The influence of watching TV English cartoon programs on children's EFL acquisition

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تأثير مشاهدة برامج الرسوم المتحركة التلفزيونية باللغة الإنجليزية على اكتساب الأطفال للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

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Abstract

In a world increasingly shaped by digital media, this study explores the effectiveness of English cartoons as a pedagogical tool for young children's English as a second language (L2) acquisition. Due to the widespread availability of digital platforms and the long hours children spend watching screens, these programs have become an integral part of their daily lives. This provides opportunities for incidental learning where children are exposed to new vocabulary, stories, and conversations, which can enhance their linguistic abilities.

The paper synthesizes findings from existing studies in educational technology, integrating established theories such as Krashen's input hypothesis, Paivio's dual coding approach, and Chomsky's Innate-Nativism theory to provide a theoretical framework. The focus is on specific aspects of language development, including phonological awareness, vocabulary expansion, and sentence formation. The research aims to present a comprehensive descriptive overview of how exposure to selected animated cartoons impacts the linguistic development of young learners.

The study concludes with a summary of results from previous research and offers recommendations for parents, educators, and content designers on how to leverage this medium for language learning.

Keywords: animated cartoons, L2 acquisition, young learners, informal learning, digital media.

ملخص

بالنظر إلى التأثير المتزايد لوسائل الإعلام الرقمية، تستكشف هذه الدراسة فعالية الرسوم المتحركة الإنجليزية كأداة تربوية لاكتساب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية (L2) لدى الأطفال الصغار. نظراً للانتشار الواسع للمنصات الرقمية والساعات الطويلة التي يقضيها الأطفال أمام الشاشات، أصبحت هذه البرامج جزءاً لا يتجزأ من حياتهم اليومية. وهذا يوفر فرصاً للتعلم العرضي حيث يتعرض الأطفال لمفردات وقصص ومحادثات جديدة، مما يمكن أن يعزز قدراتهم اللغوية.

تجمع الورقة النتائج من الدراسات الموجودة في مجال التكنولوجيا التعليمية، ودمج النظريات الراسخة مثل فرضية كراشين للمدخلات اللغوية، ونهج بايفيو للترميز المزدوج، ونظرية تشومسكي الفطرية لتوفير إطار نظري. وينصب التركيز على

جوانب محددة من التطور اللغوي، بما في ذلك الوعي الصوتي، وتوسيع المفردات، وتكوين الجمل. ويهدف البحث إلى تقديم نظرة عامة وصفية شاملة لكيفية تأثير التعرض لرسوم متحركة مختارة على التطور اللغوي للمتعلمين الصغار.
تختتم الدراسة بملخص للنتائج المستخلصة من الأبحاث السابقة وتقدم توصيات للآباء والمعلمين ومصممي المحتوى حول كيفية الاستفادة من هذه الوسيلة لتعلم اللغة.

1. Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, the acquisition of L2 becomes early. Where English language has become global communication language in various fields as technology, science and culture. Due to the increase of awareness to start learning languages early has led many parents and educators to seek on effective and innovative devices for teaching children the English language in the early years. In this context, nowadays media is considered one of the most important means. Especially, cartoons program. The presence of English language cartoons in children's daily lives has expanded rapidly through television and digital platforms, because children are interested in watching cartoons and they have a keen sense of hearing. Especially, children who aged between 4 to 8 years have ability to imitate sounds and actions. This way combines between entertainment and education, which contributes to reinforce listening, pronunciation and acquiring a large number of vocabulary and even sentence formation in an indirect manner and interactive way by incidental. This introduction explores the effect of watching English cartoons on the acquisition of English among young learners aged 4 to 8 years. Particularly when audio is combined with visual support.

Recent studies highlight the significant role of English cartoons in enhancing the second language skills and integrate it into an educational context in an early childhood. This paper aims to show the role through expose of descriptive results of previous studies, which investigated this effect. This study will not analyze new data, but it just concentrates on the previous descriptive data in this domain.

1.1. The problem of research

Despite the widespread of animated English cartoon programs among children, there leftovers a significant need for a deeper understanding of the impact of these programs on specific features of their second language acquisition. The research attempts to address the main questions as follows: what is the impact of cartoon programs on language vocabulary acquisition, an accurate pronunciation, and auditory comprehension among young learners from (4 to 8 years) in different contexts.

1.2. Research questions

Separating out from the main research question, the following questions:

- To what extent, watching cartoons programs effect English language vocabulary acquisition among young learners from (4 to 8 years) in different contexts (school or home).
- Clarification to how these programs of imitated cartoons impact on improving pronunciation among young learners from (4 to 8 years). * How these programs develop the auditory comprehension among young learners from (4 to 8 years).

1.3. Research objectives

This paper aims to achieve the following goals* description of impact of watching English cartoons programs on the vocabulary acquisition among young learners (4 to 8 years) * explanation to how these cartoons programs influence and develop pronunciation among leaners from (4 to 8 years). *Outlining the role of imitated English cartoons in developing auditory comprehension among young learners from (4 to 8 years).

1.4. The importance of research

The importance of this study lies on several aspects: * The theoretical significance: this paper contributes to enhance literatures review related to a second language acquisition among children and provide perceptions to the role of digital media in this pedagogical process and also this study includes and classify the previous studies related to this issue. To provide database for the next researchers. * The practical significance: firstly, this study provides guidelines for parents and educators to the ideal usage of English cartoons programs as a pedagogical tool. Secondly, probably the results of this study help curriculum designer to design and incorporate the attraction of cartoons in the learning process that are suitable for their ages, to encourage young learners for learning L2. * The social significance: this study maximizes the awareness to the importance of the early expose to English language, besides, the big role of home and school environment and their impact on the learning process.

2. The theoretical foundations

The theoretical framework is the basis for this study, which aims to understand the effect of cartoons on learning children's L2 and develop their language skills. These programs are designed mainly to transfer knowledge and skills that is characterized by attractive colors, songs, beloved characters and movements. This part it will consist of the main theories to acquire L2, linguistic development for children, the effectiveness of cartoons for L2 learning can be explained by several key theories:

2.1. L2 Acquisition theories

To understand how children acquire English language as L2 through cartoons programs, it is necessary to expose some theoretical foundation in this field.

2.1.1. The philosophy innates – Nativism theory (Noam Chomsky)

Humans are born with a pre- wired, specialized "language organ" in the brain which he called a "language acquisition device (LAD)". Language is an innate, biological faculty unique to humans. The device works through the expose to surrounding environment, watching cartoons considered as stimulating linguistic factors. Philosophical theory is that certain key concepts, abilities, or knowledge are "native or in born," hard wired", and present in the mind at birth

2.1.2. Krashen's language acquisition theory

Stephen krashen's theory is one of the most theoretical foundations for L2 acquisition, this theory consists of five hypotheses; two of them related directly to this study:

1. Comprehensible input hypothesis this hypothesis states that language acquisition happens when learner is exposed to linguistic input, which is slightly above their current proficiency level (i+1). In other words, the content that learner exposed to must be comprehensible, but it should contain new elements that slightly push them to develop their linguistic understanding. In content of cartoons programs, the dialogues and individual characteristics presented by these programs work, as simply entries for children (especially) in the visual context, gestures, and intonation they can contribute to their learning.

2. Affective fliter hypothesis

This hypothesis refers to existence of an effective filter that influences the extent to which learner benefits from linguistic input. This filter is affected by psychological and emotional factors such as motivation, self-confidence, and an anxiety. When the effective filter is low (meaning the learning feels comfortable and confident), the linguistic input becomes more effective in the acquisition process. Cartoon programs work in this factor by being enjoyable and non-threatening can contribute to lowering this effective filter. This makes children more eager to linguistic input and more prepared to join with learning process, family and peers.

2.1.3. Social learning theory (Albert bandura, 1977)

This theory emphasizes on the importance of learning through observation, or imitation, which posits that individuals acquire new behaviors by observing and imitating others. Particularly, when these behaviors lead to positive outcomes, it is possible for children to notice how the characters in cartoons programs use the English language through the imitation of (vocabulary, pronunciation, and expression), when children see their beloved characters speak English language fluently, that is push them and motivate them to linguistic behavior.

2.1.4. Behaviorist theory (B.F Skinner)

This theory, rooted in the work of B.F Skinner, is one of the earliest attempts to explain language acquisition. It suggests that children learn language by imitating the sounds and vocabulary they hear. Then, this learning is reinforced through interaction with others, such as parents, peers, and teachers. According to this theory, children are often rewarded for using language correctly. Additionally, media as cartoon programs can enhance the learning process by providing the repeated of the linguistic patterns, that this theory emphasize.

2.1.5. Interactionist theory

This interactive theory offers a perspective that bridges behaviorism and innate abilities. It suggests that language acquisition depends mainly on the interplay between child's innate capacities and their social environment. Therefore, social interaction is crucial in language acquisition process. Although cartoon do not provide direct interaction, they can prompt subsequent questions and discussion with parents and peers about the content.

2.1.6. Dual coding theory (Allan Paivio, 1990)

This theory assumes the information stored in memory through visual and verbal channels. Cartoon programs are characterized by their integration of image, sound, and text, this led to both channels are activated then enhance retention of the data.

2.1.7. Language development in children aged (4-8 years)

The development of children in the age group is crucial developmentally. Where children acquire through this stage the basic rules of their mother tongue, they are prepared to acquire the second language. At this stage, children's' experience rapid brain growth in language acquisition and social skill formation, children have high ability to capture the sounds, imitate the speech, and they have a linguistic eager and desire to communicate, because they affect with the visual content, especially if it is enjoyable and repetitive, cartoons programs usually support these features.

2.2. Definitions of basic concepts: The basic concepts used in this study are:
2.2.1. The second language

The second language (L2) is any language that to be learned after the mother tongue (L1). The context in this study is refer to second language as an English language acquired by children, who's their mother tongue is Arabic, it is possible to be acquired in a formal environment (such as school) or informal (during the media).

2.2.2. Cartoons programs

They are films or animated episodes aimed at children, the focus is on providing visual and auditory content, that can help in educational programs designed specifically for language learning, or that may lead to entertainment but still contains linguistic elements. In this study concentrates on cartoons programs that are presented in English language with in specified at age group.

2.2.3. Vocabulary

Enhancing vocabulary and sentence formation is possible through stories context, this way helps in understanding the meaning more deeply, in the other hand, the constant exposure to English language maximizes linguistic proficiency. Therefore, Cartoons programs support these features.

2.2.4. Auditory comprehension and Pronunciation

Children learn the correct pronunciation through imitating of beloved characters, repetition in conversations helps to reinforce vocabulary. Cartoons programs effect on pronunciation through providing clear and repeated audio samples.

3. Literature review and previous studies

A literature review is an essential part of any scientific research, as it provides a historical and knowledge context for the topic under study, it helps to identify research gaps, and guides the current research. In this section, previous studies that have addressed the impact of cartoon programs on children's second language acquisition will be reviewed and analyzed, focusing on aspects related to vocabulary, pronunciation, and listening comprehension in (home and school environments.

This part exposes some descriptive results of previous studies that adopted this topic:

3.1 First: the impact of cartoon programs on vocabulary acquisition

Several studies have shown that cartoon programs can be an effective tool in enhancing vocabulary acquisition on children linguistic. For example, Neuman & Dwyer (2009) conducted a study; they found that children who exposed to educationally designed videos showed significant advances in vocabulary knowledge. Another study by Younas & Dong (2024) indicated that children who regularly watch English language cartoon programs tend to have large vocabularies compared to their peers who do not expose to such programs. This is because cartoon programs often present new vocabulary with a combination of image with the sound, making it easier for children to associate words with their meanings.

Another study by Younas & Dong (2024) investigated the effect of animated films on increasing students' vocabulary and found that animated films significantly contribute to this improvement. Positive effect on vocabulary attributed to the engaging and entertaining of the nature of cartoons, which motivate children to engage with the linguistic content presented.

Another study conducted by Abdullah and Al- Zahrani (2020), which titled by "The Impact of Educational Cartoon Clips on Acquiring English Vocabulary among preschool children", found that, children who expose to educational cartoon clips, showed a noticeable improvement in their ability to use a new vocabulary and recall them in the appropriate context. Due to the repetition of words and their combination with image and sound, which makes them easier to recall.

3.2 Second: The effects of cartoon programs on the acquisition of sound

It is a vital aspect of second language acquisition; some studies have shown that cartoon programs can play a major role in improving it. For example, a case study by Al-Ghanim (2020), focused on an Arab child who watched English TV cartoons in an English as a foreign language (EFL) environment. The study found that the child's pronunciation was similar to that of native speakers and significantly outperformed Arab English learners regarding problematic sounds. The study concluded that children might acquire English pronunciation through TV cartoons, even in an EFL environment where opportunities for linguistic interaction available are limited. This study highlights the importance of the linguistic input that children receive from TV programs, even without direct interaction in developing pronunciation system.

A foreign study by Stanley (2021) titled "Cartoons as a Tool for Language Acquisition" confirmed that, animation cartoon provide a relatively clear and slow model of pronunciation in some programs aimed at children. These programs also expose the learner to a diversity of accents and natural linguistic fluency that helps children to progress and learn.

Another study conducted by Dharma (2024) indicates that exposure to English cartoons positively affects the acquisition of the sound system.

3.3 Third: The effect of cartoon programs on listening comprehension

Listening comprehension is a fundamental in language acquisition; learners must understand what they hear before they can produce. Cartoon programs provide an ideal environment for developing listening comprehension, because they present linguistic integrated with a visual content. By watching cartoons, children can associate words and sentences with action and pictures to enhance their ability to understand the overall meaning, even if they do not understand each individual word (Ahmed & Sharmin, 2023).

In addition, Ahmed & Sharmin (2023) indicated that, who regularly watches English cartoons programs showed improvement in the ability to understand spoken language. This improvement is not limited to vocabulary and sentence comprehension. It extends to the ability to follow stories, understand sounds, and recognize idiomatic expressions

Li & Brand (2009) demonstrated that, animated stories improved both listening comprehension and pronunciation in young ESL learners, because, children often imitate the voices and repeat phrases of beloved characters.

Kucirkova & Littleton (2016) highlighted that such repetition in animated cartoons is a cornerstone of early language development, reinforcing syntactic structures and phonetic patterns memorably.

3.4 Studies addressing the positive and negative impact

A study be Smith & Johnson (2019) indicated that the narrative problems solved by cartoon characters, make the learning process meaningful for the child, transforming it from a routine task into a fun and purposeful activity.

Despite the many benefits of cartoons programs for language acquisition, some studies have pointed to potential negative aspects or made recommendations regarding exercise us. For example, a study by Mahmoud etal. (2021) indicated that excessive exposure to cartoons may negatively effects children's overall language development, finding an inverse relationship between prolonged exposure to cartoons and speech development. However, no effect of cartoons on children's pronunciation appeared in this study. This study highlights the importance to moderate in cartoon viewing and the need to guide children toward meaningful content.

Other studies have also addressed the impact of cartoons on children's behavior in general, stating that some cartoon programs may contain scenes of violence or undesirable behaviors that may affect children Aldaqqaq, (2020). However, these aspects are outside the linguistic focus of this study but are mentioned to provide a broader context on the impact of cartoons.

3.5 Summary of the previous studies

Through the reviewing of studies, the following characteristics that contribute to the effectiveness of cartoon programs, can be identified as evaluable educational tool in children's second language acquisition, especially with regard to vocabulary and phrases in different contexts, because cartoon enhances memorization. Moreover, cartoons programs enhance the correct pronunciation, and listening comprehension. Studies emphasize the importance of the rich linguistic input and visual context that these programs provide, which facilitate understanding and recall. The language used in many children's programs is clear and accompanied by gestures and facial expressions that clarify meaning, watching cartoons has a

significant impact on children development of their attitudes, actions, and skills. On the other hand, it is worthy to mention that some studies warm against over exposure of watching animated cartoons and it is possible to influence their potential on overall linguistic development if children do not properly guide. Since, these days the majority of the children spend a notable amount of time watching and enjoying English cartoons. Generally, the literature supports the hypothesis that English cartoons programs can contribute positively to the development of second language skills in children aged 4 to 8 in both contexts at home and school.

4. Methodology

This research paper follows a descriptive methodology aimed at analyzing the effects of cartoon programs on individuals, speech and auditory comprehension. Descriptive approach aimed to describe the phenomena as it is in reality, without changing or manipulating its variables. The aim represents in description and analysis study, for effects of cartoons programs on acquisition of English vocabulary, development of auditory comprehension and pronunciation, as a helping tool on acquisition of English language (L2) among children aged between 4 to 8 years, taking in the account the contexts of exposure (school or home). The selected studies analyzed to identify, regarding the effectiveness and challenges of using cartoons for second language learning.

This research relies on the collection of information from reliable secondary sources, such as published research papers in scientific journals, books and academic documents. The study concentrates on studies that considered the same age group in contexts (home and school).

The goal of this study is to collect the existing knowledge and present it in a systematic and comprehensive manner, which provides a deeper understanding of phenomena and highlights the main results reached by previous researchers in this area.

4.1. Findings and Discussion

- Children who regularly watch English-language cartoons show significant improvement in vocabulary and pronunciation.
- Repetition in dialogue helps to reinforce new words
- Visual context supports comprehension, even in the absence of subtitles
- Children learn everyday phrases such as greetings, commands, and common expressions easily.

4.1.1 Challenges and Limitations

- **Positive impacts**:
  - Cartoons often help children in language acquisition (L2) and learning new vocabulary through repetition and engaging visuals.

  - Animated stories encourage creative thinking; maximize imagination, and storytelling skills.
  - Some cartoons embody emotional empathy, problem-solving, and friendship dynamics.

- **Negative Impacts**:
  - Despite the benefits, it should be noted that learning from cartoons remains insufficient without pedagogical support**.**
  - Some content in programs is non-normative dialects or age- age-inappropriate vocabulary.
  - Cartoons often blend global cultural elements and degrading advertisements, and inappropriate content, influencing fashion, language, and social norms.

- Exposure to violent or rude behavior in cartoons may normalize such actions for children.
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5. Conclusion.

This research paper aimed to describe the effect of cartoons on English language acquisition in children aged 4 to 8 years, with a concentration on vocabulary, pronunciation, and auditory comprehension in school and home contexts. Through a descriptive literature review, it can be concluded that animated programs are a helpful tool for learning the English language.

Cartoons contribute to enriching vocabulary and improving pronunciation and auditory comprehension skills. Cartoon content significantly influences young children's development, based on the content type and viewing context. However, it should be used in a conscious and directed way to maximize the benefits and avoid any possible negative effects.

This study summarizes the main results from a comprehensive review of the literature and previous studies:

- **Improving vocabulary, listening, and pronunciation skills:** Children learn the correct pronunciation by imitating cartoon characters. Imitating dialogue helps reinforce vocabulary visually and aurally, which facilitates the process of sentence formation.
- **The importance of context:** The role of context plays an important part in L2 acquisition. These programs have a role in both the school and home environments. At home, they can serve as an informal and enjoyable introduction to language learning, and in the classroom, they can be used as complementary educational tools to enhance learning.
- **Motivation and engagement:** Using language through storytelling and context helps children to understand meaning more deeply. Subsequently, continuous exposure to the English language maximizes linguistic proficiency. The visual context and interesting stories encourage children's continuous engagement, and positive characters enhance values and support emotional education.
- **Beware of excessive exposure:** Despite the benefits, some studies suggest that excessive exposure to cartoon programs may have a negative impact on overall language development if children are not properly guided or the content is not purposeful.

6. Recommendations

Based on the study results, I recommend the following:

Tips for parents.
- Encourage children to watch English educational cartoons programs and stimulate them to contact and interact with the content to reinforce learning.
- Set time limits to balance screen time with physical and social activities.
- Monitor content design, with consideration of the ethical aspects that align with Islamic society. Therefore, it is essential to choose programs carefully and accompany the child during watching.

Tips for trainers and teachers
- Choosing educational movies with clear language and age-appropriate content.
- Combine viewing with learning activities such as repetition and voice acting to attract children for learning and acquiring L2.
- Using clips from language programs to present new vocabulary and to train on the correct pronunciation, as well as developing listening comprehension skills.
- Combine English educational programs as helping tools to improve learning, in modern curricula, especially in Arabic communities, through the early ages.

- Directing students and parents toward credible sources for educational programs.

Tips for future researchers
- Conducting experimental and field studies to evaluate the quantitative impact of cartoons on second language acquisition in various contexts. Focusing on specific types of cartoons such as (Peppa Pig or plippi). Additionally, a long-term study on cartoons impact and their development across different age stages.
- Encouraging for design of Arabic cartoon programs that are specifically for teaching English, taking into account, these programs must be matched with the Arabic society and their beliefs.
- As a gap for study to be considered, *inability for young children to read an early age. *Degrading advertisements and inappropriate content that interrupt children's watching.

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