

Digital storytelling with moral values: Investigating listening engagement in an EFL classroom using YouTube Kids

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Abstract. This study explores how sixth-grade EFL students engaged with animated digital stories and interpreted moral values during classroom storytelling activities using YouTube Kids. A qualitative descriptive design was employed with 15 sixth-grade students in one public elementary school in Indonesia. Data were collected through classroom observations, student worksheets, and a reflection sheet. The data were analyzed using deductive coding based on the behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of student engagement, combined with inductive coding to identify patterns in students' responses to moral values. The findings indicate three interconnected dimensions of engagement. Cognitive engagement was reflected in students' efforts to follow story sequences, interpret characters' actions and consequences, and connect story events with their own experiences. Emotional engagement appeared in students' expressed feelings toward particular events and characters, including fear, surprise, sadness, relief, and enjoyment. Behavioral engagement was observed through attentiveness, pointing at the screen, raising hands, smiling and nodding, repeating phrases, and verbally responding during discussions. The reflection data also showed that students interpreted moral values in context rather than uniformly. In *The Frightened Lion*, students commonly identified ideas related to avoiding negative assumptions, checking situations before reacting, and thinking positively. In *Snow White*, students identified kindness, patience, generosity, and the avoidance of jealousy and arrogance, while some also emphasized responding to wrongdoing without returning the same wrongdoing. Several students connected these interpretations with personal experiences or intended actions. The findings provide qualitative evidence of multidimensional classroom engagement and students' moral-value interpretation during digital storytelling activities. The study does not claim direct improvement in language proficiency or lasting behavioral change; rather, it highlights how animated stories can provide a context for observable participation, emotional responses, cognitive interpretation, and moral reflection in a young EFL classroom.

Keywords: digital storytelling; moral values; listening engagement; EFL classroom; YouTube Kids

Abstrak. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana siswa EFL kelas enam terlibat dalam kegiatan storytelling digital dan menginterpretasikan nilai-nilai moral melalui cerita animasi yang digunakan dalam pembelajaran menggunakan YouTube Kids. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif dengan melibatkan 15 siswa kelas enam di salah satu sekolah dasar negeri di Indonesia. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, lembar kerja siswa, dan lembar refleksi. Data dianalisis menggunakan pengodean deduktif berdasarkan tiga dimensi keterlibatan siswa, yaitu behavioral, emotional, dan cognitive engagement, serta pengodean induktif untuk mengidentifikasi pola respons siswa terhadap nilai-nilai moral. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan tiga dimensi keterlibatan yang saling berkaitan. Cognitive engagement terlihat dari upaya siswa mengikuti urutan cerita, memahami tindakan dan konsekuensi tokoh, serta menghubungkan peristiwa dalam cerita dengan pengalaman mereka sendiri. Emotional engagement terlihat dari respons perasaan siswa terhadap peristiwa dan

tokoh tertentu, seperti takut, terkejut, sedih, lega, dan senang. Behavioral engagement terlihat melalui perhatian siswa, menunjuk ke layar, mengangkat tangan, tersenyum dan mengangguk, mengulangi frasa, serta memberikan respons secara verbal selama diskusi. Data refleksi juga menunjukkan bahwa siswa menginterpretasikan nilai moral secara kontekstual dan tidak selalu seragam. Dalam The Frightened Lion, siswa mengidentifikasi nilai yang berkaitan dengan tidak membuat asumsi negatif, memastikan suatu keadaan sebelum bereaksi, dan berpikir positif. Dalam Snow White, siswa mengidentifikasi nilai kebaikan hati, kesabaran, kemurahan hati, serta pentingnya menghindari iri hati dan kesombongan. Beberapa siswa juga menghubungkan interpretasi tersebut dengan pengalaman pribadi atau tindakan yang ingin mereka lakukan. Penelitian ini memberikan gambaran kualitatif mengenai keterlibatan siswa yang multidimensional dan interpretasi nilai moral dalam kegiatan storytelling digital di kelas EFL. Penelitian ini tidak mengklaim adanya peningkatan langsung dalam kemampuan bahasa maupun perubahan perilaku jangka panjang, tetapi menunjukkan bagaimana cerita animasi dapat menjadi konteks bagi partisipasi yang dapat diamati, respons emosional, interpretasi kognitif, dan refleksi moral siswa dalam pembelajaran EFL.

Kata kunci: keterlibatan dalam kegiatan menyimak; nilai-nilai moral; pembelajaran bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL); penceritaan digital; YouTube Kids

INTRODUCTION

Listening is a fundamental language skill that supports the development of speaking, vocabulary, pronunciation, and overall language competence. However, listening may receive less attention than reading and writing in EFL classrooms, particularly in Indonesian elementary schools where literacy-based practices remain common (Suwannasit, 2019). For young learners, meaningful exposure to spoken English is particularly important because listening provides essential input for subsequent language development. Therefore, listening activities need to provide comprehensible and meaningful input while encouraging learners to actively engage with the learning process.

Storytelling offers an effective means of creating meaningful listening experiences for young EFL learners. Through narratives, learners encounter language within a contextualized sequence of events, characters, and actions. Storytelling can also encourage learners to predict events, interpret characters' actions, and construct meaning from spoken input. (Harashchuk, 2025), for example, highlights the potential of storytelling to support young learners' engagement and comprehension by presenting language through meaningful narratives. Thus, storytelling can make listening activities more contextualized and interactive rather than presenting spoken language as isolated linguistic input.

The development of digital technology has expanded the ways storytelling can be incorporated into language classrooms. Digital storytelling combines narrative, spoken language, and visual elements, allowing learners to process language input through multiple modes. Previous research generally indicates that YouTube and digital storytelling can support listening and engagement by providing accessible audiovisual input and meaningful contexts. For example, studies have reported improvements in listening comprehension among young learners using YouTube videos and podcasts (Tran, 2022; Yaacob et al., 2021), while other research has highlighted the benefits of YouTube for vocabulary development, enjoyment, confidence, and learner autonomy (Nerta et al., 2024; Yuyun & Simamora, 2021). Similarly, research on digital storytelling suggests that multimedia narratives can enhance motivation, engagement, and language learning by integrating visual and auditory support

(Moradi & Chen, 2019; Wu & Chen, 2020). More recent studies have continued to demonstrate the potential of animated and digital storytelling for young learners' listening and engagement (Faridah et al., 2025; Fitria & Afdaleni, 2025).

Although these studies demonstrate the pedagogical potential of YouTube and digital storytelling, their primary focus has been on learning outcomes or learners' general perceptions, such as listening comprehension, vocabulary development, motivation, and satisfaction. Consequently, less is known about the nature of learners' engagement during listening activities, particularly how they cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally respond to the learning experience.

To examine learners' engagement beyond measurable learning outcomes, the concept of student engagement provides a useful theoretical perspective. (Fredricks et al., 2004) conceptualize engagement as a multidimensional construct consisting of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. Behavioral engagement refers to students' observable participation, effort, attention, and involvement in learning activities. Emotional engagement concerns learners' affective reactions, including interest, enjoyment, excitement, or boredom during learning. Cognitive engagement involves the mental effort learners invest in understanding, interpreting, and connecting new information with their existing knowledge. Considering these dimensions together allows researchers to examine whether not only students participate in a listening activity, but also how they think about, feel about, and respond to the learning experience.

Within digital learning environments, YouTube Kids provides a potentially appropriate platform for young learners because it offers child-oriented audiovisual content, including animated stories and educational videos. Previous research has indicated that YouTube Kids can support children's English communication and language development when appropriate content is carefully selected (Imaniah et al., 2020; Listiani, 2023). However, existing literature has largely examined YouTube Kids in terms of its usefulness as a language-learning resource rather than on students' engagement with listening activities on the platform.

Animated stories also provide opportunities to connect language learning with moral education. Because narratives present characters, conflicts, decisions, and consequences, they can expose young learners to values such as kindness, honesty, courage, and empathy. Previous studies have shown that cartoons can communicate moral values to children through engaging and age-appropriate narratives (Abdullah, 2023), while multimedia learning videos have also been associated with children's interest and emotional engagement in moral education (Fatmawati & Raharjo, 2024). However, these studies primarily examine moral education rather than its connection with EFL listening engagement. This suggests an opportunity to examine how students respond to moral values while simultaneously engaging with English listening activities.

Despite the growing evidence supporting YouTube and digital storytelling in language education, an important gap remains. Existing studies have predominantly focused on learning outcomes, such as listening comprehension and vocabulary, or on general affective outcomes such as motivation and satisfaction. Less attention has been given to the multidimensional nature of students' engagement during listening activities, particularly among young EFL learners in formal elementary classrooms. Moreover, the potential of animated stories to connect English listening with students' responses to moral values has received limited attention. Thus, the relationship between listening engagement and moral-value interpretation remains underexplored in elementary EFL contexts.

This study addresses these gaps by bringing together two aspects that have commonly been examined separately: students' multidimensional engagement in English listening and their responses to moral values embedded in animated stories. Rather than focusing only on listening achievement or the effectiveness of YouTube as a learning tool, this study examines how sixth-grade EFL learners engage cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally with animated stories and how they respond to the moral values presented through those narratives. In doing so, the study contributes a more holistic view of animated digital storytelling as both a language-learning resource and a context for character-related reflection.

This study explores the listening engagement of sixth-grade students during English listening activities using animated stories from YouTube Kids. It also examines their responses to the moral values embedded in the stories. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do sixth-grade students engage cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally in listening activities using animated stories from YouTube Kids?
2. How do the students respond to the moral values of the animated stories?

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore students' engagement and responses to moral values during listening activities using animated stories from YouTube Kids. The qualitative approach is appropriate for examining participants' experiences, perspectives, and interactions within their natural learning context (Creswell, 2014). A qualitative descriptive design was selected because it allows researchers to provide a straightforward and detailed description of participants' experiences and responses in their natural classroom context (Kim et al., 2017).

The participants were 15 sixth-grade students from one class at a public elementary school in Indonesia. The class was selected because the listening activities were conducted as part of the regular English learning activities. All 15 students in the class participated in the learning activities and provided the data analyzed in this study. The participants were selected based on their availability within the classroom context and their participation in the instructional activities.

The study used student worksheets and reflection sheets as written instruments. The worksheet was designed to assess students' understanding of the animated stories through questions related to the characters, events, and storyline. The reflection section was designed to elicit students' personal responses to the listening activities, including their feelings, memorable parts of the stories, moral values they identified, and their personal experiences or intended actions. The instruments were developed in accordance with the objectives of the study and the characteristics of the sixth-grade learners.

Before being used in the classroom, the instruments were reviewed to ensure that the questions were appropriate to the students' English proficiency, age, and research objectives. The wording and instructions were adjusted to make the tasks understandable for the participants.

A combination of deductive and inductive coding was employed. Deductive coding was initially guided by Fredricks et al. (2004) three dimensions of engagement: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. These dimensions provided the initial analytical categories for examining students'

listening engagement. At the same time, inductive coding was used to identify patterns and variations that emerged directly from students' responses and classroom observations, particularly their responses to the moral values embedded in the stories.

Ethical considerations were addressed because the participants were elementary-school students. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the school before data collection. The students' parents or legal guardians provided informed consent for their children's participation, and the students were also informed about the study and provided assent before participating. Participation was voluntary, and students were informed that they could decline to participate without academic consequences. To protect confidentiality, students' names were not included in the research report; instead, codes were used to identify their responses. The collected data were used solely for research purposes and were handled confidentially.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings on students' engagement in listening activities using animated stories from YouTube Kids and their interpretations of the moral values conveyed. The findings are organized into two main themes. The first theme examines students' multidimensional engagement through cognitive, emotional, and behavioral evidence. The second theme focuses on how students interpreted the moral values presented in *The Frightened Lion* and *Snow White*. The analysis also considers how these dimensions of engagement were interconnected with students' moral interpretations.

Students' Multidimensional Listening Engagement

Students' engagement was examined through three dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. Student reflection sheets provided evidence of how students interpreted the stories and described their emotional responses, while classroom observation notes provided evidence of students' visible participation and spontaneous responses during the listening and discussion activities. The two sources were therefore used to capture different aspects of students' engagement rather than being treated as equivalent forms of evidence.

1. Cognitive Engagement: Interpreting Story Events and Constructing Meaning

The students demonstrated cognitive engagement through their reflective and interpretive responses to the two stories. Rather than merely recalling story events, several students interpreted characters' experiences and identified meanings beyond simple factual information. For example, one student wrote, "*Sometimes our fear is based on what we think, not what is real.*" This response suggests that the student interpreted the lion's experience by distinguishing between perceived and actual threats. Another student wrote, "*Don't judge a book by its cover,*" indicating an interpretation of the characters and events beyond literal recall. In response to *Snow White*, one student noted that "*The stepmother was jealous and hurt others and this resulted in bad consequences,*" while another wrote, "*Snow White was kind even when she was treated badly.*" These responses indicate that students were interpreting characters' actions and consequences and constructing meanings from the narrative rather than merely reproducing what happened in the stories.

The students' reflective responses further suggest that cognitive engagement involved moving from understanding story events to interpreting their implications. Students not only described what

happened to the characters but also considered why characters acted in particular ways, what consequences followed, and what lessons could be related to their own experiences. This pattern was particularly visible in responses to *The Frightened Lion*, in which some students connected the lion's fear with their own experiences of being nervous in unfamiliar situations. The stories therefore provided a narrative context through which students could organize their understanding of events and relate them to personally meaningful situations. Cognitive engagement in this study was thus expressed through students' interpretation of the narrative, evaluation of characters' actions, and construction of personal meaning from the story events.

This interpretation is broadly compatible with previous research suggesting that narrative and multimedia storytelling can support learners' engagement and meaning-making through contextualized content (Fitria & Afdaleni, 2025; Harashchuk, 2025; Moradi & Chen, 2019). However, the present findings provide a more specific illustration of how such engagement appeared in a young EFL listening context. Students' cognitive engagement was expressed not only through understanding the narrative but also through their attempts to connect characters' experiences, actions, and consequences with situations that were personally meaningful to them. Thus, the findings suggest that the narrative context and reflective activities together provided opportunities for students to construct meaning from what they listened to.

2. Emotional Engagement: Emotional Responses to Characters and Events

The reflection sheets also revealed students' emotional engagement with the narratives. Students described different emotional responses depending on the events and characters presented in the stories. While watching *The Frightened Lion*, one student wrote, "*I felt nervous when the lion was alone and afraid,*" while another stated, "*I was happy when the lion finally made friends.*" In response to *Snow White*, one student wrote, "*I was mad when the queen kicked Snow White out of the castle,*" while another expressed that she was "*touched when the prince saved her and they got married.*" These responses indicate that students' emotions were connected to specific narrative events and character experiences rather than merely reflecting general enjoyment of the videos.

The emotional responses are important because they appear to have made particular characters and events personally salient to the students. For example, fear in *The Frightened Lion* was followed in some responses by relief or happiness when the situation changed, while anger toward the stepmother in *Snow White* reflected students' evaluation of how a character was treated. This suggests that emotional engagement was not separate from students' interpretation of the narrative. Their feelings toward particular characters and events provided a basis for noticing, discussing, and evaluating what happened in the stories. In this sense, emotional engagement may have supported students' attention to the meanings embedded in the narrative, although the present qualitative data do not allow a causal conclusion that emotional engagement directly produced deeper learning.

The finding is broadly consistent with previous studies that describe storytelling and animated or multimedia narratives as contexts that can support learners' emotional involvement and attention (Abdullah, 2023; Harashchuk, 2025; Wu & Chen, 2020). The present study, however, provides qualitative evidence of how this involvement was expressed by young EFL learners: students attached specific emotions to characters' experiences and then discussed or reflected on those experiences. Thus, the emotional dimension of engagement in this study is best understood as students' affective involvement with the narrative, rather than as evidence of measurable gains in language retention or comprehension.

3. Behavioral Engagement: Visible Participation during Listening and Discussion

Behavioral engagement was identified primarily from the classroom observation notes, which recorded students' visible and spontaneous responses during the storytelling and discussion activities. The observations included students leaning forward, smiling, pointing at the screen, mimicking characters' voices, raising their hands, commenting on characters, and responding verbally to events in the stories. For example, during *The Frightened Lion*, a student responded, "Wow, the lion is scared!" while several students pointed at the screen. During the discussion, a student raised a hand and commented, "He helped his friend," followed by a personal example of helping a friend. Similar participation was observed during *Snow White*, when students smiled, nodded, repeated phrases, and reacted verbally to the characters. These observations provide evidence of students' behavioral participation during the activity, rather than simply their reported engagement after the lesson.

The observed behaviors suggest that the narrative format created multiple opportunities for students to respond while listening. Their pointing, gestures, verbal comments, and hand-raising occurred in response to specific story events rather than as isolated classroom behaviors. The visual and auditory features of the animated stories may have contributed to making these events salient and easy for students to respond to, but the observation data do not allow the effect of individual features to be separated. It can be concluded from the observations that the stories provided a stimulus-rich listening context in which students frequently responded through both verbal and physical participation.

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4. Interplay among Cognitive, Emotional, and Behavioral Engagement

The findings indicate that cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement were not expressed as completely separate forms of participation. Rather, the students' responses suggest that these dimensions could occur in relation to one another as students followed story events, responded emotionally to characters, and expressed their interpretations during classroom activities. Because the study used qualitative observation and reflection data, this relationship is interpreted as a pattern in the data rather than as a causal sequence.

The reflection sheets provide examples of how emotional responses were accompanied by cognitive interpretation. In *The Frightened Lion*, for example, students did not only report feeling afraid or relieved; several students also reconsidered the cause of the lion's fear. One student explained that negative thinking could make a situation appear more frightening than it actually was, while another student connected the story to a personal experience of hearing a noise at home and later discovering that it was only a neighbor. These responses show that emotional reactions to the story were accompanied by attempts to reinterpret the events and construct meaning from them. In other words, the students' feelings appeared to provide a starting point for thinking about why the characters acted as they did and what could be learned from the experience.

A similar relationship was visible in the students' responses to *Snow White*. One student reported feeling upset when the stepmother expelled Snow White but happy when Snow White eventually married the prince. The same response identified kindness, patience, love and care, and the avoidance of jealousy as important values, followed by a personal statement that the student wanted to be like Snow White because she had a kind heart. Thus, the emotional response was accompanied by an evaluation of the characters' actions and a personal interpretation of the moral meaning of the story.

The observation data provide complementary evidence for the behavioral dimension of this process. During the viewing and discussion activities, students were observed pointing at the screen, responding verbally to story events, raising their hands, smiling or nodding, and participating in follow-up activities. For example, a student responded, "He helped his friend," while raising a hand during the discussion of *The Frightened Lion*. During *Snow White*, students showed visible reactions to the treatment of Snow White, including leaning forward and verbally commenting on the queen's behavior. These observations suggest that some students' interpretations and emotional responses were also expressed through observable participation during classroom interaction.

Taken together, the two data sources suggest a recurring pattern in which story events provided material for students to think about, emotional reactions made particular events personally salient, and classroom interaction created opportunities for students to express their interpretations. This pattern was especially apparent when students encountered actions that involved fear, kindness, unfairness, or jealousy. The multimodal nature of the animated stories may have contributed to this process by presenting characters' actions, voices, and narrative events together, thereby providing contextual cues that students could use to interpret what happened. However, the present data do not allow the researchers to determine whether the visual or auditory features themselves caused particular forms of engagement.

Importantly, the relationship among the three dimensions should not be understood as a fixed progression from cognitive to emotional to behavioral engagement. The data instead suggest that the dimensions could overlap during the listening activities. A student could react emotionally to an event, reconsider its meaning, and then express that interpretation through a verbal response or discussion. Conversely, classroom discussion could provide an opportunity for students to articulate an interpretation that had developed while watching the story. This interconnectedness helps explain why the students' listening engagement was visible not only in their comprehension of story events but also in their emotional responses and participation in classroom interaction.

This finding also provides a bridge to the second theme of the study, namely students' interpretation of moral values. The moral meanings identified by the students did not appear only as abstract statements about being "good" or "bad." Instead, they were often connected to specific story events and characters, emotional reactions to those events, and students' own experiences or intended actions. For example, students' responses to fear in *The Frightened Lion* were connected to reflections about negative thinking and personal experiences, while responses to *Snow White* included evaluations of kindness, jealousy, and responding to mistreatment. The interplay among cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement therefore appears to have created opportunities for students to move from following the story to interpreting what the characters' experiences might mean in their own lives.

Overall, the findings suggest that digital storytelling provided a context in which listening, emotional response, and classroom participation could occur together. Rather than demonstrating that digital storytelling directly caused higher engagement, the data indicate that the animated narratives created

opportunities for students to attend to story events, respond to characters, discuss their interpretations, and connect those interpretations with moral meanings. This interpretation is consistent with the multidimensional view of engagement proposed by Fredricks et al. (2004), while remaining cautious about claims that cannot be established from the present qualitative data.

Students' Interpretation of Moral Values in the Animated Stories

1. The Frightened Lion: From Fear to Personal Reflection

In *The Frightened Lion*, students' moral interpretations were primarily associated with fear, negative assumptions, and the importance of reconsidering situations before reacting. The students did not simply describe the lion as being afraid; several responses interpreted the cause of the fear and drew a lesson from how the situation was resolved. For example, one student explained that the lion was initially afraid because he thought there was a monster, but later realized that what he feared was only a small frog. Another student concluded, "*Jangan berfikir negatif sebelum kita memastikannya*" ["Do not think negatively before making sure"]. The same student connected the story to a personal experience in which a noise at the bedroom window initially caused fear but was later discovered to have come from a neighbor.

This response is significant because the moral interpretation was constructed from the relationship between the character's experience and the student's own experience. The student first recognized the emotional dimension of the story, then reconsidered the cause of the lion's fear, and finally applied the lesson to a real-life situation. Thus, the moral value was not presented as an isolated rule but emerged from the interpretation of a particular narrative event. Similar patterns can be seen in other responses in which students associated the story with thinking positively and not becoming easily frightened.

The findings suggest that the narrative conflict in *The Frightened Lion* provided a concrete situation through which students could discuss fear and the consequences of making assumptions. The animated format may have supported this interpretation by presenting the characters, actions, and sequence of events together, giving students contextual information from which to understand the situation. This interpretation is in line with (Moradi & Chen, 2019), who describe digital storytelling as a form of language learning that combines narrative and multimedia elements, and with (Harashchuk, 2025), who emphasizes the role of storytelling in providing meaningful contexts for young learners' engagement and comprehension.

Importantly, the students' responses varied in emphasis. Some focused on overcoming fear, while others emphasized positive thinking or checking a situation before drawing a conclusion. This variation suggests that students did not necessarily derive one identical moral message from the story. Instead, they constructed somewhat different interpretations from the same narrative event. Such variation is particularly relevant to moral education because it indicates that animated stories can provide a starting point for discussion rather than functioning as a single-direction source of moral instruction.

2. Snow White: Kindness, Jealousy, and Moral Evaluation

Students' interpretations of *Snow White* were more explicitly focused on interpersonal values, particularly kindness, patience, love, and care, and the negative consequences of jealousy and arrogance. Several students evaluated the stepmother's treatment of Snow White as wrong while positioning Snow White's kindness and patience as desirable qualities. For example, one student

described feeling upset when the stepmother expelled Snow White and happy when Snow White eventually married the prince. The same student identified kindness, patience, love and care, and avoiding jealousy as important lessons, and stated that they wanted to be like Snow White because she had a kind heart.

Other responses similarly evaluated the characters' behavior. One student stated that "we should not be arrogant or jealous" and explained that they would act like Snow White because she was kind and helpful. Another student interpreted Snow White's behavior as an example of not responding to wrongdoing with wrongdoing, writing that Snow White's kindness meant that she did not repay her stepmother's evil actions.

The responses demonstrate a process of moral evaluation. Students identified specific actions as desirable or undesirable and used those actions to formulate broader principles. Jealousy was interpreted as harmful, while kindness and patience were associated with positive behavior. This process can be seen particularly clearly in the response of S15, who wrote that one should "*Tetap berbuat kebaikan meskipun dijahati*" ["Continue doing good even when treated badly"] and concluded that "*kejahatan tidak perlu dibalas dengan kejahatan*" ["evil does not need to be repaid with evil"].

At the same time, the students did not all respond to the moral dilemma in the same way. Some students stated that they would behave like Snow White because she was kind or patient, whereas others said that they would not. For instance, S2 explained that they would not behave like Snow White because Snow White was patient whereas they were not. Another student stated that they would not act like Snow White because they would prefer to defend themselves. These differences are important because they indicate that students were not merely reproducing a predetermined moral lesson. Their responses reflected individual judgments about how a person should respond to unfair or harmful treatment.

This finding can be related to (Abdullah, 2023) discussion of cartoons as a medium for communicating moral values to young children. It also corresponds with (Yaacob et al., 2021), who highlight the use of video-based materials with young learners in listening contexts. In the present study, however, the important point is not simply that students recognized moral values in a cartoon. Rather, the students' written responses show that they evaluated character behavior and, in some cases, considered whether they would make similar choices themselves. This provides stronger qualitative evidence of moral interpretation than simply identifying words such as "kindness" or "patience."

The classroom observations further support this interpretation. During the *Snow White* activity, students responded verbally to the characters' behavior, including the comment "The queen is mean!" while leaning forward during the follow-up discussion. Students also commented that Snow White was nice to others, smiled and nodded, and some repeated phrases from the story. During the wrap-up activity, one student stated, "I want to be kind like her," while writing on paper. These observations show that moral evaluations were also expressed through classroom participation rather than appearing only in the written reflection sheets.

3. Connecting Moral Interpretation with Personal Experience

A notable pattern across the two stories was the students' tendency to connect narrative events and moral values with their own experiences, perspectives, or intended actions. This connection was more

explicit in some responses than others, but it provides an important link between students' engagement with the stories and their interpretation of moral meaning.

In *The Frightened Lion*, personal connection occurred through experiences of fear and uncertainty. One student described being frightened by a noise at home before discovering that it came from a neighbor. The experience closely resembled the lion's mistaken assumption in the story and allowed the student to reinterpret fear as something that can result from an incorrect assumption. In this case, the moral interpretation emerged through comparison: the student related the character's experience to a personal situation and used the similarity between the two events to formulate a lesson.

In *Snow White*, personal connection was more often expressed through intended behavior. Some students stated that they wanted to be like Snow White because she was kind, while others considered whether they would respond patiently or defend themselves when treated unfairly. S1, for example, expressed a desire to be like Snow White because of her kindness. S8 similarly interpreted Snow White's refusal to respond to wrongdoing with wrongdoing as a behavior worth following and stated that people should not repay evil with evil.

The classroom observation data provide another indication of this connection between narrative and personal relevance. During the discussion of *The Frightened Lion*, one student responded, "He helped his friend," while raising a hand, and the observation notes indicate that the student mentioned a time when they had helped a friend. During the final activity, some students connected the story to real-life situations while writing their responses.

These patterns suggest that moral interpretation was closely related to the multidimensional engagement discussed in Section 1.4. Cognitive engagement enabled students to interpret character actions and narrative consequences; emotional responses made particular events meaningful to them; and classroom participation provided opportunities to articulate those interpretations. The moral meaning emerged through an interaction between the narrative and the students' own perspectives rather than simply being transmitted by the story.

This interpretation is broadly compatible with (Yaacob et al., 2021), who examined the use of YouTube and video podcasts in listening comprehension among young learners, and with (Imaniah et al., 2020), who discussed YouTube Kids in relation to young children's English communication development. It also corresponds with (Fitria & Afdaleni, 2025), who describe digital storytelling as involving learners in constructing meaning through multimedia narratives. In the present study, the students' reflections extend this perspective by showing that meaning construction was not limited to understanding the English-language content. Students also used the narrative situations as a basis for discussing values, judging characters' behavior, and considering their own experiences or possible actions.

However, the data do not demonstrate that students had permanently adopted or internalized these moral values. The evidence is limited to their immediate written reflections and classroom responses, and the study did not examine whether these interpretations resulted in sustained behavioral changes. Therefore, the findings are best understood as evidence that the animated stories created opportunities for students to recognize, evaluate, and personally relate to moral values during the listening activities. This cautious interpretation is consistent with the qualitative nature and scope of the present study.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study suggest several pedagogical implications for English language teachers working with young EFL learners. First, animated stories can be used not only as sources of listening input but also as stimuli for multidimensional student engagement. The findings showed that students' engagement was expressed through cognitive interpretation of story events, emotional responses to characters and situations, and observable participation during viewing and discussion. Therefore, teachers may consider selecting short and age-appropriate animated stories that contain clear narrative events, character actions, and meaningful conflicts. Rather than treating the video as supplementary material for listening comprehension only, teachers can use story events as prompts for students to notice, interpret, and respond to what they hear and see. This approach is consistent with the finding that students' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement could overlap during the listening activities, particularly when students responded to salient events and characters.

Second, the findings indicate the importance of providing opportunities for students to articulate their interpretations after and during listening. Teachers can complement conventional comprehension questions with guided reflection and discussion prompts that ask students what they felt, why a character acted in a particular way, what they learned from the situation, and whether they have experienced or might encounter a similar situation. Such prompts can move students beyond recalling characters and events toward interpreting narrative meaning and connecting the story with their own perspectives. In the present study, students' reflections showed that moral interpretation sometimes emerged through this personal connection. For example, a student related the lion's mistaken fear to a personal experience and used the similarity between the two situations to formulate a lesson. Thus, guided reflection can serve as a bridge between listening comprehension, personal response, and meaning construction.

Third, animated stories may provide opportunities to integrate English language learning with moral reflection when the selected stories contain values that are relevant and understandable to young learners. Teachers can use character actions, conflicts, and consequences as starting points for discussing values such as kindness, patience, honesty, or the consequences of negative assumptions. However, moral discussion should remain open to students' interpretations rather than requiring a single predetermined response. The findings from *The Frightened Lion* and *Snow White* indicate that students did not merely identify moral values but sometimes evaluated characters' choices and related them to their own experiences or intended actions. Therefore, digital storytelling can be positioned as a context for language practice and moral reflection, while teachers should avoid assuming that students' immediate reflections necessarily indicate lasting changes in moral behavior. The present data support the use of animated stories to create opportunities for students to recognize, discuss, and personally relate to moral values, rather than to claim direct or long-term character development.

Study Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study involved only 15 sixth-grade students from one class in a single public elementary school. The findings reflect the experiences and responses of this particular classroom context and should not be assumed to represent young EFL learners in other schools, age groups, or educational settings. Rather than providing broad generalizations, the findings offer contextual insights into how students engaged with and interpreted animated stories during English listening activities.

Second, the study focused on two animated stories, *The Frightened Lion* and *Snow White*. The themes, characters, conflicts, and moral values presented in these stories may have influenced the types of responses expressed by the students. Other story genres, narrative structures, or digital media may generate different forms of engagement and moral interpretation. Therefore, the findings should be understood in relation to the specific stories and instructional context examined in this study.

Third, the data were collected through classroom observations, student worksheets, and reflection sheets, which primarily captured students' immediate responses during and after the listening activities. These sources provided evidence of students' interpretations, emotional responses, and observable participation, but they did not allow the researchers to determine whether the engagement or moral interpretations were sustained over time. In particular, the study did not examine long-term changes in students' listening development, moral understanding, or actual behavior. Future research could address these limitations by involving students from multiple schools and educational contexts, using a wider range of animated stories, and incorporating longitudinal or follow-up data to examine whether students' interpretations and engagement are maintained beyond the classroom activities.

CONCLUSION

This study explored sixth-grade students' engagement in English listening activities using animated stories from YouTube Kids and examined how they interpreted the moral values presented in the stories. The findings indicate that students' listening engagement was multidimensional. Cognitive engagement was reflected in students' efforts to interpret story events, character actions, and narrative consequences. Emotional engagement appeared through students' feelings and reactions toward particular characters and events, while behavioral engagement was observed through their attention, verbal responses, hand-raising, physical reactions, and participation in follow-up activities. These dimensions were interconnected rather than occurring as a fixed sequence, suggesting that students could think about, feel about, and respond to story events within the same learning experience.

The findings also show that students were able to identify and interpret moral values through the animated stories. In *The Frightened Lion*, students related the character's fear to negative assumptions and the importance of reconsidering a situation before reacting. In *Snow White*, students evaluated characters' actions in relation to kindness, jealousy, fairness, and responses to mistreatment. Some students further connected these moral interpretations with their own experiences or intended actions. These findings suggest that moral meaning was constructed through students' engagement with narrative events and their own perspectives, rather than simply received as a lesson from the stories.

Therefore, the study suggests that animated storytelling can provide a meaningful context for combining English listening activities with opportunities for emotional response, classroom participation, and moral reflection. The contribution of the study lies not in demonstrating that animated stories directly improve language proficiency or produce lasting behavioral change, but in showing how young EFL learners can engage with listening materials across cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions while interpreting moral meanings. Given the contextual nature of the study, these findings should be understood as qualitative insights into the potential of animated stories to support integrated language-learning and reflective classroom practices. Further research involving broader contexts, additional story types, and longer-term observation is needed to examine whether these patterns are sustained across different learners and learning environments.

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