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REVIEWING ANIMATION FILM MEDIA IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' ENGLISH VOCABULARY

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Abstract
Vocabulary mastery is essential for developing English language proficiency. However, many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners continue to experience difficulties in acquiring and retaining vocabulary. Although numerous studies have investigated the use of animation films in vocabulary instruction, their findings remain fragmented across different educational levels. Therefore, this study aims to systematically review the positive impacts and challenges of using animation films to improve students' English vocabulary learning in the Indonesian EFL context. A systematic literature review was conducted by analyzing 12 empirical studies published between 2016 and 2026. The studies were retrieved from Google Scholar using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria and analyzed through Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis. Taguette software was used to facilitate the coding and categorization process. The analysis generated two overarching themes and eleven sub-themes. The findings revealed six major positive impacts of animation films: improved vocabulary mastery, positive learner perceptions, increased motivation and classroom engagement, enhanced vocabulary comprehension through visual context, supported incidental vocabulary learning, and promoted autonomous learning. However, the review also identified five recurring challenges, namely fast-paced dialogue, dependence on subtitles, uneven learning outcomes, distractions during learning, and technical issues. Overall, the findings indicate that animation films are an effective instructional medium for supporting vocabulary learning by providing meaningful, contextualized, and engaging learning experiences. Nevertheless, their successful implementation depends on careful instructional planning, appropriate media selection, teacher guidance, and adequate technological support. This review contributes to the existing literature by providing a comprehensive synthesis of both the pedagogical benefits and implementation challenges of animation films in English vocabulary instruction across different educational levels in Indonesian EFL classrooms.
Keywords: *animation films; English vocabulary learning; English as a Foreign Language (EFL); systematic literature review; thematic analysis*

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary mastery is one of the most fundamental components of English language learning because it serves as the foundation for developing learners' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Students with limited vocabulary often experience difficulties in understanding spoken and written texts as well as expressing their ideas effectively in communication (Nation, 2017). Similarly, Helmi (2025) emphasized that vocabulary knowledge enables learners to construct meaningful sentences and communicate accurately in various contexts. Since vocabulary supports all aspects of language proficiency, learners require repeated exposure to new words through meaningful learning experiences

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that promote long-term retention (Nation, 2017). Therefore, developing students' vocabulary knowledge remains a crucial objective in English language teaching.

Despite its importance, vocabulary learning remains challenging for many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Students frequently encounter difficulties in pronouncing words correctly, understanding meanings, remembering newly learned vocabulary, and using words appropriately in different contexts (Rohmatillah, 2015). Likewise, Rosyada et al. (2023) reported that many students struggle to retain vocabulary and lack confidence when applying newly acquired words during communication. These challenges often reduce learners' motivation and hinder their overall language development.

One factor contributing to these difficulties is the limited use of engaging instructional approaches in vocabulary instruction. Traditional vocabulary teaching frequently emphasizes memorization rather than meaningful language use, making students less motivated to participate actively in classroom learning. Folse (2004) argued that vocabulary retention improves when learners repeatedly encounter and actively use new words in meaningful contexts instead of relying solely on rote memorization. Likewise, Nation (2012) suggested that effective vocabulary instruction should provide multiple opportunities for learners to experience, practice, and recycle vocabulary through communicative activities. Consequently, teachers need instructional media that can create enjoyable, contextualized, and interactive vocabulary learning experiences.

Animation films have increasingly been adopted as one of the instructional media to support vocabulary learning because they combine visual images, audio input, contextual situations, and authentic language use. Through animated stories, students are exposed to vocabulary in meaningful contexts while simultaneously observing pronunciation, gestures, and situational cues that facilitate comprehension. Such multimodal input not only attracts students' attention but also promotes better vocabulary retention and learner engagement.

Previous empirical studies have consistently demonstrated the effectiveness of animation films in improving students' English vocabulary learning. Simanjuntak et al. (2019) found that animation films significantly improved elementary school students' vocabulary achievement by increasing learners' interest and participation during classroom activities. More recent studies (Imaduddin et al., 2025; Munir, 2016; Wijaya et al., 2024) further confirmed that animated videos facilitate vocabulary acquisition by presenting words in authentic communicative situations, thereby helping learners understand meanings more easily and retain vocabulary for longer periods. Collectively, these findings suggest that animation films can serve as an effective medium for vocabulary instruction across different educational settings.

However, although previous studies generally report positive findings, the existing literature remains fragmented in several respects. Most previous research has primarily focused on measuring the effectiveness of video-based learning through classroom experiments conducted in specific educational settings rather than examining learners' experiences across different contexts (Navarrete et al., 2023). Consequently, limited attention had been given to synthesizing evidence across different educational stages, identifying recurring pedagogical benefits, and examining the practical challenges teachers encountered when implementing

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animation films in English vocabulary instruction (Zhou et al., 2024).

To address this gap, the present study reviews previous empirical studies investigating the use of animation films in English vocabulary learning. Unlike previous primary studies that focus on individual classroom interventions, this review synthesizes evidence regarding both the positive impacts and implementation challenges of animation film media across different educational levels in Indonesia. By integrating findings from previous research, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how animation films support vocabulary development and to identify factors influencing their successful implementation in English classrooms. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) What are the positive impacts of using animation film media on students' English vocabulary learning? and (2) What challenges are encountered in teaching and learning English through animation film media?

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative systematic literature review (SLR) to synthesize empirical evidence regarding the use of animation films in improving students' English vocabulary mastery. A systematic literature review is a rigorous research method that identifies, evaluates, and synthesizes existing studies using explicit, transparent, and reproducible procedures to answer specific research questions while minimizing potential bias (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). Rather than examining the effectiveness of animation films through primary data collection, this study integrates findings from previous empirical studies conducted in Indonesian educational settings to identify common patterns, positive impacts, and implementation challenges.

Search Strategy and Data Sources

This systematic review was conducted using Google Scholar and all articles accessed between 2016 and 2026 were reviewed. It was chosen because it covers a wide range of academic literature, including journals, theses, proceedings, and various scientific publications from various disciplines, making it easier for researchers to find relevant sources more comprehensively. Furthermore, Google Scholar is known as one of the most accessible academic search engines and is capable of providing a broader citation coverage than some other databases (Martí´n- Martí´n et al., 2018).

Study Selection

The study selection followed a four-stage screening process adapted from the principles of the PRISMA guideline (Moher et al., 2009). Predefined inclusion criteria were established to ensure the relevance and quality of the selected studies. The inclusion criteria were: articles published between 2016 and 2026; articles written in English; empirical studies focusing on the use of animation film media for teaching English vocabulary; studies conducted in Indonesian educational settings; participants consisting of elementary, junior high school, or senior high school students; and studies conducted in formal classroom contexts.

The selection process consisted of four sequential stages. In the first stage, a broad Google Scholar search identified 17,200 publications related to animation

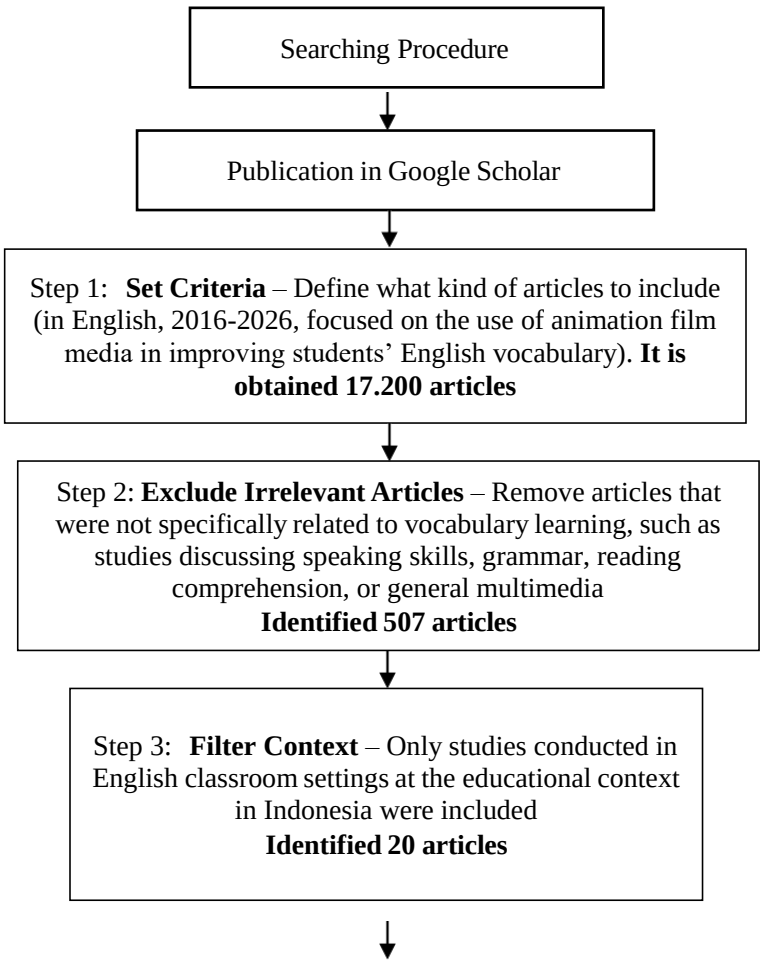
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films and English language learning. From the initial search results of 17,200 records, 16,693 articles were excluded because they focused on English skills other than vocabulary (e.g., speaking, reading, grammar, listening), duplicate publications, review papers, conference abstracts, or studies unrelated to animation films. This process resulted in 507 potentially relevant studies. In the second screening stage, 487 articles were removed because they were conducted outside the Indonesian EFL context, leaving 20 eligible studies. Finally, after full-text assessment, 8 articles were excluded because they did not specifically investigate animation films as the primary instructional media for vocabulary learning or did not satisfy all inclusion criteria. Therefore, 12 empirical studies were included in the final synthesis.

Data Extraction

Relevant information from each selected study was systematically extracted using a standardized data extraction form. The extracted information included: author(s) and publication year; educational level; research design; participants; instructional media; research instruments; data collection techniques; data analysis methods; and major findings related to the effectiveness and challenges of using animation films for English vocabulary learning. The extracted data were organized into summary tables to facilitate comparison across studies before thematic analysis was conducted.

Table 1. Selection of journal article



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Step 4: **Select Final** – Choose the articles that meet all conditions (animation film media, students,English vocabulary, English classroom settings at the elementary school, junior high school, and senior high school levels in Indonesia)
Identified: 12 articles

Data Analysis

The selected studies were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. This approach enabled the researchers to identify recurring patterns across the reviewed studies. The analysis involved six stages. First, the researchers repeatedly read the twelve selected articles to become familiar with the data. Second, meaningful segments related to the implementation of animation films in vocabulary instruction were coded systematically. Third, similar codes were grouped into broader categories to generate initial themes. Fourth, the themes were reviewed and refined by comparing them with the complete dataset to ensure coherence and consistency. Fifth, each theme was clearly defined and named according to its characteristics and supporting evidence. Finally, the findings were reported by synthesizing the themes in relation to the research questions. Throughout the coding and organization process, Taguette software was used to facilitate qualitative coding and thematic categorization.

The thematic analysis generated two overarching themes: (1) the positive impacts of animation films on students' English vocabulary mastery and (2) the challenges encountered during the implementation of animation films in English vocabulary instruction.

RESULT

A total of 12 empirical studies published between 2016 and 2026 were included in this systematic literature review. The articles were analyzed over a 15-day period, from 15 May to 30 May 2026, following the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Of the selected studies, eight employed quantitative methods, three adopted qualitative approaches, and one used mixed-methods designs. The extracted data were analyzed using thematic analysis, resulting in two overarching themes and eleven sub-themes related to the implementation of animation films in English vocabulary learning. The findings are presented according to the two research questions.

RQ1: What are the positive impacts of using animation film media in improving students' English vocabulary learning?

The thematic analysis identified six positive impacts of using animation films in English vocabulary instruction, namely improved vocabulary mastery, positive learner perceptions, increased motivation and classroom engagement, improved vocabulary comprehension through visual context, supported incidental vocabulary learning, and promoted autonomous learning (see Table 2).

Among these themes, improved vocabulary mastery was the most frequently reported benefit, appearing in seven of the twelve reviewed studies (Aridha, 2018; Arif et al., 2022; Imaduddin et al., 2025; Matulessy et al., 2024; Munir, 2016; Rahmani, 2018; Simanjuntak et al., 2017). These studies

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consistently demonstrated that animation films improved students' vocabulary acquisition by presenting new words through meaningful visual and contextual representations. The combination of audio, visual images, and authentic situations enabled students to understand word meanings more easily and retain newly learned vocabulary more effectively than traditional memorization activities.

Another frequently reported finding concerned positive learner perceptions, which emerged in five studies (Arifani, 2021; Aziz et al., 2016; Imaduddin et al., 2025; Swarno et al., 2025; Wijaya et al., 2024). Students generally perceived animation films as enjoyable, engaging, and less stressful learning media. These positive perceptions contributed to a more comfortable learning environment and encouraged greater participation during classroom activities.

The third sub-theme, increased motivation and classroom engagement, was identified in four studies (Imaduddin et al., 2025; Matulessy et al., 2024; Simanjuntak et al., 2017; Wijaya et al., 2024). The reviewed studies consistently reported that animation films attracted students' attention, increased classroom participation, and encouraged learners to become more actively involved in vocabulary learning activities.

In addition, improved vocabulary comprehension through visual context was reported in three studies (Arifani, 2021; Rahmani, 2018; Swarno et al., 2025). These studies indicated that visual cues, facial expressions, gestures, and storylines provided contextual support that helped students infer the meanings of unfamiliar words and improved vocabulary retention.

Two studies (Arifani, 2021; Permata et al., 2022) further highlighted incidental vocabulary learning, demonstrating that students naturally acquired new vocabulary through repeated exposure to contextualized language while watching animation films without relying exclusively on explicit vocabulary instruction.

Finally, promoted autonomous learning emerged in one study (Swarno et al., 2025). The study reported that students voluntarily used animation films beyond classroom instruction as supplementary learning resources, suggesting that animation films may encourage independent vocabulary learning outside formal educational settings.

RQ2: What challenges are encountered in teaching and learning English through animation film media?

Although the reviewed studies generally reported positive outcomes, the thematic analysis also identified five recurring challenges associated with implementing animation films in English vocabulary instruction. These challenges included fast-paced dialogue, dependence on subtitles, uneven learning outcomes, distractions during learning, and technical issues.

The first challenge, fast-paced dialogue, was identified in two studies (Swarno et al., 2025; Wijaya et al., 2024). These studies reported that rapid conversations in animation films sometimes exceeded students' listening proficiency, making it difficult for learners to recognize unfamiliar vocabulary and comprehend the overall content.

Closely related to this issue, dependence on subtitles also emerged in two studies (Swarno et al., 2025; Wijaya et al., 2024). Although subtitles facilitated

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comprehension, excessive reliance on written text occasionally reduced students' attention to spoken language, pronunciation, and listening comprehension.

The most frequently reported challenge was uneven learning outcomes, which appeared across several reviewed studies (Arif et al., 2022; Arifani, 2021; Imaduddin et al., 2025; Matulessy et al., 2024; Munir, 2016; Wijaya et al., 2024). While animation films generally improved vocabulary learning, the extent of improvement varied among students due to differences in English proficiency, prior vocabulary knowledge, learning motivation, and individual comprehension abilities.

Another challenge concerned distractions during learning. One study (Swarno et al., 2025) reported that some students became more interested in the entertainment aspects of animation films than in the vocabulary learning tasks, indicating the importance of teacher guidance and carefully designed learning activities to maintain instructional focus.

Finally, technical issues were documented in one study (Swarno et al., 2025). The reported challenges included inadequate technological facilities, limited access to multimedia equipment, and occasional technical disruptions, all of which affected the effective implementation of animation films during classroom instruction.

Table 2. Thematic Analysis of the Use of Animation Films in Vocabulary Learning

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Description	Supporting Studies
Positive Impacts	Improved Vocabulary Mastery	Animated movies significantly improved students' vocabulary achievement and retention across educational levels.	1, 3, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11
	Positive Learner Perceptions	Students viewed animated movies as enjoyable, less stressful, and effective learning media.	2, 5, 6, 8, 12
	Increased Motivation and Classroom Engagement	Students became more interested, active, and enthusiastic during learning activities.	3, 6, 7, 8
	Improved Vocabulary Comprehension Through Visual Context	Visual cues, actions, and storylines helped students understand and remember vocabulary.	2, 5, 10
	Supported Incidental Vocabulary	Students acquired vocabulary naturally through exposure to contextualized language in films.	2, 4

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Main Theme	Sub-theme	Description	Supporting Studies
	Promoted Independent Learning	Students used animated movies as self-directed learning resources outside the classroom.	5
Challenges	Fast-Paced Dialogue	Students struggled to understand rapid speech and unfamiliar expressions.	5, 8
	Dependence on Subtitles	Some students relied heavily on subtitles to comprehend movie content.	5, 8
	Uneven Learning Outcomes	Not all students showed equal improvement due to differences in proficiency and learning styles.	1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9
	Distractions During Learning	Students occasionally focused more on the storyline than vocabulary learning.	5
	Technical Issues	Internet connectivity, devices, and technology access sometimes hindered learning.	5

DISCUSSION

RQ1: What are the positive impacts of using animation film media in improving students' English vocabulary learning?

The findings of this systematic literature review demonstrate that animation films provide substantial pedagogical benefits for English vocabulary learning across elementary, junior high, and senior high school contexts in Indonesia. Among the six identified positive impacts, improved vocabulary mastery emerged as the most dominant theme, appearing in seven of the twelve reviewed studies. Consistent evidence was reported by Munir (2016), Simanjuntak et al. (2017), Aridha (2018), Rahmani (2018), Arif et al. (2022), Matulessy et al. (2024), and Imaduddin et al. (2025), who found that animation films significantly improved students' vocabulary acquisition and retention. These studies suggest that vocabulary learning becomes more meaningful when learners encounter new words through visual representations, contextualized dialogues, and authentic situations rather than isolated memorization. This finding supports Nation (2012, 2017), who argued that repeated encounters with vocabulary in meaningful contexts strengthen vocabulary knowledge and promote long-term retention. Likewise, Wang et al. (2021) reported that multimedia-based vocabulary learning enhances lexical processing because learners simultaneously receive visual, auditory, and textual information, enabling deeper cognitive processing and more durable vocabulary retention.

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Another important finding concerns learners' affective responses toward animation films. Five studies, including Aziz et al. (2016), Arifani (2021), Imaduddin et al. (2025), Swarno et al. (2025), and Wijaya et al. (2024), consistently reported that students perceived animation films as enjoyable, interesting, and less stressful than conventional vocabulary instruction. These positive perceptions were closely associated with increased motivation and classroom engagement, as also demonstrated by Simanjuntak et al. (2017), Matulessy et al. (2024), Imaduddin et al. (2025), and Wijaya et al. (2024). Students became more willing to participate in classroom discussions and vocabulary-related activities because animation films created an enjoyable learning atmosphere. This finding is consistent with Folse (2004), who emphasized that meaningful vocabulary learning activities are more effective than rote memorization because they actively involve learners in processing lexical information. Similarly, recent evidence from Gatcho (2024) indicates that audiovisual media increase learner engagement and motivation by providing authentic language input within meaningful communicative contexts.

The present review further highlights the important contribution of visual context to vocabulary comprehension and incidental vocabulary learning. Arifani (2021), Rahmani (2018), and Swarno et al. (2025) reported that visual cues, facial expressions, gestures, and storylines helped students infer the meanings of unfamiliar vocabulary without depending entirely on dictionary translations. Moreover, Arifani (2021) and Permata et al. (2022) demonstrated that students acquired new vocabulary incidentally while watching animation films because repeated exposure to contextualized language naturally facilitated vocabulary development. These findings are supported by multimedia learning principles, which suggest that learning becomes more effective when verbal information is integrated with relevant visual representations. Likewise, Wang et al. (2021) concluded that multimedia learning environments support both intentional and incidental vocabulary acquisition by reducing cognitive load and strengthening learners' semantic processing.

Finally, although only one reviewed study explicitly identified autonomous learning as a benefit, Swarno et al. (2025) reported that students voluntarily continued watching animation films outside classroom instruction to expand their English vocabulary independently. This finding indicates that animation films have the potential to extend vocabulary learning beyond formal classroom settings by encouraging self-directed learning through widely available digital media. Collectively, the findings of this review demonstrate that animation films contribute not only to vocabulary mastery but also to learner motivation, contextual understanding, incidental learning, and learner autonomy. By synthesizing evidence across different educational levels, the present review provides broader empirical evidence than previous classroom-based intervention studies and contributes a more comprehensive understanding of animation-film-based vocabulary instruction in Indonesian EFL classrooms.

RQ2: What challenges are encountered in teaching and learning English through animation film media?

Although animation films offer considerable pedagogical benefits, the reviewed studies also revealed several implementation challenges that should be

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carefully considered by English teachers. One commonly reported challenge concerns fast-paced dialogue and students' dependence on subtitles. Both Swarno et al. (2025) and Wijaya et al. (2024) found that learners often struggled to follow rapid conversations delivered by native speakers, particularly when unfamiliar vocabulary appeared within authentic speech. Consequently, many students relied heavily on subtitles to understand the storyline. While subtitles effectively supported comprehension, excessive dependence on written text sometimes reduced learners' attention to pronunciation and listening comprehension. These findings suggest that teachers should carefully select animation films that match learners' language proficiency and gradually reduce subtitle use as students' listening abilities develop.

Another challenge identified in this review concerns the variation in students' learning outcomes. Although studies by (Arif et al., 2022; Arifani, 2021; Imaduddin et al., 2025; Matulessy et al., 2024; Munir, 2016; Wijaya et al., 2024) consistently reported improvements in vocabulary mastery, they also acknowledged that the magnitude of improvement differed among students. Learners with stronger English proficiency, richer prior vocabulary knowledge, and higher learning motivation generally benefited more from animation-film-based instruction than lower-achieving learners. These findings indicate that animation films alone cannot guarantee successful vocabulary learning because individual learner characteristics continue to influence instructional effectiveness. Therefore, teachers should complement animation films with scaffolding strategies such as vocabulary pre-teaching, guided viewing tasks, and collaborative discussions to accommodate learners with different proficiency levels.

The review also identified several classroom management issues related to the implementation of animation films. Swarno et al. (2025) observed that some students became more interested in the entertainment aspects of animation films than in the intended vocabulary-learning objectives. Similar concerns were also reflected in recommendations made by Aridha (2018) and Rahmani (2018), who emphasized the importance of selecting age-appropriate animation films and designing interactive follow-up activities to maintain students' instructional focus. These findings suggest that animation films should not function as stand-alone teaching media but should be integrated into carefully structured instructional sequences consisting of pre-viewing, while-viewing, and post-viewing activities that guide students toward targeted vocabulary learning outcomes.

Finally, practical constraints related to technological resources were also reported. Swarno et al. (2025) highlighted that inadequate multimedia facilities, unstable internet connectivity, and limited technological infrastructure occasionally hindered the effective implementation of animation films during classroom instruction. Similar concerns have been raised in recent multimedia learning research, which emphasizes that successful technology integration depends not only on instructional media but also on institutional support and teachers' digital competence. Therefore, schools should provide adequate technological infrastructure and professional development opportunities that enable teachers to integrate animation films effectively into English vocabulary instruction. Overall, this review suggests that although animation films represent

an effective instructional medium, their successful implementation depends on appropriate media selection, thoughtful instructional design, sufficient technological support, and teachers' ability to address learners' diverse needs.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the 12 studies reviewed in this systematic literature review, animation films are an effective medium for supporting English vocabulary learning. The findings revealed several benefits, including improved vocabulary mastery, positive student perceptions, increased motivation and engagement, improved comprehension through visual context, support incidental vocabulary learning, and promoted independent learning. However, the review also identified several challenges, such as fast-paced dialogue, dependence on subtitles, uneven learning outcomes, distractions during learning, and technical issues. Overall, this systematic literature review provides evidence that animation films represent a pedagogically valuable medium for English vocabulary instruction while highlighting the instructional and contextual factors that should be considered to maximize their effectiveness in EFL classrooms.

Therefore, Indonesian EFL teachers are encouraged to select animation films that are appropriate for students' age, English proficiency, and learning objectives. Teachers should also implement structured learning activities through pre-viewing, while-viewing, and post-viewing stages to maintain students' focus on vocabulary learning. When technological resources are limited, offline videos or selected film clips can be used as practical alternatives.

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