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The impact of evil characters in animation shown on MBC3 TV channel on the development of a defeatist personality in early childhood under current changes in the Arab region

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ABSTRACT

Animation, an art which captivates young audiences, affects the mental, psychological, and linguistic development of children, so there is an urgent need to study it along with all the factors affecting childhood, especially in a world full of wars and violence. The present study explores the effect of watching animated films on the development of a defeatist personality during early childhood. The study applies content analysis to animated films presented on MBC3 TV channel to try to determine the harmful impact such films might have on child personality. The study recommends that parents should carefully choose cartoons for their children to watch and that the content of animated films presented to children should be revised. The production of Arab animated films intended for Arab children is also recommended.

Key words: characterization, Animated films, defeatist personality, violence, dependency

Introduction

Childhood, as a stage in the human life cycle, is a period of significant biological, physiological, psychological, and social growth. Between infancy and the beginning of adolescence, about age twelve, the human acquires major life skills – the ability to walk, talk, read, care for themselves, and come to know the world around them. During this time, the child first encounters the major agents of socialization: the family, peers, school, and media. Today, visual media, which has the power to reach such a vast number of people at once, can tremendously help foster the development of desirable values and habits in children. With the increasing effect of children's programs, scholars and educationists feel the urgent need to study such programs and identify their educational, ideological and social impacts. The most dangerous influence of these programs is the serious harm they may cause to identity, leading to dependency (Alahmad: 2014,1).

Animation can be considered a kind of material which strongly appeals to children, affecting their mental, psychological, and linguistic activities. Thus, there is an urgent need to study the various factors affecting childhood, especially in our world full of wars and violence.

The Arab region has been witnessing huge strategic changes on the political, military, economic, and social levels. The wars and conflicts involved have had extremely negative effects on the stability and security of the region (Barkat:2010, 65).

Research questions

1. What are the key political changes in the Arab region?
2. What are the essential traits of cartoon characters in animated films?
3. What are the essential traits of evil characters in animated films?
4. What are the traits of the defeatist character in animated films?
5. To what extent is there a relation between the content of animated films and the development of a defeatist personality?

Research objectives

1. To identify current political changes in the Arab region.
2. To determine threats to the Arab personality.
3. To make recommendations for the production of animated films that would be appropriate for the religion, language, customs and traditions of Arab communities.
4. To make recommendations for the production of animated films that could contribute to the development of a sound Arab personality based on Arab identity.

Research rationale

With the above objectives in mind, the present study has come to use a combination of survey and content analysis of animated films intended for children. Content analysis, according to Berelson(1952), is a "method which is used to describe the apparent content objectively and quantitatively". It is also described by Hussein (1983) as "a method...to discover the intellectual, cultural, political and moral background from which the media message emerges" (Alghazouly&Aldaghil:2000,3). The study applies content analysis to materials presented in animated films shown on MBC3 TV channel to try to determine the aims such materials may have been created to achieve. Thus, the study was designed to explore the effect of such films on children, particularly as regards the development of a defeatist character.

To achieve the objectives of the study, the following procedures were followed:

1. The research population was selected.
2. Relevant content categories and units were chosen, viz. cartoon characters and traits of the defeatist personality.
3. Analysis lists were compiled.
4. Content analysis was conducted to determine what a cartoon defeatist personality is like.
5. Analysis of frequencies and statistical treatment were carried out.
6. Interpretations and conclusions based on the results were made.

Limitations of study

1. By focusing on animated films presented on MBC3 TV channel, the present study limits itself to illustrating the effect of such films on children's acquisition of defeatist morals.
2. Timeline: the animated films scrutinized for the purposes of this investigation were televised from October 1, 2015-December 31, 2015.

Research sample

The research sample was selected through randomly watching animated films broadcast on the channel involved during the targeted period of time. Six episodes were chosen from each film, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Animated films analyzed

	Title of film
1	<i>The Decisive Battle</i>
2	<i>Thomas & Friends</i>
3	<i>Yogi</i>
4	<i>Spongebob</i>
5	<i>Captain Muscles</i>
6	<i>Scooby Doo</i>

Statistical adjustment of research tools

1. Validity of research tools

To ensure their validity, the finalized analysis lists were revised by five teaching staff acting as judges. The agreement ratio was 80%.

2. Reliability of research tools

The Reliability of study tools was calculated using the agreement-between-two analysts method, where another analyst is provided with the rules and procedures of analysis to calculate the agreement equation using Copper's equation, as follows:

$$\text{Agreement Ratio} = \frac{\text{number of agreement}}{\text{number of agreement} + \text{number of disagreement}} * 100$$

The agreement ratio is (83) .

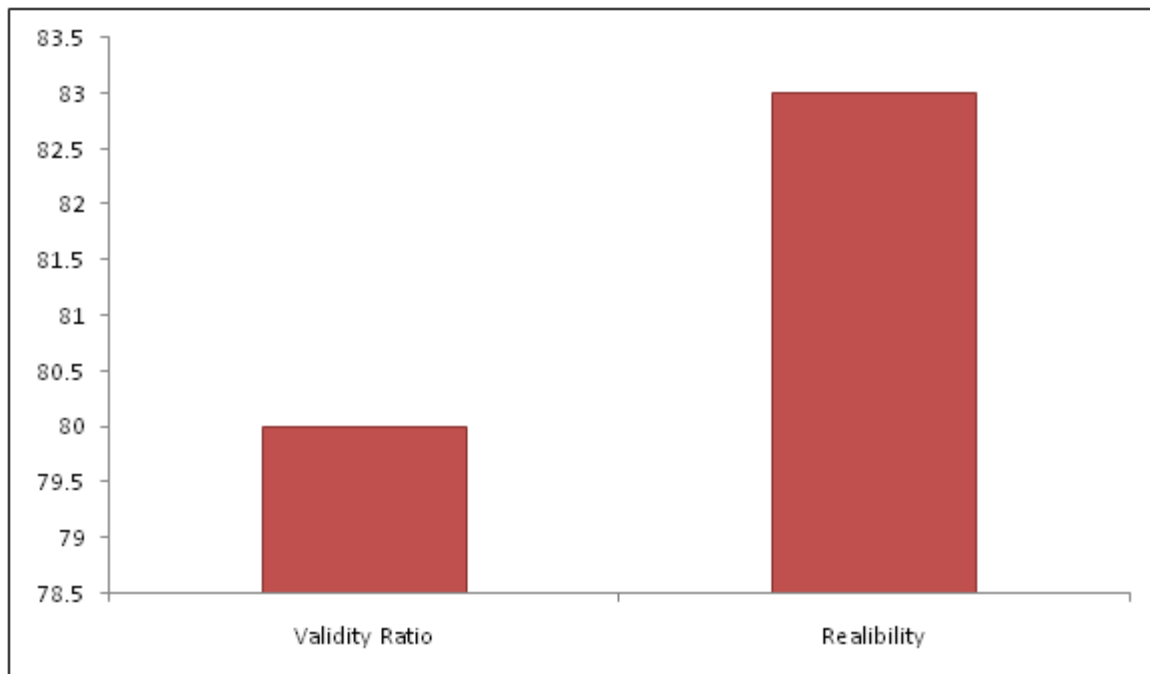


Figure 1. Statistical adjustment of research tools

Terminology

1. Animation: a series of drawings, computer graphics, or photographs of objects that when viewed quickly one after another creates the appearance of movement. They are shown on television and cinema as films or series. (Alqalini&al.:2011,6)
2. Defeatist personality: one which is weak, negative, pessimistic, depressed, lazy, unambiguous, etc.
3. Early childhood stage: a stage of human development, from the age of two to the age of six or seven years (Doherty& Hughes,2009)
4. Literary villain: a 'bad' character in a story

Alsaed (2003): a study which aims to identify educational values inculcated in children in a number of episodes of *Bakar* shown in three successive years. The descriptive method is used in the analysis of the content of these episodes. The results of the study point out that this cartoon aims to promote religious, cognitive, economic, sporting, cultural, aesthetic, and patriotic values.

Alhuwaili (2004): an attempt to identify values integrated in animated films through descriptive, analytical tools. The positive values ratios are cooperation, faith and honesty (13.3%); fluency (12.6%); vivid imagination (12.6%); and mental abilities (10%). The ratios of the negative values are waste of time (18.8%) and aggression (17.5%). The results of content analysis are cooperation (14.7%), patience (11.75%), vocabulary acquisition (9.8%). The study recommends the launching of an Arabic channel for the Arab Muslim child. Such results agreed with the opinions of a hundred Gaza mothers.

Saturnine (2004): an investigation of the negative influences of animated films which uses a survey about children who committed crimes after watching certain animated films. The study found that such films have such a negative influence on children that it may be considered one of the reasons for committing crimes.

Alghodaif (2007): a study tracing the effect of animated films on the ideological values of children through a questionnaire designed for mothers. The results show that the mothers are not quite aware of the role of such films in the construction of solid ideological values. Two-thirds of the sample did not assert the influence that animation might have on ideology construction.

Alazmi&Alomai (2008): a study that tries to ascertain the conceptions of primary school students in Kuwait of the Divine Self and the effect of animated films on those conceptions. Using the experimental method, the study involves a random sample of 200 male and female primary school students from different areas across the country who watched the film *Hercules*. The study found out that the conceptions of the Divine Self are clear and deep, which is an indication that the children receive good knowledge about Allah from their families. Animated films, it was found, affect some children's conceptions, especially as regards metaphysical issues; the film contains scenes which plant some kind of doubt and confusion in the young audience's minds.

Abdulnabi (2011): a study using content analysis to identify the role of animated films in improving cognitive aspects of late childhood (9-12 years of age). The study proves that animated films have a profound effect on improving cognitive abilities at that age. Thus, such films should be used to guide, educate and entertain children.

Alqalini et al. (2011): an attempt to use animated films to help children with a simple mental handicap (-50 to 75) acquire social skills. The study, employing the scale of social skills of the handicapped in an experimental design, found out that cartoons help improve the social skills of some handicapped children.

Ibrahim (2013): a study that investigates the effectiveness of animated films in teaching children with Down's syndrome verbal skills of listening and speaking. The experimental design in use involved an experimental group and a control group of children and applied Stanford scale. In addition, a program of a series of animated films was built by the researcher, who showed that animation has a very positive effect on the verbal communication of such children.

Commentary on previous studies

The present investigation agrees with the previous studies listed above on the following points:

1. Children should watch animated films under parental supervision, particularly as regards the moral content of those films.
2. Much of the content of animated films reflects negatively on children, psychologically and socially.
3. Spending much time watching animated films is harmful to children, wasting the child's time and making them socially-isolated.
4. It is necessary to produce animated films based on the traditions of Arab Islamic society.
5. It is necessary to produce animated films designed to improve the mental abilities of children.

On the other hand, while the previous studies reviewed focus on the effect of animated films on children's aggression and violence, the current undertaking deals with the effect of such films on the development of a defeatist personality.

Literature review

Children have become much more interested in cartoons over the years. Typically, children begin watching cartoons on television at the early age of six months, and by the age of two or three children become enthusiastic viewers. This has become a problem because a large number of children watch too much television. The cartoon shows are violent and make the children not only violent but also addictive. The children who spend too much time watching cartoons on television are more likely to develop mental and emotional problems, along with brain and eye injuries.

1. The importance of early childhood

Many studies have shown that early childhood contains many factors which affect a child's growth, creating an environment which affects him/her positively or negatively (Baghit et al.: 2010, 266). For example, it is in early childhood that many personality traits, such as leadership, dependency and control appear

(Ali:2012,128).It is also the period during which the main bases of consciousness are built; the child begins to follow the community's religious instructions and moral values and distinguishes good and evil (Jibrilet al.:2003,163).

2. The development of personality during early childhood

Child psychologists and educationalists agree that the main base for a child's personality is laid during the first early years of his/her age. This is a result of interaction and integration between the skills and predispositions the child is born with and the experiences he/she acquires from his/her family. If the construction of this base is solid and sound, the child will be able to deal with the difficulties, challenges, and problems that he/she might encounter later in life (Baghitet al.:2010,247).

Animated films may contribute to the development of that ability, since they can be very effective in improving values in children through popular cartoon characters. These films develop ideological principles, knowledge of the environment and history as well as language skills. Animated films, in brief, play a critical role in this sensitive period of a child's life (Abdulkafi (ed.) 2006: 13,12).Banadura(1993) asserts this idea in his theory of social learning, in which the child learns through imitation. Autism theory, similarly, confirms that the child identifies with the characters of the films positively or negatively (Mazeed:2008,120). Moreover, the formation of moral consciousness at the age of four, which grows through interaction with parents, gives early childhood additional importance (Abdullah:2009,100).

3. The defeatist personality

The defeatist is a lazy, spineless pessimist who fears confrontation and refuses challenges.The defeatist is a dependent person, waiting for others to solve his problems. This weak and inactive person is psychologically unstable and has no aim in life.

4. Characterization in narration

Characterization, according to Narrati.com, is the process of creating a character in a narrative work. Characters, which are the distinctive personalities involved in the events described in a story, are divided into primary and secondary characters. The former are the ones whose actions determine the plot of the story while the latter have supporting roles to provide the main characters with information, material goods, services or whatever is needed in order to advance the plot. The primary, or major, characters must possess complex personalities to create interest. If the reader can personally identify with major characters, the story carries added emotional charge. Major characters have their own motives that drive the action of the story. Conflicts occur between characters creating situations that demand resolution. As a story evolves, the personalities and motivations of major characters may undergo change, adding to the complexity of the story.

Major characters are protected by character shields - a plot device that protects them from the misfortunes perilous for minor characters. The shield can be skill, luck, paranormal force or something unexplained. Such characters can be categorized as the protagonist, tragic hero, antihero, antagonist, villain and false protagonist.

The Protagonist is the hero or heroine of the story whose progress in life is the storyline. The flaw, problem, conflict or quest that confronts the protagonist provides the substance of the story. The protagonist is usually blessed with virtues that place him/her on the side of 'good', which signifies the philosophical and moral stance that the author assumes the reader sympathizes with. The Antagonist, on the contrary, is a hero or heroine who actively opposes the protagonist, hindering the protagonist's progress toward a resolution of his problem. The antagonist, in other words, represents an opposing force that is depicted as 'evil'.

The Tragic Hero is a type of a character whose personality has some tragic flaw (hamartia) that prevents him from being what he wants to be, causing him constant suffering. The hamartia provokes the sympathy of the reader. In certain stories, an antagonist is presented as a tragic hero to justify fatal flaws. The antihero, on the other hand, is a type of a protagonist who presents himself more like an antagonist. As the story develops the reader comes to understand that the antihero is really on the side of 'good'.

The villain is the most stereotypical type of an antagonist, depicted as an utterly evil person. The villain has no scruples and hates everyone and everything. There is also an 'evil twin', i.e. a type of an antagonist who is the alter ego of the protagonist. This opposition to the protagonist multiplies the effect of conflict in the

story. The false protagonist, on the other hand, is a character who is introduced as a protagonist at the beginning of the story but removed from the storyline later on. This character is replaced by another character who is elevated to the level of protagonist.

Because of its centrality to storytelling, the character of the villain is worth further explanation. That character is usually depicted as a cruel person devoted to a life of wicked and malicious actions in the plot of the literary work. As an antagonist, the villain functions as an obstacle which the hero has to overcome at various stages of the plot. Being a complex character steeped in immorality and evil doing for his own gain at any cost, a villain may be depicted with bizarre physical traits to make him appear truly villainous while others may appear as mere mortals with a dark soul, capable of bringing terror and destruction by their evil actions. In the world of fantasy a good literary villain is less human and has an evil plan like that of the villain Voldemort in the *Harry Potter* series or the villain Sauron in *Lord of the Rings*.

5. The effect of animation on the development of a defeatist personality

Studies show that 80% of children in the Arab World spend more time watching television than studying. Dollard et al.(1939)assert through frustration theory that frustration depends on a hypothesis that aggression follows frustration(Alamir,2001,195,196). Repeated watching of shooting,killing, and bloodshed scenes leads to sad feelings and becoming prone towards these actions. Psychological and social studies which dealt with youth who perform similar actions in the United States prove this serious effect (Georges (ed.) (1999),27).

It is worth mentioning a relevant study in some detail here. The study in question, conducted by Banadura (1993), divides a group of kindergarten children into five smaller groups: (1) a group that sees a man assaulting a big doll made from rubber and filled with water verbally and physically; (2) a group that watchesthe same action through a movie; (3) a group that watches the same action through an animated film; (4) a group that watches nothing and is considered the control group; and (5) a group that watches a helpless man.After the experiment, every child was put in a situation similar to the one he watched. A group of observers registered the behavior of the children through windows. The response averages were calculated as follows:

Table 2: Response averages

	Group	Response Average
1	First group	183
2	Second group	192
3	Third group	198
4	Fourth group	52
5	Fifth group	42

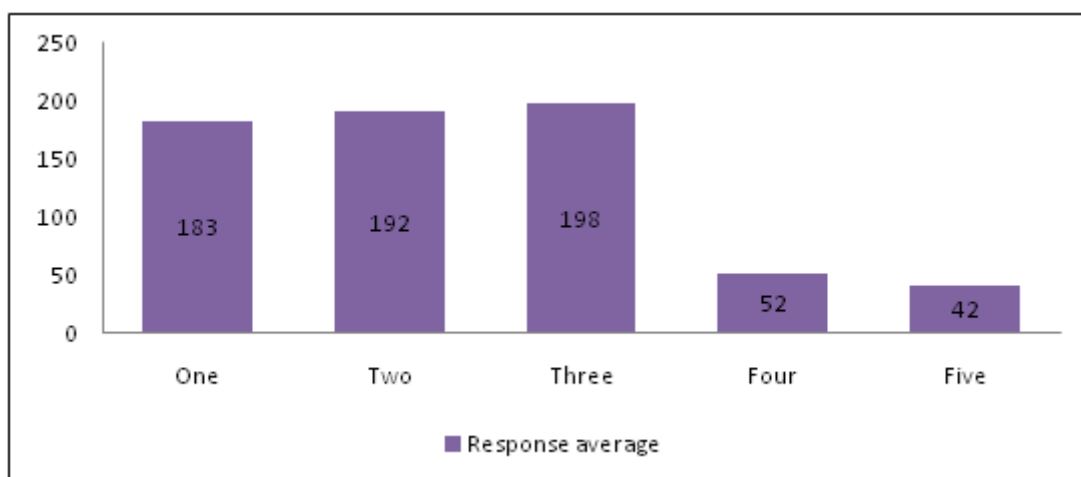


Figure 2. Response averages

As the table and graph above show, the average of responses of the children who watched the animation film is the highest. This result shows the serious effect of animation films on children. (Ghabari&AboShara:2010,203)

Current changes in the Arab region

The Arab region has been witnessing movements launched by people aiming at political, administrative and financial change to save the nations and destiny. Those Arabs aspire to the kind of constitutional changes that would create a political life free from corruption and conducive to stability, development, freedom and justice (Alomair:2011,3). However, those efforts seem to have largely deviated from the path that could lead to the goals sought. The powers which aim to perpetuate the dependence of the Arab countries upon non-Arab countries have in a sense changed the so-called Arab spring into an Arab autumn. Those enemies of the Arab world aim at controlling all the oil reserves of the Arabs and strengthening the Israel's presence and national security. The Iranians also aim to maintain their ideological presence in the Arab region (Ghaliah: 2008, 66-71). Thus, there is no doubt that the Arab world is faced with serious threats not only to its security but also to its existence.

Results

First Question: What are the key political changes in the Arab region?

The answer was obtained through a theoretical framework which includes the important political changes in the world as a whole and in the Arab region in particular. This way, it was easy to see the efforts of Western powers to change the map of the Arab world to create a new Middle East. This situation should motivate us to revise all media materials presented to our children because there are Western schemes hatched to create an Arab generation without identity or aims.

Second Question: What are the essential traits of popular cartoon characters?

The study has analyzed the key characters in the chosen animated films. The results of the analysis are as follows.

1. *The Decisive Battle*

The main character in the episodes is Leo, named the last pharaoh. He has a bracelet which enables him to enter the pharaonic era through the 'time gate'. He is the savior of the kingdom. The cartoon, which is full of dangerous implications and misrepresentations of history, provides children with false information about the history of a great civilization which contributed immensely to human advancement. This great civilization cannot be so helpless that it needs a young man from our modern era to defend it. The bracelet that gives this young man the power to save the kingdom could have been given to any other person from the same era. The implication here is that the nation involved cannot defend itself. Thus, notions of helplessness, weakness and therefore dependency are inculcated in kids, which serves colonial goals.

2. *Thomas & Friends*

A train named Thomas is the hero, a character that seems exciting but gets into a lot of trouble that could only be blamed on himself. The main characteristic of Thomas, who describes himself as a playboy, is that he always leaves the important tasks and does the one thing which is less important. The implicit idea in the episodes is the marginalization of important tasks.

3. *Yogi*

The main character, Yogi, is the savior of the world. The cartoon seems to instill into children the idea that there is a sole hero in the world and that the safety and security of the world is the responsibility of this sole character. Thus, the ideas of dependency and the world's sole power are obviously represented in the cartoon.

4. *Spongebob*

The main character in this cartoon is Spongebob, who, as the name indicates, is made of sponge, probably chosen to imply his weakness. This is evident in Spongebob not being a pivotal character; he appears weak and dependent in most of the episodes.

5. *Captain Muscles*

There are three main characters in this cartoon: Captain Muscles, Genius and his Genius's mother. Captain Muscles is a huge human creature with big muscles and a small brain, a combination that can be considered a

marginalization of the role of the brain in human life. The second character, Genius, is a small child. In spite of his name, he doesn't think well and is a follower of Captain Muscles. The third character is the mother who looks very strange; she has very thick hair that seems to imply the absence of both sight and mind.

6. *Scooby Doo*

This cartoon is about four friends and a dog called Scooby Doo. The events centers around solving the problems they face. There are two recurring female characters, Daphne and Velma. Daphne is the complete embodiment of the delicate female, with a tiny waist and thin legs and arms. She wears an outfit made of a pink and pastel purple fabric and pastel purple high heels. She has long red hair and is very pale, and stands with her hands on her hips a great deal of the time. Velma, on the other hand, has a much stockier build, with a larger waist and slighter thicker arms and legs. She wears a sweater and a skirt in a plain mustard color and thick black-rimmed glasses. She also wears knee socks. Fred and Shaggy, the two main male characters, also portray two opposites. Fred is blond and tall, with a somewhat muscular build and a very conservative style of dress. His pants always look neatly pressed and he wears a clean white shirt with a collar. Shaggy, on the other hand, is very tall and thin. His brown hair appears eternally disheveled, and his pants and shirt are bulky, appearing too big for his thin frame. When they face a problem, those characters come up with solutions that are illogical and exaggerated. The major theme of the cartoon is that the solutions to our problems exist in the hands of others.

Table 3: The essential traits of popular cartoon characters

Hero species sample	Human being	Animal	Bird	Deformed creatures	Human-like machines	Total
No.	3	-	-	2	1	6
Ratio	50%	-	-	33.4%	16.6%	100%

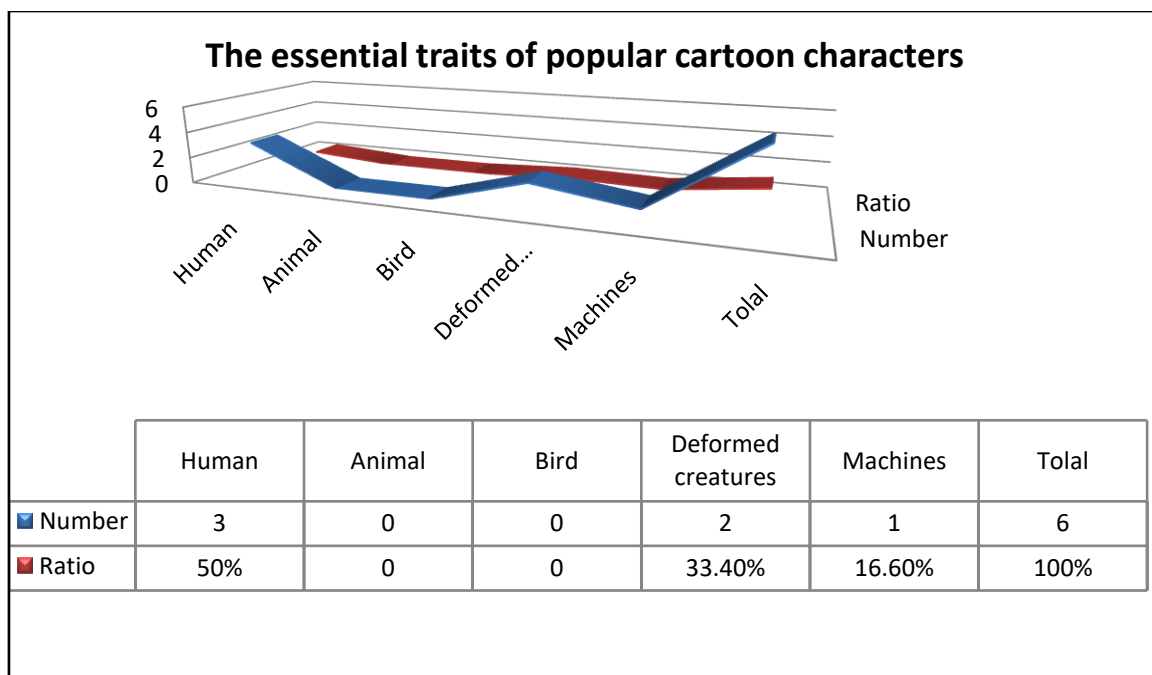


Figure3. The essential traits of popular cartoon characters

Third Question: What are the essential traits of evil cartoon characters?

The present study explored the main features of evil characters in the selected cartoons to investigate the effect of the portrayal of evil in such cartoons on children. All the villains in the six animations, it was found, nearly have the same characteristics. They are (a) very ugly creatures (animals like BooBOO in *Yogi*, deformed creatures like Volt Ghost in *Scooby Doo*, and Bikin Bottomites in *Spongebob*); (b) very weak; (c) very

stupid; and (d) a real danger to the very strong heroes. The portrayal of these weak villains as a real danger plants in the souls of children that they cannot overcome any danger without external help. This picture of the villain deepens the defeatist sense in the child's mind. After long exposure to such films, the child will be afraid of each and every thing which has an ugly or unusual appearance.

Fourth Question: What are the traits of the defeatist cartoon character?

This question is answered through the analysis list which dealt with the features of the defeatist personality.

Table 4: Traits of the defeatist cartoon character

features sample	Fear of confrontation	Loss of hope and frustration	Sense of failure	Total
No.	20	27	24	71
Ratio	28.2%	38%	33.8%	100%

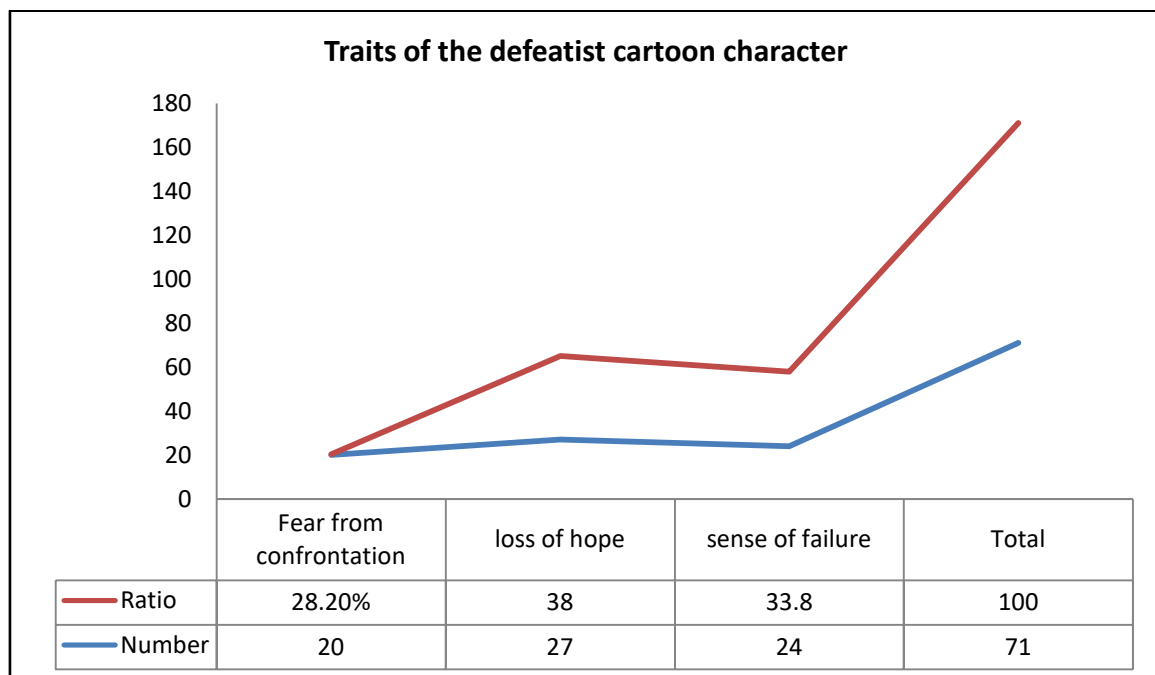


Figure 4. Traits of the defeatist cartoon character

The table above shows that the episodes contain a large number of scenes which imply defeatism. Moreover, there are silent scenes, actions, gestures and facial expressions which imply withdrawal, defeatism and resigned acceptance of failure. Repeated utterances such as "I'm a futile leader" and "What a poor man" express failure and the inability to do anything about it, loss of hope and frustration. On the other hand, the dramatic line in all the animated films under study is that we should seek the help of others to protect us and we cannot live without an alien power helping us.

Fifth Question: To what extent is there a relation between the content of animated films and the development of a defeatist personality?

The literature reviewed earlier confirmed that animation has a positive and negative effect on children in the early stages of life (Alghodaif: 2007), (Alazmi & Allomair: 2008). Researchers have found that animation, for one thing, supports the feeling of fear as the child cannot differentiate between reality and imagination. Moreover, the child would attempt to fly, leap, and generally behave in imitation of what he/she sees in cartoons. The failure to imitate such actions lead to bad feelings which may affect the future development of the child. In an attempt to corroborate these claims, three episodes from each cartoon were watched in the course of the present study to analyze the vocabulary used by the characters. It was found that the vocabulary and expressions used in the five cartoons are nearly the same. The vocabulary used express the features of a defeatist person who is weak and helpless. The following two tables show the results.

Table 5: Content analysis of vocabulary usage

word \ repetition	The Decisive Battle	Thomas & Friends	Yogi	Spongebob	Captain Muscles	Scooby Doo
Lost	8	7	6	9	8	7
Monster	11	2	4	2	7	7
Magic	9	4	5	5	5	5
Mystery	8	0	5	2	2	8
Anxious	10	4	3	7	4	4
Afraid	15	5	8	9	7	9
Alien power	10	0	9	0	0	6
run	20	5	8	10	7	9
hunted	11	0	3	2	2	10
Fail	9	6	5	8	7	7
Catastrophe	5	2	3	4	3	5
danger	10	3	7	8	9	7
surrender	5	0	4	7	6	9
dark	14	1	5	7	7	6

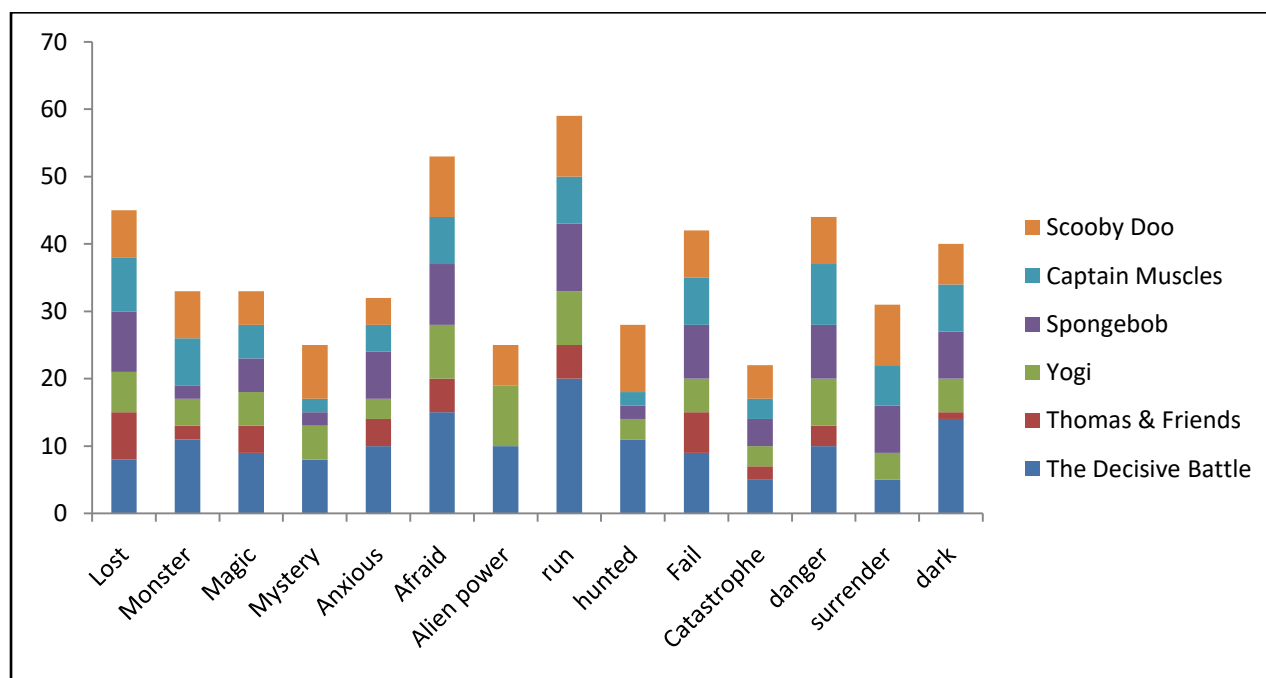


Figure5.Content analysis of vocabulary usage

Table 6: Content analysis of expression usage

word \ repetition	The Decisive Battle	Thomas & Friends	Yogi	Spongebob	Captain Muscles	Scooby Doo
I'm a failure.	9	8	11	14	12	7
I'm a very bad leader.	10	5	2	3	5	4
We will never succeed.	8	2	4	4	6	6
I'm a playboy.	9	5	3	6	0	12
I will pass to the dark	8	0	5	0	4	4

side.						
I give up.	20	3	3	5	4	5
This is our end.		0	4	4	6	6
We should surrender.	15	0	6	0	4	5
This battle ended but the war doesn't end.	4	0	2	0	3	3
Oh God, it's the end.	7	1	3	3	6	4

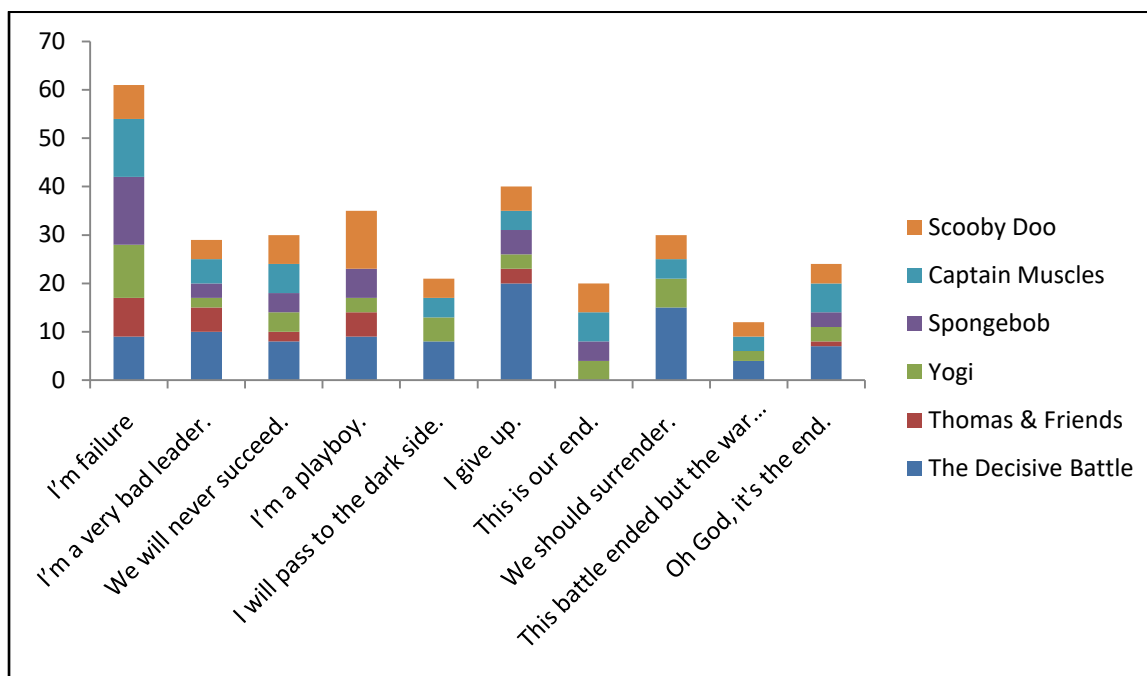


Figure6. Content analysis of expression usage

The above tables show that the episodes contain a large number of words and expressions which imply defeatism. We can notice the use of these expressions in the daily speech of children, an indication of the magnitude of the problem faced by the Arab nation.

Recommendations

1. To make sure that children do not watch harmful cartoons, parents should be made aware of the effect of animation on the linguistic, psychological, social and religious development of their children.
2. Efforts should be made to produce of animated films appropriate for Arab culture.
3. The content of foreign animated films should be revised.

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