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## TEACHING ENGLISH TO ADULT LEARNERS WITHIN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AT UNIVERSITY: BARRIERS AND MOTIVATION FACTORS

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The article aims to conduct the experimental research of the adult learners' readiness to learn English, investigate adult learners' barriers to study English and develop the model of English teaching environment for adult learners within university extracurricular activity based on the collaborative teaching strategy. The hypothesis of the research is that motivation to study the English language among adult learners will be increased after the investigation of their learning barriers and work on their minimisation in the conditions of university extracurricular work within the collaborative learning strategy. In order to achieve the purpose of the research, a set of scientific methods was used: analysis, synthesis, complex analytical method, conceptual system method, factual method, descriptive method, questioning, testing, observing, interviewing and generalisation. Respondents were 52 adult learners (age range was from 40 to 55) who were the participants of the Ukraine-Norway project, who attended the course "English for Business". The respondents were united into three age groups: 40-45 years; 45-50 years; 50-55 years. The majority of respondents (51%) showed a high level of a readiness to continue the English study process after completing the proposed course. The application of the suggested in the article model will minimise adult learners' barriers to study English, increase the level of adult learners' motivation to learn English, create a positive learning environment, engage adult learners into the English study process as active participants, promote collaboration and support within the peers.

**Keywords:** English language; adult learners; collaborative teaching strategy; learning barriers; motivation; university extracurricular activities.

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### Introduction

The traditional attitude towards the target audience of English language teaching is that it is usually represented by kids, schoolchildren, young students and young specialists for their professional purposes. The teaching process is considered to be challenging when the English language students' position is occupied by adult learners. Today this idea is supported by parents, educators and policymakers to prepare young generation for a future in globalised multilingual world (Cozma, 2015).

Nowadays, we live in the age of technology development and high intellectual competition, and every modern person is challenged to meet the conditions of today and be competitive. This can only be achieved by studying to obtaining new competences, in particular foreign language skills. For this reason, most adults feel the need to acquire new knowledge, especially in English language, for self-development, self-improvement and skills development that make a person competitive in the labour market.

Adults' interest and motivation for English learning may change over time, reflecting changes in opportunities for participation, employment status, workplaces, migration and individual changes related to adult development (Settersten & Lovegreen, 1998).

The emergence of information society, introduction of new technology, development of international cooperation and the mobility on a labour market increases the importance of adult education and English language learning in particular. Understanding motivation and barriers to adult learning is urgent issue due to the current situation in the globalised world (Chao, 2009).

In the context of our research, adults are understood to be military servicemen, United Forces Operation (UFO), formerly ATO, members and their family members. After the end of the military career, or after returning from the war zone, it is this category of adult population that is at risk, because, due to their long stay in the war zone, they are subject to prolonged traumatised and it is important for them after returning to civilian life to begin life anew with the existing experience (Kolenichenko, 2019).

Therefore, there is a need in the society to adapt the above-mentioned population to the conditions of civilian life. It is possible to satisfy this necessity in Chernihiv thanks to the international project Ukraine-

Norway, which is being implemented on the basis of Chernihiv National University of Technology. Adults, such as military personnel, ATO / UFO participants and their family members can gain new knowledge in the context of university extracurricular work. In the article, we focus on the specificities of teaching English to adult students of the project – servicemen, ATO / UFO members and their family members, as they experience fears and barriers related to foreign language acquisition during their learning. This requires a specific approach to this category of students and the use of a relevant teaching strategy.

The suggested collaborative teaching strategy of English to adult learners encourages learners to apply their language abilities and produce more target-like results (Swain & Lapkin, 2000). Collaborative activities positively enhance the educational experiences of adult learners and increase their motivation (Severinsen et al., 2018).

Therefore, the development of the model of English teaching environment for adult learners within university extracurricular activity based on the collaborative teaching strategy is urgent.

### Literature review

The first major effort to study the engagement of adults in education was performed in 1991 in the USA. The National Household Education Survey provided detailed national data on adult education participation rates and participants' characteristics measuring the level of engagement and reasons why potential participants do not participate in different forms of adult education. Following the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), we use the term "barriers" in this paper as the factors that inhibit or prevent adult learners from participation in some activities, in particular learning English (NCES, 1998). Yap's research (2009) connected the facilitation of learning among adult students with the understanding of how they are motivated to learn and what learning barriers they have.

The theoretical framework for our study considers interaction and collaboration as essential elements for English language learning development among adult learners (Sousa et al., 2019). Collaborative activities positively enhance the educational experiences of adult learners and increase their motivation to learn English (Chao, 2009).

The studies (Severinsen et al., 2018) analyse the main English teaching strategies for adult learners, defining the advantages and limitation for them. According to the particularity of our target audience in the context of our research, we consider that it is important to focus on the collaborative learning teaching strategy. Collaborative learning promotes interconnected work as all participants share and learn more about each other (DeCapua et al. 2018). Additionally to studying, participants work collaboratively to support each other (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2016).

The research (Brooks et al., 2001) highlights the importance of ensuring the appropriate learning environment for effective studying process. They note the need to provide the adult learners with the comfortable and positive climate and facilitating role of the teacher.

Our research is based on previous work within the "Ukraine-Norway" project as well as the results of the pedagogical experiment and the developed model of formation of intercultural competences by learning English (Sandal et al., 2019; Kolenichenko, 2019).

Thus, most of the existing studies are focused on the research of motivation and barriers of participation in the adult education, mostly within formal curricular. So, such barriers mostly are related to the course content, non-flexible approach in a schedule and organisational approach. In our paper we will focus on the conditions of university extracurricular work, in particular the project environment with a range of non-formal education methods, as an efficient way of adult learners support and learning barriers' minimisation. In our opinion, the investigation of English learning barriers among adult learners is a prerequisite for the development of motivation factors for them.

**The aim** of this article is to conduct the experimental research of the adult learners' readiness to learn English and continue the English study process after completing the proposed course, investigate adult learners' barriers to study English and develop the model of English teaching environment for adult learners within university extracurricular activity based on the collaborative teaching strategy.

We **hypothesise** that motivation to study English language among adult learners will be increased after the investigation of their learning barriers and work on their minimisation in the conditions of university extracurricular work within the collaborative learning strategy.

### Methods

*Research design.* The following methods have been used to conduct the experimental research:

- empirical – questioning in the format of interviewing and focus-group, pedagogical observation;

– statistical and mathematical methods for quantitative and qualitative analysis of data obtained during the research.

*Instruments and procedures.* In the course of the first stage of the experimental research to determine adult learners' readiness to master foreign language skills before the training, the method of questioning (interviewing) was used. The interviewing list of questions was constructed in such a way that we could determine the level of readiness (high, medium, low), the period when the previous English language classes were taught, the purpose of learning a foreign language, etc. The interviewing list included six questions:

- 1) "Have you been learning English for a long time?"
- 2) "Are you ready to learn English today?"
- 3) "Are you uncertain about learning a foreign language?"
- 4) "For what purpose do you study English?"
- 5) "What are some difficulties you may have while learning English?"
- 6) "What makes you study English?"

In the course of the second stage of the experimental research to identify the barriers that arise among adults when learning a foreign language, the focus group method helped to identify major barriers that adult learners experience when learning English. When carrying out the focus group, the following four questions were asked:

- 1) "What prevents you from learning English?"
- 2) "What are the reasons that you didn't/don't learn English?"
- 3) "Your previous experience of learning English"
- 4) "What, in your opinion, can help you to learn English?"

At the third stage of the experimental research a control interviewing of students' willingness to continue learning a foreign language in the context of extracurricular work at the university, but outside the project was conducted. The interviewing list was adapted from the previous to the future prospective and included five questions:

- 1) "Are you ready to continue to learn English today?"
- 2) "Are you uncertain about learning a foreign language?"
- 3) "For what purpose will you study English?"
- 4) "What are some difficulties you may have while learning English?"
- 5) "What makes you study English?"

Data analysis: statistical and mathematical methods – for quantitative and qualitative analysis of the results of the experimental research; graphical method – for their visualisation.

*Research Sample.* Respondents were 52 adult learners (age range was from 40 to 55). All of them were the participants of the Ukraine-Norway project "Professional Retraining and Social Adaptation of Military Officers and Their Family Members" at Chernihiv National University of Technology, who attended the course "English for Business". The respondents were united into three age groups: 40-45 years; 45-50 years; 50-55 years. Most of the respondents are men (85%), since the specifics of the target group of the project – former military personnel staff and participants of the antiterrorist operation in the East of Ukraine.

*Validity and reliability.* Validity and reliability of the research data are confirmed by the fact of alignment of the results of experimental research conducted by questionnaire, pedagogical observation, interview and focus-group as well as the participants' self-evaluation.

*Ethical principles of research.* Participants of the pedagogical experimental research agreed to participate on their free will. They signed the consents on data processing and participation. The experimental research was conducted in compliance with the respect to human rights and ethical principles.

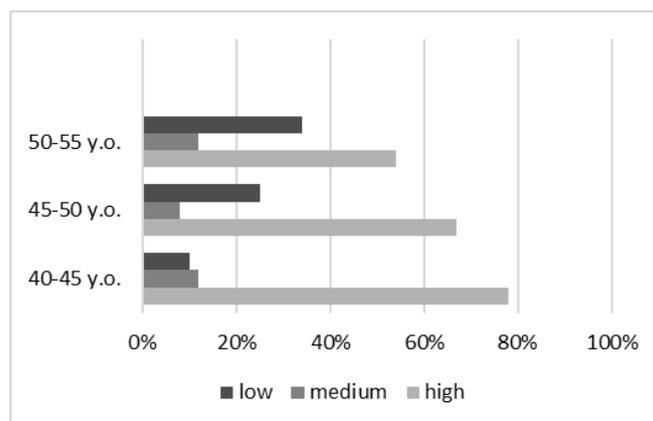
## **Results**

The first stage of the experimental research showed the following results:

1) *The level of readiness of adult learners (by age criteria) to learn English prior to the start of the proposed course:*

- Respondents aged 40 to 45: 78% of respondents have a high level of readiness to learn English; medium – 12% and low – 10% of respondents.
- Respondents aged 45 to 50: 67% of respondents are on the high level of readiness, 8% – on the medium and 25% – on the low.
- Respondents aged 50 to 55: 54% of respondents are on the high level of readiness, 12% – on the medium and 34% – on the low.

Thus, we obtained the results of the study according to which we determined the average level of readiness for learning English across the three age groups. 63.3% of respondents are at a high level of readiness, 10.6% – at a medium level and 23% – at a low level (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1. Indicators of adult learners (by age criterion) readiness to learn English language before the start of studies, %**

Source: author's development based on a questionnaire conducted in September 2019 at the Chernihiv National University of Technology within Ukraine-Norway project

### 2) Barriers that arise among adults when learning a foreign language:

The majority of the respondents answered the question through the prism of language learning problems, namely: "... I have problems with grammar"; "... lack of time to attend classes", "not enough vocabulary to speak", "... I'm afraid to be mistaken when I start to speak", "I do not understand when someone speaks English, although I have a sufficient level of knowledge of English...", "I am ashamed that I am already an adult, but I read with mistakes... at my age it is a shame".

That is why adults have the fear of making a mistake in speaking, the fear of starting and not learning English. Among adults, the mechanism of protection works: "I would rather be silent than talk with mistakes".

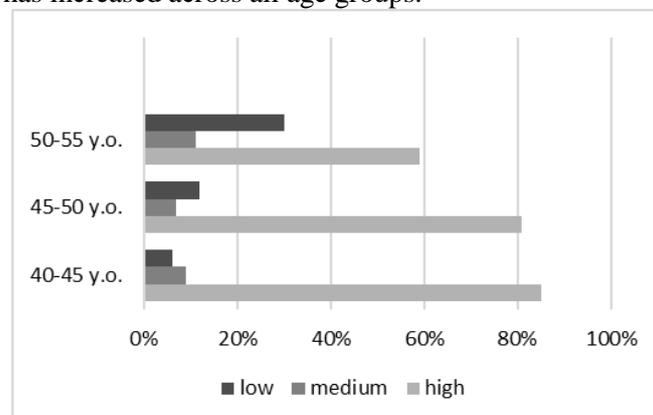
### 3) The level of readiness of adult students to continue learning a foreign language in the context of extracurricular work at the university after completion of the course:

– Respondents aged 40 to 45: 85% of respondents have a high level of readiness to continue learning English; a medium – 9% and a low – 6%.

– Respondents aged 45 to 50: 81% of respondents are on a high level of readiness to continue English, with a medium of 7% and a low of 12%.

– Respondents aged 50 to 55: 59% of respondents have a high level of readiness to continue English, with a medium of 11% and a low of 30%.

Thus, we obtained the results of the study, according to which we determined the average level of readiness to continue learning English across the three age groups: 75% of respondents were at a high level of readiness, 9% – at a medium level and 16% – at a low level (Fig. 2). Thus, the level of readiness to continue learning English has increased across all age groups.



**Figure 2. Indicators of the level of adult learners (by age criterion) readiness to continue learning English after completion of studies, %**

Source: author's development based on a questionnaire conducted in December 2019 at the Chernihiv National University of Technology within Ukraine-Norway project

## Discussion

Having analysed the responses of adult learners by focus group results, we can identify four groups of barriers to English language learning among adult learners: *cognitive-communicative*, *negative perceptual*, *organisational*, *behavioural*.

Under *cognitive-communicative barriers*, we understand the difficulties associated with stereotypical thinking: an adult cannot effectively learn a foreign language because the cognitive processes are not as developed as in young people. Following El-Omari (2016), who confirms that the learners are afraid of making mistakes and expressing their opinion and own ideas, we agree, that teacher's job is to create the supportive environment where making mistakes is not criticised and accepted as an integral part of learning.

*Negative perceptual barriers* to learning English are reflected in a person's consciousness as a negative perception of English and a fear of making a mistake. Negative perception barriers include lack of confidence as a fear about making steps and engagement in the process, lack of support and understanding as a fear that the course will be too difficult for the learner and they will be left behind the group (Arifin, 2017). Taking into account the mentioned above authors, we can make a parallel to our national background: having rules is a big problem for all adults who studied in Soviet school. Fear of breaking the rule, not following the rules is a priority in conducting behavioural actions. This point is confirmed by adult educator Stephen Brookfield (1990) in his developed term "impostor syndrome", denoting a set of feelings of inadequacy, of chronic self-doubt which make people think that their accomplishments are worse than those of the people around them.

*Organisational barriers* relate to the teaching system – one of the common barriers to learning English. Adult learners already have experience in learning English, but the system of knowledge they have received in past is quite confusing and out of date. Adult students studied old textbooks, but there are currently textbooks from leading US colleges / institutes that incorporate American teaching methods. Quite often, new American textbooks are unintelligible to adult learners because the tasks formulations and patterns of their fulfilment are different, students lack such component as creativity and creative thinking when solving problems. Organisational barriers consist of used learning methods, a way of delivering a learning material and general management activities related to the studying. These types of barriers mean that the form of study does not meet the needs of adult learners. The types of organisational barriers that can be related to this include resources needed for learning activities, a general lack of support services at times and places suitable to adult learners; and recognition of prior learning and previously obtained academic background (Chao, 2009). We agree with the idea of Cozma (2015) that adult learners should be equal in the instructional process and then they will be more open to cooperate with the teachers.

*Behavioural barriers* concern the lack of free time or the inability to organise it, the ability of self-organisation and self-control (doing homework, self-study). At the same time, foreign language should be personally significant to set goals, choose language improvement strategies and exercise self-esteem and self-control (Stakanova, 2017).

We are convinced that the right English language teaching method for adults will help them overcome the obstacles they may encounter when learning English. By identifying the barriers that adult learners encounter when learning English, we can identify the motivational factors for learning English among adult learners.

We support the idea of Galbraith (1990) about a positive learning environment that should be based on involving learners in mutual planning of curriculum; involving participants in diagnosing their own learning needs; encouraging learners to formulate their own learning objectives; helping learners to carry out their learning plans and involving learners in evaluating their learning. However, we think that the creation of a positive learning environment is challenging in the conditions of formal education. We share the opinion of Park & Choi (2009) that to improve the adult learners' English proficiency, it is important to provide them with the opportunity for interaction within the extracurricular activities that effectively support adult learners in social and learning context. Extracurricular activities provide a safe learning atmosphere for adult learners to share their interest in learning English.

According to the obtained results of the experimental research, we support the opinion of Falasca (2011) on the necessity of removing barriers, especially relating to the organisational learning process, to engage adults in educational activities.

Sogunro (2014) defined eight most motivating factors for adult learners in higher education: quality of instruction; quality of curriculum; relevance and pragmatism; interactive classrooms and effective management practices; progressive assessment and timely feedback; self-directedness; conducive learning environment; and effective academic advising practices. His study concludes that these factors are critical to eliciting or enhancing the will power in students in higher education toward successful learning.

According to the results of the focus group, we can define the motivational factors that determine the process of learning a foreign language by adults:

- involvement of adults in the process of managing the educational process;
- involvement in the educational process of computer technologies and modern information Internet resources.

As Sharma (2006) points out, the teacher should consider the appropriateness and the extent of the use of technology, especially in the case of each particular group:

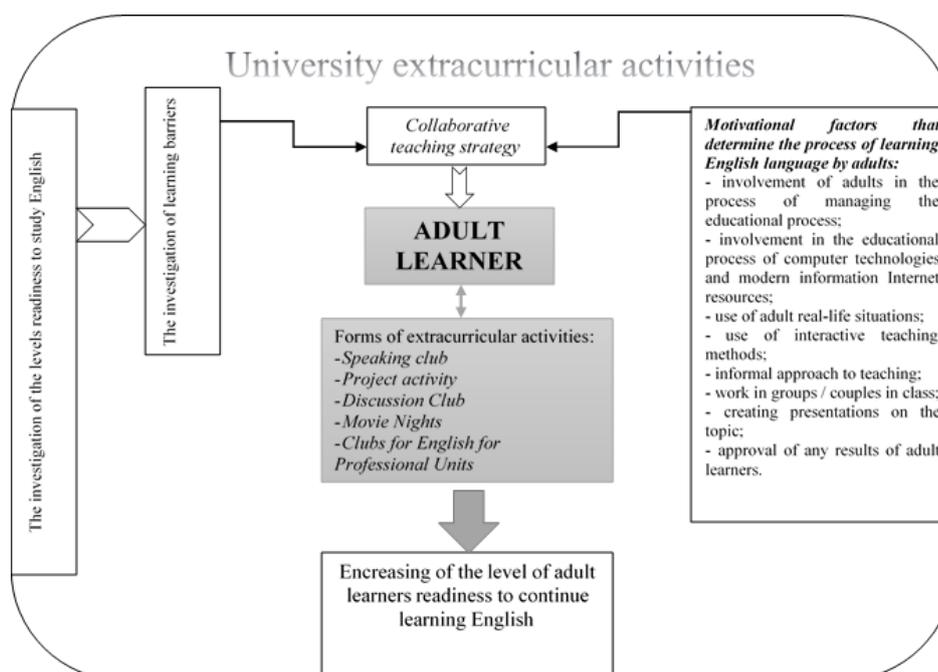
- use of adult real-life situations;
- use of interactive teaching methods;
- informal approach to teaching;
- work in groups / couples in class;
- creating presentations on the topic;
- approval of any results of adult learners.

In the context of our study, we agree with Chao (2009) that adult learners' motivation and barriers to learning English have their bases. Adult learners have their own personal biography, view of the world, that is needed to survive and succeed in their personal endeavours, and they even have their own personal view of success. Internal and external influences on the adult learner both in their past and present experiences from these views. These views, in their turn, form the adult. With this in mind, there is a need to create a tool to help teachers of adult learners understand the adult learners' motivation and the barriers to learning.

Adults are certainly more cooperative learners, and, what is more important, their cooperation comes as a natural consequence of their seeing the point of the various instructional situations in which they are involved. In this way, the teacher no longer has to "camouflage" learning by resorting to entertaining activities, such as games or songs, although, if properly selected and used, they may be sometimes appropriate for students of an older age (Cozma, 2015).

We agree with the authors' notice to the use of life experiences teaching strategy carefully as discussing learners' life experiences can provoke unexpected situations from non-participation to emotional breakdown. Most our learners experienced trauma after the participation in military actions or lost family members and sharing past experiences could retraumatise them (Severinsen et al., 2018).

The results of the pedagogical experiment proved the article's hypothesis that motivation to study English language among adult learners is increased after the investigation of their learning barriers and work on their minimisation in the conditions of university extracurricular work within the collaborative learning strategy. The results of the experimental research showed the need to develop the model of English teaching environment for adult learners within university extracurricular activity based on the collaborative teaching strategy (Fig. 3).



**Figure 3. The model of English teaching environment for adult learners within university extracurricular activity based on the collaborative teaching strategy**

Source: authors' development

An extracurricular approach to learning English is more effective because of the ability to provide a comfortable environment of support and collaboration. Adult learners can learn English by engaging in conversation clubs, watching English movie nights, participating in projects involving foreigners (being able to communicate with native speakers), as well as learning the language depending on their professional background in specialist professional associations. In doing so, the teaching strategy should be collaborative, providing a process of mutual support for adult learners, which is important in the context of our target group.

The results of the study show that the primary stage in the process of teaching adult learners English is to determine their level of readiness for such learning, to identify specific barriers that impede learning English and, accordingly, to form a teaching strategy, to select forms of work aimed at removing identified barriers. The results of the study show that, in this model, the motivation of adult learners to continue learning English is increasing.

It should be noted that teaching English to young people and adults is different in its approach and teaching method, and this is due to, first of all, the psychological characteristics of an adult. Therefore, at English language lessons, information should be provided systematically, not fragmented. Adults are better able to memorise new words that are connected with an associative series or a synonym. The free atmosphere of communication will help to remember the long forgotten words from the subconscious and this process will not be stopped by the feelings of inferiority that have arisen before. It is important when teaching English for adults to avoid the huge sets of rules. When learning a language, it is necessary to learn the tools of mastering the language, which will allow an adult to creatively approach to learning it. The training should be based not on the study of certain rules, but on the creation of a situation that bears certain associations, and according to this situation patterns of language acquisition are learned. This means a simulation of a context where an adult chooses a particular tense form and uses it during communication is needed.

An important aspect of teaching English is the removal of previously formed constructs of learning a language in the mind of an adult. Adults already have English language learning structures that have been formed previously. They do not form a language competence, but on the contrary, are an obstacle to its formation.

Effective learning of English by adults is supported by creating a relaxed, positive atmosphere. Using the methods of conversation, discussion will allow to learn English in a relaxed atmosphere. Using modern gadgets greatly simplifies the learning process for adults. After all, there are many online applications, video resources, audiobooks that make learning English interesting and productive.

An English teacher, understanding the psychological features of an adult, should understand that among adults, English in the communication process tends to be reduced to a literal translation of certain language constructs. However, the modern teaching methodology emphasises that when speaking a foreign language, you need to dive into a situation that requires translation and, accordingly, the selection of linguistic structures is performed already in this situation.

We agree with Baharudin (2013) that adult learners need to adapt and find solutions to their problems, they have to make the decisions on their own; they should question themselves on the purpose of continuing their study and take every challenge as a motivator for them to improve in their studies and life.

**Limitations.** We consider it appropriate to emphasise that the results of the questionnaire and focus-group are subjective, based on participants' self-esteem, apply only to a specific category of adult students – military servicemen / ATO participants and cannot be extended to other categories of adult students.

### **Conclusions**

Thus, every modern person is challenged to meet the conditions of changing society. For this reason, most adults feel the need to acquire new skills in English language for the purpose of self-development and self-improvement to be competitive in the labour market. The use of a collaborative teaching strategy and investigation of adult learners' barriers to study English determines the specific English teaching environment for adults. The experimental research proved that it is important in the process of teaching adults to consider the barriers that arise within it, which will facilitate effective learning in accordance with the communicative, cognitive and personal expectations of adult learners. The result of such learning is the organisation of a learning process that meets the life needs and personal interests of adult learners. The authors propose the model of English teaching environment for adult learners within university extracurricular activity based on the collaborative teaching strategy. The obtained results can be useful for language teachers who already work, or intend to work with the adult learners, facilitators, mentors or scientists in the sphere of adult education or lifelong learning. Considering adult learners' barriers to study English and motivational factors can contribute to the development of different forms of university

extracurricular activities and didactic materials focusing on adult education. This paper tries to enhance the studies on English language acquisition by adult learners. The further research will investigate the comparison between the level of adult learners readiness to learn English language within formal curriculum and university extracurricular activities. Studying of the correlation between adult learners' level of motivation to study English and their learning results can lead to the development of training courses for the system of adult education.

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