



The Role of the English Language Curriculum in Fostering Preparatory Stage Students' Essential Life Skills

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Abstract

Due to the demanding changes of the 21st century, there is a need for students to acquire life skills that can ensure their future success and aid them when facing challenges; hence, one of the direct ways of fostering those skills in students is through the activities presented in their curriculum. This research's main objective is to examine the role of the English curriculum in fostering preparatory stage students' essential life skills, especially critical thinking, problem-solving, emotional intelligence, and effective communication skills; to do so, this study covered those skills in terms of their definitions, importance, and inclusion in preparatory stage English curriculum. Moreover, a mixed method approach was adopted using a Likert's scale survey as a tool on a non-random sample of the first and second preparatory stage students. Findings show that while the English curriculum includes activities that can help students develop those skills, these activities are not practically used in classrooms. Hence, recommendations for fixing this gap between the intended outcomes of the curriculum and the practical implementation inside the classroom were made.

Key Words:

Life skills, curriculum, Critical thinking, Problem-solving, Emotional intelligence, Effective communication

1. Introduction:

The illiterate of the 21st century will not "be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn." – Alvin Toffler.

As Alvin Toffler said, developing one's ability to learn non-stop is, nowadays, more important than ever. We are living in a world where everything is always changing, with new technologies emerging all the time that we can barely catch up, and with the global job market being fluid, the knowledge we should equip students with within the four walls of the classroom is no longer sufficient. Students need to develop skills that will help them succeed outside the classroom and not just within. What they should learn is not just reading, writing, listening, and speaking, but they should also learn and develop life skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, emotional intelligence, and effective communication. Life skills are today's new currency for success, so equipping our students with such skills is not only crucial but inevitable. However, before we delve deeper into those skills to understand their importance in the preparatory stage curriculum, we need first to understand what is meant by curriculum and preparatory stage students.

Traditionally, the term curriculum has been defined as "a written document or a plan of action to accomplish goals; a body of subjects or a subject matter prepared by teachers in order for the students to learn" (Farid et al.,

2018, p.8) In this sense, the term curriculum is very close to the term syllabus; it is viewed as a sort of written plan that students need to follow to learn. This definition also views curriculum as merely content, subjects, and lessons that teachers design to help students reach a certain goal. Therefore, this definition of curriculum is not inclusive enough as it views curriculum as mostly about the content being taught and excludes the broader learning experiences it should involve. Hence, a more holistic and inclusive definition of the curriculum was provided by Mutale Mulenga (2018) as follows: "Curriculum is all the selected, organized, integrative, innovative and evaluative educational experiences provided to learners consciously or unconsciously under the school authority to achieve the designated learning outcomes which are achieved as a result of growth, maturation, and learning meant to be best utilized for life in a changing society." (p. 20) So unlike the first definition, which limited curriculum to a 'written plan,' this definition expands it to include all educational experiences, whether intentional or unintentional. It includes all the lessons, activities, as well as experiences that are designed to help students grow, mature, and prepare for society.

Furthermore, this study focuses specifically on preparatory-stage students. Between the primary and secondary educational phases, the prep stage, also known as middle school or junior high in some countries, is a transitional period that helps students become ready for high school and determines their future job path. As for which age group this stage targets,

it differs from one country to another. For example, according to The U.S. Educational System (2025) and The British Education System (n.d.), middle schools target students between the ages of 11–14. However, in Egypt, the preparatory stage is the second stage of basic education following the primary stage and preceding the secondary stage; it targets students between the ages of 12–14. So, we must understand that this period of children's lives is very important; it is like a bridge between their childhood and adolescence, and it is when they start shaping their personalities. Therefore, we must understand they are easily influenced, and whatever habits they pick up will stick with them forever; that is why education and school curriculums should not just focus on school subjects and developing language skills, but they should also focus on developing students' essential life skills.

And here comes the question: What is meant by life skills? According to the World Health Organization (1997), life skills are "abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour, that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life." These skills, from this perspective, are essential tools that help students achieve personal growth and success, for they help prepare them to adapt to their constantly changing environment and deal with every challenge they might face effectively. Building upon this definition, WHO (2003) offers a more holistic view of life skills by defining them as "a group of psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and

creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others, and cope with and manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner." By offering this definition, WHO recognizes the multi-dimensional nature of life skills and that they encompass a wide range of cognitive, emotional, and social abilities that cover and help improve every aspect of students' lives, from communicating effectively and empathizing with others to thinking critically and solving problems. Therefore, integrating these skills into school curricula is not just important but rather vital in today's world, for they ensure that students are not only equipped with academic knowledge but also with tools that guide them to better employ this knowledge effectively, leading to a fulfilling future. Hence, this research paper will focus on four essential life skills under two categories: Cognitive skills such as critical thinking, problem solving and socio-emotional skills such as emotional intelligence and effective communication.

First are the cognitive skills. Critical thinking is the first essential life skill, which we will explore in more detail later in this research paper. According to Cambridge University Press (n.d.) critical thinking is "the process of thinking carefully about a subject or idea, without allowing feelings or opinions to affect you"; furthermore, Scriven and Paul (1987, as cited in Ferreira, Meda, & Talvio, 2024) defined critical thinking as "the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skilfully conceptualizing, analysing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information"; in light of the

first definition, we find that critical thinking helps students think objectively about everything that they encounter and this will help them form their own opinions without bias and judge things impartially. On the other hand, the second definition focuses on how critical thinking can help students think deeper– to analyse, evaluate, and connect ideas, again without being biased since they will be focusing on facts rather than opinions, and this will help students become good problem solvers and decision makers.

Unfortunately, critical thinking is one of those skills that many students lack these days; because of the constant use of technology and social media, students are subjected to what is called 'Brain Rot'; This term was coined by the American author Henry David Thoreau (1854, as cited in BBC, 2023) in his book *Walden*, and it means "the supposed deterioration of a person's mental or intellectual state, especially viewed as the result of overconsumption of material considered to be trivial or unchallenging"; what we can conclude from this is that because of these children's constant use of social media, they are finding it very hard to think deeply about anything because all the time, they have quick and easy information ready at hand and responses that everyone on social media have already thought through that they just stop using their minds to think of anything themselves. Our children are struggling with critical thinking skills that are important for their success inside and outside the school. Therefore, including activities in the English curriculum and ensuring that they are applied in classrooms is a must if we want

this struggle to come to an end and help our students become deep thinkers and great decision makers.

Furthermore, thinking critically often leads to developing strong problem-solving skills, the second life skill tackled in this study. Critical thinking, alongside other cognitive, social, and other important skills, is a basic requirement for developing effective problem-solving skills for students, equipping them with strategies that help them deal with unpredictable problems they might face while doing their tasks or even in real-life situations. (British Council, n.d.)

According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund– UNICEF (n.d.), problem-solving is "the ability to identify a problem, take logical steps to devise a desired solution, and monitor and evaluate the implementation of the solution." This definition provides us with a basic yet helpful outline of how the problem-solving process works effectively; problem solving is a process that requires students to go through a series of steps to effectively deal with every challenge they face, whether it is expected or unexpected, and whether it is related to their academic life or real-life experiences. These steps may include identifying the problem, analyzing it, trying out different solutions and finding the most suitable one, and finally, evaluating its effectiveness.

Moreover, WHO (1997) sheds light on the significance of having problem-solving skills in

its definition by highlighting that problem-solving “enables us to deal constructively with problems in our lives. Significant problems that are left unresolved can cause mental stress and give rise to accompanying physical strain.” WHO stresses how the development of problem-solving skills not only develops students’ cognitive skills but also supports their overall well-being. When students are taught how to deal with problems constructively, they become more resilient and prepared to handle academic pressure and less likely to struggle mentally, emotionally, and physically, which might be the case if the problem they are dealing with stays unresolved. Therefore, integrating problem-solving skills in the English language curriculum and other subject areas is a necessity for raising a generation that is capable of using their full cognitive, emotional, and social abilities to deal with whatever challenges they face throughout their life journey.

The third essential life skill discussed in this research is emotional intelligence (EQ). In *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle (350 B.C./1999) said that: “Anyone can become angry—that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way—this is not easy”. Emotional intelligence is one of those skills that both grown-ups and youth are unaware of how important it is; During our field training as a group, we encountered lots of students who lacked self-regulation and management; they did not know how to express themselves appropriately, and all they could do was

express their feelings through anger outbursts, and this frustrated both them as well as their teachers. If these students and everyone in general just knew how effective and impactful EQ could be on others and how it can help facilitate communication, they would immediately seek to develop that skill; One day, Daniel Goleman, the author of *Emotional Intelligence: why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, described, in an interview, an incident that can demonstrate how powerful EQ can be in everyday life. That day, he took a bus up Madison Avenue in New York City, and all the passengers, including him, kept to themselves and had a bubble around them that said “do not talk to me”. However, the bus driver completely changed the mood as he greeted everyone warmly, asking how their day was going, striking up conversations, pointing out a sale at a department store, or recommending a museum exhibit nearby; his energy and enthusiasm were contagious, and all the passengers' moods were completely shifted by the time they got off the bus. Years later, Goleman came across an article in *The New York Times* about this driver whom everyone loved turned and whose name was Govan Brown; people would wait for his bus every day, and he received over three thousand letters from passengers praising his kindness without a single complaint. (Big Think, 2024, 9:44). This story is a great example of how people with high emotional intelligence can have a lasting effect on others. Therefore, developing the ability to control oneself, express oneself, and empathize with others appropriately is essential for everyone to learn, and it is best developed in school with

teachers and curriculums as the media by which we can teach students such a skill. Moreover, having a strong sense of emotional intelligence often leads to having better communication skills and stronger relationships, as it enables students to understand and empathize with those around them, ultimately strengthening their relationships through meaningful interactions. Therefore, we have chosen communication to be the next social-emotional and final life skill to be discussed in this paper for its significant role in improving the quality of students' lives and urging them to have healthy connections with their surroundings. (Doshi, 2022).

Communication is defined by Adair (2011) as “the giving, receiving or sharing of ideas, knowledge or feelings –the contents of the mind, heart and the spirit of man– by such means as speech, writing or signs” (p. 5). In this sense, communication is not just about exchanging words with one another; it is a more complex process that also involves sharing thoughts, knowledge, or feelings through various means. Effective communication skills enable preparatory stage students to better express themselves, allowing them to have deeper and more meaningful connections with their peers and everyone around them. Furthermore, effective communication enables students to be active learners and become more engaged in the learning process, for it helps them better articulate their thoughts and develop active listening skills, which in return contributes to their overall mental, emotional, and social growth, as well as the academic one.

Adair (2011) then builds on the first definition and narrows the focus to the essence of the communication process by describing it as “the ability of one person to make contact with another and to make himself or herself understood” (p. 6). This definition sheds light on the core purpose of the process of communication: making contact with other people and being understood by them. Having solid communication skills could play a major role in students' lives, especially during this specific stage of development, where being able to express their unspoken thoughts and doubts and feeling understood and accepted in return is crucial to their overall growth and well-being. Hence, including effective communication skills constantly into the curriculum is of major importance for the opportunities it provides students with, like expressing their thoughts, engaging in meaningful interactions, building strong relationships, and enhancing their overall mental, emotional, and social growth.

2. The objectives of the study:

- 1) The primary objective is to examine the role of the English language curriculum in fostering preparatory stage students' essential life skills.
- 2) Define each life skill and demonstrate their importance for prep stage students.
- 3) Determine whether the English curriculum includes activities on those four skills.
- 4) Assess students' opinions on whether the English curriculum helped improve their life skills.

5) Identify what may hinder the curriculum from fulfilling its intended role.

3. The importance of this study:

Given all the previously mentioned points, we come to understand that integrating life skills in English curriculums is essential for helping preparatory stage students prosper when they are in school and after they graduate. We need students who can think and criticize thoughts and ideas, effectively solve problems that they face, understand themselves and others, and communicate effectively with those around them. Therefore, the significance of this study lies in its analysis of whether these skills are indeed incorporated within the preparatory stage's curriculum in the form of tasks, activities, or exercises that can help students practice them. It also identifies whether students get to practice them, regardless of whether they are integrated or not.

4. Literature Review:

Education today is increasingly viewed as not just a means of transmitting academic knowledge but also a platform for equipping students with essential life skills necessary for personal and professional growth. Research by Hasrat et al. (2024) argues that education is not just about academic content; it also involves lifelong talents such as communication, problem-solving, and analytical thinking. In today's rapidly changing world, elementary education must incorporate these skills to prepare students for real-world problems. Traditional education paradigms, such as rote memorization and standardized testing, are no longer sufficient. Modern education prioritizes

emotional intelligence, communication, teamwork, creativity, and critical thinking, which are necessary for personal and professional growth. Integrating these skills into the elementary curriculum requires a comprehensive approach, including new content, teaching approaches, assessment techniques, and the general learning environment. The curriculum should prepare students for real-world problems, encourage problem-solving and critical thinking, foster teamwork and collaboration, and promote creativity through activities like storytelling, presentations, debates, and writing projects. Evaluating 21st-century talents requires a more thorough strategy, including portfolio evaluations, performance-based assignments, and formative assessments. These techniques provide more accurate assessments of students' critical thinking, creativity, and teamwork skills, encouraging their development and aligning with contemporary education objectives.

Similarly, Verma (2024) discusses how the modern world has significantly influenced education, focusing on examination results to prepare students for real-life challenges. However, with technological advancements and social change, the need for understanding emotional intelligence has grown. Life skills, such as innovative thinking, problem-solving abilities, emotional regulation, communication, and interpersonal skills, are essential for children to cope with the complexities of modern life. Integrating life skills into schools' curriculums can enhance all-around education, emphasizing the wholeness of human development rather than focusing on academic performance. Life skills education is inclusive, nurturing the cognitive, emotional, and social

dimensions of students' development. The World Health Organization defines life skills as abilities that promote adaptive and healthy behavior, enabling people to cope effectively with everyday challenges. Theoretical frameworks for incorporating life skills into the curriculum include constructivist learning theories, which emphasize experiential learning activities involving collaboration and problem-solving. Socio-Emotional Learning frameworks, which include core competencies like self-awareness, coping with emotion, stress coping, empathy, effective communication, interpersonal relationships, critical thinking, creative thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving, aim to create a context for students to realize and regulate their emotions and build positive relationships lifelong.

5. The Theoretical Framework:

5.1 Critical Thinking:

Critical thinking has been described in many ways, in line with various perspectives on its role in education. The majority of definitions of critical thinking trace back to Dewey's original work (1910), where he was reflecting on the nature of thought in education. He argued that thinking in an educational setting involves the creation of beliefs, which may or may not be based on well-considered reasoning. That is, our beliefs shape our thoughts, and we create these beliefs by evaluating evidence either implicitly or explicitly. Definitions of critical thinking have changed over time to emphasize the need to scrutinize information, ideas, and arguments and consider the potential consequences of actions or thoughts before determining their validity or usefulness

Indrašienė et al. (2021) highlight the significance of critical thinking, stating that it is "recognized as one of the tools for the formation and development of human and social capital, and an important global labour market competence. Critical thinking is used as a strong argument in developing missions of education institutions, implementing learning aims, and evaluating learning outcomes, staff abilities, organizational success and political decisions". (p.17) This statement emphasizes the essential role of critical thinking in both educational and professional contexts, as it is a key skill for academic and career success.

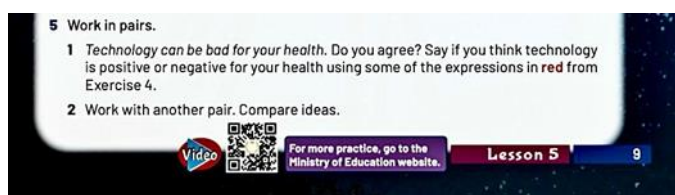
Building on this idea, the development of critical thinking skills has become extremely vital in this information-rich society, especially for students. They have greater access to information (including false, misleading information) since they carry their phones in their pockets or at their fingertips. These young people must be able to distinguish reliable sources from fake ones, establish their opinions, and make decisions based on the best information available to them in this age of "fabricated news." Critical thinking is an attitude that encourages the desire for knowledge, intellectual openness, and the readiness to challenge presumptions, which is more than just a cognitive skill.

In this context, critical thinking skills are essential for young minds, enabling them to evaluate complex information, deconstruct it into manageable parts, solve problems, adjust to new circumstances, communicate effectively, and arrive at well-founded conclusions. They are crucial for academic subjects, decision-making, and problem-solving. Critical thinkers can tackle

issues creatively, identify trends, and make logical decisions, fostering resilience. They also enhance communication skills, allowing teens to express ideas clearly, control emotions, and critically assess information to avoid being misled by false claims and misinformation.

This is particularly significant during middle school, a pivotal stage for both physical and cognitive development, in which students begin forming their own opinions, identities, and perspectives. Gaining proficiency in critical thinking facilitates information analysis, fact-based and opinion-based distinction, and well-informed decision-making. Instead of merely taking information at face value, it encourages pupils to think critically and question presumptions. It also improves their ability to solve problems by teaching them how to approach problems rationally and come up with workable answers. Good critical thinking abilities also help students communicate more effectively by allowing them to articulate their thoughts clearly, back up claims with facts, and participate in insightful debates. Additionally, by teaching students to understand and judge other perspectives and approach problems with a balanced mentality, these abilities help students develop emotional intelligence. Because the world is constantly changing, critical thinking gives students the flexibility, inventiveness, and analytical abilities they need to succeed in school, in their social lives, and their careers.

The following exercises are designed to apply critical thinking within the middle school



curriculum. By engaging in these activities, students develop their ability to analyze information, evaluate different viewpoints, and articulate well-reasoned opinions.

2nd preparatory, unit 7, lesson 5

Students participate in a structured discussion that encourages critical thinking by exploring the impact of technology on health. This activity is designed to guide students through a multi-stage reasoning process, helping them develop analytical and evaluative skills while forming well-supported opinions.

The first stage of the discussion focuses on identifying the issue, where students begin by debating whether technology has a positive or negative influence on health. Next, involves analysing arguments by examining both the advantages and drawbacks of technology. They learn to recognize and assess contrasting viewpoints, an essential skill in critical thinking. Finally, students justify opinions with evidence.



1st preparatory, unit 7, lesson 3

Students engage in a discussion-based activity that enhances their critical thinking skills by prompting them to reflect on their personal learning experiences. This exercise encourages students to analyse how they acquire new skills, compare their experiences with those of their peers, and express well-reasoned opinions about the learning process.

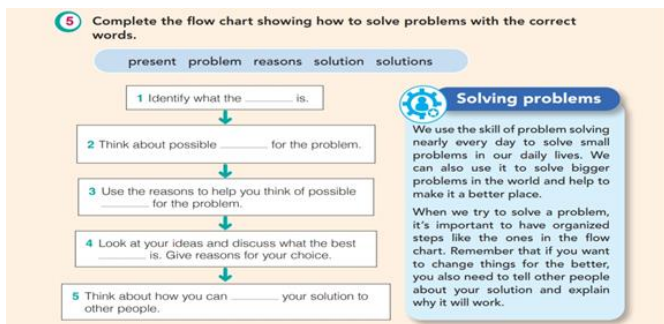
5.2 Problem-solving:

Problem-solving is an important skill that enables students to deal with problems in everyday life, school, and workplaces. It involves analysing problems, considering different options, identifying the obstacles encountered in real-life situations, and choosing the appropriate solution to overcome them. It improves teamwork, time management, and conflict resolution, which is why problem-solving is regarded as a cognitive and intellectual process. Given its cognitive nature, scholars like Rahman (2019) define problem-solving as "a cognitive process that focuses on accomplishing an objective for which the students do not primarily know a solution technique." (p.66) According to that, problem-solving is a mental process aimed at achieving a goal that requires making a cognitive effort to find a solution that is not immediately known. Ganeem (2018) expands this definition, describing problem-solving as "a set of processes through which the learner can use his previous acquired knowledge and experience, as well as employing the language skills and thinking skills in order to arrive to a prospective solution that requires a new or familiar situation." (p.8) He emphasizes that problem-solving requires learners to apply their prior knowledge, language skills, and thinking skills to arrive at a potential solution.

These definitions show that problem-solving is not just an academic skill but an essential tool for adapting to our progressively changing world. Currently, almost everything is changing, and new technologies are transforming every part of life like never before. Therefore, Problem-solving is an essential skill that students need, both in and out of school. Beyond adaptability, problem-solving also helps students develop an optimistic mindset when facing challenges as it increases their adaptability

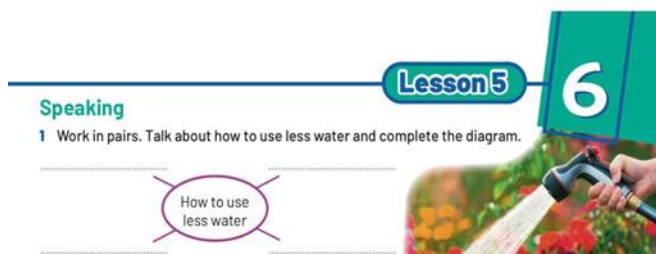
and capacity in handling them; when students learn how to solve problems, they develop their ability to think critically and creatively by looking at problems from different perspectives and finding new solutions. Another key importance is that problem-solving promotes independence and self-confidence, as students who can make their own decisions without relying too much on others become self-assured. It also improves social relationships; when students can approach problems rationally and systematically, they are better at resolving conflicts with friends, classmates, and family members calmly and fairly. Because of its wide range of benefits, this skill is not only useful for the English curriculum but also in all subjects, such as math, science, literature, and social studies; for instance, English curricula can employ activities in Reading Comprehension, and students will know character conflicts by identifying problems and proposing the best solutions. They can also guess different outcomes at the end of the story before reading the conclusion. Making inference questions encourages them to go beyond the text, read between the lines to interpret unstated ideas, and understand deeper meanings. Writing activities could include creating stories where characters solve problems or rewriting alternative endings. For example, students could write letters advising a friend on issues like overcoming shyness or studying well. For speaking and listening activities, students can participate in debates about real-world issues. For instance, they can discuss ways to prevent bullying in schools or role-play scenarios such as returning a faulty product. Due to its importance and positive influence on middle school students, the Egyptian Ministry of Education included activities that help develop

that skill in the preparatory English curriculum in order to prepare them for facing challenges in their everyday lives and their future careers.



1st preparatory, unit 1, lesson 3

Learners solve problems sequentially as dictated in the flowchart, working from the top to the bottom. The activity starts with identifying the problem, thinking about possible solutions, analysing the reasons for selecting the best solution, and finally discussing the most appropriate answer with colleagues; this enhances interacting with others, thinking critically, and making logical decisions based on evidence.



2nd preparatory ,unit 6, lesson 5

The speaking part requires using problem-solving skills to find solutions for saving water. Students are presented with a mind map about "How to use less water" where they need to suggest different solutions for saving water; this is relevant to the real world as the reduction of Water is a significant global issue, making this a relevant problem for students to engage with.

5.3 Emotional Intelligence:

Emotional intelligence(EQ) is not a modern concept but has been long emphasized by different

philosophers and authors, though without explicitly using the term; philosophers like Socrates, who said his famous quote, "To know thyself is the beginning of wisdom," and Pythagoras, who said " Man know thyself; then thou shalt know the Universe and God" both emphasizing self-knowledge which is one of the major aspects of EQ. Furthermore, in his famous book The Abolition of Man, C.S. Lewis said, " Without the aid of trained emotions, the intellect is powerless against the animal organism."

Emphasizing that one of the ways we can overcome weaknesses within us is through controlling our emotions and feelings instead of letting them control us.

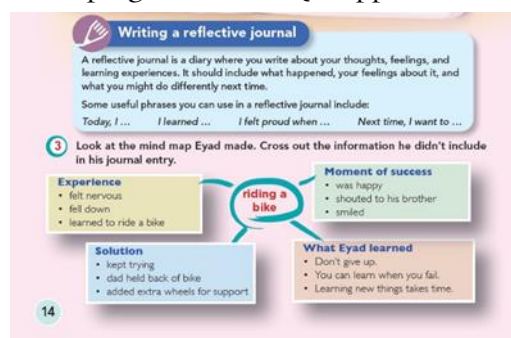
Furthermore, in his book Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ, Daniel Goleman (1995) said, "If your emotional abilities aren't in hand, if you don't have self-awareness, if you are not able to manage your distressing emotions, if you can't have empathy and have effective relationships, then no matter how smart you are, you are not going to get very far." In light of the previous quote, we can understand how emotional intelligence (EQ) is not only important for students' success but for everyone in general. Unlike the previously mentioned cognitive skills, critical thinking and problem solving, that students would need to get over obstacles that might face them, emotional intelligence is crucial if they want to succeed in both their work lives and personal lives. Daniel Goleman discussed further in an interview how IQ can predict a person's school performance and future earnings because it indicates the type of job they can pursue, such as becoming an engineer, doctor, or lawyer. However, once they enter such fields, everyone else is roughly as intelligent as they

are. Their IQ is no longer significant at this point because emotional intelligence takes priority. According to him, combining intelligence and emotions is not what emotional intelligence is all about. In reality, though, it's about "being intelligent about emotions." This is what educators should be seeking to develop in their students, along with other academic skills, if they want them to stand out among others in their future jobs.

Moreover, in his article *What Makes a Leader?* Daniel Goleman (1998) outlined four key aspects of emotional intelligence: Self-awareness, self-management, empathy, and relationship management. Self-awareness involves recognizing and understanding one's emotions and how they shape thoughts, perspectives, and actions. Individuals who struggle with self-awareness often find it challenging to strengthen other aspects of emotional intelligence. In contrast, those who are highly self-aware tend to excel in various areas, which is why it's essential for English curriculums to emphasize the development of emotional intelligence (EQ) to support students in achieving success in all their endeavours. The second domain, self-management, is the ability to regulate one's emotions, ensuring that they don't disrupt ongoing tasks, even in moments of frustration, anger, or anxiety. During our field training, we noticed that many girls at the school had a lot of anger; they didn't know how to handle their feelings in a healthy way, and instead of talking things out, they would resort to anger outbursts like hitting each other or shouting insults. It is becoming more and more important for students to improve this skill, and English curriculums as well as educators should focus on helping students regulate their emotions effectively. Empathy, the

third part of emotional intelligence, is a key part of social awareness. It means understanding and caring about how others feel, and this includes not just people but also animals. English curriculums should support students in developing empathy for all living beings, especially because they will become future leaders who need to create safe and welcoming environments. The fourth component is relationship management, which is about handling conflicts in a positive way, staying calm and listening to others, speaking clearly (which links to the next skill), and building good relationships where people feel comfortable. (Goleman, 1998) This is one more reason why developing students' EQ is of the utmost importance, and curriculums should include content and learning experiences that can help students learn how to manage their emotions well in order to preserve relationships in their work lives and personal lives as well.

Therefore, given the significance of importing such a skill in the students' books, this research aimed to analyse the content and exercises of the curricula of the preparatory stage while focusing on exercises that help improve self-awareness, self-management, empathy, and relationship management. The following are some sample exercises discovered that can contribute to developing students' EQ if applied in classrooms.



- 6 Write a reflective journal entry about something you learned to do. Use your notes from Exercise 5 and the expressions in the *Useful language* box. Write 100–120 words in your notebook.



Check your writing

1st preparatory, unit 7, lesson 6

This unit itself revolved around writing journals and describing personal experiences; this writing exercise asks them to start writing their journal entries. Although this exercise does not explicitly state it but it is useful in helping students develop their EQ because keeping a diary, in general, is an excellent way to develop self-awareness. When students learn how to write about their daily experiences, they learn how to express their emotions and recognize patterns in their emotions and reactions, to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses in their personality, to track their behaviours and bad habits to work on changing them; hence, knowing themselves better.

Reading

- 5 Read the article. What happens on Random Acts of Kindness Day?

Random acts of kindness

In 1982, some friends were in a restaurant in California, USA. They wanted to make the world better. One of the friends, Anne Herbert, wrote down her idea: **Practice random acts of kindness**. A random act of kindness is a kind thing that you do for someone, for no reason. You can do random acts of kindness for the people you know: for example, buy flowers for your mother. You can also be kind to **strangers**: for example, give your seat to someone on a bus. Now, February 17th is Random Acts of Kindness Day. All over the world, people do kind things for the day: not because they have to, but because they want to see a **smile** on a person's face. Isn't that a **fantastic** idea?



- 6 Look at the words in bold in the article. Match the words and the definitions.

- 1 when you do things to help others and show that you care about them **kindness**

Speaking

- 8 Ask and answer the questions in pairs.

- Do you think people should always do random acts of kindness? Why?
- What would you like to do on Random Acts of Kindness Day?



For more practice, go to the Ministry of Education website.

Project

- Try to do random acts of kindness for three days, at home and at school.
- Take notes about what you do and how people feel. You will need these notes later in the unit.

Lesson 2

47

2nd preparatory, unit 5, lesson 5

Furthermore, in the 2nd preps' students' book, unit 5 'Helping You, Helping Me' focuses on

encouraging doing random acts of kindness, as in the reading section; then, it is followed by a speaking exercise that asks students to discuss in pairs whether they think that people should always do acts of kindness and what act of kindness would they do if there was a day for doing acts of kindness. By asking students to think of whether people should do acts of kindness, we are helping them consider others' feelings and how such acts can affect others in a positive way, which is key to developing empathy

Then, there is a project box that asks them to do random acts of kindness for three days at home and at school while taking notes on what they did and how it made people around them feel. This way, students maintain positive relationships with those around them

5.4 Effective Communication:

According to the World Health Organization (1997), effective communication means that “we are able to express ourselves, both verbally and non-verbally, in ways that are appropriate to our cultures and situations. This means being able to express opinions and desires, but also needs and fears. And it may mean being able to ask for advice and help in a time of need.” Communication is a vital aspect of our human nature, and it is what sets us apart from all other living beings; it is what makes us humans. Without being capable of expressing our thoughts, fears, hopes, and desires, we are only existing rather than living.

Communication is a flexible tool, allowing us to express ourselves in limitless ways even when cultural and linguistic barriers exist. Being able to employ this gift of communication effectively is vital and can transform one's life completely for the better; hence, it is important to look at communication not only as a tool for exchanging

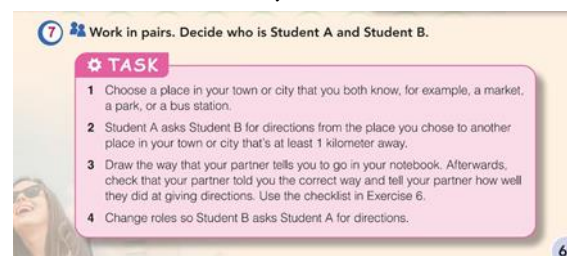
information but rather as a tool with which we construct our realities. Effective communication, then, is a skill that must be acquired by all from the earliest stages of our lives, as it helps us navigate the different phases we go through and enables us to express the fears, needs, and desires related to those phases.

The preparatory stage is when students go through their early adolescence phase in which they undergo significant physical, mental, and psychological changes. Hence, it is a phase where they feel desperately in need to express and talk about these changes, and feel heard and accepted in return. It is also a phase where they start to develop their own opinions, beliefs, and viewpoints related to different areas of life. Thus, it is important for their mental and emotional development to be able to express them freely and, simultaneously, listen actively to others when they also express theirs. This is when effective communication should come into use, for it has a major role to play in preparing students to embrace their thoughts and fears, shape their beliefs through meaningful interactions, and express them effectively with everyone around them without the fear of being judged. (Wood, 2016)

Moreover, effective communication not only supports students' emotional and social well-being but also helps them achieve academic growth. It is through effective communication that students can become active learners and be more involved in the learning process. When students are able to express their opinions freely and be involved in discussions, they will better digest the subject matter; they will learn it by heart since they have taken part in shaping their knowledge. (Amadi & Paul, 2017) Therefore, integrating effective communication skills into the curriculum and into

classes is of great importance in order to create a dynamic learning environment, one that helps students maximize their academic excellence while also enjoying and finding meaning in the learning process.

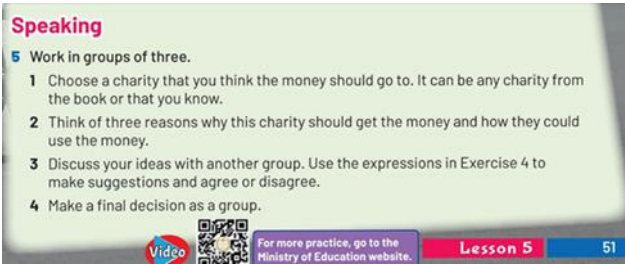
Communication is one of the most emphasized life skills inside the Egyptian English language curriculum. Aside from its significant role in shaping students' lives in various areas, employing effective communication skills is inevitable when dealing with speaking or group activities that students come across. Most, if not all, speaking and group activities require students to work in coordination and communicate well with their peers in order to successfully complete the task. If done correctly, these activities could highly contribute to enhancing both speaking skills and communication skills in preparatory stage students. Therefore, it is of great importance to ensure their successful implantation inside the classroom. Some of these activities may include:



1st preparatory, Unit 11, Lesson 3

In this activity, students must employ various aspects of effective communication in order to complete it successfully. First, they choose the place of the role play. Student A, next, has to employ active listening skills while Student B effectively describes directions using clear language. Then, Student A gives Student B constructive feedback on his/her performance, this makes communication effective. This activity also requires them to switch roles, which ensures that

both students go through the same experience and benefit equally.



2nd preparatory, Unit 5, Lesson 5

Similarly, this activity requires students to discuss choosing a charity. Next, they brainstorm ideas together. Then, a discussion between groups is held to reach a final decision. This activity requires students to utilize effective communication, active listening, and decision-making skills. Therefore, if applied, it could be a beneficial and effective communication activity.

6. Methods of Research and the Tools Used:

This research employed the mixed methods approach, the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, on the role of the English language curriculum in fostering essential life skills in preparatory stage students. The Likert scale survey was used as the data collection tool; it is a type of survey that collects responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, providing quantitative data that illustrates overall patterns in students' opinions. After collecting statistical data, an interpretation of students' responses was made to understand the meaning behind their answers, providing a qualitative analysis of the numerical data gathered. This provided a deeper understanding of how the curriculum impacts life skill development. The survey was conducted on 105 first and second-year students from Saraya El-Koba preparatory school for girls in Egypt. A non-random cluster sample was taken from four classes,

two from each year. This survey aimed at identifying whether students are aware of each skill's importance, English lessons include activities that employ each skill, the English curriculum helps students develop each skill, teachers focus on employing each skill in their lessons, and students can apply each skill outside the classroom.

Below are the survey questions presented on EQ (the same set of questions was used for the other skills to make a total of 32 questions):

Table (1): A sample of the survey questions

Questions	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.In my opinion, I believe that learning emotional intelligence through experience is more effective than learning it inside the classroom.					
2.Emotional intelligence is an important skill for my future.					
3.I often participate in activities that help improve my emotional intelligence skills.					
4.The activities in my English students' book improved my emotional intelligence skills.					
5.The curriculum provides clear guidance on how to develop emotional intelligence skills.					
6.My teacher focuses on the exercises in the book that enhance my emotional intelligence skills, and not only on the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading & writing).					
7.My teacher gives me tasks that require using emotional intelligence and gives me honest feedback on how well I have used them.					
8.I feel more confident using my emotional intelligence skills outside of school after having developed it inside the classroom.					

7. Limitations:

The researchers encountered multiple obstacles while conducting the survey:

- 1) There was no technological equipment that facilitated the process, so the researchers fixed this by distributing printouts of the questionnaire; however, it was costly, given the number of students.
- 2) Given the students' weak language skills, they could not understand the survey questions, so the researchers had to translate every question, which took a lot of time.
- 3) During the conducting of the survey, it could not be applied to third prep students as they usually did not attend school. Therefore, the survey was applied to first and second prep students only.

8. Results of the Research:

8.1 Quantitative analysis:

Table (2): A statistical analysis of the Likert scale survey results

number	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	average	deviation	percentage	T test	sample direction
1	19	25	31	21	9	3.228571	1.466483516	64.57142857	1.597127	Neutral
2	29	38	17	13	8	3.638095	1.502380952	72.76190476	4.352112	Agree
3	7	13	18	42	25	2.380952	1.372710623	47.61904762	-4.62104	Disagree
4	12	21	12	39	21	2.657143	1.727472527	53.14285714	-2.03375	Neutral
5	7	19	20	41	18	2.580952	1.361172161	51.61904762	-3.1546	Disagree
6	2	3	17	39	44	1.857143	0.854395604	37.14285714	-13.7065	Disagree
7	3	6	19	29	48	1.92381	1.128754579	38.47619048	-9.76977	Disagree
8	12	21	37	19	16	2.942857	1.458241758	58.85714286	-0.40154	Neutral
9	19	25	38	16	7	3.314286	1.294505495	66.28571429	2.4878	Neutral
10	48	37	11	6	3	4.152381	1.034249084	83.04761905	11.41736	Agree
11	17	26	27	24	11	3.133333	1.53974359	62.66666667	0.88733	Neutral
12	23	36	22	16	8	3.47619	1.463369963	69.52380952	3.334427	Agree
13	19	32	29	13	12	3.314286	1.525274725	66.28571429	2.111403	Neutral
14	10	23	29	31	12	2.885714	1.352197802	57.71428571	-0.86606	Neutral
15	11	21	29	30	14	2.857143	1.431318681	57.14285714	-1.02273	Neutral
16	23	27	30	15	10	3.361905	1.540842491	67.23809524	2.406748	Neutral
17	21	32	29	12	11	3.380952	1.507326007	67.61904762	2.589752	Neutral
18	43	26	22	8	6	3.87619	1.436446886	77.52380952	6.250339	Agree
19	12	13	21	36	23	2.571429	1.631868132	51.42857143	-2.69112	Disagree
20	11	18	23	31	22	2.666667	1.628205128	53.33333333	-2.0978	Neutral
21	12	19	21	30	23	2.685714	1.717582418	53.71428571	-1.875	Neutral
22	6	11	22	41	25	2.352381	1.268864469	47.04761905	-5.22997	Disagree
23	5	13	21	38	28	2.32381	1.297985348	46.47619048	-5.33819	Disagree
24	17	25	28	22	13	3.104762	1.594688645	62.0952381	0.673166	Neutral
25	19	27	31	15	13	3.228571	1.581868132	64.57142857	1.480629	Neutral
26	49	36	9	8	3	4.142857	1.104395604	0	10.60381	Agree
27	12	14	19	37	23	2.571429	1.651098901	51.42857143	-2.65977	Disagree
28	9	13	29	36	18	2.609524	1.355677656	52.19047619	-2.95143	Disagree
29	6	14	28	37	20	2.514286	1.252197802	50.28571429	-3.97468	Disagree
30	7	14	21	43	20	2.47619	1.30952381	49.52380952	-4.09878	Disagree
31	6	13	21	42	23	2.4	1.280769231	48	-4.80037	Disagree
32	13	21	26	28	17	2.857143	1.604395604	57.14285714	-0.9124	Neutral

8.2 Qualitative Analysis:

Q1: ‘In my opinion, I believe that learning emotional intelligence through experience is more effective than learning it inside the classroom.’

64.57% of respondents selected ‘neutral,’ which may suggest that the majority were either undecided, did not hold a strong opinion, or potentially recognized the value of both experiential and classroom-based approaches without favoring one over the other.

Q2: “Emotional intelligence is an important skill for my future”, 72.76% agreed, suggesting that the majority of the students, after being quickly introduced to the skill, recognize EQ as an important skill for their future.

Q3: “I often participate in activities that help improve my emotional intelligence skills”, 47.61% disagreed, suggesting that most students believe that they do not engage in enough activities that help them improve their EQ.

Q4: ‘The activities in my English students’ book improved my emotional intelligence skills.’ 53.14% of respondents selected ‘neutral,’ which suggests that most students were uncertain or indecisive about whether the book’s activities had a meaningful impact on their emotional intelligence skills.

Q 5: “The curriculum provides clear guidance on how to develop emotional intelligence skills”; 51.61% disagreed, suggesting that more than half of the students believe that the English language

curriculum does not sufficiently direct them in developing EQ.

Q6: “My teacher focuses on the exercises in the book that enhance my emotional intelligence skills, and not only on the four language skills”, 37.14% disagreed, suggesting that the majority do not believe that the exercises on EQ are not being emphasized enough during classes.

Q7: “My teacher gives me tasks that require using emotional intelligence and gives me honest feedback on how well I have used them.”, 38.47% disagreed, suggesting that the majority believes that their teachers do not engage them in tasks that require using EQ and, therefore, do not receive feedback.

“Q8: ‘I feel more confident using my emotional intelligence skills outside of school after having developed them inside the classroom.’ 58.85% of respondents selected ‘neutral,’ suggesting that more than half of the students were unsure or unconvinced about the extent to which their English classes contributed to their confidence in applying emotional intelligence skills outside of school.

Q9: “In my opinion, I believe that learning communication through experience is more effective than learning it inside the classroom”, “66.28% responded 'neutral', which may suggest that the majority of respondents are either undecided, see value in both learning contexts equally, or do not have a strong opinion on whether one method is more effective than the other.

Q10: “Communication is an important skill for my future”, 83.04% agreed, suggesting that the majority of the students consider communication as an important skill for their future.

“Q11: ‘I often participate in activities that help improve my communication skills.’ 62.66% of respondents selected ‘neutral,’ indicating that the majority of students were uncertain or lacked a clear perception of how frequently they engage in activities that enhance their communication skills.

Q12: “The activities in my English student’s book improved my communication skills”, 69.52% agreed, suggesting that most students believe that their student's book is integrated with activities that help them develop communication skills.

Q13: “The curriculum provides clear guidance on how to develop communication skills”, 66.28% responded neutrally, suggesting that more than half of the students are uncertain about whether the English curriculum provides explicit guidance on how to develop communication skills.

Q14: “My teacher focuses on the exercises in the book that enhance my communication skills, and not only on the four language skills”, 57.71% responded neutrally, suggesting that the majority are uncertain whether English teachers prioritize communication skills the way they do with language skills.

Q15: “My teacher gives me tasks that require using communication and gives me honest feedback on how well I have used them.” 57.14% responded neutrally, suggesting that most students are uncertain whether their English teachers give them enough communication-based tasks and constructive feedback.

Q16: ‘I feel more confident using my communication skills outside of school after having developed them inside the classroom.’ 67.23% of respondents selected ‘neutral,’ suggesting that the majority of students were uncertain about the extent to which their English

classes contributed to their confidence in applying communication skills beyond the classroom.

Q17: 'In my opinion, learning critical thinking through experience is more effective than learning it inside the classroom.' 67.61% of respondents selected 'neutral,' indicating that a significant portion of the study sample was uncertain about which method—experiential or classroom-based—is more effective for developing critical thinking skills.

Q18, "Critical thinking is an important skill for my future," 77.52% agreed suggesting that a significant majority of the study samples recognize the value of critical thinking in their future.

Q19: "I often participate in activities that help improve my critical thinking skills.", 51.42% disagreed, suggesting that more than half of the answers are not effectively engaging to develop their critical thinking abilities.

Q20: "The activities in my English students' book improved my critical thinking skills." 53.33% responded neutrally, suggesting that over half of the respondents are uncertain about the effectiveness of their English students' book activities in developing critical thinking.

Q21: "The curriculum provides clear guidance on how to develop critical thinking skills," 53.71% responded neutrally, suggesting that over half of the respondents are uncertain about the curriculum's ability to foster critical thinking skills.

Q22: "My teacher focuses on the exercises in the book that enhance my critical thinking skills, and not only on the four language skills." 47.04% disagreed, suggesting that almost half of the answers believe their teachers focus mainly on language skills without integrating critical thinking exercises.

Q23: "My teacher gives me tasks that require critical thinking and gives me honest feedback on how well I have used them.", 46.47% disagreed, suggesting that nearly half of the respondents feel their teachers do not provide critical thinking tasks or feedback.

Q24: "I feel more confident using my critical thinking skills outside of school after having developed them inside the classroom.", 62.09% responded neutrally, suggesting that many respondents are not sure about the impact of classroom-developed critical thinking skills on their confidence in real-life applications

Q25: 'In my opinion, I believe that learning problem-solving through experience is more effective than learning it inside the classroom.' 64.57% of respondents selected 'neutral,' suggesting that more than half of the students were uncertain about whether experiential learning is more effective than classroom instruction for developing problem-solving skills.

Q26: "Problem-solving is an important skill for my future.", 82.85% agreed, suggesting students strongly see problem-solving as an essential skill for future success.

Q27: "I often participate in activities that help improve my problem-solving skills," 51.42% disagreed, suggesting that more than half of the respondents are not actively participating in activities aimed at improving their problem-solving abilities.

Q28: "The activities in my English students' book improved my problem-solving skills.", 52.19% of the study sample, suggesting that more than half of the respondents believe textbook activities do not promote their problem-solving skills.

Q29: "The curriculum provides clear guidance on how to develop problem-solving skills.", 50.28%

disagreed, suggesting that around half of the respondents believe the curriculum lacks clear guidance in providing problem-solving skills. Q30: "My teacher focuses on the exercises in the book that enhance my problem-solving skills, and not only on the four language skills." 49.52% disagreed, suggesting that almost half of the respondents believe their teachers focus more on traditional language skills than problem-solving exercises.

Q31: "My teacher gives me tasks that require using problem-solving and gives me honest feedback on how well I have used them." 48% disagreed, suggesting that less than half of the respondents feel their teachers do not provide problem-solving tasks with their feedback.

Q32: "I feel more confident using my problem-solving skills outside of school after having developed them inside the classroom.", 57.14% responded neutrally, suggesting that more than half of the respondents are not sure about the effectiveness of classroom-based problem-solving skill development in improving their real-life problem-solving confidence.

9. Interpretation of Results:

The survey results indicate that the first and second preparatory stage students are aware of what each life skill is and its importance. However, they believe that their English lessons do not include enough applications that help them develop those essential skills. Although the English curriculum incorporates activities and tasks that can help them develop those skills, as demonstrated in the theoretical framework, they do not get to practice those activities in the classroom. Moreover, the majority agree that the teachers do not focus on helping them improve their soft skills as much as their language skills; they also do not focus on

practicing the activities in the book that enhance life skills but rather focus on the content and structure. Therefore, students feel that even after having been subjected to the curriculum, they still are not able to develop those skills despite their significance; hence, they are not able to employ those skills either within the school or on a daily basis.

10. Recommendations:

Based on the survey findings, the researchers recommend the following in order to ensure that students develop those skills.

- 1) The curriculum should present life skills as essential learning outcomes instead of treating them as secondary.
- 2) The teacher's guide should emphasize incorporating life skills in lessons and offer structured guidance on how to develop them alongside language skills.
- 3) Each unit should include activities where students reflect on their development of life skills.
- 4) Instead of focusing only on language skills, teachers should connect language learning with life skills.
- 5) Teachers should focus on implementing the life skills-based tasks in the book along with the language-based tasks.
- 6) Teachers should include performance-based assessments to evaluate students' ability to apply life skills along with providing students with feedback.

11. Conclusion:

This research tackled the role of the English language curriculum in fostering preparatory students' essential life skills, including cognitive skills (critical thinking and problem-solving) and socio-emotional skills (emotional intelligence and effective communication). Those four skills were

covered in terms of their definitions, their importance to students of the targeted age, and their inclusion in the preparatory stage curriculum. Furthermore, a Likert scale survey was conducted on a non-random sample from students of Saray El-Qubba preparatory school for girls to determine whether the skill-based activities in the curriculum help develop students' life skills. However, the results show that while the curriculum includes activities meant to build these skills, they are not effectively practiced in the classroom; this is mainly due to the teachers' focus on language-based activities and their negligence of skill-based exercises despite their significance for students' future success. Hence, some recommendations were suggested for helping ensure their incorporation in English curricula and classes, along with suggestions of areas of further research. Finally, this study aimed to inspire changes in education concerning the incorporation of life skills in English curricula in a way that makes students not only competent language users but also critical thinkers, creative problem-solvers, good communicators, and emotionally intelligent individuals.

12. Areas for Future Investigation:

- 1) Examine the extent to which teachers are trained to incorporate life skills effectively into their English lessons.
- 2) Expand this research to include other essential life skills, such as leadership, adaptability, creativity, etc.
- 3) Investigate the role of educational technology in enhancing life skills.
- 4) Explore how the curriculum combines life skills and language learning and how this affects students' learning.

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