

Animated Cartoons to Develop Listening Skill and Vocabulary

Prisla Devi Krishnan¹, Melor Md Yunus² *Melor Md Yunus²

¹Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

²Office of the Vice Chancellor, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600, Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

*Corresponding author E-mail: melor@ukm.edu.my

Abstract

English language is a second language to most pupils in Malaysia. The importance of mastering English language to a certain level of proficiency is highlighted in the National Education Blueprint - 2013-2025. Many of the pupils have very strong mother tongue (L1) influence which hinders the acquisition of English language. The lack of exposure to English language has resulted to limited vocabulary among pupils from rural and semi-urban schools. This has led them to being weak in English language. The use of “Animated Cartoons” via YouTube is introduced to develop their listening skills and expand their vocabulary in order to master English language. Thus, the focus will be on 10 weak ability Form 1 pupils with strong influence of L1 background. Data was collected based on pre and post-test score and a questionnaire survey data was also collected and analysed using descriptive statistic. The findings found that the use of ‘Animated Cartoons’ had a positive impact on the pupils and increased their acquisition of vocabulary and listening skills. Thus, it is crucial that the use ICT be integrated in English language curriculum to enable low proficient pupils’ mastery of the language and fulfil the vision in the National Education Blueprint.

Keywords: Animated cartoons; low proficient; vocabulary; listening skills; L1 (mother tongue).

1. Introduction

English Language has played an important role as a benchmark to our country’s progress as a nation. Many programmes’ and policies were implemented by the Ministry of Education (MOE) throughout the past decade to initiate and improve the quality of Malaysian students’ acquisition of English Language.

It is hoped that the mastery of English Language will contribute to the fulfilment of the nation’s vision as a developed country and lead the youth of today into an era of rapid global development. The transition and development of KSSR (Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah) in the year 2012 and KSSM in 2017 is one of the major transformations in the education system in preparing students to develop skills needed for the 21st century. This can be seen in the Malaysia Education Blueprint in shift two: “to ensure every child is proficient in Bahasa Malaysia and English Language” 2013-2025 [1].

With the current rapid development in the global market as can be seen in the Fourth Industrial Revolution 4.0, Malaysian youths must be able to master English language to an expected standard and acquire digital literacy which is the prerequisite in the National Transformation -TN50, 2021-2050. The concept of TN50 reaches out 30 years into the future from the time when the country has achieved Vision 2020. The onus is on the people of Malaysia to either ride on the opportunity to prosper and be one of the economically developed country with innovative citizens or to be left behind [2].

2. Problem Statement

Despite the nation’s aspirations for youths to master English language, there still exist a category of students who are unable to master the language. This category of students have been labelled as low proficiency students. Their inability to communicate competently and their poor proficiency has resulted in Malaysian graduates being the major complaints among employers in private organizations resulting in them being unmarketable. This is a major setback as this group of students could jeopardize the nation’s vision as stated in the Malaysian Education Blueprint - 2013-2025 aspirations and the demands of the emerging 4th Industrial Revolution.

English language is the second most important language in Malaysia, after Bahasa Malaysia as the country’s national language [3]. The main reason for learning English is not to acquire native speakers’ capability but rather to be intelligible among international English speakers and those within their ‘community’ [4]. English language today is a basic requirement need for job seekers, especially in the private sector.

Nevertheless, one of the main concerns for Malaysian students not mastering English to a level of standard required is the lack of vocabulary in mastering the language. This contributes to the number of students who are poorly equipped in the language skills and are considered as low proficiency students. As a fact, children are exposed to their mother language (L1) in their home surroundings and learn it first-hand. Their understanding of the language is solidified with inking concepts and actions they see in their world. Children are far more likely to pick up another (second) language if it is highly present in their daily lives, enabling them to understand and practice this language through observation and interaction [5].

In this study context, the main reason for the selected students having lack of vocabulary is due to their dominant influence of mother tongue and the lack of exposure to English environment. It was commonly known that many children in rural areas began school in a language that they are not familiar with and/or do not fully understand [6]. This is indeed, true in Malaysian context, whereby those children in the rural area have difficulties in learning English. This might be due to the surrounding that does not support the exposure of English language that for some parts of the Malaysian population, learning English may be like learning a foreign language [7].

As seen in another study using technology in the classroom can increase student engagement and motivation, but teachers must use it effectively as a tool and not simply as a means to engage students [8].

Technology usage in today's younger generation inside and outside of a classroom has become an epitome of a 21st century learning tool. To engage weak learners especially in using technology will help them not only in familiarizing themselves to the language but also keeping them focus and motivated in the lesson to master the acquisition of English language. Tun Dr Mahathir quoted that Malaysians must be competent in English language if they were to compete in the international markets [9].

Using animated cartoons via YouTube was introduced to encourage low proficient students to develop their listening skills and enhancing their vocabulary. Thus, this research was conducted using animated cartoons via YouTube to develop their listening skill and vocabulary among low proficient students.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Importance of Listening

Listening is an important skill that is needed for communication in people's daily lives. Listening is an integral part of language learning because it provides the oral input that acts as the platform for language acquisition and help learners to communicate in spoken interaction. Teaching English language to students with low proficiency has always been a challenge due to the dominance of their (L1). This is more so as they have very limited vocabulary count to start with and of being in an environment with no exposure to the language. Listening is the most essential part of spoken communication as it is crucial in providing the content and meaningful response. In mastering a language for communicative purpose, listening plays a vital role, as it assist the language learners to master pronunciation, word stress, vocabulary, and syntax and the understanding of messages conveyed can be based solely on tone of voice, pitch and accent; and this is only made possible when we listen [10].

Due to this, students have been categorized as low proficient and unable to write nor speak well. Extensive listening is generally defined as learners "doing a lot of easy, comprehensible, and enjoyable listening practice" [11]. This will definably increase the vocabulary count as well especially among low proficiency students who are from communities that do not use English language in their daily lives. Thus, listening is an integral part of the learning process. "It is the medium through which people gain a large proportion of their education, their information, their understanding of the world and human affairs, their ideals, sense of values" (p. 3) [12].

3.2. Vocabulary Acquisition

Vocabulary is the core essence to English language teaching because without sufficient vocabulary students cannot understand others or express their own ideas. Vocabulary knowledge is often seen as an important tool for second language learners because a limited vocabulary hinders the acquisition and mastering a

successful communication. Several factors can be identified on the difficulties faced by second language learners. All of them are somehow co-related on factors such as socioeconomic, ideological and cultural conditions beyond their own teaching and learning and the intellectual characteristics of learners [13].

The teaching and learning of English in rural and semi urban school in Malaysia has always been a major Strule because English is hardly used except during classroom lessons. This gives the impression of English being a foreign language that does not serve a purpose in their community. Researchers have found that vocabulary acquisition is a crucial predictor of foreign language learning and reading motivation in first and second language learning [14]. Thus, in order for low proficiency students to master a standard of English language, vocabulary knowledge and vocabulary count needed to be increased.

3.3. Vocabulary Knowledge & Listening Skill among low level learners in Malaysia

Though it is a fact that English is the second language in Malaysia, in reality, it resembles a foreign language to many Malaysian students, especially in the non-urban areas. This is because English is not used in their everyday activities since they can use either the national language, Bahasa Malaysia or for non-ethnic Malays, their respective native language (L1). Consequently, there are students who are still not proficient in English even after more than 10 years of learning the language [15].

Even though many programmes and policies has been implemented by the Ministry of Education (MOE) to alleviate the importance of English in schools, many students from rural and semi-urban areas with strong influence of mother tongue view English as a foreign language which is spoken only during language lessons in schools. In areas where the mother tongue plays a strong role in the community, English will seem as a language that is not important. Furthermore, in a community where English is hardly used and they have practically zero opportunity to practice with their peers and added with the fact that their parents do not have the education background that gives them the necessary educational support. This socioeconomic status do not allow them easy access to books, CD's, and even television in some cases [16]. This would contribute to the limited exposure to English environment and limited amount of vocabulary size.

Previous studies have examined the vocabulary size of Malaysian students in higher institutions and found Malaysian students' vocabulary size to be limited [17]. In another study conducted it was found the effect of learners' vocabulary size and depth on their listening comprehension and his results suggest that vocabulary size is a major component for successful listening comprehension whereas depth of vocabulary knowledge contributed little to learners' listening comprehension [18].

3.4. Animated Cartoons via Video-sharing Website: YouTube

In this age of Information and Technology, the use of Internet has brought many changes in teaching English. It is a highly useful tool which benefits both the learner and the teacher using it for many activities related to teaching and learning. ICT has the potential to cater to the needs of students by providing opportunities to learn creatively [19]. This will most certainly benefit the low proficient learners. The conventional classroom teaching can be replaced by various electronic gadgets and technology that has mushroomed over the past decade. ICT is of immense use in teaching and learning of English language that caters to students of all walks of life. It provides teachers and students lots of creative and practical ideas to create a learner-friendly environment. Furthermore, ICT could help students improve their vocabulary and enable them to find out the meaning

of the words in the texts they read. Many lexical items could also be learnt when they watch any movies with English subtitles. Interactions with multimedia environments –symbols, shapes, sounds, colors and even letters- are powerful in forming understand. Creating phonological awareness through hearing and thinking about the language itself can help children learn to read [20].

When children are able to map the sounds of speech onto the letters they become aware that continuous speech is broken down into discrete sounds [21]. They can relate to things about their daily life and world around them [22]. According to research experts, claims are made to the effect that computers should be physically introduced in kindergarten and primary level classrooms in a coherently integrated fashion with the rest of the learning resources [23, 24]. It was explained that the successful use of computer-assisted instruction shares several characteristics with successful non-technologically based learning interventions: it extends study time and practice; it allows students to assume control over the learning situation (e.g., by individualising the pace with which new material is introduced); and it supports collaborative learning [25].

Animated Cartoons as a source of genuine audio-visual material have proven its effectiveness in second language learning acquisition and it acts as an authentic material has been considered as an effective tool that assists language learning, mainly, in EFL learning context as it clarifies abstract concepts and add humour to a topic [20]. Using cartoons in English for kids to let them enjoy and learn English by picking up the language with their favorite cartoons is a successful method for developing their listening skill. An environment for listening must be created in schools by using animated cartoons and animations (ICT) for teaching kids the English language at the primary level [26]. Many students at this level will be able to grasp a lot by hearing voices or sounds and animated videos.

3.5 The Advantages of Using Animated Cartoons among Low Proficient Students

Cartoon as an authentic language input would facilitate language practice in the classroom. Being exposed to genuine language material has a vital role in motivating language learners to correlate the content and subject matters to their life. In other words, it enables them to make the connections and relations between knowledge they get in language classroom and real world outside the classroom setting [27].

Generally, animated cartoons are essential source of authentic language input that match the purposes of mastering a second language. However, teachers must be more cautious while selecting an animated cartoon for low proficient learners. Animated cartoons that suit students' level encourage learners to absorb language input and motivate them to utilize linguistic knowledge in different communicative contexts, if they are accompanied by practical teaching strategy. According to [28] for rural areas where technology base teaching is still challenging, the smallest effort of integrating multimedia could be significant to low proficient students, to be able to lessen the gap between them and urban learners. Animated cartoons are an authentic source of offering students immediate understanding of language in a classroom lesson. Computer-animated pictures are more effective in assisting student's retention of complex knowledge or structures than recalling information that student build from classical instruction (p.203) [29].) In another case study that students who were exposed to authentic videos and who watched cartoon films have notably improved their listening comprehension skills [30]. In addition, when students are exposed to authentic spoken language in animated cartoons, they would have the capability to gain correct pronunciation of words and the English accent. Because cartoon films symbolizes every day experiences in different contexts, students' pragmatic acquisition of contextual language would be improved, as well [20].

The use of visual aids creates enjoyable learning environment in the literature classroom according to a study conducted on teacher survey which gave a positive impact of 96.2% [31]. In a study conducted on the use of cartoons on elementary students, it was found that students improved tremendously in vocabulary count after watching animated cartoons [32]. The actions, signals of hands and arms, with facial expressions might facilitate the understanding of the target verbs when accompanied with subtitles. Frequent encounters with novel words make learners become familiarized with the words, which was supported by the findings of the study. They also conclude from their study that vocabulary development is a long-lasting process that needs to be supported by contextual clues. It is due to the fact that the possibility of guessing meaning from context is higher. Words in isolation, overall, give no clues to the learner and thus they are hard to guess from context. The implication for the teachers are the new vocabulary items should be presented in context rather than in isolation.

4. Methodology

The respondents were 10 low proficient students from Form 1 class. They were weak in English language proficiency. They were selected based on their Mac monthly test where all the 10 students failed in their examination. These students come from a school in semi-urban area in Kuala Langat where their mother tongue (L1) plays a dominant role in their life. They are all Malay students from a tightly knit community where Malay language is dominant in their everyday life outside and inside of their school. English language is regarded by them as a foreign language that does not serve a purpose in their community. This is also influenced by their demographic, socioeconomic, and cultural lifestyle in their community where 95% of their population are from the Malay ethnicity.

There were two types of test conducted. The first is pre and post-test. These tests were a set of similar questions to measure students' vocabulary after watching the animated cartoons. A questionnaire was also given to students to investigate their preference in using animated cartoons in enhancing their vocabulary and listening skills. The pre and post questions consisted of vocabulary words matching the correct pictures. The descriptive statistics were used to analyse these data.

5. Results and Discussion

The analysis of the study showed that the use of Animated cartoons via You Tube had a positive influence in enhancing low proficient students listening skills and vocabulary. The study revealed that these group of students whom were extremely weak in English language and with an almost non-existing grasp of vocabulary were capable to acquire the understanding of targeted vocabulary using their listening skills.

The usage of chrome book multimedia enhanced the learning of the language where student centered learning was able to be conducted.

5.1 Implications

This study conducted has two implications which are to give autonomy to low proficient students in controlling their learning pace and teachers role in a digital English classroom .

Learners can become quite independent with the digital material animated cartoon using technology. Teachers' role here can be changed from being totally dependant on by low ability students to being in control of their learning pace. This in turn can lead to better involvement among low proficient students in the learning process. Being able to control on how and what works for them,

may encourage more successful outcomes of the learning process. This simultaneously will encourage them to use learning strategies that suits their learning capabilities and give low ability students a platform to explore their boundaries.

Using multimedia technology in classroom lesson will create beneficial outcomes to low proficient students because these sources accompanied with audio-visual sensory gives animated cartoons an appealing source of learning which students can resort to when dealing with activities and tasks.

Teachers' role here too has been changed to being a facilitator instead of the sole provider of content knowledge and language skill provider. The role of teacher here is providing a platform for low ability students to maximize their involvement using animated cartoons and other multimedia related tools to guide their teaching and learning process. Teachers role is also to providing students with digital resources or lessons that allow them explore the best ways to learn a language skill within the students' pace.

5.2 Pre and Post test score

The pre and post-test were used to compare the scores of their understanding.

Table 1: Pre and post test score for vocabulary acquisition.

No .	Students	Pre test score	Percentage %	Post test score	Percentage %	Increment %
1.	Student 1	1/5	20%	5/5	100%	80%
2.	Student 2	0/5	0%	3/5	60%	60%
3.	Student 3	0/5	0%	2/5	40%	40%
4.	Student 4	0/5	0%	3/5	60%	60%
5.	Student 5	1/5	20%	4/5	80%	60%
6.	Student 6	0/5	0%	3/5	60%	60%
7.	Student 7	1/5	20%	5/5	100%	80%
8.	Student 8	0/5	0%	3/5	60%	60%
9.	Student 9	1/5	20%	4/5	80%	60%
10.	Student 10	0/5	0%	4/5	80%	80%

Base on Table 1 and the pre-test and post-test shows that there were tremendous improvement in the mastery of vocabulary after using animated cartoons. This was a great improvement compared with the pre-test conducted earlier. The result revealed significant improvement and interest in the overall score where student 1 and student 7 scored 100% in mastering the vocabulary given. These results shows that the use of animated cartoons via YouTube is not only able to hold the interest of low proficiency students but it also shows that students are able to grasp the meaning of the words as well.

The targeted words watched within context and concept made learners become familiarized with the words, which was supported by the findings from the post test scores. The students reported in the post-test that they could make a guess about the unknown word. This familiarization was definitely strengthened by repetition. Consequently, vocabulary improvement occurred incidentally regardless of watching the episodes with or no subtitles.

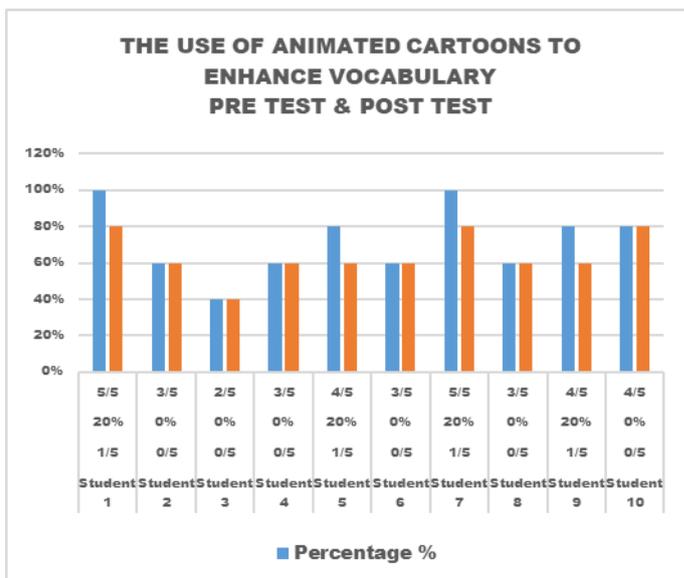


Fig 1 : The use of animated cartoons to enhance vocabulary.

The bar chart above on Figure 1 shows there is positive increment in both the vocabulary count and the percentage after the use of animated cartoons. There is an increment of about twenty percent in the vocabulary understanding and count after the students watched and listened to the animated cartoon Upin & Ipin. This study clearly indicates the use of technology and gadgets is effective in holding low proficiency students' focus in class. This added with the visual learning of watching the animated cartoons and engaging students participation in classroom activities and solidifies the understanding of vocabulary and improves their listening skill.

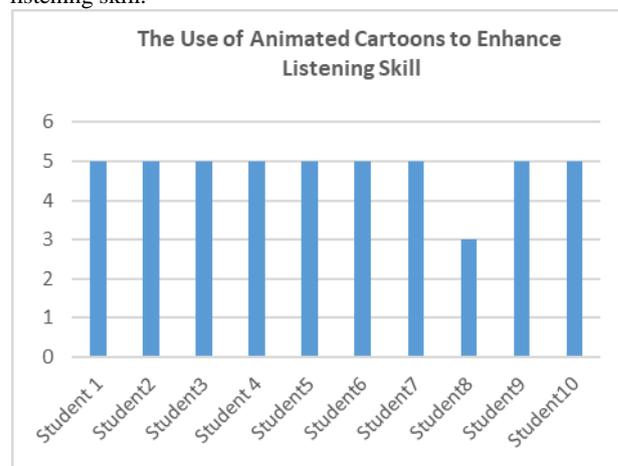


Fig 2 : The use of animated cartoons to enhance listening skill.

Base on the bar chart above on Figure 2, it was found that all the 10 students had an improvement in their listening skill after watching the animated cartoon of Upin and Ipin. Students were able to identify and write the sentences from the animated cartoon in the post test. Nine out of ten students scored full marks by getting all the answers correct meanwhile only one student scored three questions correctly out of five questions. This clearly indicates that the use of animated cartoons while helping to hold the attention and focus of low proficiency students with the use of chrome book via YouTube, it also enhances their listening skills by listening to targeted sections of the animated cartoons.

Students were able to control the pace of their learning in the classroom while teacher acted as a facilitator.

Apart from that, the use of ICT integration is a confidence boost among low proficiency students. This is also supported in a study that showed the integration of ICT in literature teaching benefits students in motivational aspects [33]. The ability to maneuver

their way using the internet (YouTube) to access the right episode of the cartoon Upin and Ipin shows that ICT integrated less promotes 21st century learning and students can choose the pace of the lesson in accordance to their learning ability. This is an essential finding as low ability students poses the biggest problem in almost every school in upgrading English language. The fact that the use of animated cartoons through chrome book which they themselves can access using internet (YouTube) is one method to help this group of students to improve their proficiency level and fulfil the nation's vision of creating students whom can master a standard of English language.

Table 2: Respondents answers for questionnaire.

No.	Students (Respondents)	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
1.	Student 1	√	√	√	√	√
2.	Student 2	√	√	√	√	√
3.	Student 3	√	√	√	√	√
4.	Student 4	√	√	√	√	√
5.	Student 5	√	√	√	√	√
6.	Student 6	√	√	√	√	√
7.	Student 7	√	√	√	√	√
8.	Student 8	√	√	√	√	√
9.	Student 9	√	√	√	√	√
10.	Student 10	√	√	√	√	√

For the questionnaire as indicated in Table 2, all the respondent showed a positive answer to learning English using animated cartoons. All of the students responded with a positive '√'. Based on these results it shows that using animated cartoon do not only increases their listening and improves their vocabulary but motivates low proficiency students in the lesson as well.

6. Conclusion

In regard to this study above with the data and findings presented, it clearly shows that the use of animated cartoons via YouTube helps the low proficiency students to enhance their vocabulary and listening skill. This study is detrimental in helping this group of students as it shows that the use of ICT integrated lessons are essential tools in upgrading low proficiency students' ability and proficiency in English language. Through this study, hopefully the language policy makers will look into the curriculum and revise it to replace learning materials and textbooks with online learning resources that students of low ability can access in accordance with their own pace. Ultimately, this will fulfill the nation's vision of creating students of all level of proficiency who are marketable and able to compete in today's rapid global era.

In regard to this, more in-depth studies and school transformations need to be conducted by the Education Ministry in using modules and education policies that forefronts ICT as the main teaching and learning tools especially in rural / semi-urban schools. This will not only reduce the gap of inequality but also up-lift the proficiency of students of all walks of life to master English and stand a chance to communicate and compete globally.

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