

ENHANCING TOEIC PREPARATION THROUGH CARTOON-BASED LEARNING AMONG AVIATION STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study aimed to compare students' English learning outcomes before and after instruction through cartoon-based learning, and to explore the reasons behind the improvement in students' performance. The research utilized TOEIC listening scores as the primary instrument and used the samples of the students who enrolled in the course "Communicative English in Aviation." Data were analyzed using a paired t-test. The findings revealed that students showed some improvement in their performance. The observations and informal interviews indicated that students were more interested in cartoon-based learning materials than traditional real-life or formal instructional media. The use of cartoons helped reduce learning-related stress, encouraged students to express themselves more confidently, and created a more relaxed and enjoyable learning atmosphere. This contrasts with traditional formal teaching methods, which may limit student engagement and participation.

Keywords: *cartoon-based learning, TOEIC, aviation English*

Introduction

English language proficiency is a crucial requirement for aviation students, particularly in TOEIC preparation, which is commonly used as a graduation criterion and a benchmark for employment in the aviation industry (Educational Testing Service [ETS], 2022). Aviation professionals are expected to communicate effectively in English or meet specific language score requirements. However, TOEIC preparation courses are often perceived as stressful and demanding, as students are required to achieve a minimum score to graduate. This challenge is especially evident among Thai students, who may have limited English proficiency while managing a heavy academic workload.

Although English language education in Thailand has been implemented from an early age, many Thai learners still demonstrate limited communicative competence. One major reason is that English instruction in Thailand has traditionally emphasized test-oriented learning and score achievement rather than communicative language use. As a result, students tend to focus on memorization and examination performance instead of developing a deep understanding of the language. Many learners show relatively strong reading skills but struggle with listening comprehension and writing, as they are often trained through passive learning approaches (Vandergrift & Goh, 2018; Nguyen & Habók, 2021).

Furthermore, learning English in Thailand is often associated with psychological discomfort. Many learners feel embarrassed to use English and fear making mistakes, as the language is perceived as distant from their daily lives and closely linked to formal or academic contexts (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Teimouri, Goetze, & Plonsky, 2019). This issue is further intensified in traditional classroom settings, where formal teaching methods may

increase anxiety and reduce students' willingness to communicate. Consequently, many learners avoid using English, which limits their opportunities for practice and slows the development of communicative competence. Historically, English in Thailand has also been perceived as an elite language, similar to French in earlier periods, and associated with higher social status and formal education (Foley, 2005; Baker, 2012). This perception has created a psychological barrier, where English is viewed as difficult and inaccessible rather than as a practical communication tool.

In response to these challenges, this study proposes the use of cartoon-based learning as an alternative instructional approach. Cartoon-based media can create a more relaxed and engaging learning environment, reduce anxiety, and increase students' motivation and participation. Since TOEIC content is closely related to everyday and workplace situations, it can be effectively integrated with cartoon-based materials. This approach aims to transform TOEIC preparation from a stressful and passive learning experience into an engaging and meaningful learning process.

Research Objectives

1. To compare students' TOEIC learning outcomes before and after the implementation of cartoon-based learning.
2. To investigate the factors contributing to students' performance improvement when using cartoon-based learning.

Research Questions

1. What are the effects of cartoon-based learning on students' TOEIC performance?
2. How does cartoon-based learning influence students' learning experience and effectiveness?

Literature Review and Theory

This study is grounded in key theoretical perspectives related to TOEIC, communicative language use, and engagement-based learning:

1. TOEIC and Communicative Language Use

The Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) is designed to assess English proficiency in real-world workplace contexts, particularly in business and service industries such as aviation. Rather than focusing on academic language, TOEIC emphasizes practical communication skills, including listening comprehension and the ability to understand everyday and professional interactions (Educational Testing Service [ETS], 2022).

The listening component of TOEIC reflects authentic communication scenarios, requiring learners to process spoken language, identify key information, and interpret meaning in context. Therefore, effective TOEIC preparation should focus on communicative competence rather than rote memorization or test-taking strategies alone. This aligns with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasizes meaningful interaction and real-life language use as essential components of language learning (Richards, 2006).

2. Engagement and Motivation in Learning

Effective learning is not determined solely by instructional effectiveness, but also by the level of student engagement. Engagement refers to the degree of attention, interest, and involvement that students demonstrate during the learning process (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2019). According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), learners are more motivated when they experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the learning environment (Ryan & Deci, 2020). When students feel interested and emotionally connected to the learning content, they are more likely to sustain attention, participate actively, and achieve better learning outcomes. In addition, research in positive psychology suggests that enjoyment and reduced anxiety play significant roles in language learning. Learners who experience positive

emotions are more willing to communicate and engage with the language, leading to improved performance (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019). Therefore, incorporating engaging and enjoyable learning materials, such as cartoon-based media, can enhance both motivation and participation. This approach helps transform learning from a passive, test-oriented process into an active and meaningful experience, ultimately improving students' TOEIC performance.

A number of previous studies have highlighted the effectiveness of multimedia and engagement-based approaches in improving English language learning, particularly listening skills. For example, Zhang and Zou (2020) found that multimedia-assisted language learning significantly enhanced students' listening comprehension and motivation. Similarly, Kim and Kim (2021) reported that gamified and media-based instruction increased student engagement and improved language performance. In addition, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2019) emphasized the role of positive emotions, such as enjoyment, in reducing anxiety and promoting active participation in language learning. More recently, Wang and Huang (2022) demonstrated that video-based and contextualized learning materials helped learners better understand real-life communication and retain language more effectively. These findings suggest that incorporating engaging media, such as cartoons, can improve both learning outcomes and student engagement, supporting the use of alternative instructional approaches in TOEIC preparation.

Methodology

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design. Prior to the implementation, the researcher, who was also the course instructor, explored students' learning preferences and found that students were more engaged when cartoon-based materials were used. A preliminary observation (pre-initial study) indicated that students demonstrated higher levels of participation during cartoon-based instruction. They appeared more active, engaged in discussions, and responded with enthusiasm, in contrast to traditional theory-based or textbook-oriented instruction, where students tended to be passive and quiet.

Based on these observations, the instructor integrated cartoon-based learning into the course "Communicative English for Aviation." Approximately 30 minutes per week were allocated to cartoon-based instruction over a period of 15 weeks. The instructional content focused on listening skills, using cartoon scenarios related to everyday and workplace contexts such as dining, social interactions, hotel services, traveling, and ticket reservations. This approach provided students with a wider range of vocabulary and created a more engaging learning environment.

To measure learning outcomes, students were assessed using TOEIC listening tests administered before and after the intervention. The sample consisted of 38 students. The data were analyzed using a paired t-test to compare pre-test and post-test scores. In addition, qualitative data were collected through classroom observations and unstructured interviews. Participatory observation was conducted during classroom activities to capture students' engagement and learning behaviors in a natural setting.

Results

The findings of this study were based on the comparison of students' TOEIC listening scores before and after the implementation of cartoon-based learning. Although the total number of students enrolled in the course was approximately 38, only those with complete pre-test and post-test data were included in the statistical analysis ($n = 38$).

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare students' TOEIC listening scores before and after the intervention. The results indicated a significant improvement in students' performance. The mean pre-test score ($M = 222$, $SD = 125$) was significantly lower than the mean post-test score ($M = 518$, $SD = 224$), $t(37) = 9.27$, $p < .001$. These findings suggest that cartoon-based learning had a positive effect on students' listening performance. Despite

variations in students' initial proficiency levels, most students demonstrated improvement after the intervention.

The results from unstructured interviews with 10 students revealed three key themes. First, students reported feeling less stressed and less pressured during the learning process. Second, they perceived the lessons as more dynamic, with greater variation in instructional activities. Third, students described the classroom atmosphere as less competitive and more enjoyable, which helped them learn more comfortably and retain information more effectively.

Findings from participatory classroom observation further supported these results. Students showed higher levels of enjoyment and increased interaction with their peers compared to traditional instruction. They engaged in both visual and auditory learning by connecting cartoon imagery with spoken language. Moreover, students appeared more confident and willing to express themselves, interacting more actively with the instructor. Overall, the learning environment became more dynamic and interactive, reflecting a shift from passive learning to active engagement.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that cartoon-based learning can effectively enhance students' TOEIC listening performance as well as their overall learning experience. The quantitative findings showed a significant improvement in students' post-test scores compared to pre-test scores, while the qualitative findings indicated higher levels of engagement, reduced anxiety, and a more positive classroom atmosphere. Overall, the results suggest that integrating engaging and enjoyable learning materials can transform TOEIC preparation from a stressful, test-oriented activity into a more meaningful and effective learning process.

Discussion and Recommendations

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research emphasizing the role of engagement and positive emotions in language learning. According to Dewaele and MacIntyre (2019), enjoyment plays a crucial role in reducing anxiety and enhancing learners' willingness to communicate. Similarly, Fredricks et al. (2019) highlight that student engagement significantly influences learning outcomes across cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. The results also support the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, which suggests that combining visual and auditory inputs can enhance comprehension and retention (Mayer, 2021). In this study, cartoon-based learning allowed students to process both visual and auditory information simultaneously, leading to improved listening performance.

In comparison with studies conducted in Asian contexts, similar findings have been reported. For instance, Zhang and Zou (2020) found that multimedia-based instruction significantly improved listening comprehension among Chinese university students. Likewise, Kim and Kim (2021) demonstrated that media-based and gamified learning increased student motivation and performance in English language learning.

In the context of aviation education, English proficiency is a critical skill, as aviation students are required to communicate effectively in international environments. However, students in aviation programs often face heavy academic workloads and performance pressure, particularly in TOEIC preparation. The findings of this study suggest that incorporating engaging instructional methods, such as cartoon-based learning, can reduce stress and create a more supportive learning environment, which is particularly beneficial for aviation students who must balance technical and language learning demands.

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed.

First, instructors should consider integrating engaging and multimedia-based learning materials, such as cartoons, into TOEIC preparation courses to enhance student engagement and reduce learning anxiety.

Second, while cartoon-based learning is effective in improving engagement and listening skills, it may not be suitable for all types of content. Therefore, it should be combined with other instructional methods, such as structured practice, test strategies, and interactive activities, to ensure comprehensive learning outcomes.

Third, future research should expand the sample size and include students from other aviation institutions or related fields to improve the generalizability of the findings.

Finally, further studies may explore the long-term impact of engagement-based learning approaches on language proficiency and professional communication skills, particularly in aviation and service-related contexts.

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