

**Fostering Kindergarten Students' Critical
Thinking Skills Using Social _ Emotional
Learning (SEL) in the EFL Classroom**

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the effectiveness of implementing a Social Emotional Learning program to foster kindergarten EFL students' critical thinking skills of a group of 25 kindergarten students from one of Cairo language schools. The quasi-experimental design called the one experimental group design was employed in the present study .A pre-post critical thinking test was given to the experimental group before and after the treatment. The results revealed that the experimental group post-test scores after the treatment outperformed the pre -test in the critical thinking test in favor of the post test. This proved that the SEL program developed participants' critical thinking skills. Learning to think critically may be one of the most important skills that today's children will need for the future. In today's rapidly changing world, children need to be critical thinkers who can make sense of information, analyze, compare, contrast, make inferences, and generate higher order skills. Schools play an essential role in preparing our children to become knowledge, responsible, and caring adults. Knowledgeable. Responsible. Caring. Behind each word lies an educational challenge.Each element of this challenge can be enhanced by thoughtful, sustained, and systematic attention to children's social and emotional learning (SEL).

Keywords: Critical Thinking, Social Emotional Learning, Kindergarten stage.

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Introduction:

Learning to think critically may be one of the most important skills that today's children will need for the future. In today's rapidly changing world, children need to be able to do much more than repeat a list of facts; they need to be critical thinkers who can make sense of information, analyze, compare, contrast, make inferences, and generate higher order skills. Schools play an essential role in preparing our children to become knowledgeable, responsible, and caring adults. Knowledgeable. Responsible. Caring. Behind each word lies an educational challenge. For children to become knowledgeable, they must be ready and motivated to learn, and capable of integrating new information into their lives. For children to become responsible, they must be able to understand risks and opportunities, and be motivated to choose actions and behaviors that serve not only their own interests but those of others. For children to become caring, they must be able to see beyond themselves and appreciate the concerns of others; they must believe that to care is to be part of a community that is welcoming, nurturing, and concerned about them. Each element of this challenge can be enhanced by thoughtful, sustained, and systematic attention to children's social and emotional learning (SEL).

The pilot study:

As a researcher in the National Center for Educational Research and Development, Curriculum Development and Teaching Methods Department, the researcher participated in various studies and visited many schools .The researcher performed a pilot study and interviewed 15 kindergarten English language teachers and supervisors. The interviews aimed at identifying the critical thinking skills and strategies currently employed in the kindergarten classrooms. Moreover, the researcher attended some lessons and observed 6 EFL kindergarten teachers while doing some activities with kindergarten students. The results of the pilot study revealed that most EFL kindergarten students lack the adequate critical thinking competencies and teachers have poor mastery in fostering children's critical thinking skills, which may be due to the prevailing traditional method of teaching English language and critical thinking skills in the

kindergarten stage. The dominant model of teaching English language, particularly for kindergarten stage students, had been to teach by giving questions and answers, and ask students to memorize the answers, or in case of using flash cards, students listen first the questions and look for direct answers without thinking. These results were consistent with the results of several studies which assured the importance of teaching students critical thinking skills especially the kindergarten stage (Ahmed & Ibrahim,2023; Al-Rahbiet, 2022; Pham,2021; Mahoney,2020; Netto-Shek,2018; McClelland et al.,2017; 2016; Aizikovish-Udi,2015; Durlak,2011). Based on the above, it can be concluded that there is students' poor mastery of critical thinking skills .This might be attributed to the methods of teaching adopted in the kindergarten stage .Therefore, the present study tries to develop critical thinking skills of kindergarten students through the social emotional learning approach.

Statement of the problem

The study problem can be stated in kindergarten students' poor mastery of critical thinking skills. This might be attributed to the traditional methods of teaching kindergarten still adopted by most EFL kindergarten stage teachers.

Questions of the study

The current study attempted to provide answers to the following main question:

"What is the effectiveness of using the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) program on developing kindergarten EFL students' skills?".

The following sub-questions were derived from this main question:

- 1- What are the critical thinking skills necessary for kindergarten EFL students?
- 2- How far is the Social Emotional Learning program effective in developing the kindergarten critical thinking skills?

Significance of the study

The present study is significant in constructing a program particularly directed to kindergarten EFL students to enhance their critical thinking skills. It attempts to investigate the impact of using SEL program on developing EFL kindergarten students' critical thinking

skills. The study might be significant to in-service teachers as it provides activities to foster critical thinking based on SEL. The findings could be theoretically and practically significant for EFL teachers, curriculum designers and researchers.

Delimitations of the study

This study was confined to:

- 1) Developing critical thinking skills necessary for EFL kindergarten students: Self-regulation, Asking Questions, Problem solving, Making Decisions, Drawing conclusions, and Interpretation.
- 2) One experimental group of 25 EFL kindergarten students in a Language School in Cairo governorate.

Critical Thinking and kindergarten Students

According to Facione (2015), critical thinking includes a set of cognitive skills and dispositions that were stated as interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation and self-regulation. The reason why Facione used the term dispositions for the aspects of critical thinking is the need for internal motivation and willingness for a person to think critically. Being able to think critically means students can identify, interpret, analyze, evaluate and infer information better, which results in the ability to transform the knowledge gained from teachers into their knowledge. The curiosity and open-mindedness of critical thinkers also allow them to become more active learners in class who ask more questions and demand a more in-depth explanation of matters being discussed. Critical thinking is also an important skill of inquiry, problem-solving and decision making. Therefore, students who think more critically are more enthusiastic, creative, autonomous and decisive; they can achieve better performance in their study (Pham,2021).

Despite consensus on the need for critical thinking, there is still considerable debate over how it is learned and, subsequently, how education can best believe that critical thinking can be taught as a generic skill independently from subject content, while others contend that mastery is pivotal to the development of thinking capabilities (Willingham,2019). Netto-Shek (2018) concludes that the teaching of

thinking is a crucial set of skills that young learners, must acquire in order to become effective learners.

Shek (2017) used the theoretical construct of constructivism, and demonstrated how thinking skills should be contextualized in authentic children's literature as a means of modeling good thinking and thinking frames. Instructionally as well, it is argued and demonstrated how thinking skills can be applied to language input young learners receive in English language lessons as well as in output tasks. Ahmed & Ibrahim (2023) confirmed the impact of critical thinking in improving students' learning and how it is important to think critically in the learning process. They recommended that learners should be exposed to intensive tasks that motivate and enhance critical thinking skills.

Social Emotional Learning

Social and emotional competence is the ability to understand, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of one's life in ways that enable the successful management of life tasks such as learning, forming relationships, solving everyday problems, and adapting to the complex demands of growth and development. It includes self-awareness, control of impulsivity, working cooperatively, and caring about oneself and others. Social and emotional learning is the process through which children and adults develop the skills, attitudes, and values necessary to acquire social and emotional competences (Elias, et al.,1997). **Social emotional learning helps students build social skills, form healthy relationships and manage their emotions. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL,2018):**

“SEL is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.”

CASEL lists five core social emotional learning competencies:

1. **Self-awareness** — Recognizing emotions and thoughts, understanding how they influence behavior and assessing personal strengths and weaknesses.

2. **Self-management** — Regulating thoughts, emotions and behaviors. Setting goals, controlling impulses and managing stress.
3. **Social awareness** — Understanding the perspective of others, showing empathy for diverse groups of people and finding support through family, school and community relationships.
4. **Relationship skills** — Communicating, cooperating, resisting negative pressure and offering help. Building and maintaining healthy relationships.
5. **Responsible decision-making** — Making ethical and respectful choices about personal behavior and relationships, and evaluating the consequences of decisions.

Rationale for using SEL in fostering EFL kindergarten students' Critical Thinking.

There are five themes to social -emotional learning (SEL) and each one corresponds in some way to critical thinking skills. Like critical thinking, SEL is a systematic approach to acquiring knowledge in and about our world. Self-awareness, in part, means examining our own prejudices and biases and thinking beyond loud media messages. Social awareness is inclusive thinking where we identify social norms with empathy and compassion. Responsible decision means making caring and constructive choices with an open mind. Self-management allows for control of reactionary opinions and views. We are open to new ideas. Relationship skills require active listening and clear communication. These SEL traits are necessary for critical thinkers too. Both CT and SEL are ordered ways of thinking based on reasoning and analytical skills that match ideas to facts. This opens the mind to deeper learning. All of which allows us to understand ourselves, others and, in turn, more fully understand our world. It reduces reactionary responses and encourages ordered thinking and curiosity. And that, among other benefits, helps us develop social, emotional, and thinking competences. We live in a loud, often angry world which needs critical thinkers who are logical, perceptive, and socially aware.

To be ready to enter school, young children need (SE) skills such as managing emotions, following direction, paying attention and getting along with others. Yet teachers report that many children enter school without these skills which can make it challenging for them to learn. Yet early childhood educators say they don't get enough training to effectively help children develop such skills. Mahoney (2020) maintains that SEL has become more central to education because of demand from educators, parents, students, and business leaders alongside rigorous research showing broad, positive impacts for students and adults. Promoting social and emotional competencies—including the abilities to understand and manage emotions, achieve positive goals, show caring and concern for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions are important for success at school and in life.

Arslan and Demirtas (2016) investigated the correlations between social emotional learning and critical thinking. According to the research findings, critical thinking and SEL were found to correlate significantly positively. In other words, individuals who are disposed to think critically also have higher social emotional learning skills. Hence, critical thinking and SEL concepts are related to each other. Farell (2013) indicated that the ESL help youngsters to improve their critical thinking and problem solving skills to form their personal value judgment and to make effective and constructive contact with others.

Empirical research has proven that children's thinking skills, can advance when suitable instructional contexts are provided. Al-Rahbiet et al. (2022) aimed in their study to explore the level of critical thinking skills integrated into the tasks of the Omani English language curriculum of young learners. Results of the study showed a low level of critical thinking skills integrated in the tasks of the textbooks as these tasks made up only(35.55%) of all the tasks in the textbooks. Maintaining lifelong critical thinkers needs initiating them in environments suitable to critical thinking practices from the early years of education. Asking children to classify objects according to their shapes and colors, presenting them with problems, or situations in which two solutions can be equally valid, or asking children to

consider some choices, evaluate them and justify their choice, are examples of tasks that are capable of developing children's critical thinking abilities (Aizikovish-Udi,2015).

Furthermore, Papadopoulos & Bisiri (2020) designed and applied a pedagogical program that aimed at improving critical thinking skills of very young learners for preschool education. Following the principles of multi literacies pedagogy, various activities were applied towards improving critical thinking skills to children, as they are prioritized as important assets for the citizen of the 21st century .Folk stories, fairy tales and games constituted the basic tools employed by the teacher throughout the program .Results showed that the children exhibited an increased level of critical thinking and they developed creative and communicative aspects of their behavior while coming into contact with other culture elements.

Research increasingly suggests that (SEL) matters a great deal for important life outcomes like success in school. Jones and Doolittle (2017) maintain” that SEL can be taught and nurtured in schools so that students increase their ability to integrate thinking, emotions, and behavior in ways that lead to positive schools and life outcomes.” Although focusing on classroom management and teaching quality can improve student outcomes, including skill-focused SEL programing in preschool classrooms as well creates additional benefits. Skill-based SEL programs combined with professional development for teachers optimize SE growth. Such programs promote social, emotional, and self-regulation skills through short lessons in which teachers present skill concepts with stories, pictures, and puppets. Children practice the skills in role play or planned activities. Teachers support children to use the skills in their everyday interactions, and they strengthen these skills by for example, praising students; efforts and providing corrective feedback. This approach has proven effective in teaching children cooperative problem-solving skills and strategies for resolving peer conflicts, which in turn reduce impulsive behaviors in the classroom and promote frustration tolerance and active learning (Bierman,2017).

McClelland , et al. (2017) examined the theory and science behind early childhood SEL interventions. Three strategies appear to make interventions more successful. First, SEL interventions including training or professional development for early childhood teachers; some also emphasize building teachers' own SEL skills. Second, effective interventions and practice of targeted skills into daily activities, giving children repeated chances to practice SEL skills in different contexts. Third, interventions engage children's families, so that kids have a chance to work on their SEL skills both at school and at home.

Moreover, Yen Law(2012) investigated in her study the strategies used by early primary teachers to promote young children's critical thinking. It also experimented children's responses to picture books reading, including their opinions and behaviors. Results showed that the effective teaching strategies: (using open-thought provoking questions, identifying and discussing key messages of the stories, making connections to children's prior knowledge and experiences, organizing peer discussion, modeling thinking aloud, and exploring words and pictures) in promoting critical thinking in children. The children's reading of picture books showed that the majority of these young children engaged in participating in the meanings of texts, and of using texts functionally with a minority engaged in the practice of critically analyzing and transforming texts.

One of the most perplexing predicaments of kindergarten teacher education is the lack of preparation to teach critical thinking and work with young learners that most teachers have upon entering the classroom. Despite its importance, critical thinking is rarely taught in school (Kasten,2012). Mechler (2016) explains an example of an open-ended question is, "How did you make your drawing?". In response to this question, children could elaborate on the particular colors they selected as well as possible reasons why they selected the colors or drew particular symbols in the illustration.

Making predictions is a building block of critical thinking because it requires thinking back to previous experiences in order to anticipate what might happen in a current or future situation (Fisher,2005). When asking children to make predictions, it's important to ask

children the “What if” questions. Encouraging critical thinking includes embracing the originality of children’s interpretations of events are based on their unique perceptions. This originality should be encouraged, as children’s ideas will vary based upon their experiences and opinions. Original responses can reflect their critical thinking abilities. Moreover, children’s responses are a gateway to their thinking and provide insight into their current understanding of the world. Critical thinking can also be promoted by children’s participation in enjoyable activities, such as art. For example, an appropriate literacy goal for pre-school children is being able to recognize the letters in their names. They could be directed to create letters using art materials, such as paper, colored markers or crayons, clay, beads, or play dough. Creating letters requires children to recall and then apply their existing knowledge to a new situation. The art activity calls upon children’s critical thinking. Children’s art creations will be unique and based upon their own interpretations of the art activity. Their artwork will differ in the variety of colors used and the design of the artwork. Hence, providing thoughtfully designed art projects is one tool teaches have for promoting children’s critical thinking(Marigliane & Russo,2011).

Rieg& Paquette (2009,1) support using drama and movement to enhance the literacy development of English language learners. Besides being "fun" learning experiences for children, drama and movement have proven to assist with developing decoding skills, fluency, vocabulary, syntactic knowledge, meta -cognitive thinking. Additional benefits for English language learners include increased motivation and reduced anxiety. Lake (2003) maintains that music is three-dimensional. A song is more than just words and notes on paper. Music is suitable for SEL environment that expresses emotion and conveys a message. Researchers have found that music trains the brain for higher forms of thinking. The human brain is extremely complex. Individual differences are as humans' visible features. Asher based his TPR method on what he calls "brain switching", he claims that no genuine learning can happen until there is a brain switch from the left to the right. There must be an image attached to the mental

representation of a word in order to retain and use it. Moreover, Lake (2003) argues that music with words uses both brain hemispheres, when coupled with visual images, music become a very powerful learning tool. Language and music are closely tied together in brain processing by pitch, rhythm, and syntactical phrasing. Music familiarizes students with these connections and provides a fun and relaxing way to acquire, process, and produce English.

Hypothesis of the Study

There is a statistically significant difference at the level of significance 0.05 between the pre and post applications of the critical thinking skills test on the research sample of students' in favor of the post application of the test.

Method

Participants

A group of (25) kindergarten students were selected from one of Cairo language schools, in the year 2022 - 2023 .

Research Design

The quasi-experimental design called the pre-test/post-test one group design was employed in the present study. A pre/post critical thinking test was given to the group before and after the treatment .Twenty five EFL kindergarten students were submitted to an SEL program. Students were trained to use critical thinking skills and implement the SEL competencies they learned by their teacher. The independent variable was the SEL program, and the dependent variable was the critical thinking pre-posttest.

Measures:

The present study made use of two main instruments:

- A pre-post critical thinking test.
- An SEL program.

a- Checklist of critical thinking skills

The checklist was meant to determine the most important critical thinking skills necessary for kindergarten students. It was designed in light of the objectives included in the Ministry of Education document and the previous literature and related studies concerned with developing critical thinking skills at this stage for ESL/EFL kindergarten students, the checklist was submitted to a panel of jury in

the field of TEYL methods of teaching to determine the degree of importance of each skill.

The critical thinking skills selected by the study according to their high percentages were as follows :

a- The critical thinking skills:

-Self-regulation: -Demonstrates self-control and self-awareness while working on tasks.-Monitors own learning and work and adjust strategies as necessary.-Seeks feedback from others and uses it to improve own work.-Manages time effectively and meets deadline.

Asking questions: -Asks questions to clarify understanding and gather information.-Generates open-ended questions that encourage discussions and exploration.-Considers others' perspectives and tries to understand their thinking.-Uses questions to challenge assumptions and stimulates critical thinking.

Problem solving: -Identifies problems and obstacles and develops strategies to solve them.-Considers different options and evaluates their effectiveness.-Collaborates with others to identify solutions and generate new ideas.-Adapts strategies and approaches as necessary and reflects on their effectiveness.

Making decisions: -Identifies and evaluates options and makes informed decisions.-Considers multiple perspectives and potential consequences.-Uses evidence and reasoning to support decisions.-Reflects on decisions and considers how they could be improved.

Drawing conclusion: -Analyzes information and data to draw conclusions. -Identifies patterns and trends in data and information. -Considers alternative explanations and possibilities. -Uses evidence and reasoning to support conclusions.

Interpretation: -Interprets information and data accurately and effectively. -Recognizes and considers different perspectives and contexts. -Draws connections and makes inferences based on evidence. -Identifies and analyzes underlying assumptions and biases.

b- Critical thinking test

Objectives of the test

A pre/post critical thinking test was administered by the researcher. It was used prior to the SEL program implementation to determine the

level of students' critical thinking skills of the experimental group before starting the treatment, and hence, the progress achieved by the group would be attributed to the suggested SEL program they had been exposed to. As a post-test, it was used to investigate the effectiveness of SEL program, on developing the students' critical thinking skills.

Test Description

The pre–posttest consisted of a 5 questions, it aimed at assessing kindergarten students' critical thinking skills. The questions were flash cards and pictures which express social and emotional learning experiences and situations and the critical thinking skills, students draw lines to the correct response, or choose the correct feeling or answer.

Test validity and reliability

To measure the test content validity, the first version of the test was given to 6 EFL supervisors and teachers to evaluate it in terms of content appropriateness, and suitability of the test to the students' level.

In order to establish the test reliability, the Cronbach's Alpha equation was used on a sample of 15 primary students' from another school to calculate the reliability coefficient which was (0. 82), and which was relatively high.

program based on Storytelling approach

Learning objectives

Kindergarten students were expected to master the identified critical thinking skills by the end of the treatment. A child with a critical thinking mindset is able to question, interlink information and ideas, make rational choices and most importantly justify their own decisions. This is crucial for development of the human brain as it shifts the focus from being a passive listener to an active learner.

Duration

The activities based on the SEL approach were taught in one month. The first session was an introduction aimed at introducing learners to the aims of the SEL program and activities they were going to perform based on the SEL approach to develop their critical thinking

skills. Each week included two sessions, and each session lasted for 60 minutes.

The validity of the Program

Sample activities were given to EFL specialists who approved them, the panel of jury approved the activities as valid .

Piloting of the activities

A small pilot study was carried out, 15 students were selected from the kindergarten stage and were asked to perform three activities, the pilot study aimed at determining the time taken by the students to do the activities and to what extent they enjoyed the critical thinking activities.

Description of the SEL program's activities to foster young learners' critical thinking skills

- Asking children open-ended questions. Encouraging children's unique responses to questions. Embrace thinking in different ways.
- Problem-solving situations: using flash cards, pictures, and stories: Help children have their creative and unique problem solving skills. Ask questions such as, "What other ideas could you provide?" or encourage them to generate alternatives by saying, "Let's think of all the other possible solutions".
- Asking young learners to make predictions. Help children make hypotheses during play ,ask: for example ,If we do this, what you think will happen next?" or" Let's predict what might happen next".
- Urging young learners to answer" What if" questions.
- Offering children with hands-on activities and new life experiences through SEL situations.

Graphic organizers: Using Venn diagram and Concept maps help making connections. Making a personal connection to characters in a story is a reliable teaching tool that connects the child to the character in the story and can enhance self-awareness .Response tasks such as "Just Like Me" is an example of tasks that use the thinking skill of comparing to encourage an aesthetic stance in young learners as they listen to stories. The skills of comparing and contrasting

supported by Venn diagram become visual and visible, require learners to locate the similarities and differences between a character in a story and themselves.

- Making connections to children's prior knowledge to new knowledge and experience.
- The Circle of Possibility game: This critical thinking task helps in understanding own self and the world that is present around us. It also deals with various issues and obstacles and encourages us to visualize the solutions for different issues. Teachers discuss a particular issue for example (Healthy food and habits) with children and ask how it affects them, family, community, country, and the world. Through this, they will form meaningful lifelong learning skills such as creative thinking, self- awareness, and many others.
- Who is my Hero? Ask your kid what comes to their mind while listening to a word "hero"? Who comes into their mind by listening to this word? Why they think is hero important in one's life? How you become a hero? Listen to them carefully and examine their thought process and correct them if they are on the wrong track.
- Watching videos: Students watch a video of the story, for example: (Three Little Fishes, We are Going on a Bear Hunt) which teach morals and SEL skills.
- Role play and drama: Students dramatize the story. Using puppets as characters, finger puppets, masks, and toys.
- Timelines activity: It helps learners to organize events according to time. Such tasks require children to identify story events and children put the events in the correct sequence.
- Pictionary: Encourage children to draw a scene to explain their thoughts. Ask them to justify what they draw. We need critical thinking skills to depict their thoughts into pictures. Students cut, color and paste shapes of the animals and characters of the story, they can use them as puppets.

Results

Results of the study are presented in terms of the study hypothesis.

To ensure the validity of the hypothesis, which states: "There is a statistically significant difference at the level of significance 0.05

between the pre and post applications of the critical thinking skills test on the research sample of students' in favor of the post application of the test."

The Wilcoxon test was used, which is one of the non-parametric statistical methods alternative to the "T" test for two related samples, because the teacher sample consisted of 25 students' which is a number less than 30, and its result came as shown in the following table:

Table (1) The result of pre and post applications of the critical thinking skills test

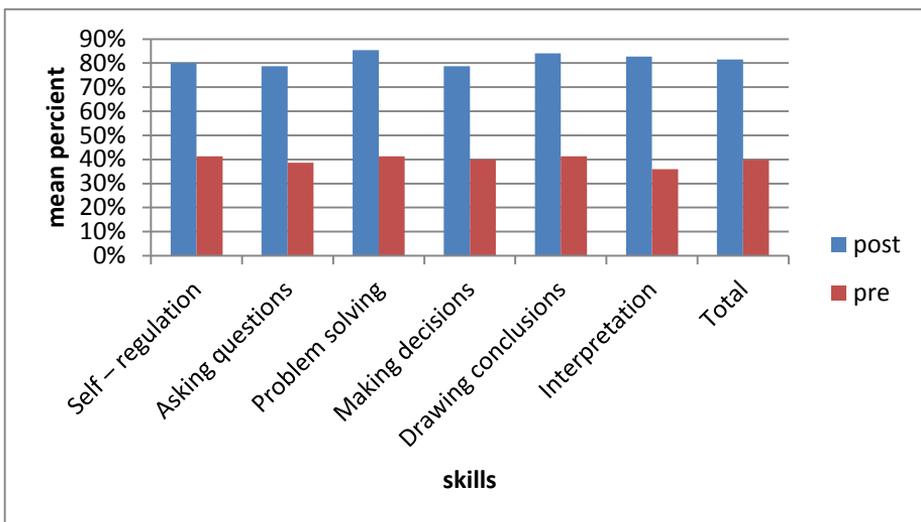
Skills	Ranks	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	Calculated Z value	Tabulated Z value at 0.05	Significant at 0.05
Self – regulation	Negative	0	0	0	4.716	1.64	Sig.
	Positive	25	13	325			
Asking questions	Negative	0	0	0	4.716	1.64	Sig.
	Positive	25	13	325			
Problem solving	Negative	0	0	0	4.716	1.64	Sig.
	Positive	25	13	325			
Making decisions	Negative	0	0	0	4.716	1.64	Sig.
	Positive	25	13	325			
Drawing conclusions	Negative	0	0	0	4.716	1.64	Sig.
	Positive	25	13	325			
Interpretation	Negative	0	0	0	4.716	1.64	Sig.
	Positive	25	13	325			
Total	Negative	0	0	0	4.716	1.64	Sig.
	Positive	25	13	325			

It is clear from the previous table that the number of negative ranks was zero for each skill and its total, which indicates that all students' scores in the post-application of the test were higher than their scores in the pre-application for each skill and its total. It is also clear from the table that the calculated value of the critical ratio "Z" was greater than its tabulated value, which indicates there is a significant difference between the pre and post applications of the test in favor of the post application at the level of significance 0.05 for each skill and its total.

This table shows the percentage of the mean for the pre and post measures for the test for each skill:

Table (2)The percentage of the mean for the pre and post measures for the test for each skill

Skills	degree	pre	%	Post	%
Self – regulation	3	1.24	41.33%	2.40	80%
Asking questions	3	1.16	38.67%	2.36	78.67%
Problem solving	3	1.24	41.33%	2.56	85.33%
Making decisions	3	1.20	40%	2.36	78.67%
Drawing conclusions	3	1.24	41.33%	2.52	84%
Interpretation	3	1.08	36%	2.48	82.67%
Total	18	7.16	39.78%	14.68	81.56%



Discussion

Social and emotional learning taps into to all modalities of learning and is able to appeal to all learning styles. SEL allows all students to comprehend what they hear and often students are more willing to speak and participate in SEL class fun environment that will help students learn effectively.

Results indicated that SEL approach is vital to foster critical thinking skills. The SEL program proved to be effective in enhancing the six critical thinking skills tremendously(Self-regulation, Asking questions, Problem solving, Making decisions, Drawing conclusions, and Interpretation).The effective teaching strategies: (implementing open-ended questions, identifying and discussing key elements of the stories, activating children’s prior knowledge and experiences, peer

discussion, using thinking aloud, and connecting words and pictures) in promoting critical thinking in children reflected a sociocultural approach to teaching and learning. The children listening to the teacher reading aloud of picture books and fairytales, showed that the majority of these young children engaged in the practices of using graphic organizers, such as (Venn diagram), participating in the meanings of texts, and of using evidence and reasoning to support their decisions. Results showed that to enhance learners' critical thinking there is a need for teaching critical thinking practices to focus on enriching children to be analysts and encouraging children to be motivated critical thinkers who can make their own decisions, respond energetically to open-ended questions. These results are in line with the results of (Papadopoulon & Bisiri,2020;Yen Law,2012).

Furthermore, when students take part and are engaged in SEL activities, they get more chances to practice problem solving, drawing conclusions, making decisions, and self-regulation skills. Hence, they may get more feeling of confidence and success which can facilitate their learning, we can consider integrating visual and kinesthetic activities to express the meaning of words. Accompanying the words with visuals and body movement and actively engaging our students in these interactive activities will give them a better grasp of the new concepts. This is consistent with (Jones& Doolittle,2017; Rieg & Paquette,2009; and Lake,2003).

Art activities are important for children's critical thinking. Children's art creations were different and based upon their own interpretations of the art activity. Their artwork was unique in using various colors and the design of the artwork. Therefore, providing thoughtfully designed art work is one instrument teachers can use to promote children's critical thinking(Marigliane & Russo,2011).

Activities like role playing, games, created a challenging SEL classroom situations in which students tried to put, with a competitive spirit, all their available resources in action. They also achieved a dramatic critical thinking effect created by critical thinking activities in an SEL settings. Anxiety can inhibit language learning, but the

researcher reflected that by using SEL, this inhibition is lowered because students are more comfortable in the classroom. Children used these critical thinking skills in their daily interaction. SEL has proven to be effective to improve children's cooperative problem-solving and resolving conflict skills, which in turn reduced impulsive behaviors in the classroom and promoted frustration tolerance. This is consistent with (Bierman,2017; and Jones& Doolittle,2017).

Remarkably, many Critical thinking activities based on SEL are interesting, challenging and motivating, so almost all the students enjoy participating in them. Implementing SEL approach relieves students' anxiety, builds up relaxing atmosphere and encourages students to have fun and become interested in learning the English language.

Recommendations and suggestions for further research:

- SEL strategies should be incorporated in EFL teacher education programs.
- Kindergarten EFL teachers should be trained to choose appropriate critical thinking activities .
- Teachers should play a vital role in teaching critical thinking to enhance learning, and must create an atmosphere that is fun and joyful for the kindergarten students.
- More studies are recommended to investigate the impact of fostering students' critical thinking skills using SEL in the primary, preparatory and secondary stages.

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