Unit 1 Learning languages

Task 1 Speaking

Discuss these questions.

1. *Which of these subjects have you studied? At what age did you study them? Which subjects are/ were you good at? Which of them do you consider relevant to you future career? Which would you like to study further?*

mathematics	history	genetics	physics	chemistry	sociology
philosophy	languages	economics	statistics	biology	

2. *What is a person called who specialises in the subject? Which is the stressed syllable in the word?*

Task 2 Vocabulary

1. *Complete the sentences with one of these verbs in the correct form.*

skip   attend   revise   re-sit   do   apply   get   study   fail   pass   pay

a) I hated maths at school. I didn´t do any of the homework, never …………… attention to the teacher and ……………….. classes whenever I could. Of course, the first time round I ………… my exams and had to ………… them the following year. The second time round I ……………, which I was really pleased about. It really boosted my confidence and I decided to …………. to one of the better universities. To my amazement, I got in and I´m there now – studying maths!

b) Marc´s a very bright student. He always …………….. very well when he was at school. I´m sure he´ll ………… a good degree, even though he doesn´t …………… hard. Of course, he hardly ever ………….. lectures or ………… the things we´ve done. I sometimes resent the fact he´s so clever!

What sort of student are you? What are the good and bad things about your studies?

2. *What is the one word all these expressions collocate with?*
intensive – introductory – intermediate – advanced – refresher – do – take – enrol on – sign up for – withdraw from – drop out of – complete – pass – fail

Task 3 Language and culture

1. *Think of answers for the questions below.*
   a) How easy is it to learn a language?
   b) Which languages are spoken most in the world?
   c) How many languages are endangered?
   d) What is the best way to learn a language?

2. *Match the answers 1-4 with the questions a-d in 1.*
   1. It is claimed that 2 500 languages are in danger of disappearing. Some have less than 1 000 speakers.
   2. This varies from person to person – no single way has been found. If you understand your learning style, you can identify the way that works best for you.
   3. The most spoken languages are Mandarin Chinese and English. Spanish is the third most common language.
   4. It is easy to learn a language that is similar to your own. Therefore, e.g. a Polish speaker will find Slavic languages easier to learn than others.

3. *At what age did you begin learning English? Do you think there is an age when you can learn more easily?*
   Read the text below. What does it tell you about the best age for language learning? Does it suggest a correlation between language learning and age?

   Researchers constantly disagree about age and the ability to learn language. One theory is that there is a ´critical period´ and if you try to learn after this period it is more difficult. Others disagree and believe it is other factors that make it more difficult. One study from 1989 investigated how quickly immigrants learnt a language and found that those who began youngest were able to learn the most.

4. *Read the text below about a study of language learning, then draw a bar chart and complete it with information from the text.*

   The bar chart illustrates the results of an English test taken by four groups of immigrants, all of whom arrived in the USA when they were different ages. The groups were made up of those who arrived in the USA between ages 3 and 7, those aged 8 to 10, a third group covering 11 to 15 and finally those who emigrated after the age of 17.
   Overall, it is evident that the immigrants who were younger at their time of arrival achieved a much greater level of proficiency in the language. Those who were 3 to 7 when they emigrated scored an average of 98 percent in the test, the highest overall outcome. However, this level of proficiency dropped rapidly for those who arrived age 17 or over; the oldest group achieved an average score of 76 per cent, which is the lowest proportion. This trend is further supported by the scores of the other age groups; those who arrived aged 8 to 10 also did better than those arriving aged 11 to 15, achieving 93 per cent and 85 per cent respectively.
   In conclusion, we can see that the bar chart demonstrates a consistent decrease in the proficiency levels of immigrants according to their age on arrival. It seems the younger they arrive, the quicker they are likely to learn English to a proficient degree.

5. *Complete the sentences with an appropriate linking word or expression. More than one answer may be possible.*

although – but – despite – due to – for example – for instance – firstly – furthermore – in addition to – in order to – moreover – nevertheless – next – on the other hand – so – such as – therefore – unless – whereas – while

a) It is hard to learn a language. _____ many people make the effort.

b) _____ he frequently travelled abroad, he never spoke a word of a foreign language.

c) _____ the fact that they didn´t read English, the prisoners were unaware of what they were signing.

d) The population has risen dramatically and _____ there is pressure on housing.

e) _____ learning various sports, the children said they hadn´t got much exercise.

f) You can study a number of courses, _____ art or interior design.

g) The exam was tough _____ she passed it with flying colours.

h) Students will not be excused from class _____ they have a doctor´s note.

i) _____ James is very good at languages, his brother Tom is absolutely hopeless.

6. *Discuss.*
Learning a second language is often seen as important nowadays but many people fail to do so. What measures would help more people to learn?