

**FaR 2021**

**International Forum “Freedom and responsibility in pivotal times”**

**USING CARTOONS AND ANIMATED FILMS TO TEACH  
LISTENING SKILLS TO YOUNG LEARNERS**

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**Abstract**

Using cartoons and animated films for English classrooms to young learners is often questioned. Is it an appropriate and meaningful way to teach listening skills? Educators and researchers always argue about the relevance of this method for educational program. This paper mentions that educators can collaborate cartoons according to subject plan. This article aims to claim that using cartoons and animated films for English classrooms to young learners can be an alternative and effective way to teach listening understanding. On the other hand, the article intends to show the impact of cartoons and animated films on teaching foreign language. Names of the cartoons and animated films which are beneficial to use in different grades for young learners to improve their listening skills are discussed in this paper. The result of the survey shows that using cartoons and animated films to teach listening skills is highly effective. It leads to improvement of students' results while using it consecutively. It also helps to make educational process balanced and make students involved. It was shown that cartoons are often motivating, encouraging and appealing for young learners.

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*Keywords:* Cartoons, animated films, listening skills, young learners



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## 1. Introduction

Teaching listening skills at English classes by using cartoons and animated films has gained attention in the English language teaching classroom all over the world. However, as listening is not considered a learning goal, elementary school students mostly acquire the ability to listen spontaneously, haphazardly, and sometimes unequally. The lack of serious approaches to teaching listening is due to an insufficient objective assessment of its importance in successful learning outcomes, as well as theoretical elaboration of the problem difficulties of learning to listen in for elementary school students.

Although certain aspects of listening have been studied by scientific linguists, psychologists and teachers, the ability of primary schoolchildren to listen is still among the few unexplored problems of linguistics and is not yet fully implemented in the context of English teaching. The underlying cause, as Gez (1981) reasons, is that “listening has so far been regarded as a by-product of speaking; consequently, work on it is episodic and is based on voice messages presented by the teacher in a form that is most acceptable for a particular class and, as a rule, very far from speech perception in natural conditions” (p. 32).

Additionally, Elukhina (1996) believes that one of the reasons for the lack of methodological and educator investment in listening is the fact that, until recently, listening was considered an easy skill. It was believed that if, when teaching oral speech, the teacher concentrates all efforts on speaking and ensures mastery of this ability, then students will learn to understand speech spontaneously, without special purposeful training. The error of this point of view is made plain by both theory and practice. Another reason for the neglect of listening is the ignorance of teachers regarding the psychological and linguistic difficulties of listening, the different skill levels of listening ability, and the stages of work with audio texts.

Thus, listening demands closer attention from teachers, who need to use special tasks in their lessons, that are aimed at the formation and development of this important type of speech activity.

## 2. Problem Statement

In the State Compulsory Standard of Primary Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the expected outcomes for listening skill after completing foreign language training in primary school include the abilities to understand the main content of a short conversation on a familiar topic, recognize the sound of familiar words and phrases; understand short questions about colour and numbers; use contextual clues to predict the content and meaning of a short conversation on familiar topics; and understand the general meaning of short stories while reading loud clearly (The state compulsory standard of primary education, 2018). These requirements are difficult to achieve in the absence of special methods and with poor theoretical elaboration of the problem. Ikabaeva (2010) notes that “the age-related characteristics of primary school children, the development of the psyche, the formation of speech qualities, and the development of writing skills make it necessary to search for adequate and effective ways of learning to listen” (par. 1).

In our opinion, the use of modern multimedia accompaniments, various technical and diverse information tools, and the introduction of animated cartoons through information and communications technology (ICT) will help teachers to improve listening competencies among younger students. When properly organized and implemented by the teacher, an analysis of multimedia materials and cartoon

viewing lesson will make the process of learning new material intense and interesting. Moreover, it will contribute to the activation of cognitive activity in students, and will also develop their skills related to the processes of perceiving spoken speech.

### 3. Research Questions

The growing influence of media on various spheres of everyday life is constantly increasing. In the modern information society, one must contend with large flows of information, which undoubtedly affect us in a certain way. From early childhood, each person is now involved in the information space. By the time he or she enters school, the child is already familiar with various types of media: visual (photo, print), audio (sound), audiovisual (film, video, television). Children's preference for media type usually depends on their age. At preschool and primary school age, children are only beginning to learn to read, and this process for them can still be seen as decoding letters and syllables, and not as a way to fully absorb information. Naturally, print media is almost not in demand at this stage, which cannot be said about television, video, and cinema. Animated films occupy a special place in the media diet of children (Popkova, 2018).

Let us dwell on the positive experience of using animated films as a means of forming listening skills in younger students.

Firstly, many cartoons are shot not for an adult audience, but exclusively for children. Their goal is to introduce the child to the world around them, so they do not have complex words and grammar, slang expressions, etc. In cartoons aimed at a younger audience, character speech is constructed simply with basic vocabulary. At the same time, children develop several skills simultaneously when watching cartoons: English speech perception, acquisition of new vocabulary, and imitation of characters (speaking and pronunciation). Additionally, young viewers get an idea about the construction of phrases, i.e. about basic English grammar. The following popular animated films and series are designed to master the basic level of the English language: "Little Bear", "Peter Rabbit", "Regular Show", "Inspector Gadget", "Arthur", "Pocahontas", "WALL-E", "Peppa Pig", "The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh", "Over the Garden Wall", "Scooby-Doo", "Adventure Time", "Aladdin", "Gravity Falls", "Rick and Morty", "The Simpsons", "The Man Called Flintstone", "Up", "Daria", "Muzzy in Gondoland".

Through animated films, young viewers can gain basic knowledge about articles, plural formation, the possessive case, countable and uncountable nouns, and agreement between the subject and predicate; pronoun topics such as the types of English pronouns; the words "some," "any," "no," and their derivatives; and numerical words (quantitative and ordinal); and verb topics such as the verb "be" in English, the verb "have" in English, the three forms of English verbs, the main irregular English verbs, basic modal verbs for beginners, and basic phrasal verbs for beginners.

At the most initial stage of learning English, one needs to be familiarized with the alphabet in order to understand the system of letters that designate the sounds of the language. "The English Alphabet" animated films on you.tube (The English Alphabet, 2021) and "Talking ABC", an animated video song about English letters (Talking ABC, 2021) contribute to faster memorization of the English alphabet, while reflecting unique features of the English alphabet (including the fact that the name of the letter does not always coincide with its pronunciation, and that several letters can represent one sound or that one letter

can indicate several different sounds depending on its position in a word). In other words, watching cartoons about the English alphabet forms knowledge about transcription, that is, about phonetic writing.

At the same time, we emphasize that animated films, which adhere to the principle of accessibility, in both form and content, educational and developmental in nature. Let us cite in this regard the animated film “Super WHY!”, where the main character teaches grammar and introduces new words through his mobile phone, thereby expanding the vocabulary of the topic. Other cartoons focus on the that teaching of vocabulary related to colors and animals (“Surprise Eggs Nursery Rhymes. Learn Colors & Farm Animals”; “What color can Timmy see?”), the alphabet (“Bingo”), counting (“Five Little Ducks”), etc. A useful animated developmental series is “Timmy Time”. Episodes are aimed at helping viewers to get to know the outside world through topics such as geography (“Timmy Goes Comping”), professions (“Timmy the Builder”), transport (“Make a Train with Timmy”), etc.

Additionally, the characters of animated series, as a rule, possess not only unique identifying features, but also equal characteristic phrases that they repeat across episodes, which contributes to the formation of a stable memorization of expressions and words in English. It is necessary for young learners to hear words and sounds repeatedly in order to learn them well.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

According to Zinchenko (1961), elementary school students have a well-formed involuntary memory that captures expressive, emotional data and events. Students are increasingly not setting themselves conscious tasks for memorization. According to Leontiev (2000), in children of primary school age, a visual-figurative memory is more developed: pupils retain in their memory certain events, information, people, and cases more accurately and for longer periods of time. Watching educational cartoons contributes to this involuntary memorization of information, which is characterized by stability and durability.

The greater the exposure to more knowledge and more opportunities to form new connections, the better children’s memorization skills, and, therefore, their memory overall. In the teaching classroom, teachers create conditions for the development of more complex forms of verbal-logical memory.

Thus, we draw attention to the fact that animated films can be distinguished by their level of complexity, which must be taken into account by the teacher when gauging their suitability for class.

#### **5. Research Methods**

These examples of cartoons at the most basic level of English are preferable for students in grades 1-3: “Little Bear”, “Peter Rabbit”, “Regular Show”, “Inspector Gadget”, “Arthur”, Pocahontas”, “WALL-E”, “Peppa Pig”, “The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh”, “Over the Garden Wall”, “Scooby-Doo”, “Adventure Time”, Aladdin”, “Gravity Falls”, “Rick and Morty”, “The Simpsons”, “The Men Called Flintstone”, “Up”, “Daria”, and “Muzzy in Gondoland”. These cartoons at intermediate and advanced levels of English are best suited for high school aged students: *Shrek*, *Frozen*, *101 Dalmatians*, *Toy Story*, *Zootopia*, *The Incredibles*, *The Lion King*, *Hotel Transylvania*, *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, and *Lady and the Tramp*.

It is important to note that most of the animated films are scenes from 10 to 30 minutes long, and there are also 2-minute works of animated art. With this in mind, we present the requirements that are established for primary school students.

## **6. Findings**

According to our survey, the first grade is "to concentrate on listening to the teacher for up to five minutes." In this regard, a series of cartoons of up to 5 minutes about three kittens ("Three Little Kittens" which contains educational songs and will teach you how to count in English) is suitable. The cartoon "Crawford the Cat" is useful in teaching English because in addition to using various English phrases (such as "hello", "thank you", "you are welcome", etc.), Crawford the Cat teaches kids to behave themselves and to be polite in only about 5-minute episodes.

For the first grade, we recommend the cartoon "Gogo Loves English" about the dragon Gogo who flew to Earth from another planet, met friends, and wants to learn English in order to communicate freely. In this cartoon, new words and phrases are repeated several times throughout each episode to encourage memorization. The episodes are short (about five 5 minutes), which helps maintain viewer engagement.

In the second grade, children should be able to concentrate on listening to teachers and classmates for up to 8-10 minutes. We suggest teachers use the animated series "Muzzy in Gondoland" from the BBC television channel, which was created specifically for those who are learning English. Muzzy is an alien for whom English is not just foreign, but also an alien. Also useful is the British cartoon "Spot the Dog," which presents simple vocabulary in an optimal time span. Younger schoolchildren in the second grade may also be interested in the animated educational television series "Pocoyo" which has episodes seven minutes in length.

In the third grade, students must analyze readings and stories from teachers or classmates sorting out main points for up to 12-15 minutes (and develop the ability to highlight new facts, recognize the unknown, and establish the sequence and causality of events). For this level, one can advise Meg and Mog, a series with short episodes from 5 to 15 minutes about the witch Meg and her black cat Mog.

In the fourth grade, students are expected to exhibit skills of "verbal communication in the process of performing group and collective exercises" for up to 20 minutes. During the survey listening skills of the students are successfully refined while watching 10-30 minute animated films. For this case, the Franklin cartoons about the turtle Franklin and his friends lasting 22 minutes each, are useful.

Usually, children perceive watching cartoons as relaxation and pleasant pastime. However, teacher's mindful analysis, careful selection, and incorporation of cartoons into the lesson plan allows the process of studying new material to be intense and interesting, and helps to stimulate the cognitive activity of students.

## **7. Conclusion**

Thus, animated films are a helpful means of developing listening skills and should be used in the classroom. However, their use in every lesson is not advised as their main function is as educational tools. Therefore, cartoon sessions can be recommended to take place either outside of school hours, or during classroom hours. Moreover, we recommend that teachers select material that is relevant to the topic of the

lesson and the curriculum, and that is adequate to the level of training and the age of the students, as well as their abilities and memory features. The optimally selected time period for viewing the cartoon plot should be integrated into the structure of the lesson and should not dominate the allotted time. Moreover, in the process of preparing cartoon lesson, the teacher should think carefully and draw up questions for discussion in advance, such as:

- What is the message of the story?
- What do you think the film is about?
- Why is it called “ \_\_\_\_\_ ”?
- The video is cute and funny, but why?
- Do you agree or disagree with the message?

And most importantly, in order to achieve success in the practical teaching of the English language, the teacher needs to remember that listening is a skill that needs to be formed not sporadically, but regularly and constantly in combination with the development of reading, speaking, and spelling skills.

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