

5-6 Years Old Children's Perceptions of Cartoon Reality

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to analyse the perceptions of reality of 5-6 year old children about the cartoons they watch. The study group of the research includes pre-schoolers. Within the scope of the study, a private pre-school and a public pre-school which volunteered to be a part of the study were determined, and the study was carried out with 101 randomly-chosen students. The data were collected via face-to-face interviewing. The answers responding semi-structured interviews were noted down. Expert opinion and the literature were taken into consideration for the preparation of the questions. The pictures that the children drew were also used as another data source. In the study, descriptive analysis, content analysis, and interpretative analysis were used. It was determined that the content of the cartoons varied depending on gender, that the children from the schools of low socio-economic level could not distinguish real elements from the imaginary ones while watching cartoons, and that some children were inclined to transform the elements which were imaginary into realistic ones in their minds.

Keywords: *Preschool education, cartoons, perception of reality, mediated media*

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INTRODUCTION

Cartoons contribute to children's learning and their social and emotional development. They improve children's problem-solving skills and aesthetic pleasure by helping them to enjoy their time. Moreover, they pave the way for children to learn various emotions and the ways to express them. Also, they improve children's linguistic and cognitive skills, guide them for thinking and making comparisons, and thanks to them, children impersonate some positive behaviour such as kindness, honesty, courage, benevolence, and turn them into acquisitions (Yagli, 2013). A child discovers everything for the very first time and sets eyes on everything in a different way than his/her parents do in the preschool period on his/her long way of becoming a person. One of the most prominent characteristics of a child is his/her lack of ability to distinguish real from imaginary, dream or fantasy. For this reason, s/he considers different stimuli which s/he gains from his/her environment and the TV to be realistic as well (Yavuzer, 2004). They might have imaginary beliefs like the reality of creatures -like fairies- doing magic, and that they can affect the physical world with their mind (Berk, 2015). Thus, cartoons have a crucial effect on the development process of a child who is not able to distinguish real from imaginary yet, and who creates a world in his/her mind with the influence of the things s/he watches.

In popular and scientific literature, it has been tried to discover children's way of discern real and

imaginary ontologically. This issue has been an object of interest from past to present in early childhood for parents, educationalists, psychologists, and media content creators. Cognitive theorists were first to raise a claim about this issue. Piaget suggests that children, beginning from around age three, attribute various meanings to objects different from their real functions and perceive them as different objects with what he calls "symbolic thoughts" (Piaget, 1964, 1999). Vygotsky, on the other hand, claims that imagination always designs things by using materials provided by reality (Goldstein, 1994; Rosen, Schwebel, & Singer, 1997). When children play pretend plays, in fact, they make these designs actual.

In order to define the imaginary-real distinction in the correct way, empirical studies have been carried out especially from the seventies to present (Flavell, 1986; Flavell, Green, Flavell, Watson, & Campione, 1986; Morison & Gardner, 1978). In these studies, children's perception of reality for unreal situations based on fantasy, appearance, and reflection has been analysed. Accordingly, it has been noticed that the reality of a dinosaur, for example, or a clothed ghost might be confusing. Giles (2003), on the other hand, indicated that children have difficulties in discerning some TV programs like the news. He asserted that the media tries to make what is real and what is imaginary similar.

People who had an interest in mental health also believed that it is significant to perceive reality the way it is. Jahoda (1959), the theorist of Positive Mental Health, suggests that the way a person perceives the world is a prominent factor for the conceptualization of his/her mental health. According to Jahoda, perceiving the reality the way it is supposed to be and adapting to it with a renovated mind means being mentally healthy. For this reason, the presentation of real and fantastical elements beginning from the early years of life is significant.

It can be suggested that children's development of reality in the early years of life is parallel with cognitive development (Giles, 2003). The sensorimotor stage is completed with the beginning of symbolic thoughts. Children attribute more meanings to objects than they really have (Hughes, 2010). Yet, new developed thought stands for a real, existing object. There is a common belief that children, until age 5, cannot distinguish real from imaginary (Giles, 2003). When they turn five, children start to realize that cartoons are not real, and that they consist of fantastical elements. Still, they can easily be afraid of cartoons due to their content (Kirsh, 2012). The studies show that after the age of five, children continue to confuse the real with the imaginary. Piaget (1929) claims that this confusion goes on until the age of 12. Morison and Gardner (1978), in a study that they carried out, confirmed that this confusion continues even for fourth and sixth graders.

Fantastical elements, which were presented with fairy tales and books in the past, can be presented by various, ever-changing tools nowadays (Ganea, Pickard and DeLoache, 2008). The process that has begun with television, along with books, now continues with wearable 3D VR technology. Many fantastical elements are possible to be presented in a realistic way thanks to the improvements in the software sector. Yet, television and cartoons are still popular.

Children can watch cartoons in any case on other electronic tools as well apart from television. In a study carried out by Qu (2017), it was demonstrated that only 28 % of children watched media contents on television, and, in the report prepared by Ofcom (2017), it was stated that 30 % of children watched them on TV. On the other hand, it can be noticed that cartoons, in order to impress children, are likely to present many more fantastical elements with the support of available software. By this means, non-existing elements can easily be presented as a personality in a very realistic way.

There are some studies that focus on children's discernment of existing and non-existing elements. Huston et al. (1995) demonstrated that children at ages 9-11 were emotionally affected by programs they watched, and that they were transformed into behaviour as emotional reactions. Wright, Huston, Reitz, &

Piemyat (1994) stated that children at ages 5-7 are successfully able to distinguish real elements on TV from imaginary ones. Studies that focus on early ages are scarce. Rosen, Schwebel, and Singer (1997) detected that 14 % of the children at the age of 3 could distinguish real, whereas this number increased to 42 % at the age of 5. The belief that cartoons do not consist of reality was noticed to be 44 % at the age of 3, while it increased to 94 % at the age of 5. The most important reason for this situation is the limitedness of data collection techniques about the perceptual features of children at early ages (Giles, 2003). Also, there has not been found any studies about children's discernment of reality in early childhood in media contents in Turkey. The present study aims to analyse the perception of fantasy or reality of the children at ages 5-6 in the cartoons they watch.

Research Model

This study presents phenomenological (science of phenomena) pattern, one of the qualitative research approaches. This pattern was preferred in order to describe and analyse children's experience of watching cartoons, the way they interpret cartoons and their perception in a detailed way. The science of phenomena (phenomenology) provides a proper basis for the studies that are aimed to analyse the phenomena which both are not completely unfamiliar to us and the ones we cannot exactly comprehend (Yildirim & Simsek, 2000).

Participants

A private and a public preschool were preferred for the study. At these schools, all of the classrooms consisting of children at 5-6 ages were asked to draw pictures. Within the scope of the study, a private preschool and a public preschool which volunteered to be a part of the study were determined, and the study was carried out with 101 randomly-chosen students with face-to-face interviewing. Accordingly, 50 children from the private preschool -24 male and 26 female students- participated in the study, whereas 51 students (24 male and 27 female students) from the public preschool participated in the study. The students were asked to draw pictures about the cartoons they most frequently watch. 101 pictures were analysed in detail, and the objects in the pictures were noted down, afterwards, interviews were held with the children by using interview forms about the pictures they drew. The answers responding semi-structured interviews were noted down, and the pictures which were drawn by the children were used as another data source.

Data Collection Tool and Data Collection Process

The study was carried out based on the cartoons which children tend to watch. The children were asked to draw pictures about the cartoons they most frequently watch. 101 pictures were analysed in detail, and the objects in the pictures were noted down, afterwards, interviews were held with the children by using interview forms about the pictures they drew. The answers responding semi-structured interviews were noted down, and the pictures which were drawn by the children were used as another data source.

Data Analysis

The pictures drawn by the children were analysed by coding according to gender. In the study, descriptive analysis, content analysis, and interpretative analysis were used. For descriptive analysis, children's opinions were directly quoted in accordance with the themes which were generated before. For content analysis, the concepts in questions of the interview were determined pursuant to the goal and subgoals of the study, some codes that were required to constitute a meaningful whole were generated with these concepts, and these codes were categorised in conformity with the subgoals of the study. With interpretative analysis, the pictures that the children drew were interpreted and some inferences were made about them.

FINDINGS

Descriptive Findings

In this part of the study, the children's answers to the first set of questions were analysed. Factual information related to the cartoons which were watched by the children was analysed in the first set of questions. Findings from the answers to the questions related to the people children watch the cartoons with, time periods of watching them, where the cartoons are preferred to be watched, the electronic tools used for watching them and their popularity are presented in this section.

Table 1. Percentages Showing with Whom Children Watch Cartoons

	Family	%	Friend(s)	%	Alone	%
Private	35	0	5	0	10	0
Public	38	74.5	0	0	13	4.5

Table 1 demonstrates the answers about with whom the children prefer watching cartoons. These answers indicate that children generally watch cartoons with their family. 70 % of the children attending private preschool watch cartoons with their family, while 10 % of them watch cartoons with their friends, and 20 % watch them alone. In public preschool, 74,5 % of the children watch cartoons with their family, whereas 24,5 % of them watch cartoons alone.

Table 2. Percentages Showing Time Periods of Watching Cartoons

	Only at weekends	%	Only on weekdays	%	At weekends and on weekdays	%
Private	0	0	17		33	6
Public	0	0	0	0	51	00

Table 2 shows the time periods in which the children tend to watch cartoons. According to the findings, 34 % of the children attending private preschool watch cartoons only on weekdays, and none of the children watch them at weekends. The children generally tend to watch cartoons both at weekends and on weekdays. This percentage was detected to be 66 for the children attending public preschool. All of the children attending public preschool watch cartoons both at weekends and on weekdays.

Table 3. Percentages Showing the Place(S) Children Prefer for Watching Cartoons

	At home (#-%)	At home and a relative's house (#-%)	At home and a friend's house (#-%)
Private	39-78	7-14	4-8
Public	51-100	0-0	0-0

Table 3 presents where the children prefer watching cartoons. According to the answers, both in private and in public preschool, all of the children can watch cartoons at home. 78 % of the children attending private preschool watch cartoons only at home, 14 % of them watch cartoons both at home and in a relative's house, and 8 % of them watch cartoons both in their own house and in a friend's house. All of the children attending public preschool watch cartoons only at home. None of the participants stated that they preferred watching cartoons in a relative's or a friend's house.

Table 4. Percentages Showing Electronic Tools Children Use for Watching Cartoons

	TV (#-%)	TV-Mobile phone (#-%)	TV-Tablet (#-%)	Tablet, Mobile phone (#-%)	Tablet (#-%)
Private	9-18	18-36	9-18	10-20	4-8
Public	7-13.7	9-17.6	17-33.3	14-27.4	4-7.8

When the electronic tools children prefer for watching cartoons are taken into consideration, it can be easily noticed that television is still an essential tool. Table 4 demonstrates which electronic tools are used by children for watching cartoons. 8 % of the children attending private preschool watch cartoons only on TV, while 36 % of them watch cartoons both on TV and on mobile phones, 18 % of the children watch cartoons both on TV and on tablets, whereas 20 % of them watch cartoons by using the TV, tablets and mobile phones, and 8 % of the children watch cartoons only on tablets. 13,7 % of the children attending public preschool watch cartoons only on TV, 17,6 % of them watch cartoons both on TV and on mobile phones, while 33,3 % of them watch cartoons both on TV and on tablets, 27,4 % of the children watch cartoons with the TV, tablet and mobile phone, and 7,8 % of them watch cartoons only on tablets.

Table 5. Percentages Showing The Cartoons Children Watch By School Types And Gender

Cartoons	Private Preschool		Public Preschool	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Vikings (#-%)	10-41.6			
King Shakir (#-%)	5-20.8			
SpongeBob SquarePants (#-%)	5-20.8			
My Little Pony (#-%)		10-38.4		
Elsa (#-%)		5-19.2		
Rapunzel (#-%)		5-19.2		
King Shakir (#-%)		4-15.4		
RafadanTayfa (#-%)			10-41.6	
BulmacaKulesi (#-%)			7-29.2	
Lightning McQueen (#-%)			4-16.6	
Ladybug and Cat Noir (#-%)				11-40.7
Elsa (#-%)				9-33.3
Masha and the Bear (#-%)				7-25.9
Other Cartoons (#-%)	4-16.6			
Other Cartoons (#-%)			3-12.5	

When Table 5 is analysed, it can easily be noticed that male children tend to watch *Vikings*, *King Shakir*, *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *RafadanTayfa*, *BulmacaKulesi*, and *Lightning McQueen* the most. According to the answers, 41,6 % of these children watch *Vikings*, 20,8 % of them watch *King Shakir*, 20,8 % of them watch *SpongeBob SquarePants*, and 16,6 % of them watch other cartoons. 41,6 % of the children watch *RafadanTayfa*, 29,2 % of them watch *BulmacaKulesi*, 16,6 % of them watch *Lightning McQueen*, and 12,5 % of them watch other cartoons.

Female children, on the other hand, seem to tend to watch *My Little Pony*, *Elsa*, *Rapunzel*, *King Shakir*, and *Ladybug and Cat Noir*. According to the table, 38,4 % of these children watch *My Little Pony*, 19,2 % of them watch *Elsa*, 19,2 % of them watch *Rapunzel*, 15,4 % of them watch *King Shakir*, and 7,2 % of them watch other cartoons. 40,7 % of these children watch *Ladybug and Cat Noir*, whereas 33,3 % of them watch *Elsa*, and 25,9 % of them watch *Masha and the Bear*.

Research Findings

Picture Analysis

This part consists of the analysis of the pictures drawn by the children. During the analysis, interpretative techniques were used along with descriptive techniques. Both the pictures and children's answers were used for the analysis.

Table 6. Percentages of (Unreal) Objects in the Most Watched Cartoons at Private Preschool

Gender	Cartoon	Objects drawn by children and children's answers from the interview	Unreal Objects	%
Male	Vikings	Sea (10), Ship (10), Vikings Characters (9), Watch Tower (8), Flag (8), Sun (3), Waves (2), Watcher (2), Treasure (1), Storm (1).	Vikings characters (9) Treasure (1) Watcher (2)	2%
Male	King Shakir	King Shakir Characters (5), Hat (1), Microphone (1).	King Shakir characters (5)	1%
Male	SpongeBob SquarePants	SpongeBob SquarePants Characters (5), House (2), House Door and Window (1).	SpongeBob SquarePants characters (5)	2%
Female	MyLittle Pony	My Little Pony Characters (5), Purple Hair (1), House (1), Bed (1), Sky (1), Rainbow (1), Sun (1), Grass (1), Flower (1),	My Little Pony characters (5) Purple hair (1)	2%
Female	Elsa	Elsa Characters (5), Flower (4), House (3), Sun (3), Elsa Powers (2), Hat (1), Hair (1), Dress (1), Snowflakes (1).	Elsa characters (5) Elsa powers (2)	3%
Female	Rapunzel	Rapunzel Characters (4), Long Blonde Hair (4), Tower and Flag (3), Sun (2), Cloud (2), Grass (2), Sky (1), Flower (1), Dress (1).	Rapunzel characters (4) Tower and flag (3)	5%
Female	King Shakir	King Shakir Characters (3), Candy (1), Cape (1).	King Shakir characters (3) Cape (1)	0%

As can be seen in Table 6, the percentages of the objects -from the cartoon *Vikings*- drawn by the children who participated in the study were analysed. According to these percentages, 10 children who participated in the study watched and drew the cartoon *Vikings*. Accordingly, 10 children drew the sea, 10 children drew a ship, 9 children drew the characters of *Vikings*, 8 children drew a watch tower, 8 children drew a flag, 3 children drew the sun, 2 children drew a watcher, 2 children drew the waves, 1 child drew a treasure, and 1 child drew a storm. The pictures that the children drew and the question: "*What did you draw for me? Can you please tell me about it?*" show that all of the male children drew the sea and a ship (M1, M2, M3, M4, M5). Almost all of the children drew Halvar, Faks, Halvar's son Viki, Halvar's men, Viki, and his father, which are the main characters of the cartoon. M1 answered the question with the sentence, "*They went on a journey to find a treasure.*", while M2 gave the answer, "*Halvar is looking around at the watch tower, and there is the flag.*", M3 answered the question by saying "*Halvar is always scared of wars, he looks around carefully, and he goes on a cruise in his ship, on the sea.*", M4, on the other hand, responded by saying "*Viking's father is in the ship, on the sea.*", and M5 gave the answer, "*Halvar is in the sea, the waves have risen and the storm has broken out, the colour of the sky has begun to change.*" This leads to the fact that all of the male children were affected by the sea and the ship more. *Vikings* takes place in a ship in a Viking village, in Sweden, and it is about Halvar's son, Viki's adventures. They use their power to get rid of the pirates and the evil and to find the treasure. On the other hand, the physical appearances of these characters do not reflect the truth. Moreover, among the male children, 22 % of unreal objects from the cartoon *Vikings* were realized to be drawn in total.

As for the cartoon *King Shakir*, it was noticed that all of the male children were affected by the characters of *King Shakir* more. In this cartoon, a feline family consisting of all-animal characters with the names of Shakir (lion), Remzi (lion), his mother, Kadriye (cat), and his sister, Canan is demonstrated. Therefore, the appearances of the characters in *King Shakir* are not considered to be factual. Moreover, among the male children, 71 % of unreal objects from the cartoon *King Shakir* were realized to be drawn in total. The character King Shakir, which has human qualities and the appearance of a lion seems to be the most drawn imaginary character. When the pictures drawn by M6 and M8 are analysed, it can easily be

noticed that King Shakir appears to be a human in the pictures despite the fact that it is actually a lion. This leads to the fact that due to its human qualities, children tend to consider the character to be real.



Picture 1: M6-The Drawings of the Characters Similar to Human Beings Even Though They Have the Appearance of Animals.

Table 6 shows the analysis of the percentages of the objects -from the cartoon *SpongeBob SquarePants*- drawn by the children who participated in the study. According to these percentages, 5 children who participated in the study watched and drew the cartoon *SpongeBob SquarePants*. Accordingly, 5 children drew the characters of *SpongeBob SquarePants*, 2 children drew a house, and 1 child drew a house door and a window (M8, M9). When the pictures and children's answers were analysed, it was noticed that M8 responded by saying "I drew *SpongeBob SquarePants* and his friend, they are in the house. I also drew the door and the window of the house.", whereas M9 responded to the question with the sentence, "I drew *SpongeBob SquarePants* and *Squidward*." It was also realized that M9 drew *SpongeBob SquarePants* with a body consisting of feet, arms, and a head. The children who gave *SpongeBob SquarePants* an appearance like this in their pictures tended to make the character almost real, and they coordinately demonstrated an example of the perception of reality in their pictures. Thus, whereas all of the children drew *SpongeBob SquarePants* and his friends, who are the main characters of the cartoon, only 3 children drew the door and the window of the house as well. This leads to the fact that all of the male children were affected by *SpongeBob SquarePants* more, and that only 3 children were noticed to have drawn the house and the door and the window of it. *SpongeBob SquarePants* is about a yellow sea sponge who lives in deep water and works as a fry cook at a fast food restaurant. For this reason, *SpongeBob SquarePants* is not a character that reflects the truth in terms of its functionality. Among the male children, 62 % of unreal objects from the cartoon were realized to be drawn in total.



Picture 2: M9-The Drawing of the Sea Sponge Character Similar to a Human Being with the Features of Its Body

Table 6 shows the analysis of the percentages of the objects -from the cartoon *My Little Pony*- drawn by the children who participated in the study. According to these percentages, 5 children who participated in the study watched and drew the cartoon *My Little Pony*. Accordingly, 5 children drew the characters of *My*

Little Pony, 1 child drew purple hair, 1 child drew a house, 1 child drew a bed, 1 child drew the sky, 1 child drew a rainbow, 1 child drew the sun, 1 child drew grass, and 1 child drew a flower (F1, F2, F3, F4, F5). When the pictures and children's answers were analysed, it was noticed that F1 gave the answer, "I drew Pinkie Pie and Rainbow Dash, they are very kind.", F2 answered, "I drew a pony bed and a rainbow, Pony is making a rainbow.", while F3 replied, "I drew Rarity. I drew the sun and I drew her purple hair.", F4 responded to the question, "I drew Pink Pony's house, I drew Pink Pony, and there are the sky, grass, and flowers.", and F5 gave the answer, "I drew Rarity." All of the children drew Pink Pony, Pinkie Pie, Rainbow Dash, and Rarity, who are all the main characters in the cartoon. This leads to the fact that all of the female children were affected by the characters of *My Little Pony* more. In the cartoon, the characters try to save the place in which they all live from the evil powers to feel safer and happier there. Also, the greatest fun that the character named Rarity has is to make her friends look beautiful with her magic, fashion and some make-up which she skilfully applies. Among the female children, F3 drew purple hair due to the fact that she was impressed by Rarity's all of these characteristics. In this respect, 42 % of unreal objects were detected in total.



Picture 3: F2-Pony Making a Rainbow

As can be seen in Table 6, the percentages of the objects -from the cartoon *Elsa*- drawn by the children who participated in the study were analysed. According to these percentages, 5 children who participated in the study watched and drew the cartoon *Elsa*. 5 children drew the character named Elsa, 4 children drew a flower, 3 children drew the sun, 3 drew a house, 2 children drew Elsa's powers, 1 child drew hair and 1 child drew a hat (F5, F6, F7, F8). When the pictures and children's answers were analysed, it was noticed that F5 gave the answer, "I drew Elsa's powers, and I drew the flowers in Elsa's house, and also the sun.", while F6 responded, "I drew Elsa and a snowy weather, and I also drew a big snowflake.", F7 answered the question by saying "I drew Elena, her hat, and her dress. I also drew a rainbow.", and F8 replied, "I drew Elsa, and I drew numbers around her. I drew Elsa's hat, her hair, and her dress." All of the children drew Elsa, who is the main character of the cartoon. This leads to the fact that all of the female children were affected by the character named Elsa more. *Elsa* takes place in a frozen land, and Elsa has some magical powers like creating things made of ice and snow. Therefore, the fact that these features present completely unreal situations makes the cartoon more tempting to watch. Among the female children, 33 % of unreal objects from *Elsa* were realized to be drawn in total.

Table 6 shows the analysis of the percentages of the objects -from the cartoon *Rapunzel*- drawn by the children who participated in the study. These percentages indicate that 4 female children who participated in the study watched and drew the cartoon *Rapunzel*. 4 children drew the characters of *Rapunzel*, 4 children drew long blonde hair, 3 children drew a tower and a flag, 2 children drew the sun, 2 children drew a cloud, 2 children drew grass, 1 child drew a dress, 1 child drew the sky, and 1 child drew a flower (F9, F10). When the pictures and children's answers were analysed, it was realized that F9 gave the

answer, "I drew Rapunzel in her tower, her blonde hair is growing so long to touch the ground, there are roses and clouds around the tower, and there is the sun, flowers, and some grass.", whereas F10 replied, "I drew Rapunzel. She has got hair and hands. She has got a tower, and there is a flag above the tower. I also drew the sun, the sky, clouds, and grass." All of the children drew Rapunzel, who is the main character of the cartoon. Thus, it can be suggested that all of the female children were affected by the character named Rapunzel more. In *Rapunzel*, time and place are not mentioned. It also takes place in a mysterious tower in an unknown kingdom. Therefore, almost all of the female children seem to have been affected by the tower, in which Rapunzel lives, and its flag. The characters that once were chosen as a model in fairy tales now appear to have been replaced by the characters in cartoons. Moreover, among the female children, 35 % of unreal objects from *Rapunzel* were realized to be drawn in total.

As can be seen in Table 6, the percentages of the objects -from the cartoon *King Shakir*- drawn by the children who participated in the study were analysed. These percentages signalise that 3 female children who participated in the study watched and drew the cartoon *King Shakir*. Accordingly, 3 children drew King Shakir and his friends, 1 child drew a candy, and 1 child drew a cape (F11, F12). When the pictures and children's answers were analysed, it was seen that F11 replied to the question by saying "King Shakir is watching TV. He has got a candy, and he has got a cape.", while F12 responded, "I drew King Shakir." All of the children drew King Shakir, who is the main character of the cartoon. It was noticed that female children, with a more detailed perspective than that of the male children, added details to some unreal objects such as a cape and a heart. Furthermore, among the female children, 83 % of unreal objects from *King Shakir* were realized to be drawn in total.



Picture 4: F11-The Character Named King Shakir Watching TV

As can be seen in Table 7, the percentages of the objects -from the cartoon *RafadanTayfa*- drawn by the children who participated in the study were analysed. These percentages signalise that 10 male children who participated in the study watched and drew the cartoon *RafadanTayfa*. Accordingly, 8 children drew Mert, Kamil, Hayri and his friends, who are the characters of the cartoon, 2 children drew a street, 2 children drew the rain, 1 child drew a garden, 1 child drew a house, 1 child drew the sea, 1 child drew a flower and 1 child drew the sun (M9, M10). When the pictures and children's answers were analysed, it was stated that almost all the children drew Mert, Kamil, Hayri and his friends, who are the main characters of the cartoon. M9 answered, "I drew Mert, and Kamil is also in the picture.", while M10 gave the answer, "I drew Mert. They are chasing Kamil." These answers lead to the fact that almost all of the male children were affected by the characters in *RafadanTayfa* more. *RafadanTayfa* is about the adventures of a group of friends who live in a neighbourhood in Istanbul. It was also suggested that the children drew the pictures by having been affected by Mert, Kamil, Hayri, and his friends, who are some of the main characters. No unreal object was detected in this cartoon.

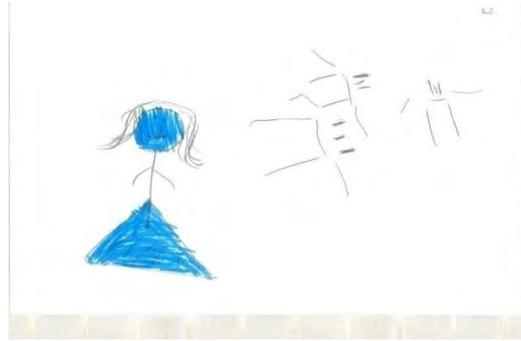
Table 7. Percentages of (Unreal) Objects in the Most Watched Cartoons at Public Preschool

Gender	Cartoon	Objects drawn by children and children's answers from the interview	Unreal Objects	Percentage
Male	RafadanTayfa	RafadanTayfa Characters (8), Street (2), Rain (2), Garden (1), Tree (1), House (1), Sea (1), Flower (1), Sun (1).		0%
Male	BulmacaKulesi	BulmacaKulesi Characters (7), Sky (3), Horror House (1), Tree (1), Star (1), Cloud (1), Sun (1).	Horror house (1)	6,6%
Male	Lightning McQueen	Car (2), Power (2), Super Power (2), Red Car (1), Fast Car (1), Turbo Speed (1).	Turbo speed (2) Super power (2)	44%
Female	Ladybug and Cat Noir	Ladybug and Cat Noir Characters (10), House (2), Grass (2), Flower (2), Sky (1), Butterfly (1), Rainbow (1), Rain (1).	Ladybug and CatNoir characters (10)	50%
Female	Elsa	Elsa and Anna Characters (9), Dress (2), Ice Mountains (2), Tree (1), Flower (1), Cloud (1), Rainbow (1), Grass (1).	Elsa-Anna characters (9) Ice mountains (2)	61%
Female	Masha and the Bear	Masha and the Bear Characters (6), Flower (5), House (3), Heart (3), Cloud (2), Sun (2), Dress (1), Grass (1), Sky (1), Rain (1).	Masha and the Bear characters (6)	27%

Table 7 shows the analysis of the percentages of the objects -from the cartoon *BulmacaKulesi*- drawn by the children who participated in the study. These percentages indicate that 7 male children who participated in the study watched and drew the cartoon *BulmacaKulesi*. 7 children drew Asli, Mert, Can, and his helpers, who are the characters of the cartoon, 3 children drew the sky, 1 child drew a horror house, 1 child drew a tree, 1 child drew stars, 1 child drew a cloud, and 1 child drew the sun (M11, M12, M13). M11 responded to the question by saying "I drew Asli, Mert, and his helper. I also drew the sky and the stars.", while M12 gave the answer, "I drew Mert, Can, and Asli. There are also trees and the sky in my picture.", and M13 answered, "I drew 3 people; Asli, Mert, and Can." When the pictures and children's answers were analysed, it was detected that almost all the children drew Asli, Mert, and Can, who are the main characters of the cartoon. This leads to the fact that almost all of the male children were affected by the characters in *BulmacaKulesi* more. *BulmacaKulesi* is about various escape adventures of children who accidentally fall down a tower on a day Can tries to see if the machine he has invented works.

As can be seen in Table 7, the percentages of the objects -from the cartoon *Elsa*- drawn by the children who participated in the study were analysed. These percentages signalise that 9 female children who participated in the study watched and drew the cartoon *Elsa*. Accordingly, 3 children drew the fairy, Anna and her friends, who are the characters of the cartoon, 3 children drew a heart, 2 children drew ice mountains, 2 children drew a dress, 1 child drew a rainbow, 1 child drew a tree, 1 child drew a flower, 1 child drew a cloud, and 1 child drew grass (F15, F16, F17, F18). When the pictures and children's answers were analysed, it was noticed that F15 gave the answer, "I drew Elsa and Anna, I also drew a rainbow.", F16 replied, "I drew Elsa and Anna in their dresses.", while F17 answered, "I drew Elsa, Anna, and the flying fairy playing on the ice mountains.", and F18 responded to the question by saying "Elsa and her friends are very happy. There are also clouds, the sky, and trees in the picture." In the pictures, there is ambiguity about the place. The children seem to have drawn the ice mountains despite the fact that they are not factual. It was also realized that the children added things to the pictures from their own life even though Elsa is a character that lives on the ice mountains. All of the children drew Elsa, the fairy, Anna and their friends, who are all the main characters. This leads to the fact that almost all of the female children were affected by the characters in *Elsa* more. *Elsa* takes place in a frozen land, and Elsa has some magical powers like creating things made of ice and snow. Therefore, the fact that these features present completely unreal situations makes the cartoon more tempting to watch. Also, among the female children, 61 % of unreal objects from *Elsa* were

realized to be drawn in total.



Picture 5: F16-The Ambiguity of the Place

Table 7 shows the analysis of the percentages of the objects -from the cartoon *Lightning McQueen*-drawn by the children who participated in the study. These percentages indicate that 5 male children who participated in the study watched and drew the cartoon *Lightning McQueen*. Accordingly, 2 children drew a car, 2 children drew turbo speed, 2 children drew super powers, 1 child drew a red car, 1 child drew a fast car, and 1 child drew the concept of speed (M14, M15). M14 gave the answer, "*The red car moves with super powers.*", whereas M15 said, "*I drew a car. It has got turbo speed.*" When the pictures and children's answers were analysed, it was realized that almost all the children drew a car, which represents Lightning McQueen. In *Lightning McQueen*, the place in which 7-cups winning main character lives is famous for being the town known as "Radiator Springs". 44 % of unreal objects were detected to be drawn by the children.

As can be seen in Table 7, the percentages of the objects -from the cartoon *Ladybug and Cat Noir*-drawn by the children who participated in the study were analysed. These percentages indicate that 11 female children who participated in the study watched and drew the cartoon *Ladybug and Cat Noir*. Accordingly, 10 children drew the characters of *Ladybug and Cat Noir*, 2 children drew a house, 2 children drew a flower, 2 children drew grass, 1 child drew the sky, 1 child drew a butterfly, 1 child drew a rainbow, and 1 child drew rain (F13, F14). When the pictures and children's answers were analysed, it was noticed that F13 responded to the question by saying "*I drew Ladybug and her house, there are also raindrops, grass, and a butterfly.*", while F14 answered, "*Ladybug is entering in her house on the grass.*" The children appear to have filled the gaps in the cartoons with some pieces from their daily life. It can also be stated that they chose to draw their own houses for the places in the pictures. Almost all of the children drew Ladybug and Cat Noir, who are the main characters. This leads to the fact that almost all of the female children were affected by the characters in *Ladybug and Cat Noir* more. Ladybug (Marinette) and Cat Noir (Adrien) are two teens who attend the same high school and yet have no idea about one another's super powers when they have first met. These two characters wear superhero costumes to fight the evil together. Thus, these features are completely unreal. It was noticed that female children tended to pay more attention to colourful costumes in the cartoons than male children did. 50 % of unreal objects were detected to be drawn by the children.

Table 7 shows the analysis of the percentages of the objects -from the cartoon *Masha and the Bear*-drawn by the children who participated in the study. These percentages indicate that 7 female children who participated in the study watched and drew the cartoon *Masha and the Bear*. 6 children drew the characters in *Masha and the Bear*, 5 children drew flowers, 3 children drew a house, 2 children drew a cloud, 2 children drew the sun, 1 child drew a dress, 1 child drew the sky, 1 child drew grass, and 1 child drew the rain (F19, F20). When the pictures and children's answers were analysed, it was noticed that F19 responded to the question by saying "*I drew Masha and the bear. I drew a cloud, the sun, some flowers, and their house.*", and F20 answered, "*I drew Masha and the bear, and I drew some flowers and the sky near them.*" Almost all of the children drew Masha and the bear, who are the main characters. This leads to the fact that almost all of

the female children were affected by the characters in *Masha and the Bear* more. *Masha and the Bear* is about the daily adventures of a bear who has retired from a circus and a naughty girl. The bear is Masha's best friend, and he has some hobbies such as fishing and growing vegetables. Thus, these features are completely unreal. 27 % of unreal objects were detected to be drawn by the children. *Masha and the Bear* consists of themes like friendship, amity, kindness, and some qualities that are unique to human beings are mentioned through animals.

Children's Opinions about the Cartoons They Watch

Table 8. Perceptions of Imaginary/Real of Children Attending Private and Public Preschool about the Cartoons They Watch

Private Preschool				Public Preschool			
Male		Female		Male		Female	
Imaginary (#-%)	Real (#-%)	Imaginary (#-%)	Real (#-%)	Imaginary (#-%)	Real (#-%)	Imaginary (#-%)	Real (#-%)
21-87.5	3-12.5	20-76.9	6-23.1	6-25	18-75	12-44.4	15-55.6

Table 8 shows the percentages of the perceptions which the children attending private and public preschool have related to the cartoons they watched and the pictures they drew about them. Accordingly, 76,9 % of the female children stated that the things they watched were imaginary. 23,1 % of these children stated that the things they watched were real. 87,5 % of the male children attending private preschool stated that the things they watched were imaginary. 12,5 % of these children stated that the things they watched were real. 44,4 % of the female children attending public preschool stated that the things they watched were imaginary. 55,6 % of these children stated that the things they watched were real. While 25 % of the male children stated that the things they watched were imaginary, 75 % of them stated that the things they watched were real.

Children's Encounters with Cartoons' Contents in Real Life

Table 9. Percentages Showing Children's Encounters with Cartoons' Contents in Real Life

Private Preschool				Public Preschool			
Male		Female		Male		Female	
Positive (#%)	Negative (#%)	Positive (#%)	Negative (#%)	Positive (#%)	Negative (#%)	Positive (#%)	Negative (#%)
1-4	23-96	3-13	23-77	22-91.6	2-8.4	23-85	4-15

Table 9 demonstrates the percentages of the perceptions of reality which belong to the children attending private preschool. Accordingly, 13 % of the female children stated that they encountered the things they watched in real life, while 77 % of them stated that they did not. Only 4 % of the male children stated that they encountered the things they watched in real life, whereas 96 % of them stated that they did not. The percentages about the children attending public preschool show that 85 % of the female children stated that they encountered the things they watched in real life, while 15 % of them stated that they did not. 91,6 % of the male children stated that they encountered the things they watched in real life, whereas 8,4 % of them stated that they did not.

Table 10 shows the character perceptions of the children attending private preschool. Accordingly, 94,4 % of the female children described the characters as kind or helpful, 5,6 % of them described the characters as funny. Male children, on the other hand, were noticed to have had various perceptions related to the characters. According to the findings, 54,5 % of the male children attending private preschool described the characters as kind or helpful, 8,5 % of them described the characters as evil, 8,5 % of them described the characters as funny, and 28,5 % of them described the characters as strong and powerful. Among the children attending public preschool, 77,4 % of the female children described the characters as

kind or helpful, 6,5 % of them described the characters as evil, and 16,1 % of them described the characters as funny. Findings collected from public preschool show that 70,8 % of the male children described the characters as kind or helpful, 12,5 % of them described the characters as funny, and 16,7 % of them described the characters as strong and powerful.

Table 10. *Character Perceptions of Children Attending Private and Public Preschool*
Character Perceptions of Children Attending Private Preschool

Male				Female			
Kind/Helpful (#-%)	Evil(#-%)	Funny(#-%)	Strong-Powerful(#%)	Kind/Helpful(#-%)	Evil (#-%)	Funny (#-%)	Strong-Powerful(#-%)
19-54.5	3-8.5	3-8.5	10-28.5	17-94.4	0	1-5.6	0

Character Perceptions of Children Attending Public Preschool

Male				Female			
Kind/Helpful (#-%)	Evil(#-%)	Funny (#-%)	Strong-Powerful (#-%)	Kind/Helpful (#-%)	Evil (#-%)	Funny(#-%)	Strong-Powerful (#-%)
17-70.8	0	3-12.5	4-16.7	24-77.4	2-6.5	5-16.1	0

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

8 % of children attending private preschool and 13,7 % of children attending public preschool watch cartoons only on TV. A report published by Ofcom (2017) in 2017 presented the fact that 30 % of children at ages 5-7 watched cartoons only on TV. Also, in a study carried out in China, Qu (2017) claimed that 28 % of children watched cartoons on TV. This study, which was completed in 2019, indicated that the percentage of watching cartoons on TV had significantly decreased.

The contents of the shows were noticed to have varied according to gender. Content creators were known to create the contents of the shows depending on gender (Gokcearslan, 2010). The study which Gotz et al. (2008) carried out in 24 countries claimed that there are some gender stereotypes, and that content creators use them especially when creating female characters. However, it is very significant that King Shakir is watched without gender gaps. Foreign shows were realized to have the same quality. Also, it was noticed that shows based on real life have no gender gaps.

Children attending private preschool differentiate from children attending public preschool. Children attending private preschool were realized to watch cartoons with fantastical settings, while children attending public preschool tend to watch cartoons with realistic settings. Private preschools signalise high socio-economic level. The public preschool which was within the scope of sampling was noticed to be located in a neighbourhood with low socio-economic level. The socio-economic level can be associated with the platforms on which children choose to watch cartoons. In this context, it is worthwhile to consider the fact that families with high socio-economic level have the opportunity to use the platforms that they can rent or subscribe in, and that they have many options presented by these platforms. Hence, this study indicates that the cartoons which the children attending private preschool watch and the cartoons watched by the children attending public preschool are different.

Samuels and Taylor (1994) stated that children cannot distinguish between the imaginary and the real in a picture until the age of 5. The present study is based on 5-6 year old children. It was noticed that most of the male children attending public preschool suggested that the contents of the cartoons were real. When the percentages related to the pictures that they drew about the cartoons they watched are analysed, this suggestion seems to be factual. In order to find out the main reason for this outcome, the cartoons they watched can be analysed. RafadanTayfa, BulmacaKulesi, and Lightning McQueen exemplify this result

sufficiently. These cartoons generally take place in real settings. Thus, a study carried out about Lightning McQueen indicated that the cartoon consists of 16 universal values out of 20. On the other hand, the female children were noticed to tend to watch fantastical cartoons such as My Little Pony and Elsa. These cartoons consist of some ambiguities about setting.

Male and female children attending private preschool were noticed to have perceptions of rather fantastical elements based on the cartoons they watched and the pictures drawn about them. Accordingly, 76,9 % of the female children and 87,5 % of the male children stated that the contents of the cartoons were imaginary. On the other hand, 44 % of female children attending public preschool stated that the contents of the cartoons were imaginary. 55,6 % of these children stated that the contents of the cartoons were based on real life. 25 % of the male children stated that the contents of the cartoons were imaginary, while 75 % of them stated that the contents of the cartoons were based on real life. These findings can be associated with the cartoons that the children like to watch. The children who tend to watch realistic cartoons seem to care about reality more, whereas the children who enjoy watching fantastical cartoons appear to care about fantasy more. This study indicates that the perception of reality has been discussed in many studies and yet could not be interpreted accurately. Wright, Huston, Reitz, & Piemyat (1994) systematically focused on the perception of TV viewing reality of the children at ages 5-7. In their study, they confirmed that children evaluate the reality of objects and phenomena depending on their age and the qualities of TV shows. Rosen et al. (1997) stated in their study that 94 % of children at ages 5-7 believe that the contents of the cartoons are not based on real life. The beliefs of the children from families with high socio-economic level and their percentages are associated with this study.

Children attending private preschool differentiate from children attending public preschool in terms of encountering the contents of cartoons in real life. Accordingly, the fact that children attending public preschool stated that they encountered the contents of cartoons in real life indicates that their perception of reality was not developed enough. These findings reveal the fact that children have difficulties in distinguishing between the imaginary and the real at these ages. In the studies carried out in the 1970s by Morison and Gardner (1978), it was confirmed that children can properly distinguish reality from fantasy after the fourth grade. However, the age of making proper discrimination between them can decrease a few years considering the fact that media was not being widely used and that the variety of it was less in those times than it is today.

94,4 % of the female children attending private preschool described the characters as kind or helpful, whereas 5,6 % of them described the characters as funny. On the other hand, there was a variety among the male children about character description. According to the findings, 54,5 % of the male children attending private preschool described the characters as kind or helpful, 8,5 % of them described the characters as funny, and 28,5 % of them described the characters as strong and powerful. Among the children attending public preschool, 77,4 % of the female children described the characters as kind or helpful, 6,5 % of them described the characters as evil, and 16,1 % of them described the characters as funny. Findings collected from public preschool show that 70,8 % of the male children described the characters as kind or helpful, 12,5 % of them described the characters as funny, and 16,7 % of them described the characters as strong and powerful. Hence, it can be suggested that male children differentiate from female children in terms of their expectations from the characters.

Children seem to describe cartoon characters generally as kind. This leads to the fact that content creators prepare the shows mostly based on the concept of "kind". It can also be claimed that children have a tendency to perceive and describe kind characters. Turkmen (2012) suggests that kind characters in cartoons are liked by children more.

When the perceptions of reality and fantasy are taken into consideration, it can be noticed that

children perceive reality more. Children seem to tend to realize especially the reality. Yet, for some cartoons such as Elsa, My Little Pony, and SpongeBob SquarePants, it was confirmed that children perceive fantastical elements more than realistic ones. Here, in terms of children's better realization of reality, it can be suggested that the children could not create equivalents for some fantastical events or objects in their minds, and that accordingly, could not reflect them to their pictures. Indeed, it was noticed that the children drew the cartoons that were fantastical and lacked realistic characters as if they were real. The fact that the characters that have the appearances of animals with human qualities in King Shakir were drawn like humans, and the fact that a sea sponge character with a head and a body was drawn like a human with a separate head and a body can exemplify this claim. Also, the places in the cartoons were drawn in the similar way. One of the children drew SpongeBob SquarePants in a house. This leads to the fact that the children integrated the characters and the places in their minds. The findings indicate that the tendency of perceiving the reality has already started contrary to the tendency of perceiving the fantasy in Piaget's (1999) "symbolic thought process", during which children learn to use an object like another object.

It was noticed that the children drew more objects for some cartoons such as Elsa, My Little Pony, and Rapunzel. My Little Pony and Rapunzel were watched only by the female children attending private preschool. When the contents were analysed, it was also noticed that more options were presented in cartoons for female children. This leads to the fact that producers tend to focus on these kinds of features that are likely to be paid attention by female children. Thus, it can be suggested that female children are under more risks in terms of commercial goals. Ogle, Graham, Lucas-Thompson, and Roberto (2017) stated that cartoon characters affect marketing strategies depending on gender, age group, and the features of the characters. Product range is wider especially for female children.

Suggestions

The present study is based on the analysis of children's perceptions of cartoons through pictures and interviews. The study was carried out with a limited sampling. The cartoons which were included in the study are the ones that were watched by this sampling. The results are valid for ages 5-6, which are considered to be critical for children's perception of reality. Further research can be carried out about the factors that lead children to have tendency to perceive the reality. Also, the effects of cartoon characters on the perception of reality can be researched. Moreover, the progressive relationship between the development of the perception of setting and the presentations of setting in cartoons can be analysed. It is advised for content creators to be more careful about balancing the reality and fantasy especially for these ages.

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