

Integrating Reading with Web Series and Cartoon Content for Enhancing Comprehension Skills of ESL Undergraduate Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore web series and cartoons as tools for enhancing the reading skills of B.Tech students. These multimedia tools enhance creativity, critical thinking, and digital literacy through scripts and visual storytelling. Visual engagement to comprehend complex concepts is considered to be more effective as compared to a densely printed text with unfamiliar syntactic structures. However, relying too much on visualisation and ignoring reading skills can impede the proficiency levels of undergraduates.

The mixture of web series and cartoons creates a transition from traditional learning to modern learning in the educational field. A balanced integration of visualisation with reading can enhance the development of vocabulary, meaningful sentence construction and sequencing of ideas needed to communicate in a wide variety of situations. Considering the influence of media on college students, the current study focuses on integrating web series and cartoon content for enhancing comprehension skills of ESL undergraduates. The subjects of the study were engineering students studying B.Tech in engineering colleges affiliated to Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University Hyderabad (JNTUH).

The data was obtained through a field study conducted for a duration of one month. A questionnaire was administered to identify the influence of web series and cartoon programmes on engineering students. English language input was provided to these students through web series and cartoon programmes. During the progress of the study, formative assessments provided feedback on the effectiveness of these visualisations and the captions or subtitles that cropped continuously on the screen. The study provides data about the progress in the proficiency levels of the students during the various stages of the field study. The qualitative data also included data obtained through personal interviews with students. Findings of the study provide information about the effectiveness of integrating web series and cartoon programmes in developing the reading proficiency of undergraduate engineering students.

Keywords: Reading, Web series, Cartoon, Comprehension and Assessment.

INTRODUCTION

The entertainment industry delivers educational content through cartoons and webseries and movies which teach people of all ages about various life situations. The invention of celluloid in 1888 enabled the development of animation technology which transformed static images into moving pictures. The film industry developed new animation methods which used physical objects, puppets, clays and cutouts during the late 1920s. The film industry experienced rapid growth after computer animation entered the market during the 1960s. The first television channel to broadcast Cartoon Network programming emerged when Turner Broadcasting system (TBS) launched its service in 1992. The combination of creative elements with emotional depth in cartoons made children and young audiences watch television for extended periods of time. In the era of Gen Z and Gen Alpha, most of the engineering students own a mobile phone for communicating with their peers and teachers. Further, the 24/7 internet connectivity made the current generation to spend more screen time and less reading hours. In this context, it was felt the motivation that students have towards screen time can be integrated with reading skills. Further, an integration of visualization with reading content can make the students view the images or videos and simultaneously read the same content on the screen.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The web series and cartoon shows are based on the video content through watching screens and listening to the audio clips. Moreover, the audio-visual element is effective, and one can get involved in it. There was much research on the challenges and influence of movies. There was little research on the influence of web series and cartoons with reference to B.Tech students. Buckingham (2003) believes that web series and cartoons encourage innovative thinking. By watching them, the students can improve their focus on language

Mention that

According to Kocak and Goktas (2020), cartoons enhance vocabulary learning in young adults because young learners won't be interested in improving their new vocabulary. By watching cartoons, they will be introduced to the new vocabulary. Learning vocabulary is a challenging task in a second language. Y.Li and Leng (2019)

examine how the students' performance is affected when the learning materials are being displayed in acquiring English vocabulary. When vocabulary is displayed in the form of photographs or videos, it will grab the attention of viewers to learn it. Tosun(2015) states that vocabulary will be effective by blending learning methods for the students' comfort zone.

Relevance of Multimedia in Enhancing Reading Skills

In a classroom, reading is primary because all the course materials are either presented in the form of printed forms or handwritten. In the digital age, the process of everyday correspondence through email or WhatsApp happens when an individual either reads messages or responds to the messages which is again read by the one who receives the message. Multimedia technology made it possible to generate words automatically based on the audio-visuals. Individuals who watch on the screen also can view the captions and read the dialogues or information presented. Further, many universities across the world have added multimedia as an integral part of course curriculum. The use of video clips or movies as an additional or supplementary teaching aid in the classroom indicates the relevance of multimedia tools in enhancing communication skills of the students. Also, the advancements in technology to generate the translation of unknown language with English captions on the screen make the learning of a second or foreign language more effective. However, Mayer, and Moreno (2002) cautions that the effectiveness of multimedia integration depends on how well the teacher designs and incorporates them in the classroom teaching-learning process.

Students when glued on to television sets or movie screens are not conscious of the time they spend on reading the captions on the screen. Due to the development of educational technology, literacy in reading skills has improved because individuals can get language input as they spend more time glued on to the television. Reading skills are considered necessary for learning any language to comprehend even the technical and complex aspects. It is observed that most of the B.Tech students struggle with reading comprehension, particularly in vocabulary and sentence structures. However, in current technological world, multimedia tools are available for those struggling readers to improve their language skills. It may differ from traditional learning to modern learning. Traditional learning depends on the lecture method, which is followed by textbook-based learning. Even though it may be a suitable approach, the present generation of learners expect more interaction with interactive web applications, multimedia resources, immediate feedback and collaborative virtual platforms.

Integrating Web Series with Reading Skills

A web series is a series of scripted or non-scripted videos in the form of episodes that will be uploaded on the internet. It was introduced in the late 1980s and was popular in the late 2000s. It has become easy to access as the internet is cheaper. Web series can be watched through a smart smartphone, desktop, laptop, or tablet. After the advent of smartphones, most people are habituated to them. Most of the producers are interested in web series instead of serials. There is no fixed time to watch web series like our regular serials or programmes. Moreover, these web series will be streamed through Amazon Prime, Netflix, ZEE 5, or Jio Hotstar. These are available for 24 hours on all days. After watching the webisodes, the viewers can post comments, tag their favourites, initiate discussion and also do additional reading in a particular theme. It is observed that web series influence the young learners with their subtitles. Verhallen (2006) believes that vocabulary will be developed with a proper understanding by watching web series with subtitles. The learners will comprehend the webisodes by watching the screen and reading the subtitles. This shows a great involvement of the learner as he/she must focus on the screen and read the dialogues. Kucirkova(2017) opines that web series allow us to increase our involvement, which motivates us to read and write. Since web series is a series of video episodes that will be telecasted only on the internet, individuals who have small screen also view it. As the internet has become cheaper, many web series and other online video streaming services have emerged, making the entertainment industry as a source of income. In India, many over-the-top (OTT) streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Jio Hotstar have emerged. Web series in multiple languages are more popular on OTT platforms. People love to watch them by reading English subtitles, irrespective of their mother tongues. OTT services are extended to smartphones apart from personal computers, laptops, and television sets. Therefore, smartphone users are more likely to watch web series.

Cartoons and Reading Skills

Cartoons are visual expressionistic forms with animation. They involve the viewers with their animation. They are available in multiple languages with different genres like science and fiction. Children mainly enjoy the cartoon shows with visual storytelling. Even the young adult learners will be interested in watching them. Ainsworth(2008) states that it is good to utilize animation on a computer that can be accessed with the latest trends in technology.

Web series and cartoon programs are multimedia tools that are also regarded as educational tools because these tools provide not only entertainment, but also knowledge and language abilities. According to Rokni and Atae

(2014), subtitles influence language acquisition greatly. By reading subtitles of the web series or cartoon shows, language can be understood, and new vocabulary will emerge.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study addresses the following research questions:

How effective are Web Series and Cartoon programmes in enhancing reading skills of engineering students?

Does the integration of reading skills with Web Series and Cartoon programmes make the learners successful?

Are the students able to comprehend the reading content when integrated with Web Series and Cartoon programmes?

Does the web series and cartoons impact students negatively or positively? If so, give reasons.

What are the pedagogical implications of the study?

4. METHODOLOGY

The current study approached quantitative and qualitative research methods to collect data from students' opinions and experiences. It provides deeper insights into the influences of web series and cartoons. The sample consisted of 20 B.Tech students. Quantitative data included a learner questionnaire, pre-test, and post-test related to the video or audio recordings.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher conducted a case study on six engineering students. A Korean web series, "Sound Track," was selected for reading tests. It consisted of four episodes with English subtitles. It was a story of the evolution of the relationship between two close friends. The duration of the first episode was forty minutes. The test was conducted during the ELCs lab session, as the session was for 150 minutes.

Initially, the test was conducted without giving any instructions. In the first few minutes, the students could not understand the Korean language. In the informal discussion, the students revealed that the researcher that they were unable to catch the speed for reading subtitles. They just looked at the screen. The show was stopped for some time, and instructions were given for reading subtitles to understand it. They were also glad to read and understand a new language.



Figure 5.1: Sound Track, Episode 1

The above figure 5.1 is a scene with English subtitles in the first episode of the "Sound Track" web series. The scene depicts a conversation between two characters. The language used in the subtitles was simple and easy to understand. Vocabulary and grammatical aspects can be observed in the subtitles.

The researcher wanted to continue testing students by choosing a cartoon show as a sample. The name of the cartoon show was "The Princess Who Never Smiled". The duration of this show was 6 minutes 55 seconds. It was with the English subtitles. The show was colourful with the images of characters that were attractive. It fascinated the viewers with its accent. The researcher conducted a reading test on this cartoon without any instructions as the students were already experienced in watching the web series. The following figure 5.2 is a scene with sub titles from "The Princess Who Never Smiled".



5.2 Figure: A scene from “The Princess Who Never Smiled”

In this show, the speaker narrates the story of a princess and other supporting characters.

The researcher surveyed by administering a questionnaire for the students. The samples were twenty students, and the questionnaire consisted of 20 multiple-choice questions. The questions were mainly focused on the influence of language

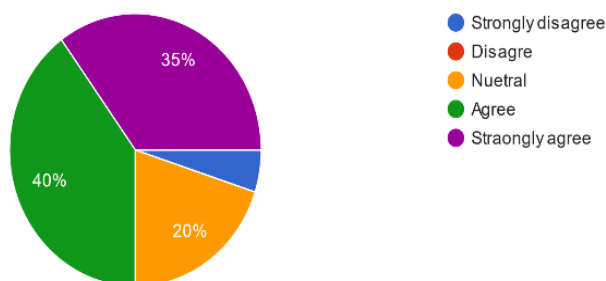
ability from web series and cartoons, and reading skills in students. Therefore, the qualitative data would be analysed.

Quantitative Analysis based on the Learner Questionnaire

The students were asked to watch the episode without receiving any guidance. After 15 minutes of watching, the students informed the researcher that they could understand the episode a little by watching their actions. Then the researcher gave the required instructions. The students applied instructions and watched the screen, and read the subtitles. They even observed the spellings, words, and sentences. It was also observed how the students were involved in watching and reading. The majority of the students showed good progress in their reading. By the end of the episode, the students could understand the theme of the episode. Watching four episodes of the web series will help them improve their language and comprehension. The students gained confidence in learning any new language. Watching web series for learning a new language is a good intention. If it is exceeded, the students will face negative consequences.

According to the following figure 5.3, 35% of the students strongly agreed that they would recommend web series for improving reading skills.

20. I recommend web series/cartoons to friends for improving English reading and writing skills
20 responses



5.3 Figure: Percentage of Recommendation of Web series/Cartoons to Friends

In the case of web series, the majority of the students could understand the show with subtitles, although the accent of this show is entirely different from the Indian accent. As the students were habituated with the first reading test of the web series, they could understand the accent of the characters in the web series.

11. what do you learn from watching cartoons?

20 responses

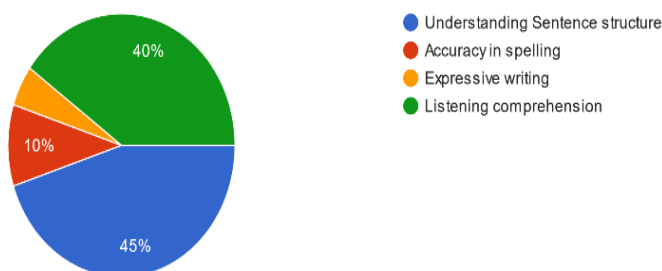


Figure 5.4: Survey on Cartoons

The above figure 6.2 shows the percentage of learning outcomes from the cartoon. 40% of the students agreed that

As the English language is a medium of instruction and the students belonged to B.Tech course, most of them had basic knowledge of English. Some of the students struggled as they were not familiar with a few words. Therefore, the students observe expressions and dialogues while watching the shows. The following figure 6.3 shows the students' focus on cartoons and web series. 40% of the students opined that they learn listening comprehension from watching cartoons.

18. I focus on — while watching cartoons and web series.

20 responses

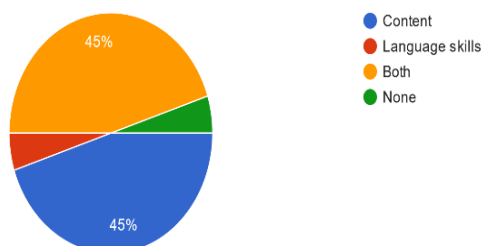


Figure 5.5: Students' focus while watching cartoons and web series

6. FINDINGS

The findings of the study indicate that integrating web series and cartoon content with reading tasks can enhance the comprehension skills of ESL undergraduate engineering students. It is observed that students initially struggled to match the pace of the subtitles, particularly in the Korean web series Sound Track. However, with minimal guidance, they were able to adjust quickly by simultaneously watching the visuals and reading the captions. This improvement reveals that visual context enhances comprehension when learners encounter unfamiliar vocabulary, sentence structures, or accents. The reading test using the cartoon The Princess Who Never Smiled further confirmed this pattern. Since students had already gained experience from the web series activity, they were able to read and understand the subtitles more easily during the cartoon session. The colourful visuals, clarity in narration, and short duration helped students to maintain attention. It made easier to follow the plot and decode new words. This suggests that due to the visual cues in cartoons, it provided a supportive bridge for learners who struggle with conventional reading passages.

The data from the questionnaire indicate positive attitudes toward using multimedia for developing reading skills. According to Figure 5.3, 35% of the students strongly agreed that they would recommend web series for improving reading skills. This indicates a favourable perception among learners about the use of multimedia. Students reported that watching with subtitles helped them notice spelling, vocabulary, and sentence patterns. It also increased their confidence in understanding unfamiliar languages. Similarly, as illustrated in Figure 6.2, a considerable percentage of students expressed that cartoons contributed to vocabulary development and reading comprehension. The survey responses highlight that 40% of students believed cartoons especially improved their

listening comprehension, likely due to the slower pace, repetitive patterns, and visually storytelling patterns. The results indicate that both web series and cartoons provide meaningful language input by allowing students to connect spoken language with written subtitles. These tools encourage learners to read continuously, even when they are unaware that they are practising reading skills. The integration of visual narrative and reading supports comprehension through contextual clues, actions of the characters, tone, and transitions of scenes. The findings suggest that a balanced approach is necessary. While students enjoyed using multimedia for learning and showed improvement in reading skills, excessive screen time without structured guidance may reduce attention to reading itself. ESL teachers should integrate multimedia thoughtfully by using short, purposeful clips with subtitles. They should guide students to pay attention to vocabulary, sentence patterns, sequence of narration in the story and progress towards supplementing these activities with reading tasks. The findings of the study demonstrate that web series and cartoon programmes can be effective tools for enhancing reading proficiency in ESL engineering students. When combined with appropriate instructional support, these multimedia resources help learners improve comprehension, vocabulary, sentence construction, and confidence in understanding English-language content...

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