percentage of Use of German Language Maintenance Media

No.	Category	Percentage
1	Books/e-books	30,2%
2	YouTube	23,3%
3	Instagram	16,3%
4	TikTok	14,0%
5	Film	4,7%
6	Application (Duolingo/DW)	4,7%

This distribution shows that text-based media (books) and audiovisual media (YouTube) dominate language retention strategies. Combined, they account for over 53% of the total strategies, indicating that receptive language exposure (reading and listening) is the alumni's primary approach.

Within Fishman's framework, this phenomenon suggests that the media domain serves as a substitute for the academic domain, which is lost after graduation. However, the dominance of receptive activities also indicates that language retention has not yet fully reached the productive stage (speaking and writing).

c. Language Practice and Job Domain

Language practice strategies showed significant variation among alumni. Based on data analysis, the distribution of language practices is as follows:

Table 3. Distribution of Language Practice by Alumni

No.	Category	Percentage
1	Teaching German	20,9%
2	Talking with friends	14,0%
3	Live conversation	14,0%
4	Active reading	2,3%

Statistically, teaching activities were the most dominant strategy in the language practice category. This indicates that the work domain makes the most significant contribution to German language retention.

In comparison, alumni who teach are almost 1.5 times more likely to use language than those who practice regular conversation. This confirms Fishman's (1991) theory that the occupational domain is the most stable domain for language retention because it is routine, structured, and has a clear communicative function. More explicitly, teaching alumni demonstrate stronger language maintenance because their professional responsibilities require consistent use of German in instructional contexts, lesson preparation, and interaction with students. This occupational demand ensures that German remains an active and functional skill, reinforcing both fluency and accuracy. In contrast, non-teaching alumni often rely on informal or occasional use of German, such as casual conversations, media consumption, or personal study.

These practices, while valuable, lack the structured and obligatory nature of teaching, making their language use less frequent and more vulnerable to attrition. Consequently, the disparity between teaching and non-teaching alumni highlights the importance of occupational integration as a key factor in sustaining language retention, while also underscoring the need for external supports such as cultural programs or Goethe-Institut partnerships to provide non-teaching alumni with authentic contexts for continued German use.

d. *Motivation for Language Preservation*

Qualitatively, alumni motivation to maintain German can be understood through two main dimensions: instrumental motivation and integrative motivation, both of which reflect an individual's psychological orientation toward using a foreign language. Instrumental motivation refers to pragmatic, externally oriented drives, such as fulfilling job needs, accessing employment opportunities abroad, and academic interests such as further study. In this context, German is positioned as linguistic capital (*linguistic capital*) which has utilitarian value and can increase an individual's social and professional mobility. Therefore, individuals who view language as a strategic asset tend to have a higher tendency to maintain and develop their competence.

On the other hand, integrative motivation relates to an internal drive stemming from an interest in the culture, values, and identity inherent in the German language. This motivation reflects a desire to understand and, to some extent, affiliate with the community of German speakers. However, in this study's findings, integrative motivation demonstrated a relatively lower intensity than instrumental motivation. This indicates that emotional and cultural attachment to German has not yet become a dominant factor in encouraging language retention among alumni.

The dominance of instrumental motivation in this study indicates that German language retention is more influenced by rational considerations and practical needs than by identity orientation or cultural affiliation. Within the framework of language motivation theory, this condition confirms that the continuation of language use is strongly influenced by the extent to which the language has functional relevance in an individual's life. In other words, when German has concrete utility, for example in the context of work or education, the intensity of its use tends to increase significantly.

These findings also demonstrate a strong correlation between professional engagement and language retention rates. Graduates working in fields directly related to German, such as teaching, translation, or sectors involving international cooperation, demonstrated more consistent and sustained levels of language use. Conversely, graduates without professional engagement with the language tended to experience a more significant decline in usage. Thus, instrumental motivation plays not only an initial role in language retention but also a determining factor in maintaining the sustainability of language practices over the long term.

e. Internal Barriers

Internal barriers relate to individual psychological and cognitive factors that influence the ability and consistency in using German.

First, time constraints are a dominant factor hindering language practice. After entering the workforce, individuals' priorities shift from academic pursuits to professional demands. Consequently, the time allocated for maintaining German becomes severely limited. From a sociolinguistic perspective, this condition indicates a reduction in the intensity of language use in the personal domain, which directly impacts linguistic competence.

Second, language attrition is a cognitive phenomenon that occurs due to infrequent language use. Linguistically, lexical memory requires repeated activation to remain stable. When language is not actively used, a gradual process of forgetting occurs, particularly regarding vocabulary and grammatical structures. This reinforces the finding that language retention is highly dependent on frequency of use.

Third, fluctuating motivation reflects the instability of the internal drive to maintain the language. Intrinsic motivation that isn't reinforced by a tangible need (e.g., a job or further study) tends to weaken over time. In this context, alumni who lack a direct connection to German in their daily lives will experience a decline in commitment to maintaining the language.

f. External Barriers

External barriers relate to social environmental factors that influence opportunities for using German.

First, the lack of conversation partners is the most crucial obstacle to language maintenance. Language is essentially a tool for social communication, so without interaction, language skills cannot develop optimally. The absence of a community or social network that uses German means that alumni miss out on opportunities for active language practice.

Second, an unsupportive environment indicates a lack of language use in everyday life. In Fishman's (1991) theory, domains such as family, work, and community play a crucial role in language maintenance. When German is not used in these domains, language continuity is weakened.

Third, professions irrelevant to German are a crucial structural factor. Graduates working in non-language fields have no functional need to use German. As a result, the language is no longer part of routine practice. Conversely, graduates working as teachers or in fields related to German tend to have higher retention rates.

g. Analysis of External Barrier Dominance

Statistically, the predominance of respondents who rarely use German (60.5%) indicates that external barriers have a more significant influence than internal barriers. This confirms that language retention does not solely depend on individual ability but is heavily influenced by the surrounding social structure.

Within Fishman's framework, this situation indicates a weak domain of language use, leaving German without a functional space in the alumni's lives. In other words, even if individuals possess competence and motivation, without environmental support, language retention will be difficult to achieve.

This phenomenon also indicates a gap between linguistic competence (language competence) and actual use (language performance). Alumni may still possess language skills but lack the opportunity to use them.

h. Analytical Synthesis

This analytical synthesis indicates that barriers to German language retention among alumni are complex, multidimensional phenomena that cannot be reduced to a single variable. These barriers are formed through the dynamic interaction of cognitive, affective, and structural factors that influence each other simultaneously. From a cognitive perspective, the decline in vocabulary mastery reflects the process of language attrition, namely the weakening of lexical representation in long-term memory due to low frequency of activation and use.

This phenomenon is in line with the principle use it or lose it. In psycholinguistic studies, language skills that are not used regularly will gradually degrade. Furthermore, limited access to meaningful linguistic input also accelerates the forgetting process, resulting in a decline in both receptive and productive competencies.

From an affective perspective, fluctuations in motivation play a significant role in determining the intensity of an individual's involvement in language practice. Unstable motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, leads to low consistency in maintaining German language use. Within the framework of language motivation theory, this condition can be linked to weak integrative motivation and instrumental motivation, where individuals no longer have a strong incentive to integrate with the speaking community or to derive pragmatic benefits from using the language. As a result, German loses its personal relevance for graduates, ultimately leading to a decreased commitment to maintaining it.

Meanwhile, structural factors emerge as the most dominant variable influencing the sustainability of language maintenance. A social environment that does not provide space for German-language interaction results in limited domains of language use. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the sustainability of a language is largely determined by its distribution across various domains of life, such as

family, education, work, and social communities. When German no longer has a communicative function in these domains, it will experience functional marginalization.

Furthermore, the disconnect between German language education background and the professions pursued by alumni further limits opportunities for language use in professional contexts, thus accelerating the process of language shift (*language shift*).

It can be emphasized that external factors, particularly structural ones, play a major role as determinants because they directly shape the ecosystem of language use. The absence of a supportive environment not only limits language practice but also indirectly impacts an individual's cognitive and affective aspects. Under these conditions, even if an individual possesses adequate linguistic competence, without real opportunities to use it, this competence will erode.

Therefore, the preservation of the German language requires a systemic and sustainable approach, one that relies not only on individual efforts but also involves the collective reconstruction of the language ecosystem. This reconstruction includes creating social spaces that enable authentic communicative interactions, such as through the formation of active and participatory language communities. Furthermore, increasing the intensity of social interactions in German needs to be facilitated through communicative and contextual activities, so that the language is positioned not merely as an object of learning, but as a living communication tool. Furthermore, the integration of German into the professional sphere is crucial to ensuring the continued pragmatic function of German, for example through job opportunities, international collaboration, or language competency-based activities.

Without a concrete, relevant, and sustainable domain of use, German faces the potential for a significant reduction in its communicative function. In the long term, this could lead to language shift, with German gradually being replaced by a more dominant language with greater utilitarian value in everyday life. Therefore, language preservation must be understood as a social process requiring strong structural support, not simply an individual responsibility.

i. Discussion Based on Fishman's Theory

Based on the theoretical framework proposed by (Fishman, 2012), language maintenance is largely determined by the existence, distribution, and continued use of language in various domains of social life. In this perspective, language is not only understood as a symbolic system, but also as a social practice whose existence depends on its communicative function in certain domains, such as media, work, social interaction, and education. The results of this study indicate that the use of German by alumni is spread across several domains, with a quite striking dominance in the media domain, namely around 53%.

Meanwhile, use in the social domain was recorded at around 28%, followed by the work domain at 20.9%, and involvement in the relatively limited and unstructured informal education domain.

This distribution empirically demonstrates a significant imbalance between domains, particularly between receptive domains and those requiring active language production. The dominance of the media domain indicates that most graduates engage more in receptive activities, such as reading, listening, or consuming German-language content, than in productive language use in real-life interactions. Conversely, the work and social domains which inherently demand productive skills such as speaking and writing show lower proportions. This reflects limitations in actively actualizing communicative competence, so that German tends to be maintained at the level of comprehension, rather than interactive use.

To overcome these limitations, several deeper strategies can be emphasized. First, opportunities for institutional intervention are crucial, such as integrating German into interdisciplinary programs, alumni teaching workshops, or professional certification schemes. Universities and institutions could collaborate with the Goethe-Institut to embed German into career development pathways, ensuring that language use is not confined to academic study but extends into professional practice. Second, the creation of digital language communities would allow alumni to sustain interactive German use through online platforms, virtual meetups, and collaborative projects.

These communities could mirror the success of English and Japanese language groups in Indonesia, which thrive through fandoms, online forums, and professional networks, thereby transforming passive consumption into active participation. Third, international collaboration programs such as student exchanges, internships, joint research, or cross-border alumni networks would provide authentic contexts for German use, embedding the language into global academic and professional trajectories.

Taken together, these interventions would not only balance receptive and productive domains but also elevate German from a latent skill into a dynamic communicative resource. By combining institutional support, digital engagement, and international collaboration, alumni could sustain German as both a professional asset and a social practice, ensuring its long-term vitality in Indonesia's multilingual landscape.

In sociolinguistic studies, this imbalance between receptive and productive use can be interpreted as an indication that language maintenance is still at a passive stage (*passive maintenance*), where the language remains recognized and understood, but is not consistently used as a means of communication in everyday life. This phenomenon has implications for the limited strengthening of overall linguistic competence, as productive skills play a crucial role in maintaining the

stability and sustainability of a language.

Furthermore, when viewed through (Fishman, 2012) perspective, these conditions do not yet meet the ideal prerequisites for sustainable language maintenance. Fishman emphasized that the survival of a language depends heavily on its ability to function actively and repeatedly in various domains of life, especially domains that have high social and economic value, such as work and social interaction. When a language only survives in a limited, receptive domain, its communicative function is reduced, thereby increasing the risk of language shift (*language shift*) in the long term.

These findings indicate that German language retention among graduates remains vulnerable, as it lacks a balanced distribution of domains and productive, contextual use. Therefore, strategic efforts are needed to expand the domains of language use, particularly in the social and professional spheres, so that German remains not merely a passive language skill but also an active and sustainable communication practice in everyday life.

When compared to other foreign language communities in Indonesia, the maintenance of German appears less robust. For instance, English enjoys widespread integration into education, business, and digital communication, making it a dominant foreign language with strong everyday relevance. Similarly, Japanese benefits from cultural popularity through anime, manga, and J-pop, as well as industrial ties with Japanese companies, which provide authentic contexts for language use. In contrast, German alumni often face limited opportunities outside academic or teaching domains, which restricts the language's vitality.

This condition can be further explained through several theoretical perspectives. From the lens of Language Attrition Theory, the decline in German use among non-teaching alumni reflects the natural erosion of language skills when they are not consistently practiced in productive domains such as work or social interaction. Attrition highlights how receptive skills (reading, listening) tend to be retained longer than productive skills (speaking, writing), which aligns with the imbalance observed in alumni practices.

Meanwhile, Ethnolinguistic Vitality theory emphasizes the importance of institutional support, demographic strength, and cultural prestige in sustaining a language. Compared to English and Japanese, German in Indonesia has weaker vitality because its community is smaller, its institutional presence is limited, and its cultural visibility is less prominent.

Finally, Communities of Practice Theory suggests that language maintenance thrives when speakers participate in shared practices and social networks where the language is actively used. English and Japanese communities in Indonesia benefit from strong communities of practice whether in professional networks, fandoms, or industry collaborations while German alumni lack equivalent spaces, making their language use more fragmented and vulnerable.

Taken together, these theories underscore that German language maintenance in Indonesia requires deliberate interventions to counter attrition, strengthen ethnolinguistic vitality, and build communities of practice. Alumni programs, Goethe-Institut partnerships, and digital language communities could serve as practical strategies to embed German into everyday life, ensuring it remains an active communicative resource rather than a passive skill.

j. Synthesis of Findings

Overall, the results of this study indicate a downward trend in German language use among alumni, as quantitatively reflected by approximately 60.5% of respondents who admitted to experiencing a reduction in the frequency of German language use after leaving formal education. This phenomenon indicates a shift in language function from being active and productive to becoming more limited and sporadic. In this context, the presence of digital media emerged as the most dominant retention strategy, with a utilization rate exceeding 50%, indicating that alumni tend to maintain exposure to German through technology-based receptive activities, such as accessing audiovisual content, reading digital texts, or interacting limitedly on online platforms.

On the other hand, the occupational domain has been shown to play the most significant role in determining the continued use of German. This suggests that the relevance of language to professional needs is a key factor in maintaining the intensity and sustainability of language practice. When a language has utilitarian value in a work context, the likelihood of active and sustained use is much higher. Conversely, when there is no link between language competence and professional demands, the language tends to be marginalized in everyday life.

Furthermore, this study also confirms that external barriers are a major factor contributing to the decline in German language use. The absence of a supportive environment, a limited community of speakers, and limited opportunities to use the language in real-life interactions are structural obstacles that significantly hinder language maintenance. These external factors not only limit language use but also indirectly impact cognitive and affective aspects, such as decreased vocabulary retention and weakened motivation.

Thus, these findings indicate that German language retention among alumni is still ongoing, but is limited, partial, and has not yet reached an optimal level. This limitation is primarily due to the lack of functional integration of German into various domains of daily life, both socially and professionally. Without contextual and sustained integration, the language tends to remain a latent competency that is not fully realized in real-life communication practices.

One potential solution to address this limitation is the establishment of partnerships with Goethe-Institut, which could provide alumni with structured opportunities to engage in German language activities beyond the academic setting. Collaborations with Goethe-Institut may include access to cultural programs, language courses, professional workshops, and networking events that integrate German into both social and professional spheres. Such partnerships would not only enhance alumni motivation but also create authentic contexts for language use, thereby supporting more sustainable and functional German language maintenance.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that German language retention among alumni of the German Language Education Program at Yogyakarta State University is still ongoing but limited and suboptimal. This is indicated by a dominant decline in language use (60.5%), indicating a narrowing of the domain of use after alumni leave the academic environment. Although various retention strategies are still implemented especially through receptive digital media productive language use in social and professional domains remains relatively low.

External factors, particularly an unsupportive environment and a lack of connection to the profession, are the main determinants hindering the continued use of the language. Therefore, German language maintenance requires stronger integration into various domains of life, especially in social and work contexts, to function actively and sustainably.

5. References

- Alfiah, A. (2023). Optimalisasi pendidikan informal sebagai alternatif pemertahanan bahasa Jawa. *Jurnal Ikadbudi*, 12(1), 57–73. <https://doi.org/10.21831/ikadbudi.v12i1.76048>
- Ardi, H. (2018). Local Language Maintenance In Translating English Text. *JEELL (Journal of English Education, Linguistics and Literature)*, 5(1), 101. <https://doi.org/10.32682/jeell.v5i1.980>
- Dapubeang, & Nahak. (2025). Pemertahanan Bahasa Tetun pada Komunitas Pengungsi Eks Timor Timur di Desa Oebelo Kabupaten Kupang. *Jurnal Onoma: Pendidikan, Bahasa, dan Sastra*, 11(1), 662–672. <https://doi.org/10.30605/onoma.v11i1.4846>
- Fajri, N. C. (2021). Upaya Pemertahanan Bahasa Arek Suroboyo. *sarasvati*, 3(2), 151. <https://doi.org/10.30742/sv.v3i2.1738>
- Fishman, J. A. (2012). Language Maintenance, Language Shift, and Reversing Language Shift. Dalam T. K. Bhatia & W. C. Ritchie (Ed.), *The Handbook of Bilingualism and Multilingualism* (1 ed., hlm. 466–494). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118332382.ch19>

- Gandaresmi, T. A. G., & Rohaedi, E. (2023). Urgensi Penggunaan Bahasa Sunda Dalam Proses Pendidikan Di Pesantren Modern Sebagai Upaya Pemertahanan Bahasa Daerah. *JALADRI : Jurnal Ilmiah Program Studi Bahasa Sunda*, 9(2), 97–104. <https://doi.org/10.33222/v9i2.3415>
- Hariyanto, P., Zalmansyah, A., Endardi, J., Sukesti, R., Sumadi, S., Abidin, Z., ... Ratnawati, R. (2023). Language Maintenance and Identity: A Case of Bangka Malay. *International Journal of Society, Culture and Language*, 11(2 (Themed Issue on Language, Discourse, and Society)). <https://doi.org/10.22034/ijscsl.2023.2002013.3030>
- Kusyani, D. (2022). PEMERTAHANAN BAHASA INDONESIA TERHADAP PENGARUH BAHASA ASING PADA ERA SOCIETY 5.0. *Pedagogi: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan*, 8(2), 136–142. <https://doi.org/10.47662/pedagogi.v8i2.391>
- Mpolada, A. F. (2020). *Pemertahanan Bahasa Indonesia Di Daerah Napudesa Wuasa Kecamatan Lore Utara Kabupaten Poso (Kajian Sociolinguistik)*. 5(4).
- Niron, Y. M. L., Kami, P., & Usfal, N. (2025). Pemertahanan Bahasa Helong Melalui Penerjemahan Cerita Rakyat Berbasis Ideologi Pemerasingan. *Jurnal Lazuardi*, 7(4), 57–80. <https://doi.org/10.53441/jl.Vol7.Iss4.139>
- P. Veetil, R., Binu, P. M., & Karthikeyan, J. (2020). Language Maintenance and Language Shift among Keralites in Oman. *Arab World English Journal*, 11(4), 319–327. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol11no4.21>
- Prasasti, T. I. (2021). Upaya Pemertahanan Bahasa Indonesia terhadap Kesalahan Berbahasa sebagai Dampak dari Film Kartun Upin dan Ipin oleh Siswa SD Plus MIP MEDAN. *Pedagogika: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Kependidikan*, 1(2), 48–52. <https://doi.org/10.57251/ped.v1i2.138>
- Rahim, Arifuddin, A., Herman Tahir, & Hasnur Ruslan. (2023). Pola Pemertahanan Bahasa Indonesia Bagi Warga Negara Indonesia di Belanda: *Jurnal Onoma: Pendidikan, Bahasa, dan Sastra*, 9(2), 1411–1422. <https://doi.org/10.30605/onoma.v9i2.2791>
- Romanowski, P. (2021). A deliberate language policy or a perceived lack of agency: Heritage language maintenance in the Polish community in Melbourne. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 25(5), 1214–1234. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13670069211000850>
- Sunwell, K. (2019). Language Maintenance among Minority Languages with Special Reference to Leya Language of Chief Mukuni, Southern Province. *International Journal of Language & Linguistics*, 6(2). <https://doi.org/10.30845/ijll.v6n2p10>
- Taryono, M. R., Redita Putri Intan Elfiti, Yuliana Pakpahan, Wulanda Tambunan, Nur Afifa Alfina Ramadhani, Rahmalia Khairunissa Kurnia, ... Kamaluddin. (2025). Pemertahanan Vitalitas Bahasa Daerah dalam Masyarakat Multietnis melalui Pendokumentasian Pemilihan Bahasa Siswa Sekolah Dasar di Kota

Sorong Papua Barat Daya. *Abdimas: Papua Journal of Community Service*, 7(1), 29–37. <https://doi.org/10.33506/pjcs.v7i1.4018>

Wilian, S. (2010). Pemertahanan Bahasa dan Kestabilan Kedwibahasaan pada Penutur Bahasa Sasak di Lombok. *Masyarakat Linguistik Indonesia*.