IMPROVING EFL LEARNERS' LISTENING SKILL THROUGH ENGLISH CARTOONS: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY AT PHAN THIET UNIVERSITY, VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

By the aim to enhance the listening skills of EFL freshmen, an experiment was conducted using cartoons with thirty-five first-year students in an experimental group, compared to a control group, through pre-tests and post-tests. The intervention took place over five weeks during the first semester of the 2022-2023 school year, utilizing ten cartoons as research tools. Additionally, classroom observations focusing on five key content areas were carried out to assess participants' reactions to this method. The post-test results indicated that cartoons were an effective teaching aid, with the experimental group's listening scores improving by 31 percent, significantly higher than the control group's 12.5 percent increase. The findings revealed a clear difference between the two groups' performance, confirming that cartoons are a valuable tool for improving EFL learners' listening comprehension.

Keywords: *Cartoons, EFL learners, listening skill, treatment*

1. Introduction

Among the four language skills, listening is often the most difficult for learners. Rivers (1986, p. 15) points out that listening occupies a substantial part of an adult's time, estimating that adults spend 45% of their communication time listening, 30% speaking, 16% reading, and just 9% writing. Furthermore, listening is the first skill developed when learning a foreign language. In other words, before someone can understand and produce speech, they must first perceive sounds, words, and speech patterns. Therefore, listening is the foundational skill in language acquisition.

The purpose of teaching listening is to enhance students' listening abilities. The primary objective is to prepare students for global competition by improving their understanding and awareness of the fundamental role and significance of the English language. Another goal of English teaching is to deepen students' comprehension of the relationship between language and culture (Rahayu & Permatasari, 2021). English language skills are crucial for global communication, as English has become a key medium for accessing valuable information and resources across various platforms, including print and electronic media. This aligns with the goals of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as outlined in the SDGs and MDGs (Hermann in Syakur, 2020). It is a response to addressing global challenges through character education

and national awareness. Streaming cartoon videos is considered one of the most effective and practical ways to improve listening skills. Using animated films helps students retain the lesson and keeps them engaged and motivated during the class.

In practice, the use of cartoon movies in promoting listening skills deserves more consideration. The potential of these cartoon videos lies in their effectiveness. Instead of simply practicing listening, students can use this method and observe its impact. Focusing on the challenges faced by EFL students at Phan Thiet University, the researcher aims to contribute a visual technique that can improve their listening comprehension. Moreover, the lack of previous research on this specific topic highlights a gap that this study seeks to address. Therefore, the research titled "Boosting EFL Students' Listening Skills through English Cartoons: An Experiment at Phan Thiet University" is seen as a novel and valuable solution for an important educational issue. Based on theoretical foundations and the study's context, the research aims to answer the question: "How can English cartoons enhance EFL students' listening skills?".

According to Rahmawati (2010), listening requires effort because it involves recognizing and understanding what others are saying. This process includes being attentive to the speaker's vocabulary, grammar, and accent. Listening is considered an active process in which listeners extract and interpret information from both visual and auditory signals to clarify the message and situation being communicated by the speaker. Active listening involves gathering information through auditory and visual cues and connecting it with prior knowledge (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). The term "select" means that listeners focus on specific parts of the incoming information to make sense of it, while "interpretation" refers to the process of combining prior knowledge with new information to understand the input and determine the speaker's intent.

Despite previously being considered a passive skill, listening is, in fact, an active process. Celce-Murcia (2001) highlights Anderson and Lynch's challenge to the notion of listening as a passive act, rejecting the idea of the listener as a "tape recorder." They argued that this perspective falls short of explaining how listeners derive meaning from spoken texts, which depends on their personal listening objectives and prior knowledge. In this context, listening comprehension involves the integration of both non-linguistic skills (such as interpreting the speaker's intentions and using social skills like providing feedback and addressing misunderstandings) and linguistic skills (such as recognizing words, segmenting speech, and processing discourse in terms of coherence, logic, and relevant underlying schemas) (Celce-Murcia, 2001, p. 72).

Listening is a complex process that involves several stages for a full understanding of spoken language.

Petty and Jensen (1981, p.181) suggest three key steps in the listening process. First, in the "listening to" stage, listeners perceive words and phrases as sounds. Second, comprehension occurs when listeners understand these words and sentences within the context they are used. Finally, in the "responding" stage, listeners react to what they have heard (Petty & Jensen, 1981, p.181).

The term, derived from the Latin word meaning "between," has been used to refer to anything that transmits information. Heinich, as cited in Daryanto (2010, p. 4), explains that media acts as a bridge or intermediary in communication between the speaker and the listener. Therefore, media serves as a mediator between the communicator and the communicant. Arsyad (2011, p. 4) adds that multimedia is a tool that delivers or conveys educational messages. Effectively incorporating media is essential for stimulating students' natural responses, and its use can assist teachers in achieving their instructional goals.

According to Arsyad (2009, p. 49), videos can be used to depict object movement with realistic or natural sound. By combining live images with audio, videos become a dynamic and engaging tool. Sherman (2003, p. 1) argues that video contextualizes language learning by bringing elements of real life into the educational setting. This form of communication is designed for documentation, education, and entertainment. Videos can convey information, clarify complex processes and ideas, and, most importantly, either

shorten or extend the duration of the teaching and learning process.

Cartoons are likely the most well-known and popular form of visual media. They are drawings that feature exaggerated caricatures of real people and events, often created with simple lines. Cartoons can be found in various print media, such as newspapers, magazines, and textbooks. They can either be comic strips aimed at entertainment or illustrations intended to convey important social or political messages. The skill of the cartoonist lies in humor and satire (Heinich, 1996, p.118). Careful consideration is necessary when selecting media for educational purposes to ensure effective results. Based on these criteria, the investigator concludes that cartoons are humorous because they tell stories about individuals, groups, or situations. The primary function of video is to display images on a screen, similar to television. Heinich (1996) also mentioned other media such as interactive video, video games, videocassettes, and videodiscs. Educators must thoroughly prepare the use of instructional media in the classroom. Cahyaningrum (2010) references Sand (1956, p. 353-355) and Brown et al. (1977), who suggested several methods for using video or audiovisual media in teaching English listening skills.

When using animated videos in the classroom, Cakir (2006) emphasizes that teachers should follow a few practical strategies. These include: (1) Active viewing, where the teacher plays

the video and allows students to watch it fully, helping the teacher assess the students' understanding of the content; (2) Freeze framing and prediction, where the teacher pauses the video to focus on characters' reactions, body language, emotions, and facial expressions. This helps students learn which expressions are appropriate in English communication; (3) Silent viewing, where the video is played without sound, and students are asked to infer what the characters are discussing. This activity encourages students to remember the dialogue. Additionally, in the sound-on and vision-off activity, students only hear the dialogue without seeing the visuals, requiring them to focus on the spoken words. These strategies clearly demonstrate the value and benefits of incorporating visual aids in teaching receptive skills, offering excellent opportunities for students to enhance their listening comprehension.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research design

The quantitative approach was used to analyze the raw data in the study, as reflected in the mean scores from both the pre-tests and post-tests. SPSS software was selected to process the data and produce the results after a 5-week experimental period.

To determine the differences between the two groups after the training, identical pre-tests and post-tests were designed, each lasting 10 minutes and consisting of 20 questions. Both groups answered these questions after listening to an eight-minute audio.

The tests included a variety of listening tasks, featuring three types of exercises: multiple choice, cloze tests, and one-two-three-word completion. Additionally, the tests aimed to assess changes in the 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 followed traditional listening instruction using a standard textbook.

For the control group, the five-week pronunciation lesson plan was prepared by the teacher according to the textbook Solutions (new edition) by Tim Falla, Paul A Davies Oxford University Press. Lessons 1, 3 and 5 were four out of eight lessons chosen by the researcher-teacher for experimental period, each class were from 15 to 18 minutes. However, the distribution of knowledge about pronunciation elements in the book as well as in these 3 lessons was not balanced and complete. This required the experimental teacher to think so that the controlled group was arranged to teach a reasonable listening teaching program and balanced in time compared to the experimental group. Regarding teaching methods, the lecturer applies conventional teaching techniques, students follow what the teacher instructed.

2.2. Sample and sampling procedures

Out of 278 sophomores studying English as a foreign language (EFL) in the Faculty of Foreign Languages, 70 sophomores from various majors were randomly selected as the research

sample. These participants shared similar listening levels and backgrounds. The experimental group consisted of 35 EFL students, with the remaining participants assigned to the control group.

Research instruments
English cartoons

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

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

Step 2: Analyzing pre-tests' scores.

Step 3: Performing teaching experimental teaching listening by cartoons on the experimental group, teaching usual listening part following the textbook.

Step 4: Giving the students a post-test.

Step 5: Analyzing post-tests' marks using t-test for dependent group.

Step 6: Interpreting the research results of the t-test to reveal the findings.

The experimental data will be analyzed and compared using the ANOVA algorithm in SPSS software to assess how the two groups of students perceive and pronounce elisions differently before and after the trial. If the Sig. (2-tailed) value is greater than 0.05, it indicates no significant difference between the post-experiment and initial results. Conversely, if the Sig. (2-tailed) value is less than 0.05, it suggests that the elision pronunciation results vary significantly between the two groups before and after the experiment.

3. Results and discussion
3.1. Experimental results

In order to address the research question, "How does watching English cartoons improve EFL learners' listening skills?", pre-test and post-test results were analyzed and compared to highlight the differences between the two groups before and after the experiment. This comparison also helped to assess the level of improvement in students' pronunciation. The pre-test results are presented in the table 1.

Table 1: *Proportion of correct answers for the experimental group and the controlled group from the results of 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 (controlling group)= 45 (experimental group)= 45	Variances	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	SD	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Preparation of 2 groups from 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

In table 2, the data clearly showed a variance with Sig. (2-tailed) values of 0.065 and 0.062, both of which are greater than 0.05. This indicates that the mean scores of participants in both groups were nearly the same, suggesting that their listening skills were initially balanced. In the pre-test, most students in both groups demonstrated below-average English listening comprehension, with 41.5% and 8.7%, respectively. However, after the post-test, the experimental group significantly improved, with their scores soaring to 72.5%, while the control group only reached 11.2%. The experimental group notably showed improved listening comprehension.

For the untreated group, the highest score achieved was only 11.2%, which was just a 2.5% increase from the pre-test results. This clearly indicates that the traditional teaching method did not lead to significant progress in students' listening skills. In contrast, the experimental group showed remarkable improvement compared to both their own pre-test scores and the untreated group. The treated group improved by 31% from their pre-test scores and outperformed the untreated group by 12.5%. Although the increase in the ratio was modest, the overall improvement from the initial results was around 39%. This notable increase in scores demonstrates that EFL students in the experimental group significantly enhanced their listening comprehension after watching cartoons as part of the experiment. For the control group, listening remained a challenge, with little to no substantial increase in the number of correct answers compared to the pre-test results.

The findings clearly showed that the textbook-based listening instruction had minimal impact on students' listening abilities. Table 2 presented a two-tailed Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.00 for the experimental group, which is below the 0.05 threshold. This aligns

with the final test results obtained during the experiment. The experimental group's listening proficiency showed significant variation, indicating that using cartoons to improve EFL students' listening comprehension is an excellent and effective approach.

The findings of this article build upon the work of researchers like Purba (2020), Syafii et al. (2020), and Field (2010), reinforcing the idea that using cartoons to improve English listening skills is an effective approach. Notably, current cartoons, which have been less explored by the mentioned scientists and others globally, are the focus of this study. The author has developed a solid theoretical framework and designed an appropriate experimental program to ensure both scientific value and practical relevance, offering a useful reference for future related research. As a result, cartoons are highlighted as an ideal tool for English teachers, particularly valuable for teaching listening, speaking, and overall language skills.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Overall, the findings demonstrated that EFL students in the experimental group significantly improved their listening skills by participating in a listening practice program that used English cartoons. The research question,

"How can English cartoons enhance EFL students' listening skills?" was convincingly answered, with a notable 31% improvement after the trial. Despite initial difficulties in recognizing sentences and words, students showed remarkable progress, ultimately being able to identify the majority of new vocabulary from classroom English audios and videos. The research confirmed the scientific validity of the cartoon-based approach, showing that students' listening abilities benefit from this method. The study introduced an innovative strategy for English teachers to enhance students' listening, speaking, writing, and pronunciation skills across different age groups.

For engaging students, fostering a passion for learning listening skills, teachers should implement innovative and flexible teaching strategies, particularly when teaching language skills and listening comprehension. Additionally, teachers' approaches to teaching listening should focus on incorporating more audio-based media, such as music, broadcasts, video clips, movies, and dramas, to effectively boost EFL students' motivation and learning enthusiasm. However, within the scope of this study, the treatment was limited to EFL freshmen, and did not extend to sophomores or other levels of ESP or ESL learners.

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CẢI THIỆN KĨ NĂNG NGHE CỦA NGƯỜI HỌC TIẾNG ANH TỔNG QUÁT QUA PHIM HOẠT HÌNH TIẾNG ANH: MỘT NGHIÊN CỨU THỰC NGHIỆM TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC PHAN THIẾT, VIỆT NAM

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ABSTRACT

Với mục tiêu cải thiện kĩ năng nghe của sinh viên EFL, một thực nghiệm đã được thực hiện, sử dụng phim hoạt hình cho 35 sinh viên năm nhất thuộc nhóm thực nghiệm, so với 35 sinh viên của nhóm đối chứng, thông qua bài kiểm tra trước và sau thực nghiệm. Quá trình thực nghiệm diễn ra trong 5 tuần của học kỳ đầu tiên năm học 2022-2023, với các công cụ thu thập dữ liệu bao gồm 10 phim hoạt hình tiếng Anh. Ngoài ra, các quan sát lớp học tập trung vào năm lĩnh vực nội dung chính được đưa vào để đánh giá phản ứng của người tham gia đối với phương pháp này. Kết quả kiểm tra sau thực nghiệm cho thấy phim hoạt hình được công nhận là công cụ hỗ trợ giảng dạy hiệu quả, với điểm nghe của nhóm thực nghiệm cải thiện 31%, cao hơn đáng kể so với mức tăng 12,5% của nhóm đối chứng. Điều này cho thấy quy trình thực nghiệm đã làm nổi bật sự khác biệt giữa kết quả của hai nhóm, khẳng định tính ứng dụng và hiệu quả của phim hoạt hình 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*