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Sent to the Hindustan Times

Why this obsession with early language instruction?

An expert committee has recommended instruction in three languages for very young children, with demanding standards ("The three-language formula is a bad idea," June 3).

Why this obsession with early language instruction? The committee appears to be unaware of the research showing that language acquisition is possible and can thrive for older language acquirers, adults as well as older children.

This happens when acquirers obtain comprehensible, highly interesting input that is rich in language, in the form of listening to stories and reading for pleasure. In one study done by Beniko Mason, students of English as a foreign language ages 21 to 78 made very impressive gains in English competence simply by reading English books for pleasure for periods ranging from a few months to several years. All gained at approximately the same rate.

Stephen Krashen
Professor Emeritus
Rossier School of Education
University of Southern California