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DISCUSSION CLUBS AS A MODERN WAY to LEARN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

English is the language of international communication. For those who speak it fluently, all the doors of the world are open to them. Travel, communication with foreign friends, business negotiations in English, education in the most prestigious universities.

There are currently over 7000 linguistic units in the world. There are many criteria for determining the popularity of a certain language, which often makes it difficult to compile statistics. One language may lead in the ratings according to the number of its speakers, another according to the prevalence in the world, the third according to the ease of use in a certain field of activity. For example, while not as an official language, English is considered popular and widely spoken in many countries around the world.

In this paper, the popularity of English is defined by the number of its speakers. Thus, according to statistics [1], English is the first language in the ranking, with 1.2 billion speakers. Second place is occupied by Chinese, with 1.11 billion speakers.

There are several reasons for the high popularity of English: historical, linguistic and information-technological.

The historical reasons include a period in the history of England from the 16th to the 18th century. The colonial policy of Britain [2] contributed to the rise of the English language in many areas during this period.

Linguistic reasons include flexibility of English language and its ability to change under the influence of external factors. English belongs to the Indo-European language family (Germanic group) [3], but over the centuries, it has interacted with French, Scandinavian, Germanic dialects and Latin. The interaction of English with others and its modernization has had a significant impact on its rise in popularity.

Herbert Marshall McLuhan, a Canadian cultural scientist, philologist and literary critic, coined the expression «Global Village» in his book «The Gutenberg galaxy: the making of typographic man». At first, it implied the Internet, but later it began to refer to the entire globe. The author suggested that, thanks to electronic technology, our world will be reduced to the size of a village. The quantity of information, the speed of its exchange, the openness of the information space unites people and at the same time a great deal of content is created exactly in the English language. The English-speaking information field is the information-technical reason for the popularity of the English language.

The EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) is the world's largest ranking of English proficiency among adults in non-English speaking countries. The report is

based on the scores of 2.2 million people in 100 countries and regions (2020). The Index is based on the EF Test of English (EF Test of English). The EF EPI is divided into 5 proficiency levels: very high level, high level, medium level, low level, very low level. According to the EF EPI score for the year 2020 [4], the first place in English proficiency is occupied by the Netherlands. EF EPI score – 652; position in Europe – 1/34. The Republic of Belarus took 40th place out of 100 with a score of 513. This position in the rating refers to the average level of English proficiency.

A club is generally understood to be a meeting of people with an interest in a particular place. Language clubs are designed to train verbal communication between people in a foreign language. Groups can be small (up to 8 people) or quite large (20 – 25 people). For each meeting, participants choose a topic that is relevant and interesting to them. The role of the club leader or chairperson is to ensure that everyone is able to communicate fully.

The goal of the meeting is to improve the language skills, to overcome the language barrier, to develop the understanding of the speaker's speech, to improve the pronunciation, to make interesting acquaintances.

At present there are about 50 English speaking clubs in Belarus. In this paper we will focus on the conversation clubs which are in Minsk. They can be divided into paid and free ones according to their availability. Among paid conversation clubs we can single out the following: KickStart English, Bright Lights School, EN Discovery. Among the free conversation clubs, we can highlight the following: Fialta English Club, English Debating Club, Student English Club. It should be noted that the Student English Club is a student's speaking club, created in Belarus State University.

KickStart English is the most famous English language school in Minsk. That is because the teachers here are British. So, students have a chance to listen to and learn the perfect English accent. KickStart English provides an extensive selection of courses and conversation clubs. The cost of attending conversation courses is 230 BYN per course [5].

Bright Lights School is a school of English, whose courses are created by modern methods and are designed for people of all ages and levels of proficiency. Topics that are discussed in the clubs need to be controlled by the school administration. The cost of attending conversation courses and clubs is 158 BYN per course [6].

EN Discovery is a school of English with an English conversation club. Among the topics for conversation are: Debate Club, American History Club, Ted Talks Video Club, Conversation Club, Movie club and Modern America. The cost of attending conversation courses is from 135 BYN per course [7].

As noted before, among the free conversation clubs are Fialta English Club, English Debating Club and Student English Club.

Fialta English Club is the largest and most popular conversation club in Minsk. to get here you need to apply in advance in the social network. The organizers choose 30 people out of all applicants. The demand is based on the fact that the meetings are

held thanks to the educational centre «Fialta». The meetings take place once a week, every Friday at 19:30.

The English Debating Club is a conversation club which attendance is conditional on having a library card for the A. S. Pushkin Library. Meetings are held once a fortnight on Fridays at 6.15pm.

The Student English Club is a student conversation club at the Belarusian State University. The only rules are «no Russian» and a name badge. Meetings are held every Saturday at 14:00.

Learning a foreign language is a long process. Despite the fact that English is not one of the top difficult languages like Chinese, the difficulty of learning it cannot be ruled out.

There are many linguistic factors that make a language easy or difficult for different speakers. Six such factors are most commonly identified [8].

Factor one: grammatical concepts. The factor takes into account differences in word order, number of verb tenses and other relative native language topics.

Factor two: language family. The factor takes into account both the belonging of a language to a particular family and the presence of related and borrowed words.

Factor three: sounds and tones. From the name, the presence of new sounds and tones in the foreign language is taken into account.

Factor four: writing system. The factor takes into account the writing system and script.

Factor five: cultural distance. This factor answers the question: are there significant differences in cultural concepts in the language?

Factor six: language resources. This factor refers to the number of resources available for language learning: textbooks, videos, audio materials.

The most convenient and correct way to learn a foreign language is systematisation. Language exams such as TOEFL and IELTS are also based on systematisation. They are structured into four sections: listening, reading, writing, speaking. In order to identify the most difficult part of learning English, a survey was conducted with 68 participants. The survey found that the most difficult part was speaking: 43 percent of the total number of votes. The need therefore arose to identify the problems behind this difficulty and to find ways of solving them.

A second survey revealed the three most frequent explanations for the fear of speaking a foreign language.

The first problem is the fear of making a mistake in words or phrases. It is rather a problem of comfort in communication. A solution can be to mentally simulate the situation and to think about the answers to the questions that the interlocutor may ask.

The second problem is the fear of one's own pronunciation. The solution to this problem is to practice speaking and to develop the awareness that mistakes are an integral part of learning. In order to train your pronunciation, you need to speak. This implies the need to learn both phonetics and to communicate with native speakers.

The third problem is insufficient vocabulary. This is a fairly common problem, the solution to which consists of two parts. The first part is expanding the vocabulary by memorising words, phrases and turns of phrase. The second part is the actual application of the learned word constructions. Here a problem often arises

in memorizing new words, which can be solved in many ways: composing sentences with new words and phrases, watching videos in which native speakers use similar phrases. In addition, one of the common ways of memorising foreign words is to think of associations [9].

In conclusion, the process of learning a foreign language depends directly on the personal qualities of a person. For successful language learning and application, not only knowledge of grammar and constant vocabulary increase is necessary, but also training of such personal qualities as confidence, patience and perseverance.

Thus, we can conclude that learning spoken English is quite difficult. The first half of the problem is the cost of attending clubs and the other half is the difficult process of getting into a club because of the large number of applicants. By conducting a survey, it was found that 97 people out of the 115 surveyed were interested in the group study of spoken English. The survey was conducted among the first-year students of the Faculty of Law of the International University «MITSO». It shows that the need for conversation clubs is high, and university-based conversation clubs are badly needed.

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