



The Role of Cartoons in Preschool Education: An Analysis in Terms of Self-Care Skills

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Abstract: This study aims to examine how and to what extent self-care skills—targeted for development in early childhood—are presented in two locally produced animated series broadcast on TRT Kid: *Niloya* and *Elif and Friends*. A qualitative research design was employed using the document analysis method. Criterion sampling, a purposive sampling technique, was used to select episodes whose titles suggested inclusion of self-care themes, based on the 2013 Turkish Ministry of National Education Preschool Curriculum. A total of 14 episodes (7 from each series) were selected. Data analysis was conducted using Dawson's (2009) Descriptive Analysis Stages. Recurring patterns, key expressions, and ideas related to self-care were coded and categorized by two independent experts. Inter-coder reliability, calculated using Cohen's Kappa, was found to be 94% for *Niloya* and 79% for *Elif and Friends*, exceeding the 70% threshold suggested by the literature (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Findings indicate that both series present self-care behaviours in a developmentally appropriate manner using visual and auditory elements. Specific behaviours such as tooth brushing, hand washing, dressing appropriately for the season, organizing one's room, balanced nutrition, rest, using hygiene tools, safety precautions, and health maintenance are embedded naturally within daily routines. These practices are modelled through the characters rather than delivered as direct instructions. In conclusion, *Niloya* and *Elif and Friends* offer content that effectively supports the acquisition of self-care skills in early childhood and can be considered valuable visual educational tools in preschool settings.

Introduction

Bandura's social learning theory emphasizes that individuals learn behaviours, attitudes, and emotional responses by observing and modelling others. According to Bandura (1971;1977), observed motor activities are reproduced through imitation. Bandura states "Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do (Zimmerman, 2013). One of the key components of social learning theory is modelling, which refers to the process whereby individuals shape their behaviours through observing others. The effect of modelling can become especially apparent when children are exposed to animated cartoons on television without any guidance. In such cases, children may develop completely new behaviours ranging from their manner of speaking to dressing styles, from table manners to moral stances (Smith et al., 2015; Altunbay & Korkmaz, 2020).

Cartoons have a significant influence on children and quickly capture their attention. Therefore, the more interested children are, the more their capacity for observation is sharpened (Ghilzai, Alam, Ahmad et al., 2017). In this way, learning takes place through watching cartoons (Osofsky, 1998). A well-written script, effective audiovisual elements, and striking character designs enable children to form emotional bonds with cartoon characters. This leads to a tendency to imitate the character—potentially replicating their speech patterns, thought styles, body language, and even clothing choices in detail (Björkqvist & Lagerspetz, 1985).

Academic content presented in traditional schools generally does not reach such levels of impact. Even when teachers attempt to explain a subject using gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice,

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these elements are the foundational components of animated cartoons. For this reason, children seek out their favourite TV shows across channels, watch them for hours, and easily internalize their content (Björkqvist & Lagerspetz, 1985).

Cartoons with positive content can help children gain social skills such as anger management, polite speaking, helpfulness, and cooperation within groups. Well-structured storylines can also support the development of individual skills such as leadership, problem-solving, risk management, and a love of sports. When these skills are presented in engaging ways, children can internalize them more easily. In this context, cartoon characters can become long-term role models for children (Habib & Soliman, 2015).

With all these features, cartoons influence children's clothing preferences, their acquisition of behavior patterns related to gender roles, and their socialization (Wijethilaka, 2020). Furthermore, studies indicate that cartoons can have both positive and negative effects on language development (Ghilzai et al., 2017), psychological development (Valdivieso & López, 2011), physical health, cognitive abilities, and daily activities (Parvin & Islam, 2020). It has been suggested that cartoons in early childhood contribute to the development of reading and writing skills (Muslu, 2015) and help children learn concepts such as friendship, cooperation, and sharing (Şahin, 2017).). Particularly in early childhood, children tend to identify with the characters they watch and wish to act like them (Demir, 2013). Thus, the tendency to establish identification at an early age contributes to the growing interest of children in animated cartoons.

Cartoons broadcast on television have always played a significant role in the lives of many children around the world (Türkoğlu & Türkoğlu, 2022; Cesur & Paker, 2007)). According to 2013 data from the Turkish Statistical Institute, 92.5% of children aged 6–15, 94.8% of children aged 6–10, and 90.2% of children aged 11–15 watch television almost every day. Among these age groups, the most-watched type of program by children aged 6–10 is cartoons (TSI, 2013). Aware of this influence, TRT (Turkish Radio and Television Corporation) launched the TRT Çocuk (TRT Kids) channel on October 24, 2008, to broadcast content specifically for children. Between 2008 and 2015, TRT Çocuk shared its broadcast hours with TRT 4 and TRT Okul, but since 2015, it has been broadcasting 24 hours a day without interruption. TRT Çocuk offers a wide range of programs tailored to the developmental levels and needs of preschool and school-age children.

However, with the widespread adoption and increased use of digital technologies, the 2024 report titled “Children's Use of Information Technologies” by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TSI) reveals that 91.3% of children aged 6–15 use the internet, and 83.9% primarily use it to watch videos. Furthermore, 98.2% of these children reported regular use of mobile or smart phones, and 75% stated that they use these devices mainly to watch films, TV series, television broadcasts, or videos (TSI, 2024).

The high viewership rates of animated cartoons have led researchers to explore the educational potential of cartoons and their relationship with the learning outcomes outlined in educational programs. It has been observed that the animated series “Rafadan Tayfa”, broadcast on TRT Çocuk, emphasizes concepts such as politeness, friendship, companionship, cooperation, and solidarity (Karaca, 2019; Sadioğlu et al., 2018). In the cartoons “Niloya and Kuzucuk”, sports elements have been analyzed, revealing that both cartoons include references to different types of sports, related concepts and terminology, and emphasize the importance of fair competition in sporting events (Yılmaz & Çelik, 2018). In the study titled Evaluation of Cartoons Broadcast on TRT Çocuk Channel According to Developmental Areas (Cengiz et al., 2020), the content of the cartoons was assessed based on the learning outcomes defined in the 2013 preschool education curriculum developed by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE, 2013).

Preschool education programs developed by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) based on developmental principles refer to teaching techniques that consider a child's individual needs and their social and cultural contexts to create an engaging learning experience. These programs, which have been updated over the years, are designed to ensure that children attending preschool institutions grow up healthily through rich learning experiences; reach their full potential in motor, social-emotional, language, and cognitive developmental domains; acquire self-care skills—although not classified as a developmental area—and become ready for primary education (MoNE, 2013; 2024). In their recent

study on comparing the physical development and health outcomes of the revised 2024 Preschool Education Program with the previous 2013 version, Yıldırım and colleagues, (2024) indicated that there is only one outcome that was not included in the updated 2024 Preschool Education Program, but was included in other outcomes of the revised program.

In addition to supporting children's development, the program also aims to prevent potential developmental delays across all areas, thus making it a multifaceted program with both supportive and preventive dimensions. Although self-care skills are not formally categorized as a developmental domain, they are addressed developmentally due to their direct relationship with the four main developmental areas (cognitive, language, social-emotional, and psychomotor). The use of appropriately designed animated cartoons for educational purposes can contribute to achieving the program's learning outcomes, support children in developing self-care habits, and facilitate the involvement of parents in this process. Therefore, this study aims to examine how self-care-related learning outcomes are addressed in animated cartoons.

Method

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design, specifically employing document analysis, to determine the frequency with which self-care learning outcomes are represented in animated cartoons. The documents analysed were cartoons broadcast on TRT Kid (TRT Children's Channel). As noted by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), and Bryman (2012), social media, radio, newspapers, cartoons, films, videos, and photographs are considered visual documents and are categorized as popular culture documents.

Data Source (Document)

This research utilized criterion sampling, a purposive sampling technique. Criterion sampling involves systematically selecting samples based on specific criteria that align with the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2014). In this approach, data possessing characteristics relevant to the study's objective are purposefully chosen (Büyükoztürk et al., 2023). Accordingly, the cartoon episodes selected as data sources were chosen based on three criteria: being locally produced, having high viewership rates, and containing titles indicative of self-care-related content. It was assumed that the episode titles reflected the content, and episodes with titles presumed to relate to self-care learning outcomes were included. Based on these criteria, two of the most-viewed cartoons among eight locally produced preschool series aired on TRT Kid—Niloya and Elif and Friends—were selected as the sample (TRT Kid, 2024). These two cartoons have been among the most popular productions on TRT Kid over the years and are particularly followed with interest by preschool-age children. Since Niloya and Elif and Friends are local productions, they include cultural elements and convey social values and daily life skills in an engaging manner. Additionally, their sustained popularity indicates their high potential to capture children's attention and contribute to the learning process.

Niloya is a Turkish animated series that follows the joyful and educational daily adventures of a cheerful and curious girl who loves nature and lives with her family and friends. Targeted at children aged 3–6, the series aims to teach values such as love, sharing, environmental awareness, and problem-solving through engaging narratives.



Elif and Friends is another animated series that centres around a girl named Elif and her Friends as they experience educational and entertaining adventures both at school and in daily life. This series is designed to instill values such as friendship, responsibility, sharing, love for nature, and basic life skills in preschool-aged children.

Data Collection Process

The data set for this study comprises selected episodes from Elif and Friends (176 episodes) and Niloya (184 episodes) that thematically align with self-care skills, as inferred from their titles. A total of 14 episodes—seven from each series—were selected based on their relevance to the eight self-care

learning outcomes outlined in the Preschool Education Curriculum developed by the Turkish Ministry of National Education.

Table 1. Overview of episode content in the analyzed cartoons

Niloya	Elif and Friends
	
<p>Achoo Winter has arrived, and Niloya has caught a cold. She is sneezing so much that she can barely speak. She wants to go outside and play in the snow, but her mother doesn't allow it because she is sick. So, Niloya decides to bring the snow indoors and transforms her room into a winter wonderland using materials she finds at home.</p>	<p>Personal Belongings After lunch, Kerem accidentally drops his toothbrush into the trash can. He asks his friends if he can borrow theirs, but no one agrees. Elif says she doesn't want to share her toothbrush. Kerem objects, but Elif explains that a toothbrush is a personal item—and personal belongings belong only to their owner.</p>
<p>Shoelaces Niloya's shoelaces come undone, but she can't tie them because she doesn't know how. However, she's too embarrassed to admit it. She continues to play with her laces untied, but keeps tripping and falling, which prevents her from enjoying her playtime. In the end, Niloya decides to learn how to tie her shoelaces.</p>	<p>Early to Bed, Early to Rise Elif wakes up late and is late for school. She feels sleepy on the way and is drowsy and distracted during class. She struggles in games and even falls asleep, only to be woken up by a ping-pong ball. When she gets home, she feels sad for missing out on the fun. Her mother tells her that if she goes to bed early, she'll feel more energetic in the morning. Elif decides to start going to bed earlier.</p>
<p>A Cold Winter Day It's a freezing winter day, and Niloya and Tospik are shivering from the cold. Still, the snow outside looks so beautiful that they can't resist going out. They bundle up and head outside. Mete is hesitant to join them because he hates feeling cold and wishes he had self-heating clothes. Niloya soon realizes that moving around keeps her warm. Together, they play snowball fights and race sleds. After having lots of fun, it's time to return home for their mother's hot soup. As they warm up, they decide that winter may be cold—but it can also feel wonderfully warm.</p>	<p>Don't Leave It Unfinished One morning, Elif has trouble walking in her room because the floor is messy. At school, during a sculpture activity, she hesitates about what to make and starts building a spaceship. She leaves for recess without finishing, and when she returns, her modeling clay has dried out. She regrets not completing her work and learns the importance of finishing tasks on time. When she gets home, she tidies up her room and decides not to leave things unfinished again.</p>
<p>I Ate Too Much Candy Niloya has eaten too much candy, and now she has toothache. However, she doesn't want to go to the dentist. She waits until the pain gets so bad that she can hardly speak. Eventually, she agrees to go to the dentist—and she's glad she did, because she ends up really liking the experience.</p>	<p>Little Chefs On cooking activity day at school, the children are excited to make cookies together. Elif and her friends are thrilled by the news. Kerem even suggests making baklava after the cookies. However, they soon realize that baking cookies isn't as easy as they thought—getting eggs, cracking them, and pouring flour are fun but challenging tasks. Everyone is curious to see how the cookies will turn out.</p>
<p>Roller Skates Niloya is new to roller skating and doesn't feel very confident, so she can't skate like Mete and Murat. She practices slowly, making small attempts. She also wants to jump off the ramp like them but doesn't have the courage. When Tospik ends up in danger at the bottom of the ramp, Niloya panics and doesn't know what to do.</p>	<p>Protect Your Health, Protect the World Elif and her friends go on various adventures about healthy eating, hygiene, and protecting the environment. They learn the importance of staying clean in nature, the value of recycling, and the necessity of adopting healthy habits. Through a fun and engaging narrative, children are encouraged to become more aware of these issues and to integrate these habits into their daily lives.</p>
<p>Cleanliness Is Health While picking blackberries, Niloya, Mete, and Murat ignore Niloya's brother when he tells them to wash their hands. Niloya doesn't see it as important. Their mother reminds them</p>	<p>Never Without My Coat Elif has gotten used to waking up early and going to school, but she doesn't like wearing her coat. Her mother tries to convince her, but Elif refuses. She is excited about a small</p>

that invisible germs can be dangerous. After picking, their hands and faces are dirty. Their mother explains that while the stains are harmless, germs can easily spread. Niloya and Mete wash up and decide to always wash their hands before and after playing.

Bad Breath

Lately, Niloya has been forgetting or postponing brushing her teeth. Her breath starts to smell bad, though she doesn't realize it. While reciting poems to her friends, each of them becomes uncomfortable because of the smell. Niloya needs to realize her mistake and brush her teeth as soon as possible!

gymnastics competition at school. However, when it's her turn, she realizes she's not feeling well—her voice is hoarse, and she has a fever. Her teacher, İpek, doesn't allow her to participate in the event. Elif is very upset because she had been looking forward to it all day.

Honey Milk

Elif is tired of drinking milk. At school breakfast, milk is served again, and she considers giving hers to Kerem. However, a basketball contest before breakfast promises an extra milk prize for the winner. Elif gives her all and wins the competition. Through this experience, her opinion about milk completely changes.

The episode contents presented in Table 1 were analysed based on their alignment with the eight self-care learning outcomes specified in the Preschool Education Curriculum of the Turkish Ministry of National Education, as outlined in Table 2. Given that it was presented under a separate heading and does not exhibit substantial differences in content from the revised curriculum in 2024, this study takes the learning outcomes of the 2013 curriculum as its primary reference.

Table 2. Learning Outcomes and Indicators for Self-Care Skills

Outcome No	Learning Outcome	Indicator
1	Applies hygiene rules related to their body.	Brushes hair. Brushes teeth. Washes hands/face. Manages toileting needs.
2	Manages tasks related to dressing.	Take off clothes. Put on clothes. Opens buttons. Closes buttons. Unties shoelaces. Ties shoelaces.
3	Makes necessary arrangements in living spaces.	Uses household/school items neatly and carefully. Tidy up household/school items. Folds, hangs, and organizes items at home/school.
4	Eats a sufficient and balanced diet.	Eats/drinks adequate amounts of food and beverages. Tries to eat during meal times. Avoid unhealthy food and beverages. Follows table manners.
5	Explains the importance of rest.	States what activities help them rest. Participates in relaxing activities. Explains the consequences of not resting.
6	Uses necessary tools and materials for daily living skills.	Uses materials related to personal hygiene. Uses tools and equipment related to environmental cleanliness.
7	Protects self from dangers and accidents.	States what to do to stay safe from dangers and accidents. Knows basic safety rules. Avoids dangerous situations, people, and habits. Seeks help in case of danger or accident.
8	Takes precautions regarding their health.	States what needs to be done to stay healthy. Explains the consequences of not taking care of their health. Acts to protect their health.

Data Analysis

This study sought to answer the following two main research questions:

⊙ How frequently do the cartoons Niloya and Elif and Friends, broadcast on TRT Kid, include the self-care learning outcomes outlined in the Preschool Education Curriculum of the Turkish Ministry of National Education (MoNE)?

⊙ How are messages related to self-care skills conveyed in the cartoons Niloya and Elif and Friends?

In line with the research questions, the data analysis was carried out according to Dawson's (2009) Descriptive Analysis Stages, based on whether the selected episodes included learning outcomes related to self-care skills. Accordingly, all episodes were listed by the researchers, and those containing themes related to self-care skills were identified. A total of 14 episodes were individually and thoroughly examined. In each episode, recurring patterns, key expressions, and ideas related to self-care were coded. These codes were then matched with relevant learning outcomes and performance indicators by

two independent field experts and grouped accordingly. To determine inter-coder reliability, the Cohen's Kappa coefficient formula was applied using the following calculation: $\text{Agreement} / (\text{Agreement} + \text{Disagreement}) \times 100$.

As a result of this calculation, the inter-coder agreement rate was found to be 94% for Niloya and 79% for Elif and Friends. These percentages exceed the generally accepted minimum threshold of 70% in the literature (Miles & Huberman, 1994), thereby supporting the reliability of the study.

Results

The 14 episodes included in the scope of the study (seven from each of the two different cartoons) were watched in their entirety, and their content was analyzed to determine whether they included self-care skills outcomes specified in the Ministry of National Education's (2013; 2024) Preschool Education Program. The findings were matched with the relevant outcomes and presented in tables. The observed self-care outcomes and the ways in which these outcomes were conveyed were detailed. In addition, direct quotations from the verbal expressions in the cartoons were included to exemplify how self-care messages were communicated.

Table 3. Frequency Values of Self-Care Skills Learning Outcomes in the Niloya Cartoon

No	Learning Outcome	f
LO1	Applies hygiene rules related to the body.	4
LO2	Performs tasks related to dressing.	2
LO3	Makes necessary arrangements in living spaces.	1
LO4	Eats adequately and in a balanced manner	2
LO5	Explains the importance of rest.	2
LO6	Uses tools and materials necessary for daily life skills.	2
LO7	Protects oneself from dangers and accidents.	2
LO8	Takes precautions related to personal health	3

When evaluating the presence of self-care skills outcomes in the analyzed episodes of the cartoon Niloya, it was found that the most frequently featured outcome was "Applies hygiene rules related to the body" (f=4). This was followed by the outcome "Takes precautions related to personal health" (f=3). In addition, the outcomes "Performs tasks related to dressing," "Protects oneself from dangers and accidents," "Explains the importance of rest," and "Uses tools and materials necessary for daily life skills" were each observed at the same frequency (f=2). The outcome "Makes necessary arrangements in living spaces" was included only once (f=1).

The learning outcomes identified in Niloya are presented below with direct quotations and timestamps from the relevant episodes.

- **Applies hygiene rules related to the body**

Episode: Achoo: "I brush my teeth now." (5:11)

Episode: Cleanliness is Health "I need to take a bath." (3:36)

"I've finished my bath. / Bless you, my girl." (5:00)

"Washing hands frequently and scrubbing with soap." (5:10)

- **Performs tasks related to dressing**

Episode: Very Cold "Here I am, I put on my coat." 2.03

Episode: Shoelace "First, you hold it like this, then make a bow and tie it tightly."

- **Makes necessary arrangements in living spaces**

Episode: Achoo "I brought the snow made of cotton and foam into the house." (4:55)

- **Eats adequately and in a balanced manner**

Episode: Cleanliness is Health *"Nutrition is just as important as health. First food, then fruit."* (5:13)

Episode: Achoo *"First, you should drink your soup."*
"I love tarhana soup."

- Explains the importance of rest

Episode: Achoo *"Mom, you should stay home and rest."* (2:32)
"Now I need to rest." (4:17)

- Uses tools and materials necessary for daily life skills

Episode: Cleanliness is Health *"We should wash our hands using soap."* (3:13)
"We should chase away the germs with soap." (3:47)

- Protects oneself from dangers and accidents

Episode: Skates *"Tie your shoelaces or you'll fall again."* (0:59)
"Take precautions, don't be afraid if you fall." (2:56)
"Look ahead and take small steps." (3:05)

- Takes precautions related to personal health

Episode: I Ate Too Much Candy *"I ate too much candy today. I won't eat more and I'll brush my teeth."* (1:57)

Episode: Very Cold *"If I dress warmly, I won't get cold."* (0:23)
"Wear clothes that keep you warm, then you won't feel cold." (5:35)

Table 4. Frequency Values of Self-Care Skills Learning Outcomes in the Niloya Cartoon

No	Learning Outcome	f
LO1	Applies hygiene rules related to the body.	6
LO2	Performs tasks related to dressing.	1
LO3	Makes necessary arrangements in living spaces.	3
LO4	Eats adequately and in a balanced manner	9
LO5	Explains the importance of rest.	3
LO6	Uses tools and materials necessary for daily life skills.	2
LO7	Protects oneself from dangers and accidents.	-
LO8	Takes precautions related to personal health	9

When evaluating the frequency of self-care skills learning outcomes in the analyzed episodes of the cartoon Elif and Friends, it was found that the most frequently featured outcomes were "Takes precautions related to personal health" and "Eats adequately and in a balanced manner" (f=9). These were followed by "Applies hygiene rules related to the body" (f=6); "Makes necessary arrangements in living spaces" and "Explains the importance of rest" (f=3); "Uses tools and materials necessary for daily life skills" (f=2); and "Performs tasks related to dressing" (f=1). Within the scope of the analyzed episodes, it was determined that the outcome "Protects oneself from dangers and accidents" was not included.

The learning outcomes observed in Elif and Friends are presented below with direct quotations and timestamps from the relevant episodes.

- Applies hygiene rules related to the body.

Episode: Honey Milk *"You little bear, you never remind us. We almost forgot! You can't sit at the table without washing your hands and face."* (1:40)
"Let's go to the bathroom first." (1:53)

Episode: Personal Belongings *"Yes, mommy, I brushed my teeth."* (1:04)

"Let's go brush our teeth." (3:31)

Episode: Little Chefs • *"Let's wash our hands and go to class." (7:47)*

Episode: Protect Your Health, Protect the World • *"Wash your hands—definitely wash them—for a full 20 seconds, wash every part." (7:24)*

- **Performs tasks related to dressing**

Episode: Never Without My Coat *"In winter, the weather gets cold and we wear coats." (3:09)*

- **Makes necessary arrangements in living spaces**

Episode: Let's Not Leave It Unfinished *"I finally cleaned my room and finished my tasks. Now I can go to the park." "Elif neatly puts away her toys, makes her bed, and organizes her room." (11:21)*

Episode: Personal Belongings *"I'm going to hang this picture in my room." (2:39)*

Episode: Honey Milk *"I set up my desk last night before going to bed." (1:19)*

- **Eats adequately and in a balanced manner.**

Episode: Little Chefs: *"Enjoy your meal, everyone." (2:17)*

"It doesn't even have sugar in it. We used raisins instead. I think it tastes better this way." (3:00)

Episode: Personal Belongings: *"I ate so much, the food was delicious." (3:29)*

"Let's go brush our teeth." (3:31)

Episode: Early to Bed, Early to Rise: *"You shouldn't sleep on an empty stomach; you have to eat." (10:02)*

Episode: Never Without My Coat: *"My mom makes linden tea for me in winter because it's very healthy." (3:59)*

Episode: Honey Milk: *"Honey milk is so delicious." (2:53)*

"I also really love the breakfast at school." (3:11)

"I drink lots of milk, and I'm growing big." (4:54)

- **Explains the importance of rest**

Episode: Protect Your Health, Protect the World: *"we're sick or not feeling well, we should stay home and rest. That way, we both recover and help prevent the spread of illness without even realizing it." (9:18)*

Episode: Early to Bed, Early to Rise: *"If I don't sleep on time, I'll run out of energy." (8:22)*

Episode: Little Chefs: *"We're so tired, let's go to the garden and rest." (10:30)*

- **Uses tools and materials necessary for daily life skills:**

Episode: Personal Belongings: *"Elif, can I use your toothbrush?" No, Kerem, you can't. But why?"*

Because this is my toothbrush, and only I can use it." (4:35)

"I'll get my toothbrush and toothpaste." (3:48)

Episode: Protect Your Health, Protect the World: *"Don't touch your mouth or nose. Use a tissue when you sneeze. If you don't have a tissue, cover with your elbow." (11:13)*

"Especially the surfaces we touch—doorknobs, light switches, elevator buttons—must be cleaned frequently. Vegetables and fruits must also be washed thoroughly." (9:57)

- **Takes precautions related to personal health:**

Episode: Never Without My Coat *"Coats keep us warm so we don't get sick." (3:16)*

"Bundle up tightly, don't get cold—keep yourself warm." (5:06)

"You need to wear a coat before going outside." (5:31)

"Let's do some exercises before starting the race." (6:55)

"Can you make linden tea? Elif says she wants linden tea to get better when she's sick." (10:19)

Episode: Personal Belongings *"Personal belongings are private. Otherwise, we could spread germs to each other." (5:25)*

Episode: Early to Bed, Early to Rise: *"Esniyoruz bu hareket çok faydalı. Şimdi derin bir nefes alıp rahatlıyoruz" 3.50*

"Can I do morning exercises?" (4:20)

Episode: Protect Your Health, Protect the World: *"When our hands are dirty—especially when we're sick—there are invisible germs and bacteria. If we don't wash our hands, these germs will spread and everyone will get sick. So, we wash our hands frequently." (7:04)*

In both Niloya and Elif and Friends, various self-care skills are presented through developmentally appropriate and visually engaging content. Hygiene habits such as brushing teeth, hand washing, and bathing are frequently integrated into daily routines, helping children internalize these practices naturally. Dressing appropriately for weather conditions and promoting independence during dressing are also emphasized.

Maintaining order in living spaces, particularly in Niloya, is depicted through scenes where children are encouraged to clean and organize their personal areas. Both cartoons promote healthy eating habits by highlighting the importance of balanced nutrition and integrating related routines such as brushing teeth after meals.

The importance of rest is illustrated especially in Elif and Friends, focusing on sleep routines and resting during illness. In both productions, the correct use of hygiene tools and the notion of personal belongings are introduced in ways that help children understand boundaries and health-related responsibilities.

Although the theme of safety and injury prevention is addressed in a limited number of scenes, examples such as being cautious while skating are included. Lastly, health-related precautions—such as proper clothing, natural remedies, and exercise—are among the most emphasized themes, contributing to children's understanding of healthy living.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that animated cartoons can be an effective tool in promoting self-care skills during early childhood. In the locally produced cartoons Niloya and Elif and Friends, it was found that topics such as hygiene practices (brushing teeth, washing hands, taking a bath), dressing appropriately for the season, balanced nutrition, and sleep were visually and audibly emphasized. The characters' presentation of these behaviors as a natural part of daily life suggests, within the framework of Bandura's social-cognitive learning theory, that real or fictional characters featured in books, films, television programs, or online media can effectively convey messages to children through symbolic modelling (Tadayon-Nabavi & Bijandi, 2012). Indeed, Bandura emphasizes that individuals can learn not only behaviours but also emotional responses and social attitudes through media content (Köse, 2012; Kahya, 2018).

From this perspective, it is believed that media and cartoons serve as role models in the development of preschool children and contribute to the learning of various skills. The findings align with several studies in the literature. For example, in their study examining the vocabulary in cartoons, Temizkan and Atasoy (2016) observed that cartoons included types of words (verbs, fixed expressions, etc.) important for language development but noted that cultural elements such as idioms and proverbs were limited. This finding underlines the importance of presenting self-care concepts to children in a clear and natural manner, in addition to supporting linguistic development.

Similarly, in a study analysing sports-themed cartoons, Yılmaz and Çelik (2018) emphasized that while the content supported children's physical development, aspects related to safety and protection—

dimensions of self-care—were insufficient. This is consistent with the findings of the current study, where the learning outcome “Protects oneself from dangers and accidents” was not addressed at all in Elif and Friends and was only minimally represented in Niloya. This highlights that cartoon content should not only be entertaining or informative but must also adopt a holistic approach to children's developmental needs.

The results of our study are also in line with those of Cengiz and colleagues (2020), who examined various cartoons in the context of developmental domains. In that study, cartoons such as “Kuzucuk”, “Ege ile Gaga”, and “Kare” were analyzed and found to include only limited representations of motor development and self-care skills. These findings suggest that locally produced cartoons generally focus more on cognitive, social-emotional, and language development, while there is a need for more intentional and structured content to support self-care and motor skills.

Another supporting study was conducted by Musuloğlu and Sezgin (2024) on songs featured in TRT Çocuk programming. Music is an important learning tool in early childhood, not only enhancing children's aesthetic sensitivity but also contributing to their language, motor, cognitive, social-emotional development, and particularly self-care skills. The study revealed that while most songs published by TRT Çocuk included expressions aligned with developmental domains, certain learning outcomes were addressed only to a limited extent. One notable finding was that content related to self-care skills was less frequently featured in the songs. This observation aligns with the results of the present study. While many examples of self-care behaviours were naturally embedded in the Niloya and Elif and Friends cartoons, some outcomes (e.g., protection from accidents) were addressed in only a limited manner. Considering that both cartoon and music-based content serve as symbolic models for children, it is clear that vital life skills like self-care should be more robustly and systematically represented in such media. Therefore, it is of great importance that children's media content prepared for educators and families be enriched with messages promoting the acquisition of self-care skills.

Furthermore, cartoons also play a significant role in cultural transmission and values education. Various studies on the Niloya cartoon have shown that core values such as love, respect, helpfulness, responsibility, and tolerance are conveyed to children through themes, dialogues, and songs (Firat, 2019; Yolaşmazoğlu, 2022; Ufak & Yorulmaz, 2022). In Kutlu's (2024) study, it was noted that Niloya contributed to children's social-emotional development through its theme of love for animals.

Considering all these findings, it can be stated that while locally produced cartoons partially serve the developmental domains outlined in early childhood education programs, their content should offer a more holistic and planned structure—particularly in fostering essential habits such as self-care skills.

Conclusion

The findings of this research indicate that locally produced animated cartoons can be an important tool in promoting self-care skills during early childhood. The cartoons Niloya and Elif and Friends convey fundamental self-care skills—such as hygiene, dressing, nutrition, rest, regular routines, and safety measures—through scenes designed in accordance with children's developmental characteristics and modelled behaviours. The presentation of these skills as a natural part of daily life enables children to internalize these behaviours through observational learning. However, one notable finding is that certain self-care outcomes, especially safety-focused behaviours such as “protecting oneself from danger and accidents,” were only addressed to a limited extent. This suggests that cartoon content should be structured with a more holistic approach, encompassing all areas of self-care.

Similarly, studies analyzing songs broadcast on TRT Kids have shown that while some developmental areas are strongly supported, self-care skills are given more limited attention. This finding once again underscores the importance of using symbolic learning tools such as cartoons and children's songs in a more systematic and goal-oriented manner in the domain of self-care.

In conclusion, media content designed for children in the preschool period should not only be entertaining and educational but also deliberately structured to promote essential life skills. It is crucial that educators, parents, and media content creators collaborate to develop holistic and value-based content that is aligned with children's developmental levels.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Practitioners

- Locally produced cartoons and songs should be more closely aligned with the developmental goals outlined in the preschool education curriculum, particularly with an increased emphasis on self-care skills.
- Educators should utilize cartoons not merely as entertainment tools but as purposeful visual materials to support behaviour acquisition and reinforce learning outcomes.
- Parents should provide guidance during children's media consumption and support the reinforcement of modelled self-care behaviours through daily routines at home.
- Content producers should collaborate with child development experts and early childhood educators to ensure that cartoon narratives are pedagogically sound and developmentally appropriate.

Recommendations for Future Research

- Comparative studies could examine how cartoons impact different age groups in terms of developmental domains.
- The effectiveness of cartoons in teaching self-care skills could be compared with other pedagogical tools such as storytelling, dramatization, or interactive activities.
- Future studies may explore how media content reflects gender roles, cultural values, or moral education in relation to the development of self-care competencies.
- A cross-cultural comparison between local and international cartoon productions could provide insight into how cultural contexts influence the teaching and modelling of daily life skills.

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