

A pleasure to learn

A What's the most useful way of learning a language? Is it writing essays or doing grammar exercises? The answer is clear – whatever you like doing. Evidence shows that the most successful language learners are those who find something they like to do with their chosen language and do it again and again. And it doesn't really matter what the activity is.

B Some of the clearest evidence of this has come through research into reading. Stephen D. Krashen, a professor at the University of California, decided to look at how well language learners who read for fun did in grammar tests. He discovered that they did better than people who went on courses and it wasn't important what books they read.

Factors affecting success in grammar tests

Regular reading 51.6%

Formal study 7.2%

Time in place where language is spoken 5.2%

To prove this, he gave students books from a series called *Sweet Valley High*. These are popular books about teenage life. Although the books' literary quality may not have been high, the readers made good progress in vocabulary, reading, and speaking tests. In a separate case study, a girl improved her writing so much that her angry teacher accused her of copying. The only explanation she had was that she'd started reading regularly.

C It's not just reading stories that can help. Studying online may have a similar effect. Sugata Mitra, a professor at the University of Newcastle, proved that in parts of the world where there are no schools, children will learn to navigate the web in foreign languages and also teach themselves academic subjects if they have access to the internet. Not only that, but the children in his experiments learnt to speak new languages with good accents. Newspapers have also reported a growing group of 'polyglots' (people who speak many languages) who are using the internet to learn unusual languages. One of this group, Timothy Doner, aged 16, now speaks over 20 languages and is currently learning

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 - C is only useful when you read romantic stories.
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- 2 Sugata Mitra's research showed that
 - A children from poor countries are more motivated than others.
 - B it is not necessary to have a teacher to learn.
 - C children from poor countries prefer using computers to attending schools.
 - D children can use the internet better than a teacher.

Hindi through a diet of Bollywood soap operas, pop music, and regular chats with Hindi speakers.

40 **I** Though any contact with a language is useful, some kinds of contact may be more useful than others. For example, studies on computer-gaming in a foreign language have shown that watching people play computer games may help more than actually playing them because you
45 have time to listen to or read the language in the games. This shows that being exposed to a language is not enough; it's necessary to focus on it. Researchers are still unsure about exactly how such casual contact helps learning. But almost certainly, using language repeatedly is essential and
50 enjoyment encourages us to do this. This does not mean that language courses are a waste of time. Krashen also discovered that if you want to take an exam in English, doing a course will be as useful as reading for fun. But doing both is clearly best.

- 3 Playing computer games probably won't help you learn a language
- A as much as using English in other ways.
 - B if you watch your friends play them.
 - C if you don't play for a long time.
 - D if they have too much language content.
- 4 Doing a language course to help you prepare for an exam
- A will not help you pass.
 - B is not as useful as reading if you want to do well.
 - C can help you pass as much as reading a book can.
 - D works if you read at the same time.