

LISTENING MADE FUN: HOW SHORT ENGLISH CARTOONS ENHANCE YOUNG LEARNERS' COMPREHENSION

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji bagaimana media kartun Bahasa Inggris pendek meningkatkan keterampilan mendengarkan siswa sekolah dasar, mengatasi kesenjangan penelitian di mana penelitian sebelumnya terutama berfokus pada motivasi daripada kinerja mendengarkan yang terukur. Penelitian ini mengadopsi desain metode campuran tertanam, mengumpulkan data kuantitatif melalui tes pilihan ganda 10-item sebelum dan sesudah mendengarkan, dan data kualitatif dari wawancara semi-terstruktur. Penelitian ini melibatkan 26 siswa kelas lima di Sekolah Dasar Negeri Curug, Serang, Banten. Pembelajaran menerima perawatan berbasis video kartun menggunakan konten yang sesuai dengan usia seperti Dora the Explorer dan Peppa Pig. Hasil kuantitatif menunjukkan peningkatan skor rata-rata dari 34,62 (pra-tes) menjadi 78,46 (pasca-tes). Temuan kualitatif mengungkapkan bahwa siswa memahami materi lebih baik melalui video daripada audio saja, memperoleh kosakata baru, dan lebih antusias karena kombinasi audio, visual, dan teks di layar. Temuan ini mendukung Teori Kognitif Pembelajaran Multimedia dan Teori Pengodean Ganda, yang menegaskan pentingnya pendekatan multimoda bagi pelajar bahasa Inggris muda. Secara keseluruhan, kartun pendek terbukti menjadi metode yang efektif dan menyenangkan untuk meningkatkan pemahaman mendengarkan dan motivasi belajar.

Kata Kunci: *Kartun Pendek, Kemampuan Menyimak, Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris*

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine how short English cartoon media enhance elementary school students' listening skills, addressing a research gap where previous studies primarily focused on motivation rather than measurable listening performance. This study adopts an embedded mixed-method design, collecting quantitative data via 10-item multiple-choice pre- and post-listening tests, and qualitative data from semi-structured interviews. The study involved 26 fifth-grade students at Curug State Elementary School, Serang, Banten. Learners received a cartoon video-based treatment using age-appropriate content such as Dora the Explorer and Peppa Pig. Quantitative results show an increase in average scores from 34.62 (pre-test) to 78.46 (post-test). Qualitative findings reveal that students comprehend material better through video than audio alone, gain new vocabulary, and are more enthusiastic due to the combination of audio, visuals, and on-screen text. These findings support the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning and Dual Coding Theory, affirming the importance of multimodal approaches for young English learners. Overall, short cartoons are shown to be an effective and enjoyable method to boost listening comprehension and learner motivation.

Keywords: *English Learning, Listening Skills, Short Cartoons, English learning*

INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected world, English proficiency has become a cornerstone of global communication, and listening skills form its vital foundation, as they enable learners to decipher spoken language, acquire vocabulary, and grasp pronunciation nuances (Nhung & Dieu, 2020).

Yet, many young EFL learners face significant challenges in developing listening comprehension due to limited authentic input and lack of engaging materials in traditional classroom settings (Mukazhanova et al., 2022). In response, educators are exploring multimedia interventions, particularly short animated cartoons, which have shown to be highly motivating, visually rich, and contextually supportive of language acquisition (Yamin et al., 2023a). Studies confirm that such animations enhance comprehension by combining auditory cues with visual narratives, making English listening more accessible and enjoyable for primary students (Al Hakim, M. I. I., 2024).

This practice is grounded in Dual Coding Theory and Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, which remain well-supported in recent educational research. For instance, Kanellopoulou, Kermanidis, & Giannakoulopoulos (2019) reviewed the effectiveness of using films with subtitles as a tool for learning vocabulary, based on the principles of dual coding and multimedia, which were found to improve vocabulary retention and visual-verbal context comprehension (Kanellopoulou et al., 2019). Additionally, research by Pellicer-Sánchez et al. (2020) using eye-tracking technology demonstrated that the combination of text, images, and audio significantly supports multimodal understanding in young learners (Pellicer-Sánchez et al., 2020).

In Indonesia, although the use of audio-visual media in English language learning at the elementary school level is becoming more widespread, children's listening comprehension skills still show fluctuating results. For example, the use of cartoons in English language learning for the topic "Jobs and Professions" successfully increased cognitive achievement from 31.6% to 100% among elementary school students; however, further studies are still limited in exploring its specific effects on listening skills (Ibda et al., 2023). In addition, research at SDIT Al-Ihsan Colomadu reported that the use of short animation movies elicited positive responses and high motivation from students, but their listening scores have not been analyzed in depth to objectively measure improvements in their listening skills (Yamin et al., 2023b). Therefore, although the potential for strengthening motivation through animation has been proven, there is still a significant gap between increased interest in learning and actual ability to understand spoken language, especially in the context of local elementary schools in Indonesia.

Although various studies have explored the use of audiovisual media in English instruction, few have quantitatively measured its direct impact on listening comprehension among Indonesian elementary students. For instance, Raniadi & Umar (2023) demonstrated that films can aid vocabulary and listening development, but their sample was limited to university students. Similarly, Wijayanti & Gunawan (2021) showed motivational and vocabulary benefits from YouTube videos in elementary settings; however, their study lacked quantitative listening outcome measures. Thus, there remains a research gap: no prior study has used experimental design to statistically assess the effect of short English cartoons on elementary-level listening comprehension in Indonesia. This study addresses this gap through a focused empirical intervention.

Students aged 8–10 are considered older young learners, characterized by emerging logical reasoning, the ability to follow complex instructions, and growing reflective awareness toward learning content. These traits are increasingly recognized in current developmental research, which highlights this age group's capacity to engage in abstract thinking and cooperative learning tasks (Roslidah, 2023). The main focus of this study is to analyze changes in students' scores on listening tests before and after the learning intervention using cartoons,

as well as to explore students' and teachers' perceptions of this medium in the context of English language learning in the classroom. To that end, this study is designed to answer two main questions: (1) How does the use of short English cartoons affect elementary school students' listening skills? and (2) What are the perceptions of students and teachers regarding the use of short cartoons as a learning medium for listening in English classes? This study is expected to contribute to the development of more enjoyable and effective learning media to improve children's listening skills in the context of English language learning in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study used an embedded mixed-method approach, namely with qualitative and quantitative. This study employed an embedded mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques to obtain comprehensive findings. The research was conducted at SD Negeri Curug, Serang, Banten, involving 26 fifth-grade students aged 8–10 years as research participants. Data were collected through listening comprehension tests (pre-test and post-test) and semi-structured interviews with students and English teachers. The quantitative instrument consisted of two listening tests, each containing 10 multiple-choice questions. The test items were piloted with a comparable student group and reviewed by two English education experts to ensure content validity. The pre-test was administered before the treatment and relied solely on audio input. The post-test, given after the learning session, utilized audiovisual media, namely English cartoon videos. The cartoon media used during the treatment phase were selected based on age appropriateness, familiarity, and relevance to classroom topics. The primary videos were episodes from Dora the Explorer and Peppa Pig, both of which offer clear language, contextual visual cues, and engaging storylines that support listening comprehension.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (pre-test and post-test scores) and paired sample t-test to assess the statistical significance of the difference in scores. The quantitative instrument consisted of two listening tests, each containing 10 multiple-choice questions. The test items were piloted with a comparable student group and reviewed by two English education experts to ensure content validity. The pre-test was administered before the treatment and relied solely on audio input. The post-test, given after the learning session, utilized audiovisual media, namely English cartoon videos. The whole procedure consists of four stages: (1) giving a pre-test, (2) conducting several cartoon-based listening sessions, (3) giving a post-test, and (4) conducting interviews.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This study aims to determine the effect of using English-language short cartoons on the listening skills of primary school students. Data collection was conducted in one day through a pre-test before the treatment (cartoon viewing intervention) and a post-test after the treatment. A total of 26 fifth-grade students from Curug Public Primary School, Serang, Banten, participated in the study. In general, there was a significant increase in scores between the pre-test and post-test. Based on descriptive statistical analysis, the average pre-test score was 34.62, while the average post-test score increased to 78.46. The paired-sample t-test result was statistically significant ($t = 11.52$, $p < 0.001$), with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 2.43$), indicating a strong treatment effect. This shows an average increase of 43.84 points after students received short cartoon video-based learning.

The highest score in the pre-test was 80, while in the post-test it increased to 100. Meanwhile, the lowest score remained at 10, but most students experienced a significant increase in their scores. For example, student S2 experienced an increase from 10 (pre-test) to 100 (post-test). On the other hand, there were also students like S7 who showed consistent results, scoring 10 on both tests. To clarify the changes in scores between participants, Table 1 shows the average pre-test and post-test scores and a graph comparing the pre-test and post-test scores for each student.

In addition to quantitative results, this study also collected qualitative data through limited interviews with one student and one English teacher. These interviews aimed to reveal learning experiences and perceptions of the use of cartoons in listening learning. A summary of the interview findings is presented in Table 2 below to complement the comprehensive analysis of the research results.

Table 1. Average Pre-test and Post-test Scores

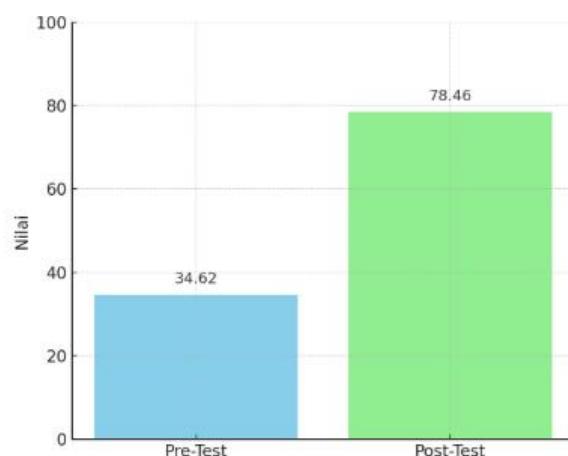
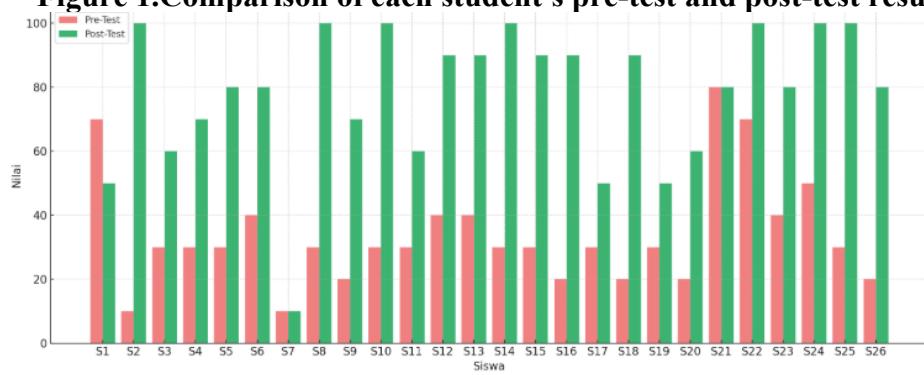


Figure 1. Comparison of each student's pre-test and post-test results.



Tabel 2. Summary of Qualitative Findings from Student and Teacher Interviews

Respondents	Key Questions	Key Answers
Students: S17	Learning preferences	Better understanding with videos because they have visuals and text

Students: S17	Vocabulary acquisition	kind (good), fishtoy (fish toy), night light (night light)
Students: S17	Perceptions of learning	Fun, not boring, like watching while learning
Students : S17	Early experiences with English	Started at age 4, through bilingual books and animated films
Teachers	Listening challenges	Students have difficulty understanding native speakers without visual support
Teachers	Responses to cartoons	Students are more focused, active, and emotionally engaged
Teachers	Implementation challenges	Limited devices, cartoon selection, and discussion time
Teachers	Willingness to integrate	Willing because learning is more lively and meaningful
Teachers	Suggestions for improvement	Use cartoons and interactive quizzes like Wordwall

Discussion

The results showed a significant increase in post-test scores compared to pre-test scores after students were taught using short English cartoons. The average score increased from 34.62 to 78.46, reflecting the positive effect of this treatment on the listening comprehension skills of primary school students.

“This aligns with Dual Coding Theory, which posits that comprehension is enhanced when verbal and visual information are presented together. A recent study found that middle schoolers learning science through combined audio-visual formats showed significantly better information retention than peers who received text-only instruction (Machingambi et al., 2024). Short cartoons such as Dora the Explorer and Peppa Pig used in this study present a strong visual context along with English audio, making it easier for students to understand the meaning of the utterances.

This study also reinforces the findings of Pellicer-Sánchez et al., (2020), who stated that multimodal input combining text, images, and sound can improve children's processing of foreign language information. In this context, cartoon videos not only increase students' attention but also provide them with visual representations that support vocabulary and sentence structure acquisition.

In addition, the almost uniform improvement among participants shows that the animation-based approach is inclusive and accessible to students of various ability levels. This is consistent with the findings of Ibda et al., (2023), which show that cartoon media encourages cognitive learning achievement in students to reach 100% (Ibda, ect., 2023).

However, there were some students who did not experience significant improvement. For example, one participant, S7, showed consistent scores between the pre-test and post-test, remaining at a low score. Possible factors may include limited prior exposure to English, reduced attentional capacity, or less favorable learning styles. These individual learner differences—especially in working memory, attentional control, and learning preferences—have been shown to significantly influence listening performance and responsiveness to multimedia instruction (Pawlak et al., 2023; Alamer, 2023).

In addition to improved scores, qualitative findings from interviews with one student revealed that he understood the material better when learning with videos because of the visuals and text that made it easier to grasp the meaning of the words. He also reported learning new vocabulary such as kind, fishtoy, and night light, and found learning with videos to be more enjoyable and less boring. The student linked their learning experience to the influence of their family environment, which had introduced them to English from an early age through bilingual storybooks and animated films. This supports Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes that intrinsic motivation is enhanced when learners' basic psychological needs are met through supportive environments. Recent meta-analytic evidence confirms that interpersonal support for autonomy, competence, and relatedness significantly enhances motivation, well-being, and learning outcomes (Slemp, Field, & Ryan, 2024).

Interviews with English teachers who assist in the learning process reinforce these findings. Teachers said that students had difficulty understanding listening because they were not accustomed to native speakers and there was a lack of visual aids. However, with the use of cartoon videos, students appeared to be more focused, enthusiastic, and actively responded to the content of the story. Teachers also identified several challenges, such as limited devices and the need for appropriate content selection. Nevertheless, they expressed readiness to integrate this method into regular lessons, as it is considered effective and enhances students' confidence. Additionally, the teacher recommended pairing cartoons with interactive activities like Wordwall quizzes to maintain optimal cognitive engagement among students (Nurgiyantoro & Efendi, 2017).

Thus, all of these findings indicate that the use of cartoon videos is not only cognitively effective, but also creates a pleasant learning atmosphere and encourages students' emotional engagement. This medium helps students understand the material more easily, enriches their vocabulary, and fosters motivation to learn. In the context of one-day learning, this approach has proven to be practical and efficient, and capable of producing tangible learning outcomes in a short period of time. Therefore, this approach is highly relevant for widespread application in English language learning in primary schools in Indonesia.

Therefore, this approach is highly relevant for widespread application in English language learning in primary schools in Indonesia. Limitations of this study include a small sample size, one-day intervention period, and limited qualitative data from only one student and one teacher. Moving forward, further research in the context of longer learning periods and more diverse class compositions is strongly recommended to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of this strategy.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the use of English short cartoon media can significantly improve the listening comprehension ability of elementary school students. This is evidenced by the noticeable increase in post-test scores after students engaged in video-based learning using cartoons, compared to the pre-test which relied solely on audio input. Qualitative findings from student interviews further support this, highlighting that audiovisual media help learners better understand lessons, acquire new vocabulary in context, and feel more enthusiastic and motivated in the learning process. Pedagogically, this approach proves to be not only cognitively effective but also emotionally engaging. The integration of cartoon media creates a light, contextualized, and child-friendly learning environment, making it a highly practical and relevant method for teaching English listening skills at the elementary level.

Beyond its immediate impact, this approach holds promising potential for long-term educational development. It paves the way for integration into thematic curricula, the use of culturally relevant or localized cartoon content, and the development of adaptive digital learning resources. These directions not only align with contemporary educational needs but also encourage more personalized and meaningful learning experiences. Therefore, this study can serve as a foundation for teachers, practitioners, and researchers to further explore the transformative role of interactive multimedia in creating more enjoyable, effective, and impactful English language learning for young Indonesian learners. This study concludes that short English cartoon media significantly improve the listening comprehension of elementary school students. The substantial post-test score gains, coupled with positive qualitative feedback, affirm the cognitive and emotional benefits of integrating cartoons into English instruction. Audiovisual media facilitated vocabulary acquisition, engagement, and clearer comprehension, especially when visual elements supported verbal input.

This research not only demonstrates immediate effectiveness but also highlights the potential of cartoons for broader pedagogical innovation. Integrating cartoon-based learning into regular curricula—especially when localized or culturally adapted—could foster deeper learner involvement. Future studies should explore long-term impacts, diverse class profiles, and additional scaffolding techniques to accommodate individual learner differences such as working memory capacity and learning styles. Overall, this study offers foundational evidence for implementing interactive, child-friendly, and multimodal strategies in English language education at the primary level. |

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