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The Effect of Watching English Cartoons on Adolescent Iranian EFL Learners' Emotion Regulation and Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

English cartoons have become increasingly popular as a resource for language learners worldwide. While the literature has primarily focused on their impact on English language skills and sub-skills in EFL education, less attention has been given to their influence on cognitive and affective aspects such as emotion regulation and self-efficacy. This study employed a mixed-methods approach with a pre-test/post-test quasi-experimental design to explore the impact of watching English cartoons on the emotion regulation and self-efficacy of adolescent Iranian EFL learners. 120 Iranian learners, aged 12 to 18, were recruited from English institutes in Tehran and randomly assigned to either the experimental or control group. The experimental group watched two 30-minute episodes of selected American-produced animated cartoons per week for eight weeks, totaling 16 episodes, while the control group did not. The MANCOVA analysis revealed significant differences in self-efficacy and emotion regulation between the experimental and control groups, indicating that exposure to English cartoons positively influences learners' emotional responses and self-efficacy. Thematic analysis of the interview data highlighted positive evaluations of the experience, identifying five themes: enhancement of language skills, positive emotions leading to increased motivation, the prominence of comedy, contribution to sustained learning, and varying effects on self-efficacy. These findings hold valuable theoretical and practical implications for the field.

Keywords: English cartoons, Emotion regulation, Self-efficacy, Cartoon genres, Adolescent language learners, EFL

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1. Introduction

The global reach of the English language has made English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction a crucial component of education systems worldwide. Educators constantly seek innovative and engaging methods to enhance EFL learners' language acquisition. One promising avenue that has gained considerable attention is the use of multimedia as a supplementary language learning tool (Zhang & Zou, 2021). Multimedia learning, having the potential to incorporate diverse media forms like text, images, audio, video, and interactive elements, contributes greatly to learning in general and language learning in particular by offering authentic and multi-sensory language input, visual context, cultural exposure, increased engagement and motivation, and flexible, self-paced, and personalized Learning opportunities (Awinzeligo et al., 2022; Mayer, 2005; Mayer & Fiorella, 2021).

With the rapid growth of digital platforms, English cartoons, as a specific form of multimedia, have been emerging as a popular resource for language learners worldwide (Alghonaim, 2020). To begin with, cartoons, with their engaging visuals, captivating storylines, and relatable characters, have been found to have the potential to enhance learners' motivation and provide them with authentic language input (Prosic-Santovac, 2017). The captivating stories, adventures, and clear presentation typical of cartoons naturally draw the viewers' attention and motivate them to understand the language (Jylhä-Laide, 1994). The combination of entertainment and learning can make the process more enjoyable and less intimidating for learners of all ages. Cartoons also offer authentic language input, exposing learners to natural language use, vocabulary, grammar structures, and intonation patterns of the target language and idiomatic expressions, slang, and colloquialisms that they might not encounter in formal language learning settings (Saiddina & Darma, 2024).

Furthermore, cartoons frequently employ linguistic modifications that make the language more accessible to beginners, much like how caregivers speak to children or how people speak to non-native speakers (Jylhä-Laide, 1994). Another benefit is the strong visual and auditory connection in cartoons. The direct link between the visuals and the words spoken can significantly aid comprehension, especially for young learners who might struggle with abstract language concepts. The animated visuals help

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learners associate words and phrases with corresponding actions, gestures, and facial expressions, enhancing their understanding and interpretation of the language (Tajeddin et al., 2023). Cartoons also offer repetitive language patterns and catchy phrases, which can reinforce vocabulary acquisition and language retention. Learners often encounter recurring vocabulary and expressions throughout episodes, allowing for increased exposure and familiarity with the language (Majuddin et al., 2021). Additionally, cartoons provide a self-paced learning experience. Learners can watch cartoons at their own convenience, pausing, replaying, or rewinding scenes as needed (Bahrani & Sim Tam, 2012). This flexibility allows learners to focus on challenging parts, reinforce understanding, and practice listening comprehension skills at their own pace.

2. Literature Review

Throughout the literature, the effect of watching cartoons on different aspects of language acquisition has been widely investigated, indicating that watching cartoons can significantly influence the language learning process. In particular, there is empirical evidence that exposure to cartoons can contribute to the learning of different aspects of language acquisition such as vocabulary expansion (Karakas & Sariçoban, 2012; Younas & Dong, 2024), grammar learning (Arıkan & Taraf, 2010), speaking skill development (Anasy, 2023, Mika, 2021), pronunciation improvement (Alghonaim, 2020), and overall language proficiency development (Mahbub, 2023). Some studies have investigated the influence of watching cartoons on EFL learners' language development in the Iranian context as well. However, they are mostly limited to exploring the effect of this practice on learners' vocabulary acquisition (Ebadi et al, 2023; Seyed Beheshti Nasab & Motlagh, 2017).

While the literature has primarily focused on the impact of cartoons on the English language skills and subskills in EFL education, less attention has been paid to how they influence the cognitive and affective aspects of language learning; To begin with, self-efficacy, defined by Bandura (1977) as the belief in one's abilities to succeed in a particular task or domain, is considered a crucial factor in language learning since students with higher self-efficacy tend to be more motivated, persistent, and resilient in their learning endeavors (Raoofi et al., 2012).

There have been some empirical studies examining the effect of different interventions on EFL learners' self-efficacy. Ruegg (2014), for instance, investigated the impact of peer and teacher feedback

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on EFL learners' writing self-efficacy in Japan. Yang et al. (2015) probed into the effectiveness of cooperative translation in improving Chinese EFL learners' level of self-efficacy in translating specialized texts. In another study, Milliner and Dimoski (2024) explored the influence of a metacognitive intervention on Japanese EFL students' listening self-efficacy. In Taiwan, Lin and Wang (2021) employed virtual reality to improve creative self-efficacy among EFL learners. In the Iranian context, Shirazizadeh et al. (2023) probed the influence of EFL students' gender, educational level, and teaching experience on their writing self-efficacy and Sherafati and Mahmoudi Largani (2023) investigated the influence of computer-mediated feedback on EFL learners' self-efficacy beliefs. Despite all these attempts, there seems to be no study investigating how watching cartoons can affect EFL learners' levels of self-efficacy. In the context of mathematics, however, Sengul (2011) found that cartoons had a significant positive effect on the self-efficacy of 7th-grade students. The visual and interactive nature of the cartoons were found to facilitate engagement and understanding, leading to increased confidence in their mathematical abilities.

One important factor that can influence learners' self-efficacy has been found to be their emotions (Hashemi & Ghanizadeh, 2011). Emotion regulation is defined as the learner's ability to manage and respond to emotions in a healthy and adaptive manner (Gross, 1988, 2015). Since the EFL classroom can be a challenging environment, often evoking anxiety, frustration, and self-doubt in learners, developing effective emotion regulation strategies can help learners cope with these challenges, fostering a more positive and productive learning experience (Zhang and Wang, 2024). Several studies have attempted to examine the effect of various interventions on EFL learners' emotion regulation (Chahkandi et al., 2016; Harm et al., 2014; Xiong et al., 2022). However, few shed light on how watching cartoons may influence this construct. Liaqat and Rasheed (2024) could be considered a recent attempt whereby the authors investigated the effect of watching cartoons on primary school student's Emotional Regulation in South Asia. Having employed a non-experimental design to collect data from 400 parents, the study found that watching cartoons contributed greatly to the regulation of the primary school student's Emotions.

Meanwhile, the available literature on cartoons primarily concentrates on younger children, ranging from preschool to elementary school levels (Alghonaim, 2020; Christopley, 2017; Jylhä-Laide, 1994; Saiddina & Darma, 2024; Trota et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2024). Despite few attempts to explore how watching cartoons can affect the language learning of 9th graders (Mika, 2021), 10th graders (Anasy, 2023), and 12th graders (Younas & Dong, 2024), there seems to be no study focusing on adolescents

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altogether. It is important to figure out how adolescent EFL learners' learning process is affected by watching cartoons; the adolescence stage represents a distinct developmental stage characterized by cognitive and social changes that might influence their language learning processes (Irwin et al., 2002). Hence, their learning preferences and strategies may differ from those of younger children.

Anchored in three key theoretical frameworks, Bandura's (1977) Self-Efficacy Theory, Gross's (1998) Emotion Regulation Theory, and Mayer's (2005) Multimodal Learning Theory, and addressing existing gaps in the related literature, the present study explores the impact of watching English cartoons, as a form of multimedia, on the emotion regulation skills and self-efficacy beliefs of adolescent EFL learners in the Iranian context. In particular, the study seeks to answer the following research questions.

1. Does watching English cartoons have any impact on Iranian adolescent EFL learners' emotion regulation?
2. Does watching English cartoons have any impact on Iranian adolescent EFL learners' self-efficacy?
3. How do Iranian adolescent EFL learners feel about watching English cartoons as far as emotion regulation and self-efficacy are concerned?

3. Methodology

This research used a mixed-methods approach incorporating a pre-test/post-test quasi-experimental design with a control group. The independent variable was exposure to English cartoons, while the dependent variables were emotion regulation and self-efficacy.

3.1. Participants

The study included 120 Iranian male and female EFL learners between the ages of 12 and 18, representing the majority of intermediate-level students. The participants were selected from four English institutes in Tehran, Iran, using a multi-stage sampling process. Initially, 200 EFL learners were assessed using the Preliminary English Test (PET) to determine their English proficiency levels. Participants with scores within one standard deviation of the mean (between 50 and 64 out of 100) were selected, resulting in a

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homogenized group of 120 learners. From this homogenized group, 60 learners were randomly assigned to the experimental group and 60 to the control group.

3.2. Instrumentation

The study employed the following instruments:

3.2.1. Preliminary English Test (PET)

B1 PET was used to homogenize the participants based on their English language proficiency levels, ensuring a comparable sample. The B1 PET, consisting of four sections, namely speaking, listening, writing, and reading, is a standardized test for intermediate-level English language qualification (Mohammed et al., 2023). The reliability checks of the PET showed an overall Cronbach's alpha of 0.87, with subscale alpha's ranging from 0.76 to 0.84.

3.2.2. Questionnaire of English Self-Efficacy (QESE)

The QESE questionnaire, developed by Wang and Bai (2017), was utilized to measure the participants' level of self-efficacy. The questionnaire is a validated instrument specifically designed to assess learners' confidence in various aspects of English language proficiency, including reading, speaking, writing, and listening comprehension. The questionnaire consists of 32 items, each rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (I cannot do it at all.) to 7 (I can do it well.). The scale has demonstrated strong internal consistency, with an overall Cronbach's alpha of 0.88.

3.2.3. Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)

The (ERQ) developed by Gross & John (2003) was employed to assess the participants' emotion regulation. The ERQ is a widely used and validated instrument designed to measure individuals' habitual use of two emotion regulation strategies: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression (Gullone & Taffe, 2012). The questionnaire comprises 10 items, with 6 items measuring cognitive reappraisal and 4

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items measuring expressive suppression. Respondents rate each item on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). The ERQ has demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.76.

3.2.4. Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all members of the experimental group to gain deeper insights into their experiences and perspectives on the influence of watching cartoons on their emotion regulation and self-efficacy. The interview questions were asked in Farsi to ensure full comprehension. The collected data was then transcribed and translated into English. Having been carefully designed to align with the study's objectives, covering aspects such as the participants' experiences with watching English cartoons, the perceived impacts on emotions and self-efficacy, and any observed differences across different genres or types of cartoons, the interview questions were validated by 4 experts with a PhD in TEFL and relevant experience to the nature of the study. Table 1 presents the interview questions.

Table 1

Questions for the Semi-Structured Interview

Number	Question
1	How do you describe your experience with watching English cartoons as a tool for learning the English language?
2	Did the experience have any influence on your emotions while learning English? If yes, how?
3	Did the experience have any influence on your confidence and self-efficacy in learning the English language? If yes, how?
4	Have you observed any differences in your ability to regulate your emotions or your self-efficacy when watching different genres or types of English cartoons?

3.3. Intervention and Data Collection Procedure

The participants were recruited from language learning centers using American English File Book 3 for intermediate-level instruction. The centers where watching movies and cartoons were not part of the curriculum or homework were specifically chosen. The sample size was determined based on power analysis and random assignment was used to allocate participants to the experimental and control groups.

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Before the intervention, the participants completed pre-test assessments to determine their English proficiency, emotion regulation, and self-efficacy, using validated scales and questionnaires.

Table 2

The Cartoons the Participants Watched during the Study

Cartoon	Description
Mickey Mouse Clubhouse	This preschool cartoon featuring the iconic Disney characters provides a more accessible and age-appropriate option for younger or lower-proficiency learners. The simple language, repetitive dialogue, and engaging visual elements can help to build foundational English skills and confidence.
Avatar: The Last Airbender	This animated series follows the journey of Aang, the Avatar, and his friends as they navigate a world of elemental magic. The show's rich storytelling, complex characters, and well-crafted English script can challenge the learners and expose them to more sophisticated language use.
Gravity Falls	This is a mystery-comedy cartoon about twins Dipper and Mabel Pines, who discover supernatural occurrences in their eccentric small town. The show's clever writing, relatable characters, and conversational American English can help to develop the learners' listening comprehension and engagement.
The Simpsons	As one of the longest-running American animated sitcoms, The Simpsons offers a wealth of episodes that can expose the viewer to a wide range of American accents, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references within an entertaining narrative framework.
Sponge Bob Square Pants	This cartoon features the adventures of an optimistic and energetic sea sponge living in the underwater city of Bottom. The show has been known for its quirky humor, colorful characters, and natural-sounding American English dialogue, which can provide engaging listening practice for the viewers.

The experimental group had regular access to English cartoons for one hour per week for eight weeks, while the control group did not. The participants in the experimental group were required to watch two 30-minute episodes of the selected American-produced animated cartoons (see Table 2) per week, totaling 16 episodes. The 30-minute episode length was chosen to provide sufficient time for the participants to become immersed in the cartoon's narrative and language, without overburdening them with excessive viewing time that could lead to fatigue or lack of engagement. The cartoons featured diverse genres ranging from comedy and adventure to mystery and educational content, exposing the participants to different styles of storytelling, character development, and language use within the English

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language context. Such diversity could cater to different learning preferences within the experimental group and allow for comparisons between the impact of various cartoon genres and stylistic elements on the learners' emotion regulation and self-efficacy. Moreover, the accent was chosen to be American English so as to expose the learners to a common target variety of the language.

Following the intervention, the participants completed post-test assessments to measure changes in their emotion regulation and self-efficacy compared to the pre-test. The collected data was securely stored and organized to ensure confidentiality and maintain data integrity. Ethical guidelines were also followed, including obtaining informed consent and ensuring participant confidentiality and anonymity.

3.4. Data Analysis:

To answer the first two research questions, a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) test was conducted to examine the effects of watching English cartoons on the participants' emotion regulation and self-efficacy scores. In addition, an ANOVA test was conducted to assess between-subjects effects. Descriptive statistics, Box's test, Bartlett's test, Levene's test, and multivariate tests were also employed to supply the relevant details. To answer the third research question, thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview data, employing Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The two researchers conducted the analysis independently and then came together to resolve possible disagreements.

4. Results

4.1. The Quantitative Phase

The first two research questions of the study attempted to investigate the effect of watching English cartoons on Iranian EFL learners' emotion regulation and self-efficacy while controlling for the participants' prior English proficiency. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) for the emotion regulation scores on the ERQ and self-efficacy scores on the QESE. Regarding the former, the experimental group showed a substantially higher post-test mean (37.62) compared to their pre-test mean (31.93), suggesting the intervention's effectiveness in improving their emotion

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regulation abilities. Similarly, the experimental group demonstrated a more substantial improvement in self-efficacy beliefs following the intervention (M = 34.86) compared to the control group (M = 29.77).

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Emotion Regulation (ERQ) and Self-Efficacy (QESE)

Group		Emotion Regulation (M, SD)	Self-Efficacy (M, SD)
Experimental	Pre-test	31.93 (5.38)	29.12 (5.01)
N = 60	Post-test	37.62 (6.12)	34.86 (5.98)
Control	Pre-test	32.17 (5.24)	28.65 (4.92)
N = 60	Post-test	33.45 (5.81)	29.77 (5.34)

Since the statistical procedures in this study necessitated verifying the assumptions before conducting the main MANCOVA analysis, the assumptions were first examined. Firstly, Mardia's test for multivariate normality was conducted to assess the assumption of multivariate normality (Table 4). The results indicated that both Mardia's skewness ($\chi^2 = 1.53$, $p > 0.05$) and Mardia's kurtosis ($\chi^2 = 3.08$, $p > 0.05$) were not significant, suggesting that the data does not deviate significantly from normality in terms of both skewness and kurtosis.

Table 4

Mardia's Test for Multivariate Normality

Mardia's Test	Value	p-value
Skewness	1.53	0.066
Kurtosis	3.08	0.054

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances was also used to check the homogeneity of error variances (Table 5). The non-significant Levene's F-values ($p > 0.05$) for both variables indicate the assumption of homogeneity of error variances was met, indicating that the error variances of emotion regulation and self-efficacy were equal across the groups.

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Table 5
Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances

Measure	F	df1	df2	p-value
Emotion Regulation (ERQ)	1.24	1	118	0.268
Self-Efficacy (QESE)	1.59	1	118	0.210

In addition, Box's Test was used to assess the homogeneity of covariance matrices (Table 6). The p-value of 0.051 was greater than the significance level of 0.05, indicating that the assumption of homogeneity of covariance matrices was met and the covariance matrices of the dependent variables (emotion regulation and self-efficacy) were similar across the control and experimental groups.

Table 6
Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices

Box's M	**F**	**df1**	**df2**	**p**
5.78	1.83	10	41035.26	0.051

Upon confirming that the MANCOVA assumptions were met, we utilized Wilks' Lambda to examine the combined effect of the group variable (control vs. experimental) on emotion regulation and self-efficacy (Table 7). The significant Wilks' lambda statistic ($p < 0.001$) indicates a significant multivariate effect of the group on the combined dependent variables (emotion regulation and self-efficacy), suggesting a difference between the control and experimental groups in their combined performance on these variables. Securing a significant outcome on this multivariate test of significance paves the way for a deeper examination of each dependent variable.

Table 7
Multivariate Test

Wilks' λ	F	df1	df2	p	Partial η^2
0.78	8.12	4	115	< 0.001	0.22

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Tests of between-subjects effect were conducted to examine the univariate results for each dependent variable separately. As shown in Table 8, the F-ratio of 14.27 ($p < 0.001$) indicates a significant group effect for emotion regulation. The partial eta squared value of 0.108 suggests a medium-to-large effect size, meaning the group variable accounted for about 10.8% of the variance in emotion regulation scores. Similarly, for self-efficacy, the F-ratio of 11.63 ($p = 0.001$) also shows a statistically significant group effect. The partial eta squared value of 0.090 indicates a medium effect size, with the group variable explaining about 9% of the variance in self-efficacy scores. Altogether, these results indicate that watching English cartoons positively impacted the participants' emotion regulation and self-efficacy.

Table 8
Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Group	Emotion Regulation	45.12	1	45.12	14.27	< 0.001	0.108
	Self-Efficacy	36.84	1	36.84	11.63	0.001	0.090
Error	Emotion Regulation	363.45	118	3.08			
	Self-Efficacy	373.91	118	3.17			

4.2. The Qualitative Phase

The third research question explored the experiences of the learners in the experimental group regarding the impact of watching English cartoons on their language learning. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews with all 60 learners in the experimental group. Thematic analysis was used to identify and analyze patterns and themes within the interview data, leading to the emergence of five themes, namely *enhancement of language skills*, *positive emotions leading to enhanced motivation*, *comedy in the limelight*, *contributor to sustained learning*, and *varying effects on self-efficacy*.

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4.2.1. Enhancement of Language Skills

One of the major themes emerging from the data pointed to the significant impact of watching cartoons on the learners' vocabulary acquisition and improved listening and speaking skills. They found it easier to memorize new words and use them in conversations after watching cartoons. S3 remarked, "After watching my favorite cartoon, I found myself using new words in my conversations without even thinking about it."

4.2.2. Positive Emotions Leading to Enhanced Motivation

The majority of the participants described a range of positive emotions, such as joy and excitement, elicited by watching cartoons. These emotions were believed to have significantly influenced their motivation and engagement in the learning process. S42 noted, "Every time I watched one of the cartoons, I felt happy. It made learning fun and encouraging." Moreover, watching cartoons seemed to have provided a relaxed and natural setting for language acquisition. Many learners have expressed that they found it significantly easier and more enjoyable to learn while watching cartoons. As S12 shared, "I love how cartoons make language learning feel like playtime; it's so much fun!" This sense of enjoyment supports the overall effectiveness of cartoons as a pedagogical tool, fostering a positive attitude toward language learning.

4.2.3. Comedy in the Limelight

While the participants' overall evaluation of the experience was positive, many reported that comic cartoons, in particular, were effective in eliciting positive emotions like laughter, which aided emotional regulation and increased engagement. S39, for instance, mentioned, "Comedy cartoons make me feel good, and that relaxes me. I learn better when I'm happy." It seemed that the light-hearted nature of these cartoons contributed to emotional regulation throughout the learning process, helping participants feel more engaged and receptive to acquiring the language. S19 remarked, "When I laugh, I feel more confident. I think I can use English better after watching fun cartoons."

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4.2.4. A Contributor to Sustained Learning

The emotional connection fostered by cartoons motivated some of the learners to seek additional opportunities for practice, enhancing their overall learning experience. S27, for instance, mentioned, “I want to learn more because cartoons show me that English can be enjoyable.” Likewise, S51 reflected, “Cartoons make practicing English fun, and I want to keep learning.” These sentiments suggest the potential of cartoons not only as educational tools but also as catalysts for sustained engagement.

4.2.5. Varying Effects on Self-Efficacy

Opinions varied on the influence of cartoons on self-efficacy. Some participants, like S18, gave watching cartoons primacy over other activities and felt more confident speaking English due to enhanced vocabulary and exposure to authentic language, stating, "When I watch cartoons, I learn new words easily, which makes me feel more confident speaking English." However, others, like S7, emphasized that “self-efficacy comes from various experiences, not just cartoons.” They highlighted the importance of personal motivation, prior learning experiences, and diverse resources in shaping their belief in their ability to learn English.

5. Discussion

This study investigated the effects of watching English cartoons on emotion regulation and self-efficacy among adolescent Iranian EFL learners. Over a 10-week period, the experimental group engaged with English cartoons for one hour each week, while the control group received standard classroom instruction without any cartoon exposure. This approach was grounded in the idea that authentic and engaging multimedia materials, like cartoons, can contribute to effective language acquisition (Tsang & Lee, 2024). The quantitative findings indicated that watching cartoons can significantly enhance emotion regulation and bolster self-efficacy among learners. This was further supported by the qualitative phase, where the participants described the experience of watching cartoons as beneficial in evoking positive emotions such as joy, excitement, and engagement, as well as in increasing their feelings of self-efficacy.

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Overall, these findings provide additional support to the existing literature, suggesting that watching cartoons is a beneficial activity in EFL contexts (Arıkan & Taraf, 2010; Christopley, 2017; Saiddina & Darma, 2024; Trota et al., 2022). The beneficial impact of cartoons can be attributed to the integration of contextualized audio and visual elements, which offer authentic and multi-sensory language and cultural exposure as well as flexible, self-paced, and customizable learning opportunities (Awinzeligo et al., 2022; Mayer & Fiorella, 2021). This aligns with Multimodal Learning Theory (Mayer, 2005), emphasizing that learning is enhanced when information is presented through multiple modalities, such as visuals and auditory inputs. Therefore, it can be argued that cartoons, as multimodal tools, reduce cognitive overload by combining verbal explanations with dynamic imagery, allowing learners to process and retain information more effectively. Moreover, the visually appealing graphics, engaging storylines, and relatable characters in cartoons are likely to capture the learners' attention and motivate them to learn the language (Jylhä-Laide, 1994, Prosic-Santovac, 2017).

In particular, the results indicate that watching cartoons not only aids in the development of foreign language skills and subskills but also effectively enhances affective aspects of language learning, such as emotion regulation (Liaqat & Rasheed, 2024). This is in line with Gross's (1998) Emotion Regulation Theory, underscoring the importance of processes that individuals use to manage and modulate their emotional states; watching cartoon characters experiencing different emotions can serve as a model for learners, demonstrating adaptive emotion regulation strategies such as reappraisal or expression suppression. By observing these characters navigate emotional scenarios, children may gain a better understanding of their own feelings and develop empathy (Pedrosa, 2016; Wilson, 2008). Moreover, cartoons can provide opportunities to recognize and practice coping mechanisms, equipping learners with tools to manage their emotions effectively—a critical component of both emotional intelligence and academic success (D'Amico, 2018)."

Furthermore, this study is among the pioneering efforts to demonstrate the effectiveness of watching cartoons in boosting learners' self-efficacy in EFL contexts. The results suggest that the engaging nature of cartoons not only made language learning enjoyable but also reinforced learners' beliefs in their ability to learn English and communicate effectively. This finding aligns with research from other fields, such as Sengul's (2011) study, which found that watching cartoons significantly improved self-efficacy among 7th-grade mathematics students. This can be related to Bandura's (1977) Self-Efficacy Theory, positing that individuals' confidence in their ability to succeed is influenced by

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mastery experiences and affective states; watching cartoons can serve as a mastery experience, as learners achieve comprehension and linguistic competence in an enjoyable and low-stress environment. Additionally, the entertaining nature of cartoons may contribute to positive emotional states, further enhancing learners' self-efficacy.

Another significant finding of this study is that adolescents, similar to children, can greatly benefit from watching cartoons while learning English in EFL contexts. This result is in line with studies targeting narrower age groups, such as 9th graders (Mika, 2021), 10th graders (Anasy, 2023), and 12th graders (Younas & Dong, 2024), suggesting that cartoons could be effectively integrated into the curriculum of EFL classes for adolescents, irrespective of their specific age, particularly when regulating their emotions and enhancing their sense of self-efficacy is concerned.

The analysis of the quantitative data also indicated that the learners perceived watching cartoons as a contributing factor to their vocabulary acquisition and listening and speaking skills. This corroborates the findings of Alghonaim (2020), Arıkan and Taraf (2010), Mahbub (2023), Saiddina & Darma (2024), Wang et al., (2024), and many more, indicating that watching cartoons is an effective means for improving vocabulary use and the productive skills in English. This impact is justified on the grounds that cartoons present language in a contextualized and meaningful way (Seyed Beheshti Nasab & Motlagh, 2017) and provide the opportunity for repeated exposure to certain words (Alghonaim, 2020).

The analysis also suggested that watching cartoons has the potential to influence learner motivation positively and facilitate sustained learning. This motivation likely stems from the positive learning environment that cartoons provide and their naturally engaging and entertaining qualities, which help reduce anxiety and enhance learning effectiveness (Mahbub, 2023). Additionally, as argued by Lodhi et al, (2018), the playful nature of cartoons could make learners less conscious of the learning process, thus alleviating the pressure commonly associated with formal education. The findings align with that of Wang et al. (2024), arguing that motivated learners are more likely to be more attentive and actively take part in the learning process, which is critical for long-term and sustained learning.

The final finding of the qualitative analysis revealed that despite the learners' positive evaluation of all the genres they were exposed to, they favored comedy better than the others. The playful and amusing qualities of these cartoons appeared to aid in managing emotions during the learning process, making participants feel more involved and open to learning the language. Previous studies have also pointed to the effective role of humorous and fun cartoons in regulating learners' emotions (Harm et al.,

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2014; Vieillard & Pinabiaux 2019). According to Harm et al. (2014), engaging with humorous stimuli, such as watching funny movies, can significantly reduce negative feelings and anxiety by providing a distracting effect and allowing individuals to re-evaluate negative events in a more positive light, helping them cope more effectively with adverse situations.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the effects of using English cartoons on adolescent EFL learners' emotion regulation and self-efficacy in an Iranian context. The findings of this research reinforce the positive effects of English cartoons as an effective tool for language learning, not only for their linguistic benefits but also for their impact on emotional responses and self-efficacy. Meanwhile, the participants reported experiencing positive emotions, such as joy, excitement, and amusement, which enhanced their motivation and engagement in the language learning process. They also perceived the experience of being exposed to cartoons from various genres, particularly comedy, positively. The findings advocate incorporating engaging multimedia resources into language instruction, as they can foster emotional and motivational factors critical for successful language acquisition.

The findings of this study could significantly contribute to the literature on the use of cartoons as instructional tools in EFL contexts, as it represents one of the pioneering efforts to explore how watching cartoons can influence both the cognitive and affective aspects of foreign language learning. Additionally, the findings hold practical implications for EFL teachers, learners, and curriculum developers. Teachers could use English cartoons to enhance emotional engagement, motivation, and self-efficacy in language learning. Learners could incorporate English cartoons into their language learning routines to benefit from the positive emotions these cartoons elicit. Engaging with various genres of cartoons can also diversify their emotional experiences and enhance their self-efficacy development. Furthermore, considering the educational benefits of cartoons, curriculum developers could include them as a resource in language learning materials. However, it is important to diversify the genres of cartoons to cater to different learner preferences and to provide training and support for EFL teachers on how to utilize cartoons effectively.

The limited sample size and specific educational setting of this study may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future research could explore how watching English cartoons affects

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adolescent EFL learners' emotions and self-efficacy in various cultural and educational contexts. Additionally, the focus on short-term effects may limit understanding of the long-term impacts on emotion regulation and self-efficacy. Conducting studies with delayed assessments could determine whether observed effects are sustained over time or if there are changes in outcomes. Lastly, this study specifically examined the influence of watching cartoons on emotion regulation and self-efficacy. Future studies could investigate other cognitive and emotional constructs to broaden our understanding of how cartoons impact different aspects of the language learning process.

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