



## Research Article

# ENHANCING EFL STUDENTS' LISTENING SKILLS VIA WATCHING ENGLISH CARTOONS: AN EXPERIMENT AT DONG NAI UNIVERSITY

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## ABSTRACT

*This study aimed to improve EFL freshmen's listening skills through an experiment involving cartoons. Forty-five first-year students were divided into an experimental group and a control group, and both groups took pre-tests and post-tests. The treatment lasted five weeks during the first semester of the 2023-2024 school year and included ten cartoons. Class observations were also conducted to assess participants' behaviors. The post-test results showed that cartoons were a beneficial teaching aid, with the experimental group's average listening scores increasing by 31%, and the significance level (Sig. 2-tailed) was 0.00, lower than 0.05. In contrast, the control group's scores increased by only 12.5% after the intervention. The experimental procedure highlighted the difference between both groups' results, indicating that cartoons effectively boosted EFL learners' listening comprehension.*

**Keywords:** cartoons; EFL learners; listening skill; treatment

## 1. Introduction

Of the four language skills, listening is typically the most challenging for learners. Rivers (1986) asserts that listening activities take up a significant portion of adult time, estimating that adults spend 45% of their communication time listening, 30% speaking, 16% reading, and only 9% writing. Listening naturally comes first when learning a foreign language, as individuals must perceive sounds, words, and speech patterns before comprehending and initiating speech. Therefore, listening is a fundamental skill in language acquisition.

Teaching listening aims to enhance students' listening skills, fostering their competitiveness in the global society by improving their comprehension and awareness of English. Strengthening the connection between language and culture is another objective of

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English teaching (Rahayu & Permatasari, 2021). Global communication relies heavily on English, providing access to valuable information and resources through various media, in line with the goals of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) (Hermann in Syakur, 2020). This is a response to the Issues of Global Challenges through Character Education and National Insight.

Streaming cartoon videos is considered an effective method for developing listening skills. Animated films help students retain the material and keep them engaged and motivated throughout the class.

In reality, when promoting listening skills, more consideration should be given to the integration of cartoon movies. The potential of these videos lies in their ability to engage students actively. Instead of merely rehearsing traditional methods, students could utilize these videos and observe their effectiveness. This research, based on the challenging listening performance of EFL students at Dong Nai University, aims to contribute a visual technique that can enhance their listening comprehension. Notably, there is a lack of prior relevant research on this topic, highlighting a significant research gap. Thus, the study titled “Enhancing EFL Students’ Listening Skills through English Cartoons: An Experimental Study at Dong Nai University” was believed as a novel solution to this pressing educational issue. This research seeks to answer the question: “How can English cartoons enhance EFL students’ listening skills?”

According to Rahmawati (2010), listening requires effort as it enables us to identify and comprehend what others are saying. This involves being aware of the speaker's vocabulary, syntax, and accent. Listening is proposed to be an active process in which listeners select and interpret information from visual and aural cues to clarify the situation and the message being conveyed by the speakers. Rubin and Rubin (1995) describe active listening as the process where a listener gathers information through auditory and visual cues and connects it to prior knowledge. The selection indicates that listeners use only a portion of the incoming information while making sense of it. Interpretation involves the process by which a listener uses both prior knowledge and newly acquired information to make sense of the input and determine the speaker's intentions.

Despite being formerly classified as a passive skill, listening is actually an active process. Celce-Murcia (2001) cites Anderson and Lynch, who dispute the idea that listening is a passive act, referring instead to the notion of the listener as a "tape recorder." They argue that this perspective is inadequate in explaining the meanings that listeners assign to spoken texts based on their personal listening goals and prior knowledge. In this context, listening comprehension requires the simultaneous integration of non-linguistic skills (such as interpreting the intentions of speakers and various social skills like providing backchannel signals and correcting misunderstandings) and linguistic skills (including word recognition, breaking down speech into its component parts, and processing the discourse in terms of

coherence, logic, and relevant underlying schemas; Celce-Murcia, 2001, p. 72).

Listening is not a simple process. To fully comprehend spoken text, audiences go through multiple stages. Three processes are proposed by Petty and Jensen (1981, p.181) for the listening process. In the first step, listening, the listeners hear words and phrases as actual sounds. Second, comprehension is demonstrated by the listeners' comprehension of these terms and sentences in the context in which they have been employed. Lastly, responding when the listeners respond to what they have heard (Petty & Jensen, 1981, p.181)

The term, which means "between" in Latin, has been employed to describe anything that conveys information. Heinich as cited in Daryanto (2010, p.4) that the media serves as a bridge or preface in communication between the speaker and the listener. Thus, a mediator between a communicator and a communicant is the media. Multimedia is a tool that delivers or conveys the learning message, claims Arsyad (2011, p. 4). Integrating media effectively is crucial to igniting students' innate impulses. The use of media can help the teacher reach the instructional aims.

Videos may be employed to represent object movement with acceptable or natural sound, claims Arsyad (2009, p. 49). It displays a live image together with sound, rendering the movie an engaging tool. Sherman (2003, p. 1) contends that video contextualizes language acquisition by allowing us to incorporate any facet of actual life into the learning environment. Indeed, this form of communication is meant to be used for documentation, education, and amusement. It may impart knowledge, elucidate intricate procedures and concepts, and most importantly, it can compress or expand the duration of the teaching and learning process.

Cartoons are probably the most widely recognized and favored visual type. They are sketches with lines that are crude caricatures of actual individuals and occurrences. They can be found in a broad range of print media, including newspapers, magazines, and textbooks. They can be comic book journeys meant mainly for entertainment purposes or illustrations meant to make significant social or political statements. The cartoonist's skill is rooted in humor and satire (Heinich, 1996, p. 118). To get a satisfying outcome, care must be taken while evaluating the media to be employed for the educational process. The investigator has deduced from the criteria above that cartoons are humorous because they depict a tale about an individual, a group, or a scenario. The main purpose of video is to demonstrate visuals on a screen comparable to a television. As a result, Heinich (1996) listed interactive video, video games, videocassettes, videodiscs, and other media. The instructor needs to prepare for the usage of instructional media in the classroom thoroughly. Cahyaningrum (2010), Sand (1956, pp.353-355), and Brown et al. (1977) proposed a few methods for using video or audio-visual media to teach English listening. Regarding employing animation videos in the classroom, Cakir (2006) makes it extremely apparent that teachers should adhere to a couple practical strategies, such as (1) active viewing, in

which the teacher plays the video and lets the students watch it through to the finish. This task assists the instructor in gauging the extent of the student's comprehension of the presented film; (2) Freeze framing and prediction, in which the instructor pauses the film to display images of characters' reactions, body language, emotions, and facial expressions. Participants learn through this practice what expressions are appropriate to use when speaking in English, specifically; (3) Silent viewing: the video is played without sound, and the students are asked to infer what the characters are discussing. Students are expected to retain the dialogue in the video through this task; also, in the sound-on and vision-off activity, students can only hear the dialogue and are unable to observe what is occurring. It is undeniable that the aforementioned arguments hold relevance and benefits in integrating visual aids to teach receptive skills, which offers brilliant opportunities for learners to absorb listening comprehension better.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Research design**

Based on the mean scores from both the pre-tests and post-tests, a quantitative approach was employed to analyze the raw data of the current study. SPSS software was utilized to analyze the data during the five-week experimental process.

To ascertain the differences between the two groups after the treatment, pre-tests and post-tests with identical content were designed. Each test lasted 10 minutes and comprised 20 questions, which participants from both groups answered after listening to an eight-minute audio recording. The tests included three types of exercises: multiple-choice questions, cloze tests, and one-two-three wording fulfillment. Furthermore, the tests aimed to measure changes in EFL learners' listening levels before and after watching cartoons. The teacher-researcher was responsible for teaching listening skills to the experimental group using ten cartoons, while the control group received traditional listening instruction from the daily textbook.

For the control group, a five-week pronunciation lesson plan was prepared based on the textbook *Solutions* (new edition) by Tim Falla and Paul A. Davies (Oxford University Press). Lessons 1, 3, and 5 were selected for the experimental group, with each class lasting 15 to 18 minutes. However, the distribution of knowledge about pronunciation elements in the book and in these three lessons was not balanced and complete. This required the teacher to develop a reasonable listening teaching program that was balanced in time compared to the experimental group. Regarding teaching methods, the teacher applied conventional teaching techniques, with students following the teacher's instructions.

### **2.2. Sample and sampling procedures**

Out of 354 students enrolled in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the Faculty of Social Sciences, a sample of 90 sophomores from multiple majors was randomly selected to participate in the study. These participants had similar listening levels and

backgrounds. The experimental group consisted of 45 EFL students, while the remaining students comprised the control group.

### **Research instruments**

- *English cartoons*

To implement visual tools to assist listening teaching, ten English cartoons were chosen as the first research instrument. Martha Speak, Adventure Time, Finding Nemo, Word Girl, Doki, Postcards from Buster, The Simpsons, WordWorld, Inspector Gadget, Teen Titans Go!. were used after the pre-test and before the post-test. The following procedures were taken in this research to analyze the collected data. It was conducted upon the procedure as follows:

Step 1: Ask students from both groups to complete a pre-test.

Step 2: Analyze pre-tests' scores.

Step 3: Teach listening by cartoons to the experimental group and teach the usual listening part following the textbook to the control group.

Step 4: Give students a post-test.

Step 5: Analyze post-test marks using a t-test for a dependent group.

Step 6: Interpret the research results of the t-test.

- *Class observations*

To explore EFL students' attitudes towards utilizing English cartoons to enhance listening comprehension, class observations were designed with ten statements grouped into two clusters: (1) EFL students' activities while viewing cartoons during listening instruction, and (2) their acceptance of adopting English cartoons in listening learning. The results of these observations were recorded on observation sheets, which included two columns labeled "Yes" and "No." The data were analyzed using SPSS to highlight learners' behaviors regarding listening comprehension through English cartoons.

The data from the experimental results were analyzed and compared using SPSS software (ANOVA) to determine how the two groups of students perceived differently before and after the treatment. If the significance value (Sig. 2-tailed) is greater than 0.05, the post-experimental results will not differ from the initial results. On the contrary, if the significance value (Sig. 2-tailed) is less than 0.05, the pronunciation results before and after the experiment will show significant differences between the two groups.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### **3.1. Experimental results**

To answer the research question "How does watching English cartoons enhance EFL learners' listening skills?". Pre-test and post-test results were treated and compared to reveal the difference between the two groups before and after the experiment. Thereby, the improvement of students' pronunciation is also determined. The results of the pre-test are shown in the following table.

*Table 1. Proportion of correct answers for the experimental group and the controlled group from the results of the post-test*

	Experimental group	Controlled group
PRE-TEST	8.3/20 correct items (41.5%)	8.7/20 correct items (43.5%)
POSTTEST	14.5/20 correct items (72.5%)	11.2/20 correct items (56%)

*Table 2. Comparison of post-test results on listening of the controlled group and the experimental group*

N (CG)= 45 (EG)= 45	Variances	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	SD	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Preparation of 2 groups from the pre-test	Equal variances assumed	56.050	0.065	.7212	-1.12003	-.50234
	Equal variances not assumed	55.078	0.062	.8241	-1.21300	-.50314
Preparation of 2 groups from posttest	Equal variances assumed	56.050	.0053	.8721	-1.12009	-.50433
	Equal variances not assumed	55.078	0.000	.8322	-1.21000	-.50417

Table 2 shows a variance in the significance values (Sig. 2-tailed) of 0.065 and 0.062, both greater than 0.05. This indicates that the mean scores of the two groups' participants were nearly the same. All participants had balanced listening skills, with students in both groups primarily able to comprehend English audio or speech at a lower-than-average level, as reflected by the pre-test scores of 41.5 percent and 8.7 percent. In contrast, the experimental group's scores significantly increased to 72.5 percent, while the control group only reached 11.2 percent after the post-test. Notably, the experimental group demonstrated substantial improvement in listening comprehension.

In the control group, students achieved a maximum score of only 11.2 percent, indicating a marginal increase of 2.5 percent from the pre-test. This underscores the limited progress made by EFL students through conventional teaching methods. The experimental group demonstrated significant improvements. Specifically, the experimental group exhibited a 31 percent enhancement from its pre-test and surpassed the control group's achievement by more than 12.5 percent. The observed improvement from baseline results was approximately 39%. This noteworthy improvement suggests a substantial enhancement in listening comprehension among EFL students in the experimental group following the intervention. Participants in the control group continued to encounter challenges in listening comprehension.

3.2. Questionnaires results

The perceptions of EFL students on English cartoons in listening teaching and learning are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Students' perceptions of English cartoons

No	Content	Yes	No
EFL students' activities while they watched cartoons in listening teaching			
1	Focusing on seeing cartoons.	43 100%	0 0%
2	Collaboration of watching English cartoons and talking in class.	2 5%	42 95%
3	Collaboration of watching English cartoons and learning English by taking notes, shadowing, etc.	38 88%	5 12%
4	Asleeping when watching English cartoons.	42 100%	0 0%
5	Removing class when watching English cartoons.	0 0%	44 100%
EFL students' attitudes on adopting watching English cartoons in listening learning.			
6	Enjoy watching English cartoons with focusing, smiling, laughing, clapping, shouting, etc.	45 100%	0 0%
7	Being upset when seeing English cartoons.	0 0%	43 100%
8	Being excited when seeing English cartoons.	44 100%	0 0%
9	Pity when the cartoons ended.	45 100%	0 0%
10	Being happy when the cartoons finished.	0 0%	45 100%

Table 3 shows that all EFL students focused on watching cartoons, 95 percent of them did not do what they liked when cartoons were played. One to three students were sometimes absent from class, the left enjoyed English cartoons that were played like focusing on watching, smiling, laughing, clapping, and shouting at class. Moreover, they were aware of actively acquiring English listening and speaking from cartoon videos through taking notes and shadowing.

Likewise, the integration of English cartoons into listening skill development was well-received. Nearly 100 percent of the participants indicated their enjoyment of using cartoons as a tool for learning listening skills. This highlights the widespread acceptance among learners and indicates their positive attitudes toward incorporating cartoons into listening acquisition.

Nearly all EFL viewers agreed with the integration of cartoons in learning listening skills, with 80 percent to 100 percent of participants endorsing the use of cartoons for teaching listening comprehension. Participants acknowledged that English cartoons served

as a visual aid for improving listening skills. Moreover, they conceded that learning through cartoons was effective and enhanced their engagement.

The findings indicated that the textbook-based listening teaching method had minimal impact on students' listening skills. Table 2 presents a two-tailed significance value (Sig. 2-tailed) from the experimental group of 0.00, which was below the threshold of 0.05. The experimental group's proficiency in listening varied considerably, inferring that using cartoons to enhance EFL students' listening comprehension is a remarkable and effective technique.

The findings of this study echo previous research, such as Purba (2020), Syafii et al. (2020), and Field (2010), demonstrating the efficacy of using cartoons to enhance English listening skills. This study focuses on contemporary cartoons. The author based on the literature review to develop a theoretical framework for the study and experimented. Consequently, cartoons are recognized as an invaluable tool for English teachers in fostering listening skills, which are essential for developing speaking, listening, and overall language proficiency.

#### **4. Conclusions and Recommendations**

The findings underscored that EFL students in the experimental group made significant improvements in their listening skills through participation in an experiment utilizing English cartoons. The results affirm the effectiveness of English cartoons in enhancing EFL students' listening abilities. Notably, despite initial difficulties in discerning sentences and words, students made substantial progress and demonstrated the ability to identify the majority of new vocabulary presented in classroom English audios and videos. The research question has been addressed. This study introduces an innovative instructional strategy that English teachers can employ to teach students of various ages, covering areas such as speaking, listening, writing, and pronunciation, among others.

In order to motivate and engage students and encourage passionate learning listening skills, teachers must employ innovative and adaptable teaching strategies while teaching language skills in general and listening comprehension in particular. Furthermore, to impart listening information to students, teachers' listening teaching strategies should concentrate on utilizing more sound media such as music, broadcasts, video clips, movies, and dramas to enhance and effectively encourage EFL students' learning spirit. Nonetheless, within the scope of the study, this treatment was conducted on EFL freshmen without offering benefits for sophomores, or other grades of ESP or ESL learners as well.

❖ **Conflict of Interest:** Author have no conflict of interest to declare.



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## NÂNG CAO KĨ NĂNG NGHE CỦA SINH VIÊN HỌC TIẾNG ANH TỔNG QUÁT QUA PHIM HOẠT HÌNH TIẾNG ANH

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### TÓM TẮT

Với mục đích cải thiện kĩ năng nghe của sinh viên EFL, một thử nghiệm sử dụng phim hoạt hình trên 45 sinh viên năm thứ nhất của nhóm thực nghiệm so với 45 sinh viên thuộc nhóm đối chứng thông qua bài kiểm tra trước (pre-test) và sau (posttest) thực nghiệm. Quá trình thực nghiệm được thực hiện trong vòng 5 tuần trong học kỳ đầu tiên của năm học 2023-2024 với công cụ thu thập dữ liệu bao gồm 10 phim hoạt hình tiếng Anh, mỗi tuần sinh viên được xem hai phim. Cùng thời gian, việc thăm dò thái độ và quan sát hoạt động của sinh viên nhóm thực nghiệm khi sinh viên xem phim hoạt hình tiếng Anh được thực hiện để xác định thái độ của họ đối với phương thức cải thiện kĩ năng nghe của sinh viên qua phim hoạt hình tiếng Anh. Từ điểm trung bình của bài kiểm tra sau thực nghiệm, phim hoạt hình được công nhận là một công cụ hỗ trợ giảng dạy hữu ích. Hơn thế, chỉ số sig.2 tailed ở mức 0,00 thấp hơn 0,05 thể hiện sự khác biệt tiến bộ mà kết quả của nhóm thực nghiệm mang lại. Ngược lại, điểm số của nhóm đối chứng chỉ tăng lên 12,5%. Có thể lí giải rằng quy trình thử nghiệm đã làm nổi lên sự khác biệt giữa kết quả của cả hai nhóm cho thấy phim hoạt hình tiếng Anh có tính ứng dụng và hiệu quả cao trong việc nâng cao kĩ năng nghe hiểu của người học.

**Từ khóa:** phim hoạt hình tiếng Anh; sinh viên không chuyên tiếng Anh; kĩ năng nghe; giải pháp can thiệp