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The Role of Authentic Texts in the Development of Critical Thinking in English Teaching

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of authentic texts in fostering critical thinking skills among English language learners, addressing the need for structured pedagogical approaches. The research evaluates how adapted authentic materials enhance language learning through lexical, communicative, and audio-linguistic methodologies, emphasizing their cultural, and cognitive significance. The study employed the approach combining content analysis with statistical comparisons using Sherman's test and Phillips' test to assess perceptions and critical thinking development. The study involved 120 Ukrainian university students. The results demonstrated strong agreement among both teachers (97%) and learners (93%) regarding the benefits of authentic texts. Participants showed high proficiency in completing tasks of varying complexity, achieving success rates of 98% for simple tasks, 95% for creative tasks, and 89% for complex tasks. These outcomes highlight significant improvements in objective text analysis, logical reasoning, self-organization, and problem-solving abilities. The findings suggest that integrating authentic texts into EFL curricula effectively cultivates critical thinking while promoting cultural and linguistic competence. Recommendations include adopting the tripartite lexical-communicative-audio-linguistic framework across language programs, selecting culturally diverse materials, and expanding research to include students at different proficiency levels for broader validation.

Keywords: Authentic materials, critical thinking, English as a foreign language, language teaching, lexical approach, Ukrainian learners

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Introduction

Learning a foreign language should be based on accuracy and consistency, which ensures the relationship between linguistic and cultural features. To understand a foreign language, students need to focus on its features, which will allow them to use individual words correctly (Nguyen, 2023). Authentic texts gives them an understanding of the cultural aspects of the language, which is associated with the rendering of its emotional colouring. Therefore, choosing authentic texts for learning English is a relevant research issue.

An authentic text can be interpreted as reproducing reliable, original information that reflects the cultural, traditional, and social features of the language development (Rakhmonova, 2024). The variety of authentic materials enables their adaptation to the level of students' language abilities. This contributes to broader cognitive activity, understanding of the values of the language, and its originality. Such approaches to learning affect a more meaningful perception of information by students, which ensures a high-quality learning process (Sasabone et al., 2023). Authentic texts can enhance students' interest in acquiring knowledge of a foreign language. So, students immerse themselves in understanding national linguistic features (Kozlova et al., 2022). This enables them to perceive English more accurately, developing their thinking and creativity. Authentic texts help students to perceive new information and words, allowing them to perceive another language more qualitatively (Nematova, 2023). The analysis of authentic texts should be based on selecting the most important information and understanding new vocabulary.

Authentic texts provide an understanding of the features of emotional lexical turns, which provides the opportunity for students' independent development based on the analysis of the obtained information (Ivashchuk et al., 2023). The development of students' thinking is associated with conducting a comparative analysis of grammatical constructions, as well as understanding the methods of rendering the meaning of individual words. The critical thinking develops through the analysis of such texts, focusing on a clear sequence of presenting information (Bidenko et al., 2024). An effective approach to developing thinking is finding additional information to reveal the content of this text and discussing information. The importance of authentic materials for learning is their belonging to original sources, which reflects the culture of the people, focusing on their lexical content (Hwang et al., 2023). The importance of using authentic texts is associated with adaptation to the natural language environment, which motivates students to use the most unique language means. Authentic texts are a tool for communication between individual features of the English language and their application in modern speech. This process expands students' professional interest (Kazhan & Karpiuk, 2024).

The studied theoretical materials give grounds to make a conclusion about the advantages of authentic texts. However, there are no separate programmes for their adaptation in the educational process. The aim of the research is to determine the role of authentic texts in the development of students' critical thinking in teaching English. The aim involves the fulfillment of the following research objectives:

- Develop approaches to the adaptation of authentic texts when learning English;
- Determine the importance of authentic approaches for the possibility of students' learning a foreign language based on the teachers' and students' opinions;
- Measure the level of development of students' critical thinking based on solving language tasks of varying complexity;
- Identify the skills developed by students during their study of English.

Literature Review

The use of various colloquial expressions fosters a more nuanced understanding of informal equivalents in foreign language acquisition. The process of learning often involves finding appropriate translation counterparts, which can be effectively facilitated through authentic materials. Zasina (2024) confirms that authentic texts foster learners' exposure to informal lexical items, idiomatic expressions, and cultural nuances. This kind of input enhances both vocabulary development and cultural awareness.

Recent advancements in AI technologies, such as ChatGPT, offer novel pathways to interact with authentic texts. According to Çelik et al. (2024), ChatGPT enables learners to simplify complex authentic materials and engage in contextualized language learning. Generative AI assists learners in comprehending original content by paraphrasing, rephrasing, and facilitating metalinguistic reflection. Moreover, ChatGPT can produce texts in different styles and levels of complexity, making it a flexible tool for autonomous learning.

Interactive technologies further support language learning by exposing students to natural discourse. Hussein (2025) emphasizes that AI-supported interaction can create a socio-cultural context conducive to optimal language assimilation. Nonetheless, the automation of content processing with ChatGPT might reduce the human dimension of teaching, potentially affecting emotional engagement and nuanced interpretation of texts. Culturally embedded materials, as argued by Xavier (2024), help integrate grammar instruction with the broader socio-cultural functions of language. Such materials engage learners on multiple levels – linguistic, cognitive, and affective – thus fostering holistic development. Liu et al. (2024) show that immersive technologies, such as virtual reality, can scaffold step-by-step reading comprehension and ensure accurate information retention. However, further research is needed to explore how such tools align with curriculum goals and language proficiency frameworks.

Audiovisual resources also contribute significantly to the acquisition of colloquial and authentic speech. Okumuş and Gürbüz (2023) note that on-screen texts and subtitles enhance incidental learning of vocabulary and grammar. However, they also caution that language in films is often modified for entertainment purposes and may not always reflect authentic use. This partial authenticity limits their pedagogical potential unless accompanied by critical discussion or guided instruction.

The virtual exchange model offers a collaborative approach to learning. According to Aranha et al. (2023), it promotes student agency and authentic language use through peer-to-peer interaction. By engaging in culturally responsive group activities, students enhance their socio-pragmatic awareness and develop greater control over their language output. Michelson et al. (2023) further assert that collaborative textual engagement expands learners' social and analytical competencies. However, the authors also recognize the need for more systematic implementation protocols to ensure equitable participation.

A recurring theme in the reviewed literature is the influence of learners' first language (L1) in shaping their approach to acquiring L2 structures. Wang et al. (2023) demonstrate how interlingual comparisons can facilitate the internalization of lexical units, especially with the introduction of authentic examples. This highlights the role of contrastive analysis and story writing as tools for integrating L1 and L2 knowledge. Recent research from peer-reviewed international journals further highlights the pedagogical potential of ChatGPT. For instance, Lee and Kim (2024) found that ChatGPT enables real-time feedback and enhances learner agency in L2 writing tasks involving authentic prompts. Similarly, in a study by Doležal and Martinek

(2024), students used AI-generated questions to interact critically with original texts improving comprehension and lexical flexibility.

Despite these positive developments, there is a notable gap in research regarding the full integration of authentic texts into structured pedagogical models, particularly for developmenting critical thinking and analytical reading skills. While many studies endorse the use of authentic materials, they are often presented as supplementary rather than core components of language instruction. Moreover, only a limited number of works address how AI tools like ChatGPT can be leveraged to scaffold learners' engagement with these materials in cognitively demanding tasks.

Finally, Kersten (2023) emphasizes that the accumulation of meaningful language experiences prepares learners for critical engagement and authentic communication. However, her study lacks specific mechanisms for integrating authentic texts into curriculum design. Further research should explore how AI-driven customization of materials could support differentiated instruction, while preserving the cultural and contextual richness of authentic input.

Methods

Research Design

The first stage of the study provided for the development of approaches to learning English using authentic texts. The approaches to learning involved working with texts and developing conversational and audio-linguistic skills. The second stage was an assessment of the impact of authentic texts on foreign language learning. The results were compared between students and teachers to obtain accurate information. The third level of the study included determining the students' critical thinking capabilities, which was associated with assessing student performance. The impact of students' critical thinking on the development of various skills for learning English was also determined.

Sampling

The sample of students was made among the educational institutions Ivan Kozhedub Kharkiv National Air Force University (KNAFU), Sumy National Agrarian University (SNAU). The research involved second-year students who could translate and speak English. The students lacked an expanded vocabulary, which affected the achievement of purposefulness in learning. The sample consisted of 120 students for whom English was a foreign language. The students studied to be English translators at the Department of Aviation English, the Foreign Languages Department. An input exam based on a written test was conducted to ensure that the students met the specified criteria. The evaluation of the test results allowed us to select a sample of students to participate in the research. It was planned to involve 150 students in the research, but 30 of them did not achieve the required results on the exam, which lasted 1.5 hours. The exam was conducted by 10 teachers teaching English for more than seven years. The students were involved in the study upon their voluntary consent to participate in it. The number of students was sufficient to implement the research objectives.

Methods

The general theoretical method of analysis was used to develop approaches to learning English. The process involved combining the features of authentic texts with the existing curriculum. For this purpose, existing teaching approaches were analysed (Alharbi, 2023; Bidenko

et al., 2024; Chaikovska et al., 2024; Rakhmonova, 2024). Training based on these approaches lasted for 4 months.

The approaches used to consider the authentic texts were assessed by determining the positive and negative impact of their adaptation in the educational process. The teachers' and students' opinions were taken into account based on their experience gained during training. The criteria for evaluation were the level of perception of the educational material, the possibility of expanding vocabulary, the adequacy of the selected authentic texts, and the possibility of using authentic words in different contexts. Obtaining input from teachers and students was made possible via Skype, which allowed for responses to be provided in a convenient format within the allotted time (three hours). The input data became the basis for calculating the Sherman criterion (Hwang et al., 2023).

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$$w_n = \frac{1}{2n}\frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n}|x_i - \bar{x}|}{\bar{x}}, \quad (1)$$

n – the total number of criteria for calculation;

x_i – the value of the studied factor;

$\bar{x}$ – arithmetic mean.

The teachers assessed the level of critical thinking by taking into account the students' ability to perform complex, simple, and creative tasks. Simple tasks involved the study and analysis of authentic texts, and understanding them in accordance with the content. Complex tasks aimed at the ability to use authentic words in different contexts, as well as developing critical thinking approaches. Creative tasks are associated with free variation of the acquired knowledge to enable communication and solving non-standard tasks. The level of the development of students' critical thinking was assessed by determining the general level of students' knowledge. Obtaining the results did not involve focusing on one exam. The results were obtained by observing students throughout the entire period of study. The level of critical thinking was assessed by calculating the J. Phillips test (Kazhan & Karpiuk, 2024):

$$p = 1 - \frac{6\sum d^2}{n^3 - n} \quad (2)$$

d – the difference of rank values that reflect the average deviation;

n – the specified number of criteria for calculation

The skills related to the development of critical thinking were identified through basic principles of critical thinking. Their consideration implied a conscious perception of information and the ability to independently improve a foreign language. It was determined which aspect of students' critical thinking was developed first. The results were combined to obtain final data.

Instruments

Skype was used as a tool during the research. It provided the possibility of receiving feedback from students. Microsoft Excel was also a research tool, which allowed for the calculations presented in the research results.

Results

The first objective was fulfilled through the approaches to the possibility of using authentic texts for learning English. The focus was on the possibility of developing students' critical thinking. Figure 1 presents the approaches to learning .

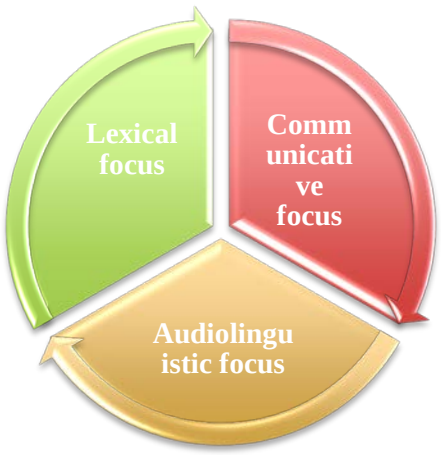


Figure 1. Approaches to adapting authentic texts when learning English
Source: developed by the authors

The lexical focus in the educational process involves reading and studying authentic texts. The educational process aimed at the integrated perception of information from authentic texts, contributing to their better understanding. In this way, students fully perceive language tools, verbs, and lexical idioms. The learning process aimed at studying new vocabulary and understanding through the performance of various tasks. This provides an understanding of the spiritual values of language and their use to ensure intercultural dialogue. The process provides an understanding of the connections between different words, which ensures rendering relevant content. The study of such words provides an understanding of the meaning of new lexical units and their independent use. Game-based methods for learning new words from authentic texts enhance students' motivation.

The communicative focus of educational approaches is associated with applying learned words in practice. This is ensured by an active form of speech interaction between students. The approach aimed at developing the skills of generating one's own thoughts based on learned words. They ensure the memorization of a large amount of information. Based on the communicative focus, students orient themselves to memorizing a separate topic. This ensures the development of conversational practices, better understanding of the native speaker, and the absence of a language barrier. The process affects the possibility of using speech structures without prior preparation, which minimizes the fear of communication.

The audio-linguistic focus involves the auditory perception of authentic texts. The process affects the perception of speech imitation, which improves the understanding of the heard text and the formation of correct pronunciation. The auditory perception of texts was associated with the information repetition at least 3 times. Understanding the meaning of words ensures the perception of their individual use. In this way, students focused on generalizing and systematizing the perceived educational materials.

The study assessed the impact of learning English using authentic texts. The assessment was related to determining the positive or negative impact of the developed learning approaches. The results included the assessment of teachers and students (Figure 2).

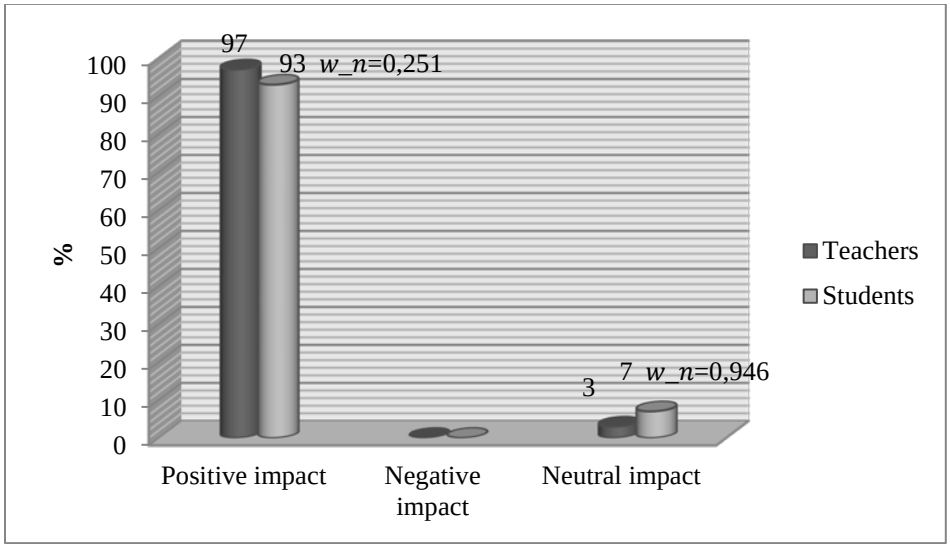


Figure 2. Assessing the impact of the approach to learning English using authentic texts (if w_n calculations exceed the tabulated value (0.537), the values are not equivalent)
Source: developed by the authors

Comparing the teachers' and students' results showed the positive impact of using authentic texts for learning a foreign language. This is determined by the use of texts that correspond to a certain level of students' knowledge and ensure a deeper learning of materials. Using authentic texts expands students' cognitive activity, focusing on the reliability of educational materials. Authentic texts provide an orientation to thematic diversity, which contributes to achieving of linguistic goals. Authentic materials offer a connection between different stages of classes for structuring of knowledge. The positive value of using authentic texts is associated with the fulfillment of a developmental function, which affects students' observation and the development of thinking. At the same time, linguistic memory develops, which ensures linguistic and creative activity. Authentic texts contribute to considering various linguistic examples, which affects the transfer of linguistic content. Authentic materials improve linguistic knowledge, focusing on the sound series. This ensures the perception of a foreign language, thereby eliminating language barriers. Based on authentic materials, it is possible to ensure effective learning based on students' immersion in a foreign language environment to conduct more effective discussions. So, the students developed English language skills during their studies based on the culture and mentality of another country. The students were more focused on engaging in professional activities.

The level of critical thinking was assessed among students. The analysis determined students' ability to perform complex, simple, and creative tasks. The development of critical thinking was assessed through calculations of the J. Phillips test (Table 1, Figure 3)

Table 1. *The impact of critical thinking on students' ability to perform language tasks of varying levels of complexity*

Level of capabilities	Complex tasks			Simple tasks			Creative tasks			*p*
	%	M	SD	%	M	SD	%	M	SD	
Full performance	89	39.5	7.1	98	44.7	5.3	95	41.2	6.9	0.739
Partial performance	11	9.3	12.1	2	5.4	18.9	5	7.2	15.3	0.718
No performance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: developed by the authors

Comparison of the features of performing language tasks of different levels of complexity found that students developed critical thinking. The students did not spend enough time performing simple tasks, and they could freely use them based on the obtained knowledge. Developed critical thinking enabled a qualitative analysis of the source information for the possibility of achieving the set goal. When performing simple tasks, the students trained socio-cultural orientation, the use of natural techniques for translation, which ensured the reflection of the flavour of the English language.

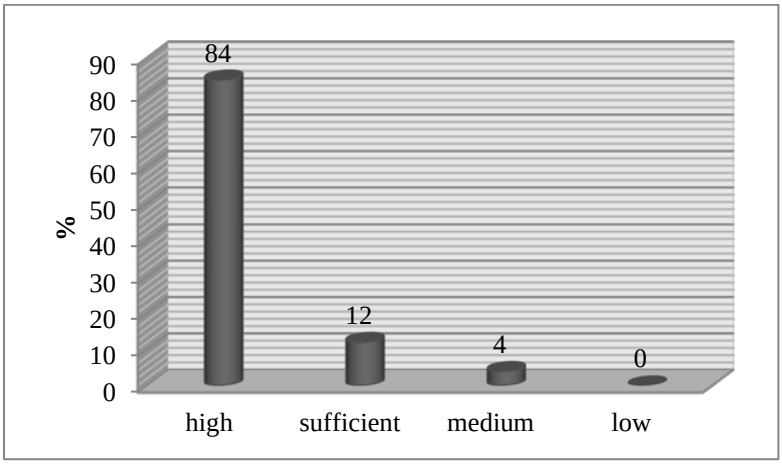


Figure 3. Percentage distribution of student performance depending on the level of obtained knowledge

Source: developed by the author

Developed critical thinking enabled students to achieve the ability to perform creative tasks. This provides the possibility of using interdisciplinary information, influencing the ability to express their own thoughts in a foreign language. Performing creative tasks involved a greater focus on the development of communicative competence. During an oral discussion of a separate topic, students focused on using various methods and techniques in communication. The expression of thoughts was competent, associated with culture, sociology, and individual traditions. The conscious use of foreign language vocabulary increased students' level of communication. Students perceived authentic words by ear, thereby improving the understanding of the obtained information. Performing creative tasks was associated with preserving the communication culture, adhering to value orientations. This allowed students to use authentic words as a means of communication, not elements taken out of context. Students also used complex tasks based on speaking skills and developed critical thinking. Based on these indicators, students provided a logical presentation of their own thoughts, which was associated with cognitive and intellectual skills.

The language skills acquired by the students gave grounds to assess which critical thinking skills had developed. The focus was on the aspects of thinking that were necessary for learning a foreign language. Figure 4 presents the results.

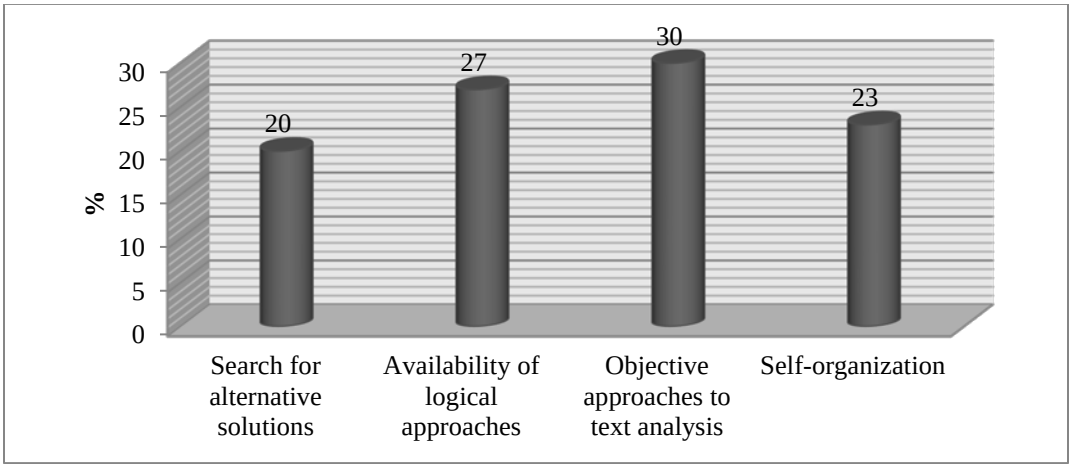


Figure 4. Critical thinking skills developed by students during their studies
Source: developed by the authors

The development of students' critical thinking showed the possibility of objective perception of authentic texts and their evaluation for using alternative language solutions. This contributed to the achievement of high results by students. Objective approaches to text analysis contributed to the development of students' awareness, which extended their ways of presenting their own thoughts based on perceived authentic texts. Students actively used logical approaches during communication, which influenced the use of different approaches to communication. Such analysis ensured the sound reasoning of their own actions, which contributed to the qualitative learning of the English language. The development of self-organization skills provided the possibility of more detailed use of authentic texts. The search for alternative solutions enabled students to use the knowledge gained to think through their own actions, which influenced the expansion of language interests.

Discussion

The corpus approach to learning English should be based on the selection of authentic language contexts. The training should focus on classifying grammatical and terminological units, as the most effective way to translate information is to enrich the terminological vocabulary. Therefore, working with authentic text ensures using terminological units in a natural context (Chen, 2023). Learning a language through situational learning enables perceiving different educational concepts, which creates an authentic environment for learning English. The mobile Collaborative Contextual Drama system provides learning English in an authentic context based on short annotations to the text and creating images. Using such an approach improved students' English (Manabe et al., 2023). Authentic texts contribute to a deeper acquaintance with the language and the students' ability to perform various tasks that can be useful in professional life. The primary importance of such texts is associated with rendering communicative purpose, which is important for the academic and professional context. This can be manifested in reading professional articles and writing texts (Drašler & Podgoršek, 2022). Learning a foreign language

should include the preservation of its basic stylistics. The use of poems was proposed for students' interaction with authentic texts. The study of poetic language enables the discovery of linguistic patterns, which develops students' independence (Jaafar & Ganapathy, 2022). The analyzed studies paid attention to one of the aspects of language learning (communicative / writing texts / text analysis based on annotations). Using one of the aspects does not ensure achieving high results by students, as they lack comprehensive approaches to the perception of information. Our article proposed to use a comprehensive approach to including authentic texts in the educational process (lexical, communicative, audio-linguistic approaches).

Artificial intelligence (AI) enhances rethinking a foreign language, contributing to the students' overall success. ChatGPT facilitates this process , as it takes into account alternative language approaches. The process aimes at understanding the text, focusing on the actual translation, rather than a superficial approach (Albeihi & Rice, 2025). AI contributes to creating algorithms for learning a foreign language, which provides personalized learning. Other texts enable developing an understanding of another culture, as well as focus on human interaction (De la Vall &Araya, 2023). The AI-based tools expand writing skills based on the generation of authentic texts. AI aims at correcting the potential and limitations for information perception. The process is implemented on the basis of creating automated tools for evaluating written text, correcting spelling (Alharbi, 2023). ChatGPT opens up many opportunities for the development of language education, enabling the creation of various forms of texts. Students' task performance entails the development of critical judgments, forming a personalized learning experience (Xiao & Zhi, 2023). The selection of texts for learning a foreign language should be related to the reflection of the specifics of a particular country. Computational linguistics technologies extract text that are associated with temporal and operational data (Zare et al., 2021). Published works provided for the use of authentic texts using computer technologies. Computer technologies were not sufficiently covered in the works, which requires searching for more effective mechanisms for their adaptation. Our article studied more traditional methods, but aimed at the comprehensive implementation of the educational process.

Learning a second foreign language should immerse students in the cultural and linguistic environment for a comprehensive understanding of the language and the dynamism of learning. Using original texts provides a better understanding of the features of the language (Abbasova, 2023). An analysis of academic articles established that attention should be paid to original (authentic) texts when learning a foreign language. Their adaptation to the educational process is considered from the perspective of using interactive technologies, which excludes other approaches to educational implementation. In our work, authentic texts became the main tool for learning English, which involved lexical, communicative, and audio-linguistic approaches. The effectiveness of the authentic texts for learning a foreign language was also assessed based on the opinions of teachers and students. The level of development of students' critical thinking was assessed by determining the students' capabilities and was related to the features of performing tasks of different levels of complexity. The skills developed by students related to critical thinking were also identified. The practical impact of the article is associated with the creation of approaches that ensure the possibility of using authentic texts in the educational process.

Limitations

The research limitations are related to the failure to involve students of different years of study. This would allow for a more qualitative assessment of the importance of authentic texts in

learning English. Further research will focus on such an approach for a comparative analysis of first-, second-, third-, and fourth-year students.

Recommendations

Using authentic texts in the educational process will provide a better understanding of a foreign language, focusing on its cultural and social features. Authentic texts expand students' language knowledge anf the ability to understand additional context. The process provides students with a broader awareness, focusing on original materials.

Conclusions

During the study, the authors maintained the sequence of stages that reflected the research objectives. The approaches to adapting authentic texts for learning English were developed. The lexical approach was associated with reading and studying authentic texts. The communicative focus provided for studying new words in practice, the ability to generate one's thoughts. The audio-linguistic focus provided for the perception of speech imitation and correct pronunciation of authentic texts. Such an educational process positively influenced the possibility of learning English. The positive influence on the teachers' opinion (97%) is associated with expanded students' cognitive activity based on studying authentic texts and achieving new goals. The students believed that the positive value of such an approach is associated with the possibility of immersion in a foreign language environment (93%).

The results of the study showed that students achieved a high level of critical thinking, which was associated with the performance of linguistic tasks of varying levels of complexity. The students were able to achieve full completion of simple (98%), creative (95%), and complex (89%) tasks, which improved the students' overall performance (84%). The students better performed creative tasks than complex ones that did not require a non-standard approach, as they could express their own opinion and independently develop foreign language skills.

The study also found that creative thinking promoted the development of other skills. These include objective approaches to text analysis, the logical approaches, self-organization, and searching for alternative solutions. Further research may focus at comparing the effectiveness of students' learning of the English language when using authentic texts and ordinary academic texts.

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