

**The Effect of the Social-Emotional Learning Strategy on  
Promoting EFL Pupils' SEL Competencies and Critical  
Reading Skills in the First Cycle of the Basic Education**

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## The Effect of the Social-Emotional Learning Strategy on Promoting EFL Pupils' SEL Competencies and Critical Reading Skills in the First Cycle of the Basic Education

### Abstract

The study examined the effect of using the Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Strategy on promoting the SEL competencies and foreign language (FL) critical reading skills of the primary second grade pupils in the first cycle of the basic education. The participants comprise 60 pupils enrolled in two classes at an international school. The participants were divided into two groups: control and experimental with 30 pupils assigned to each group. For the purpose of data elicitation, the study employed three instruments, namely the critical reading skills pre-and-posttests, pre-and-post-administered SEL observation checklist, and semi-structured interviews of ten FL experienced teachers. The study adopted the mixed method of quantitative and qualitative analysis. Inferential statistics was used including independent samples t-test and paired samples t-test. Qualitative analysis covers the responses to the observation checklist and semi-structured interview. Findings emphasized the necessity to incorporate the SEL strategy into the FL curriculum of basic education second grade.

**Keywords:** Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Strategy, (FL) critical reading skills

## الملخص

تناولت الدراسة تأثير استخدام استراتيجيات التعلم الاجتماعي-العاطفي (SEL) في تعزيز الكفايات الاجتماعية-العاطفية ومهارات القراءة النقدية باللغة الأجنبية لطلاب الصف الثاني الابتدائي في الدورة الأولى للتعليم الأساسي. يشمل المشاركون ٦٠ طالباً مقسمين إلى صفيين في مدرسة دولية. تم تقسيم المشاركين إلى مجموعتين: تجريبية وضابطة، مع تخصيص ٣٠ طالباً لكل مجموعة. لغرض جمع البيانات، استخدمت الدراسة أدوات، هي اختبارات قبل وبعد مهارات القراءة النقدية، وقائمة ملاحظات SEL. اعتمدت الدراسة على الطريقة المختلطة للتحليل الكمي والتحليل النوعي. تم استخدام الإحصاءات الاستنتاجية بما في ذلك اختبار t لعينات مستقلة واختبار t للعينات المقارنة. يغطي التحليل النوعي الردود على قائمة الملاحظات والمقابلة شبه الهيكلية. أبرزت النتائج ضرورة دمج استراتيجيات SEL في المنهاج اللغوي للتعليم الأساسي في الصف الثاني. الكلمات الرئيسية: استراتيجيات التعلم الاجتماعي-العاطفي (SEL)، مهارات القراءة النقدية باللغة الأجنبية (FL)

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## Introduction:

COVID-19 has brought countless challenges and potential threats to well-being: physical, economic, social, and emotional. Social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic is greatly exacerbating a challenge that digital media use has already wrought on the current generation: limited opportunities for social and emotional learning and reduction in social and emotional well-being. Though virtual platforms have given children and youth the chance for some form of socially distanced connection during COVID-19, research shows that it cannot take the place of face-to-face interaction for building social and emotional skills. Children need social and emotional instruction, practice, and feedback during sustained interaction and collaboration. In contrast, time spent on devices is linked to lower self-control, more distractibility, less emotional stability, and more difficulty making friends. Social and emotional development was in peril prior to the pandemic. After this time apart, it will take systematic, intentional, and intensive efforts to get social and emotional learning back on track. The COVID-19 pandemic has simultaneously introduced new stressors and removed comforting connections and routines in the lives of children, teens, and adults alike. In addition to the many pupils who have lost loved ones to the virus, pupils may be struggling with concerns about health and safety, social isolation, or the difficulties of learning remotely. They may worry about food insecurity or stable housing as unemployment rises. They may be carrying an added burden of anxiety amidst the increasingly tumultuous racial and political climate. They are certainly missing out on innumerable cherished events and activities with families, friends, classmates, and teammates. All of this ongoing stress and loss will predictably take a toll on social connections, and emotional well-being. That is why social emotional learning (SEL) instruction has proven to be overwhelmingly beneficial now. (Katie Rosanbalm, 2021).

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SEL was initiated in 1994 by a group that included Daniel Goleman, author of Social Intelligence and Emotional Intelligence, and educator-philanthropist Eileen Rockefeller Growald, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has been a pioneer in the field of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL).

Social and emotional learning can be defined as the processes through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. (Weissberg, 2015)

To more fully describe SEL, The Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning (CASEL) identifies five interconnected core competencies necessary for children's social and emotional wellbeing. These five competencies are as follows:

Self-awareness is being aware of how one's thoughts and emotions are connected to behavior. Self-awareness includes optimism and confidence in one's abilities, while also acknowledging one's weaknesses.

Self-management is the ability to take personal responsibility for one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Self-management includes adaptively coping with personal stress, exercising self-restraint, controlling impulsive reactions, and thoughtfully making decisions by considering the potential repercussions of one's actions. Self-management also includes setting goals and working toward those goals.

Social awareness is the ability to understand others' perspectives and to be thoughtful of others' feelings, even when we may disagree with their viewpoints. Being socially aware includes taking into account social and ethical norms and looking to trusted others for support.

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Relationship skills form the basis for friendships and positive social interactions across the life span. Building healthy relationships requires strong two-way communication skills, such as clearly expressing one's thoughts and feelings and also listening to and understanding others' input. Relationships require give and take, such as offering help to others and asking for help when needed. Healthy relationships require cooperation, conflict resolution skills, and good personal judgment, such as resisting destructive peer pressure.

Responsible decision making is the ability to carefully weigh potential outcomes of one's decisions. This includes considering if a choice is safe, ethical, respectful of social norms, and if the outcomes will be beneficial to oneself and others. Responsible decision making also includes taking responsibility for one's actions (Mellssa Heath, 2017).

One way of introducing social emotional learning is through reading and during reading and literature classes as reading helps learners to create characters, activate learners' minds, enrich their thoughts, widen their vision and enhance their knowledge. Reading plays a vital role in enhancing their ability to comprehend concepts and ideas. Furthermore, reading is an essential activity for enriching their vocabulary. Moreover, spelling improves when words are seen in print. The more the pupils read, the better their ability in both listening and pronunciation will be. How well a person can read will affect his/her ability to learn, to acquire knowledge and to communicate! Accordingly, it is important for pupils to be encouraged and assisted to read well in order to enhance their learning. Educators face difficulties with pupils who have limited skills in decoding and comprehending, and who lack motivation to read. They are less eager to participate in classroom reading settings. They may be hesitated or afraid of making errors. (Le Fever; Moore & Wilkinson, 2003).

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Reading books improves concentration and patience. It also helps children develop that patience and concentration, making them better at conversation and conflict resolution. Activities that build a child's social emotional vocabulary help kids to better understand and express their emotions. Connecting feelings and experiences to concrete vocabulary words helps children develop more self-awareness and build better relationships with others. When we read, watch, or listen to stories, we show greater kindness and willingness to cooperate. We become more empathetic, and understand how others may react in a certain situation. After all, we are storytelling creatures. Our brains are neurologically hardwired for stories, and a story-rich life is one key to building strong social-emotional learning (SEL) skills.

Literature is known to be a great channel for thought and emotional expression. Books and stories have always been used to promote social-emotional skills such as self-awareness, empathy, and self-management. Therefore, children's literature may be essential for children to build their social and emotional learning skills. When choosing children's literature, we often think of books that will promote a child's feelings of happiness, joy, trust, and love. The more competent children are with SEL skills, the more successful they will be in school and life in general.

### **Statement of the problem**

Due to the pandemic lack of physical interaction in the last couple of years clearly led to poor social emotional skills. EFL pupils in international schools in Egypt were negatively affected.

In addition, EFL primary pupils' reading results showed poor critical reading skills and this may be attributed to virtual learning and lack of pupil-teacher interaction as well as pupil-pupil interaction.

As being a teacher for the first cycle of the basic educational pupils, it has been observed that during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, the

reading skills and the social emotional learning competencies of the first cycle of the basic educational pupils have been negatively affected. Consequently, there is a need to develop both critical reading and Social emotional skills.

### **Questions of the study:**

The study examined and answered the following main question:

#### **What is the Effect of the Social-Emotional Learning Strategy on Promoting EFL Pupils' SEL Competencies and Critical Reading Skills in the First Cycle of the Basic Education?**

In order to answer the aforementioned question, the following sub- questions were answered:

1. What are the SEL competencies/skills needed to promote critical reading?
2. What is the effect of the SEL strategy on promoting EFL pupils' critical reading skills?
3. What is the effect of the SEL strategies on promoting pupils' Social Emotional domain?

### **Aim of the study**

This study helped determine some of the critical reading skills and social- emotional learning competencies of EFL second-year primary pupils that need more time and effort to be developed

### **Significance of the study**

The present study is significant for the following reasons:

- 1- It pays the FL curriculum designers' attention to the importance of social emotional learning in promoting pupils' reading skills.
- 2- It raises teachers' awareness of the new strategies for teaching reading.



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## Review of Literature and Related Studies

The literature and related studies on Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Critical Reading, establishing the theoretical foundation for the proposed approach. The chapter was divided into three main sections, each addressing distinct aspects. The first section introduced the constructivist learning theory, emphasizing learners' active role in knowledge construction. Piaget and Vygotsky's contributions highlighted the importance of learners' interaction with the environment, shaping individualized learning experiences. Constructivism guided pedagogical practices, fostering environments where pupils actively participated, explored, and constructed meaning.

The second section explored the theory of social constructivism, emphasizing knowledge development through social interaction and culture. Vygotsky and Bruner highlighted the role of social interaction in cognitive development, framing learning as a socially oriented process. Educators adopting social constructivism recognized the significance of culture, social interaction, and collaboration in children's knowledge development.

Moving on to the exploration of SEL, the third section defined Social-Emotional Learning as the acquisition and application of skills for understanding and regulating emotions, building positive relationships, and making responsible decisions. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) outlined five competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. SEL was seen as essential for creating a positive school climate and fostering pupils' social and emotional skills.

The emergence of SEL was traced back to the 1960s, with studies by Brackett and Rivers, Durlak et al., and Elias et al. shedding light on its roots in emotional intelligence and its positive impact on personal and social

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skills. SEL pioneers such as Howard Gardner, Daniel Goleman, Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, and Rollo May contributed significantly to its development.

SEL components, as identified by CASEL and the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (NCSEAD), included self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Durlak et al. added emotional literacy promotion, problem-solving, decision-making, social skills enhancement, and providing practice opportunities as integral components contributing to positive outcomes such as improved academic achievement and reduced behavior problems.

The significance of SEL was underscored by its positive impact on academic achievement, behavior, and mental health. CASEL emphasized its role in creating a positive school climate, while NCSEAD linked SEL to educational equity, leveling the playing field for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Long-term studies, such as those by Durlak et al., demonstrated the enduring benefits of SEL over time.

The growing popularity of SEL usage was evident in its implementation through various approaches, including standalone programs, integration into academic instruction, and school-wide practices. CASEL outlined different implementation levels from early childhood to high school. NCSEAD stressed the importance of integrating SEL into the broader education system through teacher professional development and alignment with state standards.

Guidelines provided by Elias et al. emphasized the importance of evidence-based practices, positive school atmospheres, professional development, and addressing the unique needs of diverse pupils. Studies by Jones et al. and Durlak et al. affirmed the positive impact of SEL programs on social-emotional skills and academic achievement.

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In summary, the literature review highlighted the theoretical foundations of constructivism and social constructivism, setting the stage for the exploration of SEL. SEL's emergence, pioneers, components, significance, and usage were comprehensively discussed, emphasizing its positive impact on pupils' social and emotional skills and the need for further research in schools.

Critical reading, considered an essential skill for academic achievement and professional success, involves the reflective and analytical handling of a foreign language (FL) reading text. It goes beyond superficial comprehension, requiring in-depth evaluation and analysis of the text to identify assumptions, gaps, and biases. In academic settings, pupils are expected to navigate complex texts, critically evaluate theories, and develop their arguments. In professional contexts, individuals must analyze and evaluate information for informed decision-making and effective communication.

The construct of critical reading is multifaceted, as discussed by Paul and Elder (2010), McWhorter (2014), and a meta-analysis by Abrami et al. (2015). Critical reading involves an active, intellectually engaged process, requiring readers to participate in an inner dialogue with the writer. It includes the ability to evaluate claims, identify assumptions, and assess the quality of evidence in the text. Strategies for teaching critical reading, such as questioning, summarizing, and evaluating, are effective when embedded within content-area instruction.

Recent studies, such as those by Guo and Roehrig (2016), Arya et al. (2022), Oslund et al. (2018), and Manlapaz et al. (2022), have emphasized the positive impact of critical reading practices on academic achievement, persistence, and textual retention and comprehension.

The importance of critical reading is underscored by its role in achieving academic and professional success. Bean (2011) advocated for

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critical reading instruction in college-level courses, linking it to the development of higher-order thinking skills. Elder and Paul (2010) emphasized its role in fostering intellectual autonomy and citizenship, enabling individuals to critically evaluate information and engage in effective communication. DeStefano and LeFevre (2007) found a close relationship between reading comprehension, critical thinking, and success in both academic and real-world contexts.

Recent studies by Scharf and Kuhn (2018), Kirschner et al. (2018), and others have demonstrated that explicit instruction in critical reading strategies improves comprehension of complex texts and enhances critical thinking skills. Critical reading skills are deemed fundamental for navigating the 21st-century information landscape, where exposure to fake news and misinformation is prevalent.

Critical reading skills involve a set of cognitive and metacognitive processes that enable the analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of textual information. Studies by Rohmah (2018), Azizifar et al. (2019), and Kostons et al. (2017) have highlighted the positive association between critical reading skills, academic achievement, and effective information literacy.

In conclusion, critical reading is a crucial skill for academic and professional success, requiring the ability to engage actively with complex texts, evaluate information critically, and make informed decisions. Recent studies have consistently emphasized the positive impact of explicit instruction in critical reading strategies on comprehension, critical thinking, and academic achievement. Developing critical reading skills is essential in navigating the complexities of the 21st-century information landscape.

Critical reading and social emotional learning (SEL) were closely connected for lower elementary pupils. Critical reading involved analyzing and evaluating information, requiring higher-order thinking skills and metacognitive processes. SEL aimed to develop social and emotional skills,

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including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Integrating critical reading into SEL instruction helped pupils develop these skills, such as monitoring their thinking, adjusting strategies, and conducting multiple-perspective analysis of textual information to enhance empathy and social awareness.

The positive relationship between critical reading and SEL for lower elementary pupils was suggested by limited research. Hulvershorn et al. (2018) recommended SEL programs for improving academic achievement and social-emotional skills, while Jones, K., and Cater (2020) concluded that SEL interventions enhanced both social-emotional skills and academic performance.

Studies also explored related skills, such as critical thinking and reading comprehension. Oslund et al. (2018) reported that instruction on critical thinking improved reading comprehension, and Manlapaz et al. (2022) found improvements in problem-solving, reading comprehension, and writing skills.

Advantages of implementing SEL in promoting critical reading skills included improved comprehension, increased engagement, enhanced critical thinking, improved social skills, and increased academic achievement. SEL programs were suggested to improve academic achievement and social-emotional skills (Corcoran et al., 2018; Jones and Cater, 2020).

The implementation of SEL strategies required an intentional approach based on evidence and best practices, with continuous professional development. Successful SEL implementation focused on establishing a positive school culture, providing training and support for teachers, and involving families and communities (Schussler et al., 2021; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2015).

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Barriers to SEL implementation included lack of time, funding, and personnel, as well as the complexity and diversity of pupils' needs and backgrounds. Overcoming these barriers required sufficient resources, training, support, and culturally responsive practices (Kessler et al., 2020; Zinsser et al., 2018; Sulkowski et al., 2018).

A critical reading model based on SEL strategies was emphasized for enhancing pupils' learning outcomes. Studies by Murray et al. (2018) and San Antonio (2018) supported the integration of SEL principles into critical reading models for improved comprehension, critical thinking, and overall academic success.

Previous studies explored the relationship between social constructivist theory (SCT), critical reading, and SEL. SCT-based instruction improved critical reading skills by emphasizing social interaction and collaboration (Browne et al., 2021; Kim and Lee, 2016). SEL principles integrated into SCT-based instruction promoted social and emotional skills necessary for critical reading (Johnson et al., 2017).

Additionally, studies examined the relationship between critical reading and SEL. SEL principles integrated into critical literacy intervention programs improved critical reading and SEL skills (Hofer, Harris, and Rowe, 2016; Bostwick and Phillips, 2018). Parental involvement positively influenced critical reading and SEL skills (Meece and Danziger, 2016), while bullying victimization was associated with lower levels of these skills (Sulkowski and Smith, 2018).

In summary, critical reading and SEL were closely intertwined, and integrating SEL principles into instruction had positive effects on improving critical reading skills, academic achievement, and social-emotional development for pupils in lower elementary grades.

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## Method

On delineating, the procedures implemented for executing the data collection instruments. It encompassed the depiction of the research design, the chosen participants, and the data collection instruments.

In terms of the research design, the study utilized a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods (Seiffedin and El-Sakka, 2017; Secolsky and Denison, 2018; Marghany, 2023). The study detailed the performance of the two examined groups in the pre- and posttests of critical reading and its sub-skills in quantitative analysis.

The errors made by both groups in the pre- and posttests of critical reading and its sub-skills were addressed in the qualitative analysis. This qualitative analysis also presented findings from the pre- and post-observation checklist of SEL competencies. Additionally, responses to the Semi-Structured Interview of Teachers' Satisfaction with Using SEL were subjected to qualitative analysis.

This approach aimed to achieve the study's objectives by combining both quantitative and qualitative analyses to comprehensively examine the impact of SEL strategies on critical reading skills and teacher satisfaction.

## Participants

The randomly selected participants comprise two classes at Bedayia International school. They are second primary year pupils. They were divided into two groups, namely a control group and an experimental group. Initially, each class comprised 32 pupils and both classes comprise sixty four pupils. However, two absent pupils in each class were discarded. Thus, the final number of participants in each group was 30 pupils and the total number of both classes was sixty pupils. The control group studied English

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critical reading skills by using the traditional method. However, the experimental group was taught the same skills by utilizing the SEL strategy.

### **Limitations of the Study**

- Initially, the participants were 64 pupils. However, two participants in each group were excluded due to their absence.
- At the beginning, the researcher found it difficult to convince the experimental participants of using the SEL strategies. However, they gradually got used to practice the SEL strategies due to the researcher's simplification of these strategies.
- Initially, some experimental pupils were hesitant to take part in the discussion either in groups or in pairs. The researcher had to motivate and encourage them to collaborate with their classmates.
- It was also difficult to coordinate with the experimental participants' parents due to their occupied schedules.
- It was not an easy task to fix appointments of the interviews with the EFL teachers because of their tight schedules as well.
- The limited time of FL classes could be a barrier for full implementation of the SEL strategies.
- The FL syllabus restricted to some extent the researcher's skills to provide SEL practice opportunities to the experimental pupils.
- Initially, issues of school timetables along with other academic issues hindered the researchers' efforts to fully implement the SEL-based activities.

### **Procedures**

The intervention spanned a duration of 10 weeks, during which all pupils received identical materials and assignments. The sole distinction lay in the utilization of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies by teachers exclusively in the critical reading sessions for the experimental group.



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Following the administration of the Critical Reading pretest, the pupils were then categorized into two classes: the control group comprising 30 pupils and the experimental group consisting of 30 pupils. Subsequent to the completion of the intervention, a critical reading post-test was conducted exclusively on the experimental group to assess the progress made in their critical reading skills.

### **Data Collection Instrument**

A test and and SEL checklist were used to measure the pupils' proficiency in critical reading and their Social emotional skills. Before the program, a pretest was administered to collect data about the pupils' baseline status particularly in critical reading and the English teacher for each pupil filled an SEL checklist. The test had two critical reading passages with 2 different genres and 10 questions on each text. As for the SEL checklist, it included the five main SEL competencies. At the end of the program, a critical reading post-test as well as the SEL checklist was administered to measure the effectiveness of the program on the pupils' critical reading skills.

### **Data Analysis**

In conducting an analysis of variance (ANOVA) homogeneity test (F test), the obtained significance level surpasses 0.05 ( $p > 0.05$ ), suggesting a lack of divergence in the convergence of the control and experimental groups. Essentially, the independent control and experimental groups are deemed homogeneous. Notably, the experimental group exhibits higher mean scores in the critical reading skills posttest compared to the control group, signifying superior performance among the experimental group pupils. This elevated performance is attributed to the instructional approach incorporating Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies. Furthermore, the ensuing t-test reveals a significantly lower level than 0.01 ( $p < 0.01$ ), underscoring substantial statistical distinctions in the critical

reading skills mean scores between the control and experimental pupils. Remarkably, these differences favor the experimental group, indicating a higher mean score at the 0.01 level of significance. Consequently, the initial null hypothesis is rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis. In conclusion, the study posits a comprehensive and statistically significant difference in the mean scores of critical reading posttests between control and experimental pupils. Table 1

To answer the first research question, t-tests were performed on the data from both experimental and control groups of participants to determine whether the application of multimodal composing based on mobile SNS was effective in improving EFL learners' writing performance. The t-tests were performed separately for the control and experimental groups of three pairs. The results were shown in Table 2. Regarding the second research question, the gains in total scores, readability, lexical, and syntactic complexity from pretest to posttest were computed for both sides of three pairs, and AVONA was performed to examine the intervention effect. Lastly, for the third research question, pertaining to pupils' perceptions of and attitudes towards using multimodal composing based on vlog, content analysis of the responses from the experimental-group questionnaire was performed. RQ3 focused on learners who used multimodal composing in English writing, so the learners in control groups did not respond to the learning attitude questionnaire.

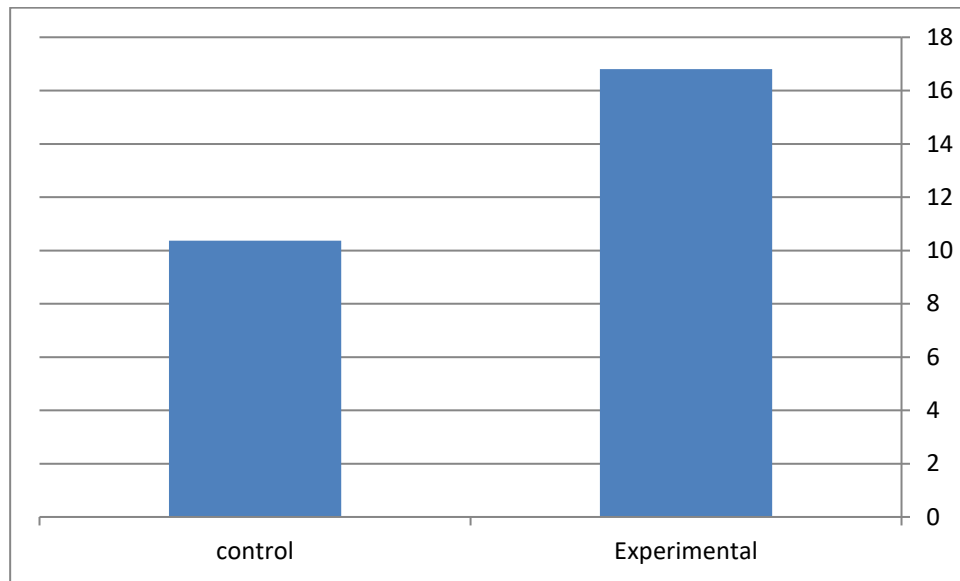
**Table 1: T-Test Results for the Significance of Differences between the Control and Experimental Pupils' Mean Scores in the Critical Reading skills Posttest as a Whole**

Component	Group	mean	Std. Deviation	Levenes,s Test for Equality of Variances		T test		Effect size ( $\eta^2$ )
				F	Sig.	t- test value	Sig.	
Critical Reading of the overall score	Experimental	16.8	1.81	1.863	0.178	11.773	0.00	0.705
	control	10.01	2.39					

Where  $N_1=N_2= 30$ ,  $DF= 58$

The following chart clarifies the significance of differences between the two groups of participants' mean scores in the critical reading skills posttest as a whole:

Figure 1: Difference between the mean scores of the control and experimental groups' achievements in the critical reading skills posttest as a whole



Eta square ( $\eta^2$ ) was used to calculate the effect size. According to Abd El-Hamid (2016, 273-284), the following equation was adopted:

$$\text{Effect size } (\eta^2) = t^2 / (t^2 + df)$$

Where:

Df= Degrees of freedom

T= computed T value

The ( $\eta^2$ ) can be interpreted as follows:

( $\eta^2$ ) < 0.010 indicates weak relation or effect

( $\eta^2$ )  $\geq$  0.010 < 0.059 indicates small size effect

( $\eta^2$ )  $\geq$  0.059 < 1.389 indicates medium size effect

( $\eta^2$ )  $\geq$  1.389 < 0.232 indicates large size effect

( $\eta^2$ )  $\geq$  0.232 indicates very large effect size

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According to table 4, the Eta square value ( $\eta^2$ ) of (0.705) clarifies that the effect size is higher than 0.232 indicating a very large effect size. The finding indicates that using the SEL strategy for teaching English has a very large effect on developing the critical reading skills as a whole of the experimental group comprising the primary

## **Result**

The incorporation of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies emerges as a promising avenue in the Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) domain. These strategies prove instrumental in nurturing pupils' cognitive abilities crucial for fostering Foreign Language (FL) proficiency and refining critical reading skills in the FL context. Notably, SEL strategies contribute to pupils' comprehension of diverse textual structures, encompassing a grasp of simple, compound, and complex English sentence constructions. This cognitive proficiency extends beyond enhancing critical reading skills, impacting the development of pupils' academic writing and oral communication skills.

The efficacy of SEL strategies is not confined solely to the enhancement of a single language skill; rather, it extends to various skills, including productive ones. The strategies empower pupils to infer novel information from reading texts and adeptly analyze, evaluate, and synthesize knowledge presented in these texts. Consequently, it is envisioned that SEL implementation should transcend the teaching of individual language skills and encompass a holistic approach.

The outlined findings underscore the pivotal role played by SEL strategies in sustaining academic achievement. According to research, SEL represents a multifaceted strategy essential for achieving academic success, acquiring real-life skills, bridging the gap between pupils' homes and schools, compensating for time constraints in learning specific subjects, and gathering valuable feedback from pupils regarding the teaching and

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learning process. The responsibility for adopting and implementing SEL strategies rests with educators, teachers, and school leaders, as the benefits extend beyond academic realms to encompass broader societal advantages.

In basic education schools, the imperative for SEL implementation becomes undeniable due to its academic, social, and personal benefits. Pupils in these schools, often facing challenges in academic progress, psychological issues, and social difficulties, stand to gain from SEL support. The positive impact of SEL strategies is not confined to the development of critical reading skills; it also extends to shaping the attitudes of experimental pupils towards learning English. The implementation of SEL strategies encourages active participation, motivation, and collaboration among experimental pupils in the process of acquiring critical reading skills. Furthermore, SEL strategies empower pupils to contribute feedback, suggest modifications, and actively shape their learning experiences, fostering a positive classroom environment.

### **Intervention Effectiveness**

Findings of the present study emphasized the influential and effective role which the SEL strategies play in developing the critical reading skills of primary second grade pupils enrolled in an international school. The complexity of these skills is obviously clear in the various components and sub-skills that can be categorized under the critical reading skills. These skills are not only limited to learning FL vocabulary but also include different cognitive skills indispensable for learning English as a school subject in the Egyptian EFL context. Thus, design and planning of EFL basic education curricula should give rooms for including SEL-based activities in the teaching syllabi and inputs to initially sustain the Egyptian children's overall proficiency in learning English and develop their mastery of all language skills. In other words, the incorporation of SEL strategies into basic education FL curricula should observe the social, emotional,

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behavioural and psychological needs of basic education Egyptian children. It is the responsibility of school leaders, educators and teachers to facilitate the implementation of SEL strategies. It is also the responsibility of education policy makers to look into the possibility of expanding the implementation of SEL strategies into Egyptian public schools. Such possibility may change the prospect of TEFL process in the Egyptian public schools. It is a step forward to support the efforts of Egyptian Ministry of Education to develop the teaching of English in the Egyptian context.

The SEL is of a paramount importance particularly at the early educational stages of children. Thus, teachers are required to have a correct perspective on the benefits, definitions and implementation ways of the SEL strategies. Teachers should be also equipped with correct solutions to overcome barriers and challenges of implementing SEL strategies. Teachers should be trained to handle the problem of short resources necessary for using the SEL strategies in the classrooms. Teachers should also be prepared to well organize their classroom times to adequately perform SEL-based activities and teaching instructions.

Due to the great importance of implementing SEL strategies, teacher preparation programs need to give priority for developing the pupil-teachers' ability to be eligible for carrying out these strategies in the classrooms and successfully train their pupils to learn and apply SEL skills within and outside schools.

## **Conclusions**

- There is wholly statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the control and experimental pupils in the critical reading posttest.
- There is statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the control and experimental pupils in each skill of the critical reading sub-skills posttest.

- There is wholly statistically significant difference between the experimental pupils' pre-and-post-administrations mean scores of the critical reading skills test in favour for the posttest.
- The SEL strategies positively affected the experimental pupils' self-awareness. Social awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.
- There is a tendency among the interviewed Egyptian EFL teachers to favor the implementation of SEL strategies in reading classes.

## **Recommendations**

Below are recommendations based on the concluding findings:

1. Teachers' preparation programs should take into considerations equipping the Egyptian EFL teachers with training necessary for applying the SEL strategies in FL classes.
2. Designers of FL curricula and syllabi should incorporate the SEL strategies-based activities into the basic education schools textbooks.
3. The implementation of SEL strategies should be generalized to include the public schools as well.
4. Pupils in the basic education schools should be given more opportunities to practice SEL-based activities.

## **5.9 Suggestions for further Research**

Below is a list of tentative research topics that can be recommended for further research in the Egyptian EFL context:

1. A study may explore the potentiality of using SEL strategies in developing other FL skills of primary second grade pupils.
2. A replicable study might be conducted using similar samples and strategies in the Egyptian public schools.

3. The effect of using SEL strategies on the basic education school pupils' attitudes and motivation towards learning English can also be investigated.
4. A study may investigate the EFL teachers' perception of using SEL-based activities in providing FL instruction.
5. A study can be carried out to examine the planning of teachers' preparation programs in line with providing adequate to implement the SEL strategies.

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