THE TWO-GATE PRINCIPLE OF GENERATIVE AI USE AS A MEANS OF FOSTERING CRITICAL THINKING IN EFL ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

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Annotation. The thesis examines how the place of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in the writing cycle determines whether it supports or replaces the analytical work of EFL students. A two-gate principle is substantiated, according to which GenAI is admitted only after the learner's own analysis is completed: first as an opponent whose counter-argument is evaluated, and then as a language editor of a revised text.

Keywords: critical thinking, argumentative writing, EFL, generative artificial intelligence, cognitive offloading, process assessment, academic integrity.

The rapid spread of large language models has changed the conditions in which academic writing is taught. An EFL student can now obtain a fluent, well-organised essay within seconds, and the pedagogical potential of such tools for explanation and language feedback has been widely recognised [2; 6]. However, the same accessibility creates a serious methodological risk. Research on cognitive offloading demonstrates that people readily transfer mental effort to external aids whenever this is possible [8], while recent studies associate frequent reliance on GenAI with lower levels of critical thinking [5; 7]. Consequently, a polished final text has ceased to be reliable evidence of learning. Prohibiting the technology is neither realistic nor desirable: UNESCO calls for teaching its critical and responsible use [10], and the Concept for the Development of the Higher Education System of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030 identifies independent and critical thinking as a key outcome of university education [12]. The question, therefore, is not *whether*

students should use GenAI, but *at which point* of the writing process and *in what function*.

The aim of the present thesis is to substantiate the two-gate principle of GenAI use in EFL argumentative writing and to describe the procedures that make students' reasoning visible and assessable. The study is conceptual in nature; it is based on an analysis of research on critical thinking, writing pedagogy, feedback and GenAI, as well as on the author's experience of teaching ESP and General English to B1–C1 learners in Tashkent.

The starting point is the understanding of critical thinking as purposeful, self-regulatory judgement that includes interpretation, analysis, evaluation and inference [4]. In argumentative writing, these operations are concentrated in three stages: reading and annotating sources, formulating questions about their reasoning, and constructing one's own argument. If GenAI enters the process at any of these stages, it is precisely the analytical operation that is delegated to the machine. Hence, the core of the writing cycle — source analysis, reasoned questioning, argument planning with Toulmin's model [9] and the first draft — is completed without AI assistance, preferably in class.

The tool is admitted at two clearly defined gates only. At **Gate 1**, after the first draft, the student asks GenAI to produce the strongest possible counter-argument to his or her position. The student must then judge in writing whether the objection is valid, partly valid or weak, and either refute it or refine the original claim. In this function GenAI does not think instead of the learner; it provides material for evaluation. Since machine-generated arguments are often general or rely on unverified evidence, this task also counteracts the excessive trust in AI output described by Lee et al. [7]. At **Gate 2**, after peer review and content revision, GenAI may be used to correct language and style. Every accepted change is recorded in a change log, so the tool works only on the form of a text whose content already belongs to the student.

The principle is effective only when it is supported by assessment. Following the idea of constructive alignment [3], the unit of assessment is the portfolio rather than the final essay: annotated sources, the Toulmin planner, the written evaluation of the Gate 1 counter-argument, the change log, a reflective log and an AI-use statement indicating the tool, the gate, the prompts and the suggestions accepted or rejected. An essay that reads well but is not supported by process evidence cannot receive high marks for analysis and argumentation. Such transparency also develops the self-regulation cycle of planning, performance and reflection [11].

The author's classroom observations confirm the importance of regulating the moment and function of AI use. Two contrasting patterns of student behaviour were noted. In the early stages of writing, a considerable number of students accepted GenAI suggestions uncritically and inserted the proposed changes into their texts without being able to explain them. Other students treated the tool as an additional source of ideas rather than an authority: they selected useful suggestions, developed their arguments independently and preserved their own position during revision. This contrast shows that access to GenAI does not in itself lead to critical engagement; the decisive factor is how learners interact with machine feedback, evaluate it and decide what to do with it [1].

In conclusion, the two-gate principle shifts GenAI from the beginning of each thinking phase to its end and changes its role from author to opponent and editor. This protects the stages in which students analyse, question and argue, while at the same time teaching them responsible and transparent use of the technology. The principle can be integrated into existing ESP and General English courses without additional equipment, which is particularly important for large classes with uneven access to technology. A quasi-experimental study comparing groups working under the two-gate principle with groups using GenAI freely is seen as a promising direction for further research.

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