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DEVELOPING CRITICAL WRITING SKILLS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING OF GENERAL SECONDARY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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This article is devoted to the problem of developing critical writing skills in foreign language teaching of general secondary educational institutions. In particular, the essence of the concept of critical writing is revealed. Its differences from descriptive writing and interrelation with critical thinking and critical reading are investigated. The important steps are determined that the teacher should overcome in order to teach his/her students critical writing. Effective methods of teaching critical writing, based on the methods of the technology of critical thinking development, are also proposed. It is emphasized on the importance of systematic use of these methods in the English teaching process.

Keywords: critical thinking; critical thinking skills; critical reading; critical writing; descriptive writing; argumentation; methods of teaching critical writing; foreign language teaching.

РОЗВИТОК УМІНЬ КРИТИЧНОГО ПИСЬМА В УЧНІВ БАЗОВОЇ ШКОЛИ У НАВЧАННІ ІНОЗЕМНОЇ МОВИ

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Статтю присвячено проблемі розвитку вмінь критичного письма учнів закладів загальної середньої освіти під час навчання іноземної мови. Обґрунтовано важливість розвитку навичок критичного письма для сьогодення та майбутнього особистості. Розкрито сутність поняття критичного письма та досліджено його взаємозв'язок з критичним мисленням та вміннями критичного читання. З'ясовано зміст поняття описового письма та досліджено його відмінність від критичного письма. Висвітлено переваги розвитку вмінь критичного письма під час навчання іноземної мови, а також труднощі, пов'язані насамперед зі специфікою іноземної мови як навчального предмета. На основі аналізу власного педагогічного досвіду автора, а також науково-методичних джерел з досліджуваної проблеми визначено важливі кроки, які повинен подолати вчитель, щоб навчити своїх учнів критичному письму. Зокрема, було наголошено на важливості розвитку в учнів умінь критичного читання та аргументації, а також на необхідності зміни вчителями підходу до формулювання письмових завдань для учнів. Запропоновано також ефективні методи навчання критичного письма, засновані на методах технології розвитку критичного мислення. За послідовністю застосування в освітньому процесі ці методи поділяються на три групи, а саме: методи підготовки до критичного письма, методи

вправлення у критичному письмі та методи оцінювання написаного. Наголошено, що систематичне використання цих методів дозволить учителю поступово розвивати в учнів уміння критичного письма під час вивчення іноземної мови та, враховуючи тісний взаємозв'язок критичного письма з критичним мисленням, удосконалювати мислення учнів загалом.

Ключові слова: критичне мислення; уміння критичного мислення; критичне читання; критичне письмо; описове письмо; аргументація; методи навчання критичного письма; навчання іноземної мови.

The importance of the ability to think, speak and write critically for the modern individual is difficult to overestimate. Every day, each of us creates and distributes dozens of messages through various information channels, influencing the consciousness of other people in one way or another. Writing as one of the means of organization, transmission, and storage of information occupies an important place in the creation of the information field in which society lives and acts. Thus, the development of students' ability to create written texts based on critical thinking is one of the urgent tasks of education in measuring the present and future, which is indicated as one of the tasks in the State Standard of Basic Secondary Education [7].

It is known that writing is one of the four types of speech activity in the process of learning a foreign language (along with reading, listening, and speaking), the development of which is systematic and mandatory in terms of forming a person's readiness for intercultural communication. Given this, as well as the close relationship between speech and thinking, it can be assumed that a foreign language lesson provides an opportunity to teach students to write with the involvement of critical thinking skills.

However, in practice, foreign language teachers often ignore this possibility, focusing on training lexical and grammatical skills, text structure, etc. On the one hand, this is due to the complexity of the process of teaching students to write in a foreign language, their lack of language knowledge and skills, on the other – due to the lack of relevant methodological knowledge and skills of teachers.

The two-way connection between critical thinking and writing and the importance of their in-line development in the educational process is revealed in a wide range of publications by foreign scholars [8; 13; 15; 18; 19; 22]. Thus, scientists (Applebee, A. N. [1], Marzano, R. J. [13], Resnick, L. B. [17]) emphasize the potential of the role of writing for improving thinking. For example, Resnick, L. B. argues that writing can be a “cultivator and an enabler of higher-order thinking” if viewed as an occasion to build arguments and master persuasion techniques [17, p. 38]. Writing allows to formulate, clarify, expand and deepen the thought, – professor Schmidt, S. J. confirms [18, p. 32]. American researchers-authors of the Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking (RWCT) project Temple, C., Steele, J., Meredith, K. [21], as well as their followers (Crawford, A., Saul, W., Mathews, S. et al. [6]) offer methods for the development of critical thinking through writing texts. It should be added that the systematic application of these methods in the educational process of any school subject allows not only to train thinking but also to improve the quality of students' writing in terms of argumentation, logic, effective selection of language means, and more. At the same time, researchers Dixon, F., Cassady, J., Cross, T. et al. consider writing as “a vehicle through which students can readily express their critical thinking” if they are consistently taught to use critical thinking strategies in writing [8, p. 181].

As demonstrated, critical thinking helps to write in an effective way, and at the same

time, develops in this process. Thus, in the scientific literature, we find the concept of “critical writing”, i.e. one that is based on critical thinking skills. The essence of this concept, as well as methods of teaching students writing critically, have been studied in a number of works by foreign scientists [4; 8; 18; 19]. Some of the articles which concern the problem of the development of critical writing in teaching English as a foreign language [3; 10; 24] deserve special consideration given the subject matter of our article. In the field of Ukrainian science, publications on this issue have not yet been made, so there is a high need for research in this area.

Therefore, we see the aim of the article in defining the essence of the concept of critical writing and the characteristics of the methodology of development of critical writing skills in the foreign language teaching process, taking into account the specifics of this subject.

Analysis of scientific publications [3; 4; 19; 20] on the essence of critical writing allows us to consider it as such that requires analysis and evaluation of information from various sources in order to formulate in the written form the own position on the problem, event, situation, etc. and support it with relevant arguments. From this definition, the relationship between critical writing and critical thinking is obvious, where critical thinking skills are used as a toolkit in the process of writing. At the same time, this type of writing encourages students to apply the skills of critical thinking and therefore allows them to improve the thinking itself. Thus, the relationship between critical thinking and critical writing is twofold. This underscores the unique benefits of teaching students critical writing. To further reveal the essence of critical writing, we should compare it with the so-called descriptive writing, that is, according to the name, used to describe something. These two types of writing are often contrasted; the main difference between them is that descriptive writing does not involve analysis, reasoning, and building of arguments. It is relatively simple and can be used in many cases, for example:

- 1) a general description of a piece of literature, or art that is the subject of analysis in the writing;
- 2) an account of the biographical details of the person referred to in the writing;
- 3) a summary of the history leading up to the event or decision referred to in the writing;
- 4) providing data on the event, or the situation referred to in the writing [23].

From the examples given, it can be seen that descriptive writing serves as a background for critical thinking and should be combined with critical writing. In this case, writing will be more rational and convincing. At the same time, writing, which contains only a description, is of little use for the development of students' thinking, because it does not require sufficient effort of thought and achievement of higher educational goals (analysis, synthesis, and evaluation by B. Bloom [5]). Teachers and students often resort to descriptive writing when learning a foreign language. This is due to the primary goal of mastering language skills: to build a sentence, to determine its lexical content, and they are not generally concerned with the content of what is written. However, as noted above, only the application of critical thinking skills stimulates the improvement of writing, enriches it, and allows students to effectively communicate in a foreign language, which is an important factor in their future self-realization in a globalized world.

In contrast to descriptive writing, critical writing requires the student to mentally

“transform” the available information and involves the use of qualitatively different skills at all stages of writing. Thus, in preparation for critical writing, the students should:

- 1) consider the quality of the evidence and argument in the sources read on the topic;
- 2) identify positive and negative aspects of the event, phenomena that can be commented upon in the writing;
- 3) assess their relevance and usefulness for discussion in the writing;
- 4) identify how best they can be woven into the argument that is developing in the writing [23].

According to the mentioned above, it is clear that critical thinking skills are used at every stage of the writing process: at the stage of preparation for critical writing, the student needs to select information on the topic, analyze it, decide how it can be used to formulate his/her opinion on the issue and build sound arguments. Then at the stage of writing, the student selects language tools to express and justify his/her point of view, which is based on the analysis of information, made at the previous stage. In the process of self-evaluation, the student applies critical-thinking skills again to provide the evaluation of the writing.

Thus, we see that critical writing is closely related to critical reading. To write critically, it is usually insufficient to involve a personal life experience and background knowledge of the problem under consideration. Students should be taught to retrieve and process more information. Additionally, it is not enough to use just a single source to support the argument, since this can lead to a biased argument.

Let us consider the main characteristic features of critical writing:

- 1) a refusal to accept the conclusions of other writers without evaluating the evidence and arguments they provide;
- 2) formulation of logical conclusions about the information presented by other writers;
- 3) a clear presentation of your ideas, opinions, decisions, etc. with their proper argumentation;
- 4) a recognition of the limitations (possible incompleteness or inaccuracy) of your ideas, arguments, and conclusions [23].

The study by N. H. Rahmat [16], exploring the connection between critical thinking, reading, and writing, considers it as a cyclical process that covers several stages and begins with the reading stage, which requires the application of critical thinking skills to assess the content of the information, to decide how it fits the writer’s needs. After that, the writer moves to the writing stage, where the piece of writing is also assessed with the help of critical thinking skills. But the first completed writing is not the final stage. If necessary, adjustments are made to the written text, or additional sources are processed and then the cycle is repeated. Figure 1 shows the full cycle of thinking and writing (Figure 1).

Thus, having explored the essence of critical writing, we present it as a complex process that requires students to apply critical thinking skills at all stages of its realization and has a particularly close connection with critical reading.

So how to teach students critical writing in a foreign language lesson? Let us list the important steps which are defined on the basis of own experience and the analysis of sources on a problem.

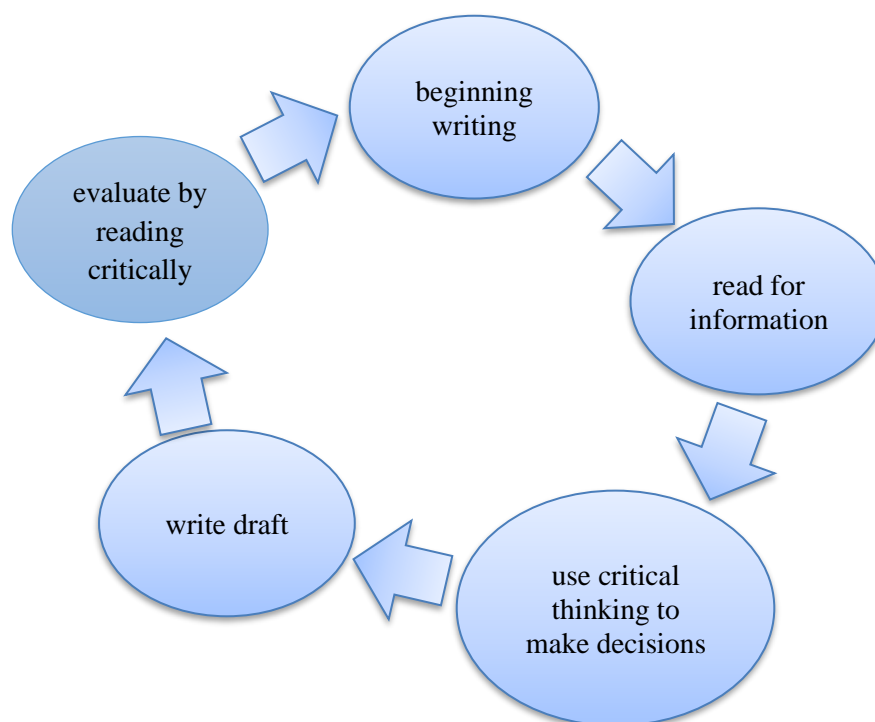


Figure 1. The cycle of thinking and writing [16, p. 119]

This will allow students to work focused, exercise self-control and self-assessment in the writing process, and adequately perceive the assessment of their writing by the teacher or other students.

Next, students need to be trained in critical reading skills. If students have not previously selected and critically interpreted information, it is necessary to organize a systematic training, which involves: 1) searching for sources on a particular topic to answer questions or solve problems; 2) analysis of the information obtained by asking questions, comparing information from several sources (starting with two), highlighting the arguments provided by the author and their discussion, distinguishing facts from the author's opinion, studying the structure of the text under consideration; 3) the study of language tools used by the author to influence the reader (e.g., linking words, interjections, synonyms, aphorisms, some punctuation marks, etc.); 4) separating the information in the text, which allows answering the question, can serve to build arguments to express the view on the problem, event, situation. Students should be encouraged to actively interact with the information they read, use it as material for processing in mind, and subsequently create their texts.

The other important step is to teach students to build an argument since the ability to provide a sound argument characterizes a critical thinker. In general, an argument (lat. *argumentum* – proof) is a ground, proof that is used to confirm something [9, p. 36], i.e. these are the statements used to prove the viewpoint expressed in the text. Figure 2 shows the structure of the argument (Figure 2).

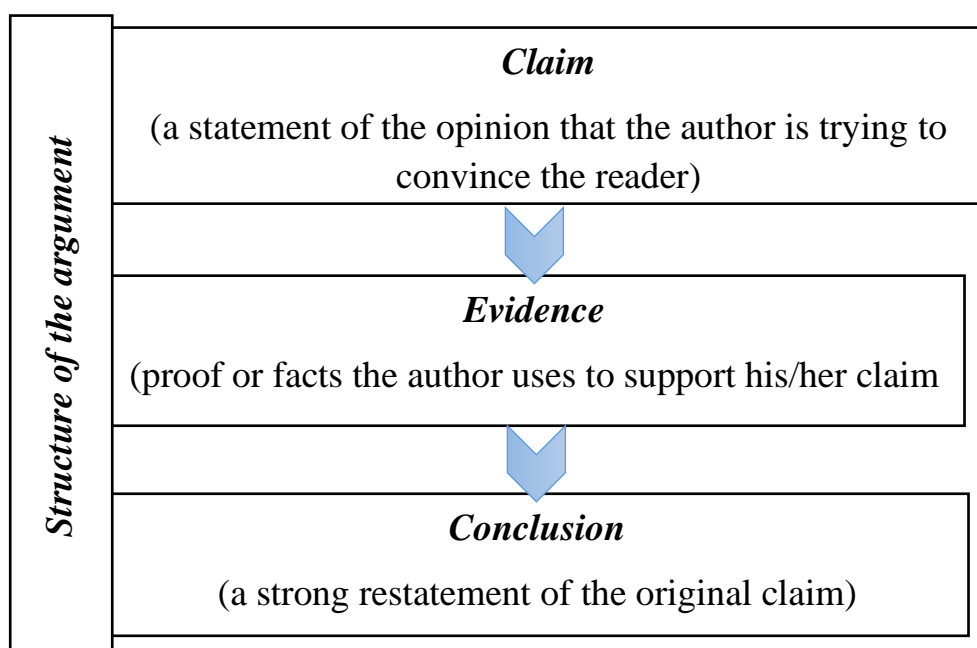


Figure 2. *The structure of the argument* (adapted from [11]).

The figure above shows the sequence of building an argument: first, a student formulates a thesis – his/her opinion, position, view at something. At this stage, students' linguistic knowledge and skills are important, which allow them to express thoughts effectively. Undoubtedly, students do not yet have sufficient vocabulary, grammar, and other skills in a foreign language compared to their communicative competence in their mother tongue. Therefore, it is necessary to encourage students to use dictionaries, reference books, online resources, and mobile applications, train them to choose synonyms, antonyms, paraphrasing, summarizing – all this will help students to state their positions or decisions properly.

Writing, in contrast to speaking, gives a student more time to consider and construct the ideas, which allows to deepen and refine them, choose the most effective linguistic means to express them. At the next stage, students need to present an argument or a set of arguments to prove their thesis. These can be facts, laws, axioms, proven theorems, i.e. statements, the truth of which has already been established before. It is at the stage of evidence making that students' ability to read critically and use the information they have read to construct arguments is revealed.

The final stage of argumentation is the formulation of the conclusion. The conclusion has the form of inference, which proves the truth of the thesis proposed. For a smooth transition from arguments to conclusions, students will need a variety of linking words and phrases, e.g., firstly, secondly, finally; however, although, in contrast, whereas; because, since; in addition, moreover; as a matter of fact, indeed; in other words, namely, that is to say; consequently, as a result, thus, that is why; in conclusion, to sum up, and so on. Students should be taught to use them correctly and appropriately, maintaining the logic of argumentation. In addition, linking words are also used to combine the structural parts of the writing (introduction, main body, and conclusion).

Also, the traditional approach to writing assignments is needed to be changed. The students should be offered a problem, an issue to write about, not just a topic. Writing about

an issue or a problem creates opportunities for students to interact with educational material, promotes inquiry, stimulates mental activity, whereas writing about a topic, which is often abstract and far from life, keeps the student at the level of a reporter of information [18, p. 34].

So what methods of teaching students critical writing are the most efficient? It should be noted that the variety of methods for the development of critical writing is the methods of the technology of critical thinking development, which are used in a certain systematic sequence. According to this sequence, we divide the methods into three groups as follows: methods of preparation for critical writing, methods of practice in critical writing, and evaluation methods.

Let us start with the methods of the first group. This group includes methods aimed at preparing students to write critically. They help students to master the skills needed to write their texts, so it is worth starting work on teaching students critical writing with the methods of this group. At the same time, they can be used at the stage of preparation for writing in a particular lesson. The list of these methods is given below:

1) methods of active reading: highlighting the keywords, “Dual-Entry Diary”, “Logbook”, “Directed Reading Activity” (DRA), “Directed Reading – Thinking Activity” (DR-TA), “Close reading with text coding” (“Insert”), “Thick and thin questions”, “Bloom’s cube”, “Reading and Questioning”, “Paired Reading/Paired Summarizing”, “Fishbone”, “True and False Statements”, “Know-Want to learn-Learnt” (KWL chart), “T-chart”, “Comparative chart” “Venn diagram” [6] – these methods involve thoughtful work with different types of texts, regarding analysis, asking questions, separating essential information from non-essential, distinguishing facts and opinions, causes and effects, drawing the logical conclusions, systematizing, summarizing, comparing, evaluating the information according to certain criteria;

2) methods that encourage students to produce new ideas: “Semantic Map”, “Basket of ideas”, “6W”, brainstorming, “Free Write” [6];

3) methods helping students to train in formulating their impressions, opinions or decisions, building arguments and making conclusions: discussion of the issue in groups/pairs, debates, “Unfinished Sentences”, “Microphone”, “PRES”, “Six Thinking Hats”, “Save the Last Word for Me” [6] – all these methods involve exchanging ideas in groups/pairs according to the social nature of critical thinking (opinion is formed and polished during discussions with others);

4) methods that help to make assumptions, test hypotheses, make decisions: “Predicting from Terms”, “Decision tree” [6].

Special attention should be paid to the system of exercises that train students’ ability to effectively use linguistic means to express their position, operating with synonyms, antonyms, metaphors, comparisons, paraphrasing, and more. These exercises are widely used by teachers at foreign language lessons, but for the development of critical thinking of students, working on these skills should be emphasized and strengthened, as a master use of language is the key to effective communication.

The second group includes methods that train the ability to write critically, that is to provide a coherent and structured statement of the opinion with further argumentation, formulation of conclusions, taking into account the style and genre of the text being written, following the requirements for its content and form. These methods can be used to train students in writing texts, as well as specifically at the stage of writing in a particular lesson.

One of the most effective methods of teaching writing is the method “RAFT” (Role, Audience, Format, Subject), which focuses students on writing for a specific purpose and audience. The realization of this method takes several steps, which are essential for organizing students’ activity to complete a special table that helps to further produce a text [6, p. 130].

For example, in the 7th grade in the process of studying the section “Health Highlights” (according to the textbook of Nesvit, A. M. [14]) the table may look like the following (Table 1):

Table 1

The example “RAFT” chart for the 7th grade

Role (who is writing?)	Audience (who receives it?)	Format (what form?)	Topic (what is it about?)
Dentist	Children	Poem	Brush your teeth every morning and night

In the 9th grade while studying the topic “Threats to Environment” (according to the textbook of Kalinina, L. V., Samoiliukevych, I. V. [12]), the table may look as follows (Table 2):

Table 2

The example “RAFT” chart for the 9th grade

Role (who is writing?)	Audience (who receives it?)	Format (what form?)	Topic (what is it about?)
Planet Earth	Politicians	Letter	Do something because I’m in danger

Another important method for teaching critical writing is to write an essay – a piece of writing of a small volume, which aims to express individual opinions and impressions on a particular topic or issue. Essay writing is necessary for developing the ability to build arguments. Depending on the purpose of writing, the essay may have different structural variations, which at the same time fit into the classical structure of the text (introduction, main body, and conclusion). To prepare students to write an essay, the teacher should acquaint the students with the requirements for the structure of the essay, which will serve as a kind of guide for students in the process of producing a text and one of the criteria for evaluating written texts. The chart below demonstrates the types of structure that an essay can have depending on the purpose of writing it (Table 3).

Students can master the methods mentioned above in the process of writing texts of various genres and styles, including reviews, justification letters, reports presenting and justifying their vision of the problem, interviews in which a separate situation and ways to solve it are discussed.

The third group includes evaluation methods, such as a) evaluation by the teacher; b) student’s self-evaluation; c) students’ peer-evaluation (in pairs or groups); d) combined evaluation. Regardless of the method chosen, evaluation is based on clear criteria that should be discussed with students in advance. To teach students self- and peer-evaluation, the teacher should regularly choose one or more student writings and comment on their evaluation according to the selected criteria. The teacher can also anonymously discuss the students’ writings that meet these criteria (received high marks) and writings that do not meet them (received low marks). It is also important that students participate in the development of criteria. All this will help them later to adequately evaluate their work and the work of others.

Table 3

The argumentative essays structure (retrieved from [2])

Argumentative Essays				
	<i>Expressing opinions</i>	<i>Advantages/ Disadvantages</i>	<i>Providing Solutions</i>	<i>Discursive Essays</i>
Introduction (Paragraph 1)	State opinion	State topic	State the problem	State topic
Main body (Paragraph 2) (Paragraph 3)	Argument 1 & reason	Advantages/ arguments for	Suggestion 1 & reason	One point of view
	Argument 2 & reason	Disadvantages/ arguments against	Suggestion 2 & reason	Another point of view
Conclusion (Final Paragraph)	Restating opinion using different words	Balanced consideration or Your opinion without personal words	Summary or best suggestion and reason	Your own opinion based on the points already mentioned

In the process of developing criteria, it is important to consider some aspects such as the genre of the text being written, which requires following the appropriate speech style; subject matter and purpose of writing; critical thinking skills involved in the writing process; linguistic means used (lexical units, grammar, punctuation, etc.).

To facilitate the work with the criteria, the teacher can develop special checklists in advance, where the teacher or the students can score the writing for each of the criteria and then calculate the total score. Such checklists can also be offered to students for self- and peer assessment. This will, on the one hand, speed up the evaluation process and, on the other hand, help to visualize the criteria and make evaluating easier.

It should be noted that evaluation is not just the final stage of writing a text, but also the whole process that permeates the two previous stages. The teacher should consider in advance some stops at each stage of students' writing and organize the feedback according to the evaluation criteria. This will serve as a marker for students, informing them whether they are moving in the right direction. After receiving this information in advance, students will be able to adjust their activities and get higher quality writings at the end. As Schmidt, S. J. pointed, we should not expect a perfect final draft from our students without giving them specific instructions, evaluation criteria, and regular feedback. Students are just learning how to write, so they need guidance, assistance, and encouragement from the teacher, rather than just evaluation [18, p. 34].

According to the stated above, it is clear that the development of critical writing is extremely relevant given the social and educational needs of today. It can be effectively implemented while learning a foreign language and creates a number of benefits for learning the language and improving students' thinking. The difficulties that teachers face in solving this task can be overcome through a special organization of the learning process. Thus, the organization involves the teacher's understanding of the essence of critical writing, awareness of its close connection with the skills of critical thinking and critical reading.

Of particular importance is also the teacher's mastery of the methods of technology of the development of critical thinking, which form the basis of methods of teaching critical writing. Systematic use of these methods by the teacher will allow students to gradually

acquire the necessary skills and learn to use them at all stages of writing the text.

Accordingly, to help teachers, the prospects for further research we see in the preparation of detailed guidelines for the development of critical writing of students in the process of learning a foreign language, as well as the development of lesson plans in a foreign language (English) that can be used in real practice of institutions of secondary education.

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