

**ARE CARTOONS BENEFICIAL TO TEENAGERS?  
LION KING VIEWERS' PERCEPTION OF THE BENEFITS OF ANIMATED CARTOON  
PROGRAMMES**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper examined Junior Secondary School Students' perception of animated cartoon programmes: A Study of viewers of Lion King Cartoon Series in Anambra State. It adopted focus group discussion approach to find out the frequency of students exposure to lion king cartoon series, the rate at which students can recall what they watched, and to find-out the benefits which teenagers derive from watching cartoons. This paper was anchored on Social Learning Theory which explains the effectiveness of media programmes in stimulating children's development and learning process. The focus Group discussion method was adopted for the study. Twenty students were purposively selected from three secondary schools in the three senatorial district of Anambra State to participate in the discussion. The study found that teenagers who participated in the study are frequently exposed to 'Lion King cartoon series, that the students can recall and discuss freely among themselves what they have learnt from the cartoons; and that there is a relationship between exposure to lion king and students' learning process. This settled the doubt on whether lion king cartoon series is among the television programmes that Peters (1987) categorized as aggression pack programmes that effect children negatively or one out of numerous good animated cartoons that Barclay (2013) categorized as good ones that are effective Social Learning Tool in educating children. Some cartoons are therefore beneficial This paper recommended the introduction of animated cartoon concepts in teaching curriculum for most primary education since it improves students' skills and competencies in storytelling and use of language.*

**Keywords:** Cartoon, Animated, Animated Cartoon, Lion King Cartoon, learning benefits.

**INTRODUCTION**

**Background to the Study**

There is a Chinese adage that likened a child's life to a paper on which every one that passes by leaves an impressive expression. Children learn best and most when they enjoy what they are doing. Using animation as a tool encourages and develops children's learning. It is not only fun but effective by using animation, children "develop skills and competencies in, storytelling, visual communication cognition,

emotional, and aesthetic aspects, observation and sensory aspects, Concentration, problem-solving and innovative aspects” (Mohammed, 2008 p. 3).

The word ‘cartoon’ is derived from the Italian word ‘cartone’ meaning ‘paper’. The term was used by painters for preliminary drawings on paper which were then transferred, either through tracing or punching, to a surface which may be a ceiling, a large canvas or a wall (Nze, 1992 and Adekanmbi, 1997). Generally, cartoons are single or multi-framed images that convey a message both with word and symbols. Both comics and cartoons use symbols, but comics have a sequential nature to them that utilize more panels to tell story thereby allowing for more depth to the story. Cartoons, on the other hand, invoke two conceptions: their presentation (all information presented in either a single or just a few panels, versus presentation in multiple panels) and their production.

An animated cartoon is a film for the cinema, television or computer screen, which is made up of sequential drawings, as opposed to animations in general, which include films made using clay, puppet and other means (Tejumola, 2000). The Lion King is a 1994 American animated musical film produced by Walt Disney Feature Animation and released by Walt Disney Pictures. It is the 32nd animated feature in the Walt Disney Animated Classics series. The story takes place in a Kingdom of lions in Africa, and was influenced by the biblical tales of Joseph and Moses and the Shakespearean play *Hamlet*. The film was produced during a period known as the Disney Renaissance. *The Lion King* was directed by Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff, produced by Don Hahn, and has a screenplay credited to Irene Meechi, Jonathan Roberts and Linda Woolverton. Its songs were written by composer Elton John and Lyricist Tim Rice, with an original score by Hans Zimmer. The film features a large ensemble voice cast led by Matthew Broderick, Jeremy Irons, James Earl Jone, Jonathan Taylor Thomas, Moira Kelly and Nathan Lane. *The Lion King* tells the story of Simba, a young lion who is to succeed his father, Mufasa, as king; however, after Simba’s uncle Scar murders Mufasa, Simba is fooled into thinking he was responsible and flees into exile in shame and despair. Upon maturation living with two wastrels, Simba is given some valuable perspective from his friend, Nala, and his shaman, Rafiki, before returning to challenge Scar to end his tyranny (Mohammed, 2008).

Most times, children tend to be excited once they hear the sound track of animated cartoon programmes like Lion King, Tom and Jerry, etc. The degree of excitement can be seen through verbal expressions [sing-along, dance-along, act-along] or through their body movements like; nodding their heads, smiling, frowning, moping with mouth open, covering the mouth with hands, closing their eyes abruptly or normally, changing position to have a better view, beckoning other children with their hands to come and join, waving hands to stop others from making noise, etc.

It is on this premise above that this paper joined Albert Bandura who propounded the Social Learning Theory in 1977 to say that learning takes place by observing the behaviours of others. When the media [Lion King Cartoon] portrays certain behaviours to the audience teenagers they [audience members] are likely to learn such behaviours if it interests them or based on frequent exposure to such behaviours.

### **Statement of Research problem**

Parents tend to be only acquainted with the negative influence of cartoon programmes on children without looking at the positive aspects. They see cartoons as distracting, promoting violence and time consuming at the detriment of the children’s academic and domestic works. Some who do appreciate cartoon programmes are busy parents/guardians who see cartoon as what will keep the children busy and away from distracting them [the parents/guardians]. Ever since Nze, (1992) categorized some cartoons as aggression packs that negatively influenced children, researchers have been analyzing cartoons to know which ones that have negative and positive influences on children. Donis, (2001) maintains that some cartoons are useful in developing the moral character of children while some other cartoons especially violent ones produce anti social behavior. Eisner (1993) in his research work discovered that animated cartoons are good for teaching basic science concepts to children, contrary to Mitchell (1994) view that children who watch cartoons will go to “hell fire”. Upon this stigma and disagreement of views on cartoons, children still love to watch animated cartoons like lion king.

Clearing of the doubts on whether lion king cartoon series is among the television programmes that Lynch, (1998) categorized as aggression pack programmes or the one’s Barclay (2013) categorized as good that are effective Social Learning Tool in educating children is the problem that this research sets out to achieve.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To find out the children’s level of exposure to Lion King cartoon Series.

2. To find out the rate at which Students can recall what they watched in Lion King Cartoon Series.
3. To ascertain the benefits children derive from watching animated cartoons like lion king.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

Bearing in mind that no research work is complete without being grounded on a theoretical framework, it becomes imperative to root this research on one of the many media effects theories, the Social Learning Theory.

Social Learning Theory is a theory propounded by Albert Bandura in 1977. This theory suggests that learning takes place by observing the behavior of others. When the media portray certain behaviours to the audience, they [audience members] are likely to learn such behaviours if it interests them or based on frequent exposure to such behaviours.

Social learning theory fits into this study because it is through exposure to animated cartoon programme like Lion King that children showcase what they have observed.

Bandura highlights four basic steps in the learning process which include thus:

1. Paying attention and perceiving the relevant aspect of behavior.
2. Remembering the behaviours, either through words or mental images.
3. Converting the remembered observation into actions.
4. Being motivated to adopt the behavior.

Thus, it is arguable that the attitudes, values and dispositions that children learn now may form the bedrock upon which their future reinforcement will be based. Dominic [2002] agreed with this when he emphasized that the information children gather from the media play the early window role for them.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted survey as the research design. This study is limited to teenagers in schools in Anambra State Nigeria. The environment of this study is the three senatorial zones of Anambra State; Anambra South, Anambra Central and Anambra North. The three prominent towns in the senatorial zones were chosen. That is Onitsha, Awka and Nnewi respectively. Three baskets were provided; in each basket were folded pieces of paper containing the names of all the schools in the zone it represents. The baskets were closed and well shaken. Through random selection, Prince Memorial Secondary School Onitsha in Anambra South, Kenneth Dike Memorial Secondary School, Awka in Anambra Central and Akaboezem Community Secondary School Nnewi in Anambra North, were selected.

The selection of teenagers in schools in Anambra State of Nigeria as an area of this study is basically the researchers' choice. However, the researchers' interest may be because the researchers are from the geographical area. The decision to sample respondents from Onitsha, Awka and Nnewi is because the three cities share the same cultural and geographical homogeneity. They also have similar natural, sociological and psychological variables. It is therefore hoped that the views of the selected teenagers will be generalized to all the Junior Secondary School Students in Anambra State. According to Anambra Universal Basic Education Board, the population of Junior Secondary School Students in Anambra state is not steady because each academic session witnesses both drop and increase in J S 1 – J S 3 (classes under study). This study then used collated population from Annual Omnibus Sheet for 2013/2014 for J S 1 and J S 2 and Basic Education Examination 2014 Mock result sheet for J S 3 respectively.

**Table 1: Population of the Study**

<b>Name of School</b>	<b>Population of</b>		<b>Total Population</b>
	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	
Prince Memorial high School Onitsha.	760	940	1,800
Kenneth Dike Memorial Secondary School Awka.	712	788	1,500
Akaboezem Community Secondary School Nnewi.	516	684	1,200
			<b>4500</b>

**Source:** Annual Omnibus Sheet/Basic Education Examination Sheet for 2013/2014.

The sample size of this is 367. This was determined using the Taro Yameni's, (1973) sample size formula as stated below.

After obtaining the sample size of 367, the researchers used proportionate allocation method to select appropriate number of students from each of the selected schools.

Owuamalam, (2012, p.122) notes that this method select its sample from a given population, documented in an orderly list. The size of the sample is calculated with this formular:

$$S = \frac{N}{N} \times S$$

Where N = Population

n = Number of group

s = Sample size grouping

S = Sample Size

For

Prince Memorial High School, Onitsha  $S = \frac{1800}{4500} \times 367 = 147$

Kenneth Dike Memorial Secondary School, Awka  $S = \frac{1500}{4500} \times 367 = 122$

Akaboezem Community Secondary School Nnewi  $S = \frac{1200}{4500} \times 367 = 98$

**Table 2: Selected number of respondents from each school.**

<b>Name of School</b>	<b>Selected Respondents</b>
Prince Memorial High School Onitsha	147
Kenneth Dike Memorial Secondary School Awka	122
Akaboezem Community Secondary School Nnewi	98
<b>Total</b>	<b>367</b>

**Source:** Annual Omnibus Sheet/Basic Education examination Sheet for 2013/2014, ASUBEBE.

The random sampling method was used to select samples from each of the selected three schools for the study using the computer sample size grouping. In each school, two baskets were used; one for girls and the other for boys. All the names of boys/girls were written in small pieces of papers, folded and put inside their respective baskets, closed and shaken severally; randomly the required numbers were selected. The selected teenagers were thereafter engaged in focus group discussion.

## **ANALYSIS OF DISCUSSION WITH RESPONDENTS**

### **Qs.1 How many of you have watched Lion King Cartoon Series? Indicate by raising up your hand?**

When the researcher asked this question, the students were excited. While some were calm and raised up their hands to indicate viewership, others stood up with their hands up. The researchers discovered that all the participants have watched to Lion King Cartoon. The researchers went further to confirm this yes attitude by throwing in the second question.

### **Qs 2: How many series of Lion King Cartoon have you watched?**

The first two people that answered were guessing. The word series was difficult for them to comprehend and the researcher used the word part to replace it. Rephrasing the questions thus; how many parts of Lion King have you watched?

One of the participants answered “all” and other participants laughed knowing that she was trying to be smart. While some said three, others said two. The researchers through physical voting of raising up hands for acceptance discovered that 89% of the respondents agreed that there are three parts of Lion Kings

Cartoon while only 18% of them said it has only two parts. Majority of the participants are viewers of Lion King Cartoon Series.

**Qs. 3: Name one character in Lion King Cartoon and tell us what the character did in the Cartoon.**

The researchers used this question to test the ability of students to recall and discuss what they have watched. Every participant took part in this exercise. The researcher noticed variation in the students' ability to narrate, body movements indicating shyness or boldness.

Among the characters mentioned are; Simba the prince who is the Chief character, Mufasa the man the Cartoon took after his name 'Lion King', Scar is a wicked uncle to Simba and a brother to Mufasa, Nala and his shaman, Rafiki are Simba's friends who helped him to defeat his uncle Scar. Majority of the students were able to tell the story line of Lion King Cartoon in a simple English Language. One of the participants gave the most clear and concise story line. Simba, a young lion who is to succeed his father, Simba, as king; however, after Simba's uncle Scar murders Mufasa, Simba is fooled into thinking he was responsible and flees into exile in shame and despair. Upon maturation, Simba is given some valuable perspective from his friends, Nala, and his shaman, Rafiki, before returning to challenge Scar to end his tyranny. From the above question the researchers conclude that there is improvement in students ability to recall what they watched.

**Qs. 4: What are the benefits of watching Lion King Cartoon?**

A lot of benefits were mentioned ranging from the melodious musical which the participants sang to ease of tension and keep themselves happy. They said it is a thing of joy and pride to sing the various songs in Lion King Cartoon. Although most of the respondents like the musical aspect of lion king, girls showed more interest.

Majority of the participants expressed their love for the challenges and fight between Scar, Mufasa and the one between Simba and Scar. They hailed Simba for his courage and victory.

One of the participants said he learnt a good lesson of obeying rules and regulations of constituted authorities to avoid fallen victim. She recalled how Mufasa and his Queen loved the Prince Simba and gave him instruction on the pride lane, how Simba learnt the lesson of his life, fire outbreak and attack on him when he disobeyed by crossing the pride lane.

Others acknowledged that they learn more each time they are narrating the story of lion king to others. It helps them in answering questions in English language, literature and Christian religious knowledge.

Some participants said that the concept of victims falling down from a height without being wounded seen in the adventure of Simba and his friends is not believable. Majority of them termed it "film trick."

One of the participants wished to meet the producer of lion king so that he can explain how fire can surround somebody without burning him as it is in the case of Simba. And other filmic manoeuvres found in the cartoon.

**Qs. 5 After watching Lion King, which language in it do you use to interact with your fellow students and outside the school environment; tell us if the language is good or bad?**

One of the participants said she loves Simba's words of victory 'I did it'. Any she tries something difficult and succeeds, she will unconsciously echo "I did it."

Ekesinachi, one of the participants said that Simba's Judgment constantly rings bell in his memory when ever two students are at loggerhead and he is to settle their case, he will remember what Simba told Kiar; "When you first came here, you asked for judgment; now I pass it, Exile" Another participant said she loves Kiar's words to her father', "A wise King ones told me that we are one, I did not understand but now I do, look at them. They are us, what difference does it make?"

Summarily, all the words children identified that they learnt from the cartoon do not make them aggressive rather they led to forgiveness and unity.

**Qs. 6 Who can explain Kiar's words in a simple way?**

One of the participants explained that some times, parents who are under tension will forget the good advice they gave to their children and violate them in the presence of their children. He said it is not good.

**Qs.7 Who can give us an example of this in our everyday life?**

One of the participants gave a good example with parents who advice their children not to fight but at home or in the market they fight each other when provoked.

**Qs. 8 Do you agree or disagree with people who said that lion king is evil and parents should stop children from watching it?**

All the children disagreed with the notion that lion king is evil. They repeated some of the benefits they derive from lion king cartoon series ranging from fun, musical, understanding of some natural concepts etc.

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

Research question one sought to find out how often children watch Lion King Cartoon Series. The findings show that majority of the respondents are exposed to the cartoon series. The result reveals that 98% of the respondents are exposed to Lion King Cartoon while a negligible number of respondents 2% are not exposed. This findings show that children are addicted to viewing Lion King Cartoon. If it is not lion king, they will prefer to watch other animated cartoons. This finding is however reinforced by earlier findings in Cartoon and children which shows that cartoon is one of the television programmes preferred by children and described as children friendly, (Okonkwo, 2012). This finding also supports the earlier finding that cartoons are the most frequent and easily accessible source of entertainment for children (Bibi and Zebra, 2012).

Research question two sought to find out whether children actually recall lion king cartoon series after watching the cartoon. Analysis of data shows that 92% of the respondents can recall what they watch and while 8% cannot. During the focus group discussion, participants showed high rate of recall by mentioning and describing the roles of the characters in the cartoon series and even act out parts of the roles in their normal daily interactions among themselves, one of the participants said she recall one expression “I did it” from Simba during one of his adventures in the cartoon. The participant recalls this anytime she tries something and succeeds. The level of recall is high. This supports the early findings that most children watch cartoon films and get infatuated with them that they resort to frequent use of dialogues and languages used by their favourite cartoon characters (Okonkwo, 2012).

Research question three revealed the benefits which children derive from watching cartoons. Most of the participants, especially females love the musical aspect of the cartoon, while a male participant said he, loves the fight between Mufasa, Scar and Simba.

From the analysis, those who said Yes that Lion King helps them in both their academic and social life are more than those respondents who said it does not. A participant said she developed narration skills after her exposure to lion king cartoon and applies the knowledge on some subjects like English Language, literature and Christian Religious Studies. One of the boys wished to come in contact with the producer of the cartoon to learn more about the concept of being surrounded by fire without the fire burning the skin of the person as seen in the case of Simba when he crossed the pride lane. He wants to learn more on the concept of hanging on the air which is a scientific gravitational concept which he saw in Lion King. Here the exposure to lion king raises the learning curiosity of the students. One participant said she learnt not to disobey her parents, after watching the price of disobedience Simba paid by crossing the pride lane against his parents’ instructions. All these are in agreement with the findings of Barclay (2013) that there is an upgrade in students’ knowledge and understanding of basic concepts of mass, volume and density concepts using animated cartoon method of learning.

**CONCLUSION**

The study sets out to examine teenagers Perception of the benefits of cartoon programmes using lion King Cartoon Series’ Viewers in Anambra State. From the findings of this study, it was established that students are not only exposed to lion king cartoon series but addicted to it. It is in agreement with to the work of Okonkwo’, (2012) who described Television programmes, especially cartoon as children’s companion. Another finding of this study is that students can recall what they watch in Lion King Cartoon programme. The students were able to identify all the characters in the cartoon and describe their roles. This supports the Chinese adage quoted at the introductory part of this study which says that “children are like a piece of paper on which anyone who passes, leaves an impression.” It also agrees with Okonkwo’, (2012) that most children watch cartoon films and get infatuated with them that they resort to frequent use of dialogues and languages used by their favourite cartoon characters.

From the findings of the study, more female students were glued to the entertainment aspect of the cartoon {songs, musical, dance, aesthetics, etc.} than their male counterpart who were more interested in manipulations and power tussle aspect of the carton. This shows that there is a significant difference between male and female students’ pattern of exposure to Lion King Cartoon Series. From the findings of the study, there is a relationship between exposure to Lion King Cartoon Series and students’ learning

process. This agrees with the findings of Barclay (2013) that there is an upgrade in students knowledge and understanding of basic concepts of mass, volume and density using animation cartoon concept.

### **Recommendations**

This paper recommends parental guide to whatever content of a cartoon the students are watching. Parents/guardian should endeavour to guide their children by buying only those cartoons that will impact positively on them. They should also emphasize on the need for time schedule for anything to their children so that they do not waste their entire time watching cartoon. Sometimes parents should involve themselves in watching cartoon series to help their children in explaining certain issues, through this, they can teach both moral norms and educational concepts.

Since producers/marketers are profit oriented, knowing that children are addicted to viewing anything called cartoon, whether it will influence them positively or negatively, the Nigerian Film and Video Censor Board should protect the interest of children by grading films and cartoons and monitor compliance.

Educators should include the concept of animation in their teaching curriculum to help them in teaching some basic concepts especially those that are abstract in nature.

Further research should be carried on this topic especially in the areas that this research did not discuss such as whether Lion King Cartoon Series is good for all ages? Whether there are aggressive songs that can influence children negatively? Etc.

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