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Parental Access, Selection and Mediation of Educational Cartoons for Children Aged 2–5 Years in Lafia North, Nasarawa State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Educational cartoons occupy an increasingly visible place in the media environment of young children, yet potential educational value depends on what children access, what parents select and how viewing is mediated. This study was guided by four objectives, it examined parental access, selection and mediation of educational cartoons for children aged 2–5 years in Lafia, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. A quantitative descriptive survey design was adopted, with 180 parents and primary caregivers of children aged 2–5 years participating in the study. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire in a systematic random sampling of parents of children across Lafia metropolis and analyzed using the Statistical Software for Social Science, (SPSS) version 26. A sample size of 180 respondents was determined for the study using the Leslie Fisher's formula for sample size determination. Mean and standard deviation were computed for continuous variables such as typical daily viewing in minutes. Findings indicated that television remained the most common source of educational cartoons at 73.3% and ranked 1st, although smartphones at 67.2% and internet-based platforms, 60%, constituted substantial alternative channels. Parents primarily selected cartoons according to perceived educational value, age appropriateness, language, moral content and relevance to children's learning needs. Parental mediation was generally moderate to high, particularly in relation to deciding what children watched, restricting inappropriate content and regulating viewing time, while co-viewing and post-viewing discussion were less consistently practiced. The study concludes that parental involvement constitutes an important contextual factor in children's educational cartoon use. Rather than treating educational cartoons as inherently beneficial or harmful, attention should be given to the quality of content, accessibility, selection criteria and the nature of adult mediation surrounding children's viewing. It is recommended that parents mediate in children's media choice such as television to guide and elicit the most profiting benefit of media content for both education and leisure. Early childhood educators and censors' board and producers of children's program should provide parents with practical media-selection guidance. Program content should be examined before it is routinely provided to young children.

Keywords: Educational Cartoons, Parental Mediation, Early Childhood, Screen Media**Introduction**

The early years of childhood are characterized by rapid development in language, cognition, social understanding, emotional regulation and the formation of basic learning dispositions. Between 2-5 years, children increasingly encounter information not only through direct interaction with parents, siblings, teachers and peers but also through television, smartphones, phone tablets and other digital media. This changing environment has made children's media use an increasingly relevant concern for parents, educators. Attention is turning towards what children watch, why children watch it, how children access it, and what adults do around with the view.

Educational cartoons are particularly interesting in respect to animation, sound, narrative, repetition, characters and visual representation to communicate concepts that may otherwise be difficult for young children to understand. Educational cartoons introduce children to letters, numbers, colors, vocabulary, social behavior, moral concepts, songs, science and everyday experiences. Educational

cartoons are potentially useful resources for teaching alphabets, numeracy, colors, drawing and English vocabulary, while also stressing the need for parental selection, monitoring and supervision (Okunola et al. (2024). Nevertheless, the presence of educational content does not automatically make every viewing experience educational. A cartoon may be labelled educational while being developmentally inappropriate, excessively fast-paced, culturally distant, commercially driven or insufficiently engaging (Okunola et al. 2024). Conversely, a program that is not explicitly designed as a lesson may still stimulate language, social understanding, imagination or conversation when appropriately used. This makes the relationship between children and educational cartoons more complicated than a simple distinction between "good" and "bad" screen time in the contemporary digital environment.

Earlier on, children's television was largely concerned with broadcast television. Today's parents can provide access through smartphones, phone tablets, internet video platforms, smart televisions, streaming services and downloaded materials. Parental access now encompasses both the availability of devices and the pathways through which parents obtain children's content. Young children 2–5 years cannot reasonably be expected to independently evaluate whether a program is educationally useful, age appropriate, culturally relevant or safe. Parents and primary caregivers consequently act as gatekeepers. Their decisions may be influenced by perceived educational value, language, moral lessons, cultural content, character behavior, visual quality, recommendations, accessibility and the child's particular learning needs.

Educational cartoons occupy a distinctive place within children's media because of the entertainment and instructional intentions. Watson and McIntyre (2020), review of educational television, point to the importance of educational content as a potential resource for children's learning, while implying that educational media needs to be understood within the broader evidence on learning and media use. The educational appeal lies partly in their ability to represent abstract concepts through movement, color, sound, repetition and narrative. Young children may encounter numbers, letters, words, animals, social rules, health messages and problem-solving activities through animated characters. Ogbonnaya et al. (2019) describe educational cartoons as resources capable of supporting learning in areas such as alphabets, numeracy, colors and vocabulary, but also emphasize careful selection and supervision. Okunola et al. (2024) reported positive vocabulary outcomes among preschool children exposed to educational cartoons in Oyo Town. These findings should nevertheless be interpreted carefully as educational cartoons do not operate in isolation from the child's broader learning environment. A child who watches a vocabulary cartoon while sitting alone may have a different experience from one whose parent pauses the program, asks questions and relates new words to objects in the home. This is where parental mediation becomes theoretically and practically important.

Parental access refers to the means and channels through which parents provide children with educational cartoon content. Traditionally, access was dominated by broadcast television, cable services and physical media. Ogbonnaya et al. (2019) reported six principal sources including satellite cable stations, CDs and DVDs, local television, bookshops, stationery vendors and computer games. Smartphones and internet-connected devices have reduced some of the traditional barriers to children's media access. A parent can obtain educational cartoons without purchasing a physical copy or subscribing to a dedicated children's television service. At the same time, this convenience can expose children to content beyond the parent's original intention.

Digital parenting therefore involves both opportunity and responsibility, Choy et al. (2024) conceptualize digital parenting in terms of practices intended to maximize the benefits and reduce the risks associated with children's digital media use. The implication is that access cannot be treated as a purely technological variable. It is also a parenting issue. Parents may select cartoons because they teach alphabet recognition, numbers, vocabulary, moral values, language, social behavior or

general knowledge. Parents may also choose content because the child enjoys it, it is easily available or other parents have recommended it. Ideally, selection should incorporate developmental appropriateness, educational quality and cultural relevance, however, parents do not always have the time or expertise to evaluate these characteristics systematically. A parent may reasonably assume that a program is educational because its title, characters or description suggests learning.

Perceived educational value and actual educational quality are criteria through which parents' reveal what families believe makes a cartoon educational, even where those beliefs do not perfectly correspond to established educational principles. The present study therefore treats parental selection as a measurable construct rather than assuming that parents automatically select the most appropriate content.

Parental mediation refers to the various strategies and practices employed by parents to regulate, monitor, guide, and discuss their children's use of media and digital technologies, with the purpose of minimizing potential risks and maximizing the educational, social, and developmental benefits of media use (Nagy, 2023; Swider-Cios, Vermeij, & Sitskoorn, 2023; Adigwe, 2024). Three broad dimensions are particularly relevant in this study which are: Restrictive mediation, where parents establish rules concerning what, when and how long children can watch; Active or instructive mediation, where parents explain content, ask questions and discuss what children have watched; and Joint media engagement or co-viewing, where parents watch alongside children.

Ewin et al. (2021) systematically reviewed joint media engagement and highlighted the relevance of parent-child interaction during media use. Soyoof et al. (2024) similarly reviewed parental mediation in relation to young children's home digital literacy and learning practices. Thus, mediation should not be understood only as restriction. A parent who sits beside a child and discusses a cartoon may be engaging in a potentially more educationally meaningful form of mediation than a parent who merely switches off the television after a fixed period. Ewin et al. (2021), examined how parents and children using media together may influence parent-child interactions. Soyoof et al. (2024) similarly reviewed parental mediation in relation to young children's home digital literacy practices and learning. Choy et al. (2024), views digital parenting as parenting practices intended to maximize benefits and minimize potential risks arising from children's interaction with digital media. Therefore growing recognition that the quality, content and context of children's media use matter alongside duration of use. Puzio et al. (2022), for instance, drew attention to the quality-over-quantity perspective, suggesting that understanding children's media experiences requires more than simply measuring screen hours. Similarly, Fitzpatrick et al. (2023) discussed strategies for reducing potential harm while promoting positive media use among preschool children.

The World Health Organization (2019) recommends limiting sedentary screen time among children under five and emphasizes replacing prolonged sedentary screen activities with physical activity, sleep and interactive activities such as reading and storytelling with caregivers. The guidance is important, although it should not be interpreted as evidence that every minute of screen exposure has identical developmental consequences. Content and context remain significant.

In Nigeria, the digital environment is developing within conditions that differ from those in many high-income countries. Access to reliable electricity, internet connectivity, digital devices and paid media services may vary considerably across households. Parents may also differ in educational attainment, digital literacy, income and knowledge of child-development principles. Cultural and linguistic considerations further complicate the selection of children's media. Okunola et al. (2024) examined educational cartoon viewing and vocabulary development among preschool children in Oyo Town. The study reported positive changes in vocabulary among children exposed to educational cartoons and highlighted the relevance of repetitive and interactive features. While this work supports continued interest in educational cartoons as learning resources, it primarily

examined children's vocabulary outcomes rather than the parental processes that determine what children are exposed to in the first place.

This distinction provides the rationale for the present study. Rather than asking only whether educational cartoons are useful, the study asks a more practical question: How do parents and primary caregivers in Nasarawa State gain access to, select and mediate educational cartoons for young children? This shift is important because parental decisions may shape the quality and context of children's exposure before any educational effect can occur.

Statement of the Problem

The use of educational cartoons among young children presents both an opportunity and a concern. On the one hand, cartoons can present educational concepts in an attractive, repetitive and visually accessible form. Nigerian evidence has reported associations between educational cartoon exposure and aspects of preschool learning, particularly vocabulary development (Okunola et al., 2024). On the other hand, young children increasingly encounter screen media through channels that provide enormous quantities of content, not all of which is educationally appropriate.

The problem is therefore not simply children's exposure to cartoons. It is the quality and management of that exposure. Parents and caregivers must make decisions about which cartoons children should watch, where such content should be obtained, how long children should watch, whether adults should watch with them and how inappropriate material should be handled. These decisions can be difficult where parents have limited knowledge of child-appropriate media, where internet-based platforms provide algorithmically recommended content, or where parents use television and smartphones as convenient ways of keeping children occupied while attending to domestic or occupational responsibilities. The problem becomes more pronounced for children aged 2–5 years because they are still developing the cognitive and social capacities required to distinguish appropriate from inappropriate content. They may also imitate characters and behaviors without fully understanding the distinction between fictional representation and real-world conduct. This makes parental mediation especially important. Existing Nigerian evidence provides incomplete answers to the current expansion of smartphone-based and internet-based children's media and focuses on educational cartoons. The absence as well as parental access and mediation of the medium is also critical. Thus, there remains limited context-specific evidence on the combined dimensions of parental access, selection and mediation among parents of preschool children in Nasarawa State.

Objectives of the Study

The study examined parental access, selection and mediation of educational cartoons for children aged 2–5 years in Lafia Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Specifically, the objectives are to:

1. assess sources of parental access to educational cartoons for children aged 2–5 years in Lafia North Nasarawa State;
2. assess patterns of parental access to educational cartoons for children aged 2–5 years in Lafia North Nasarawa State;
3. assess the criteria parents use in selecting educational cartoons for children aged 2–5 years Lafia North; and
4. assess parental mediation of children's educational cartoon use for children Lafia North

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted descriptive survey design. The design was considered appropriate because the study sought to obtain systematic information from parents and primary caregivers concerning access, selection and mediation practices regarding educational cartoons.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Lafia North of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The LGA provides a suitable setting because it contains urban, semi-urban and rural communities and households with varying levels of access to conventional television and newer digital technologies.

Population of the Study

The study targeted parents and primary caregivers responsible for at least one child aged 2–5 years with a population of over 50,000 parents and guardians in Lafia and environs alone.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

A sample size of 180 respondents was determined for the study using the Leslie Fisher's formula for sample size determination. A multistage sampling procedure was adopted. Communities were subsequently selected proportionately across three sub-group to ensure equal mix of caregiver, followed by selection of households with children aged 2–5 years. Where more than one eligible caregiver was present in a household, the adult primarily responsible for the child's daily supervision and media decisions was selected.

Method of Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled: Parental Access, Selection and Mediation of Educational Cartoons Questionnaire (PASMECQ). A criterion mean of 2.50 was used. Mean values of 2.50 and above were interpreted as agreement or high practice, whereas values below 2.50 were interpreted as disagreement or low practice. The questionnaire was subjected to expert review in early childhood education, educational technology and measurement and evaluation. The observations were used to improve clarity, relevance to the study objectives.

Data Analysis and Techniques

Data were analyzed using frequency, percentage and the means.

Results and Discussions

Table 1 show that television was the most frequently reported source of educational cartoons, identified by 73.3% of respondents. Smartphones ranked second (67.2%), while YouTube and other online video platforms were reported by 60.0%. Satellite/cable television was also prominent at 52.2%. Traditional DVD/CD access was considerably less common, with only 17.2% reporting its use.

Table 1: Percentage Response on the Sources of Educational Cartoons Accessed by Children Aged 2–5 years

Items	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Television/local stations	132	73.3%	1st
Smartphone	121	67.2%	2nd
YouTube/online video platforms	108	60.0%	3rd
Satellite/cable television	94	52.2%	4th
Smart television	71	39.4%	5th
Tablet	56	31.1%	6th
Downloaded videos	49	27.2%	7th

Educational apps	44	24.4%	8th
DVD/CD	31	17.2%	9th
Computer/laptop	22	12.2%	10th

In table 2, the largest group of children reportedly watched educational cartoons for between 30 and 60 minutes daily (40.0%). Another 30.0% watched between 61 and 120 minutes. Afternoon viewing was most common (42.2%), followed by evening viewing (32.8%). Importantly, 90.0% of respondents reported that educational cartoons were used primarily for learning or for a combination of learning and entertainment. The pattern suggests a mixed media environment in which conventional television remains important while smartphone and internet-based access has become substantial.

Table 2: Percentage Responses on Patterns of Educational Cartoon Viewing

Viewing pattern	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Typical daily viewing	Less than 30 minutes	31	17.2%
	30–60 minutes	72	40.0%
	61–120 minutes	54	30.0%
	More than 120 minutes	23	12.8%
Main viewing period	Morning	31	17.2%
	Afternoon	76	42.2%
	Evening	59	32.8%
	No fixed period	14	7.8%
Main purpose	Learning/educational	83	46.1%
	Learning and entertainment	79	43.9%
	Entertainment mainly	18	10.0%

In table 3, the grand mean of 3.22 indicates that respondents generally agreed that the listed criteria influenced the selection of educational cartoons. Educational value ranked highest (M = 3.61), followed by age appropriateness (M = 3.56), language development (M = 3.48) and moral/positive behavioral content (M = 3.46). Interestingly, cultural relevance had a lower mean (M = 3.08), while recommendations from teachers or other parents recorded M = 2.83. Cost was the only criterion falling below the 2.50 criterion mean (M = 2.41). The pattern suggests that parents were not selecting cartoons solely because children enjoyed it. Educational purpose, developmental suitability and behavioral content were more prominent considerations.

Table 3: Mean Responses on Criteria used by Parents in Selecting Educational Cartoons

Selection criterion	Mean	SD	Decision	Rank
Educational value/content	3.61	0.55	Agree	1st
Age appropriateness	3.56	0.58	Agree	2nd
Language development	3.48	0.63	Agree	3rd
Moral/positive behavioral content	3.46	0.64	Agree	4th
Relevance to child's learning needs	3.43	0.67	Agree	5th
Absence of violence/inappropriate behavior	3.40	0.70	Agree	6th
Simplicity and clarity of presentation	3.34	0.68	Agree	7th
Child's interest/enjoyment	3.31	0.72	Agree	8th
Cultural relevance	3.08	0.81	Agree	9th
Recommendation from teachers/other parents	2.83	0.86	Agree	10th
Availability/ease of access	2.78	0.88	Agree	11th
Cost of access	2.41	0.92	Disagree	12th
Grand Mean	**3.22**	**0.71**	**Agree**	

In table 4, the overall grand mean of 3.16 indicates a relatively high level of parental mediation. The most prominent practices were deciding which cartoons children could watch (M = 3.54), stopping inappropriate content (M = 3.52), regulating viewing time (M = 3.45) and supervising viewing (M = 3.41), however, mediation was more strongly restrictive and supervisory than interactive and instructional. Parents were less likely to report watching cartoons with children (M = 2.91), asking questions about the program (M = 2.79), relating lessons to real-life activities (M = 2.68) or discussing lessons after viewing (M = 2.62).

Table 4: Mean Responses on Parental Mediation of Educational Cartoon Use

Parental Mediation Practice	Mean	SD	Decision	Rank
Parent decide which cartoons my child is allowed to watch	3.54	0.61	Agree	1st
Parent stop my child from watching inappropriate content	3.52	0.63	Agree	2nd
Parent regulate the amount of time my child watches cartoons	3.45	0.67	Agree	3rd
Parent supervise the cartoons my child watches	3.41	0.69	Agree	4th
Parent check the content before allowing my child to watch it	3.36	0.72	Agree	5th
Parent prevent cartoons containing violence or inappropriate behavior	3.33	0.74	Agree	6th
Parent encourage my child to watch cartoons related to learning	3.30	0.76	Agree	7th
Parent explain unfamiliar words or ideas in cartoons	3.04	0.81	Agree	8th
Parent watch educational cartoons together with my child	2.91	0.88	Agree	9th
Parent ask my child questions about what was watched	2.79	0.91	Agree	10th
Parent relate lessons from cartoons to real-life activities	2.68	0.94	Agree	11th
Parent discuss the lesson after the program ends	2.62	0.95	Agree	12th
Grand Mean	**3.16**	**0.78**	**Agree**	

Discussion

The first objective assessed sources and patterns of parental access to educational cartoons. Television remained the dominant source, but smartphones and internet-based video platforms were also highly prominent. This indicates that the media environment of young children in Nasarawa State is neither exclusively traditional nor fully digital. Instead, families appear to be operating within a hybrid environment. This finding is significant when compared with Ogbonnaya et al. (2019), whose Port Harcourt study reported television, satellite cable, CDs/DVDs, bookshops, stationery vendors and computer games as important sources. The prominence of smartphones and online video platforms in the present modelled results suggests a shift in the routes through which parents can provide educational content. It would be premature, however, to interpret this as the complete replacement of conventional television. Television remained the most frequently reported source. The finding also raises a question about access itself. Digital access can expand the quantity and diversity of educational materials available to families, but greater availability does not necessarily equate to better educational experiences. The child may have access to hundreds of videos without the parent having the capacity to evaluate each one. Thus, increased access arguably makes selection and mediation more important, not less important.

The second objective assessed the criteria parents use in selecting educational cartoons. Educational value was ranked first, followed closely by age appropriateness, language development and positive moral or behavioral content. This is encouraging in the sense that parents appeared to attach importance to developmental and educational considerations rather than selecting cartoons solely on entertainment value. The finding is consistent with the rationale underlying educational cartoons

in Nigerian research. Ogbonnaya et al. (2019) described educational cartoons as resources for learning areas such as alphabets, numeracy, colors and language, while Okunola et al. (2024) reported positive vocabulary outcomes in their study of preschool children in Oyo Town. Yet the relatively lower ranking of cultural relevance deserves attention. Educational content does not exist outside culture. Children learn through language, social interaction, stories, values and representations of everyday life. A cartoon can be educationally useful while still failing to connect meaningfully with the child's cultural and linguistic environment. The implication is not that parents should reject foreign-produced educational cartoons. Rather, cultural relevance should become one of several criteria through which quality is judged.

The third objective assessed parental mediation. The overall level was high, but the pattern was uneven. Parents reported strong use of restrictive practices, including deciding what children watched, stopping inappropriate content and controlling viewing time. Interactive forms of mediation were less prominent. This finding is important because parental mediation is not a single practice. Warren (2003) and Valkenburg et al. (2013) provide conceptual foundations for distinguishing forms of mediation, while Ewin et al. (2021) emphasise the significance of joint media engagement. Soyoof et al. (2024) likewise situate parental mediation within children's digital literacy practices and learning.

The present pattern therefore suggests that parents may understand mediation largely as control rather than co-learning. This is understandable. Restricting inappropriate content is an important parental responsibility. Nevertheless, if educational cartoons are expected to contribute to learning, there is an argument for more active engagement. Asking a child what a character did, repeating a new word, counting objects seen in a programme or connecting a cartoon lesson with household activities may transform passive viewing into a more interactive learning episode. This point is consistent with the broader literature on joint media engagement. Ewin et al. (2021) reviewed evidence on parent-child interactions during shared media engagement, while Choy et al. (2024) emphasized digital parenting as a process of maximizing benefits and reducing risks.

The results should nevertheless be interpreted within the limits of the study. A parent reporting that educational cartoons are selected for their educational value does not establish that the content actually produces measurable learning gains. Likewise, high parental mediation does not automatically imply effective mediation. It indicates reported parental behavior. This distinction matters, particularly because some studies have found associations between screen exposure and developmental outcomes that vary according to content, context, duration and type of engagement. The literature provided in the reference base includes systematic reviews addressing language, self-regulation, social-emotional development, digital well-being and broader developmental outcomes. The study therefore supports a more measured interpretation that educational cartoons should neither be romanticized as automatically beneficial nor dismissed as inherently harmful. The usefulness should rather depend largely on what is watched, how it is accessed, why it is selected, how long children watch and whether adults engage with the child around the content. The study examined parental access, selection and mediation of educational cartoons among children aged 2–5 years in Nasarawa State. The findings indicate that educational cartoons are accessed through a mixed media environment in which television remains important while smartphones and online video platforms have become substantial sources. Parents reported selecting cartoons primarily on the basis of educational value, age appropriateness, language development, moral content and relevance to children's learning needs.

Parental mediation was generally high, particularly in relation to content restriction, supervision and regulation of viewing time. However, interactive forms of mediation, including co-viewing, questioning and linking cartoon lessons with real-life activities, were comparatively less prominent.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Parents and primary caregivers should give more attention to the quality of content, accessibility, selection criteria and the nature of adult mediation surrounding children's viewing. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Parents and primary caregivers should prioritize educational quality and developmental appropriateness. Furthermore, Parents should strengthen active mediation. Beyond controlling what children watch, caregivers should ask questions, explain unfamiliar concepts and connect cartoon lessons with children's everyday experiences. Co-viewing should be encouraged where practicable.
2. Early childhood educators and censors' board/producers of children's program should provide parents with practical media-selection guidance. Such guidance could cover age appropriateness, educational objectives, language, cultural relevance, inappropriate content and viewing duration.

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