Students Perception on Disney Animated Movies as Self-Directed Vocabulary Learning Media

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ABSTRACT

The integration of digital media in English language learning has provided new opportunities to support students' vocabulary development, particularly through audio-visual materials. One potential medium is Disney animated movies, which offer authentic language use, visual context, and engaging storylines. This study aims to explore students' perceptions on Disney animated movies as self-directed learning media for vocabulary learning. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed involving 22 ninth-grade students of MTsN 2 Jember. Data were collected through classroom observations, open-ended questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, supported by technique and source triangulation. The findings reveal that students generally hold positive perceptions of Disney animated movies, perceiving them as interesting, enjoyable, easily accessible, and helpful in understanding vocabulary through visual context, improving pronunciation, increasing learning motivation, and supporting independent learning. However, several negative perceptions were also identified, including difficulties in understanding fast-spoken dialogues, reliance on subtitles, limited focus due to distractions, and technical problems such as unstable internet connections and unclear audio quality. This study concludes that Disney animated movies have strong potential as self-directed vocabulary learning media when accompanied by appropriate guidance and learning strategies

Key Words: Students' Perceptions, Disney animated movies, Self-Directed Learning, Vocabulary learning

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary plays a fundamental role in English language learning, as it forms the basis for students' ability to comprehend texts, express ideas, and communicate effectively (Nation, 2001). Without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, learners face difficulties in developing the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, many junior high school students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts still experience challenges in vocabulary acquisition, particularly when learning relies heavily on conventional methods such as memorization and textbook-based instruction (Rahmawati & Sari, 2021). These approaches often provide limited contextual exposure and tend to reduce students' motivation to learn vocabulary independently.

In recent years, the advancement of digital technology has encouraged the integration of multimedia resources into language learning (Were et al, 2021). Audio-visual media, such as movies, have gained increasing attention because they present language in authentic and meaningful contexts. Through visual cues, sound, gestures, and situational settings, movies allow learners to infer word meanings naturally rather than through isolated translation (Hz & Daulay, 2021). This contextualized exposure is particularly beneficial for vocabulary learning, as it supports both comprehension and retention of new lexical items.

Among various types of movies, Disney animated movies are widely recognized and favored by children and adolescents due to their engaging storylines, appealing visuals, and relatively accessible language (Tyner, 2023). Movies such as *Moana and Toy Story* present narrative–adventure texts that contain rich contextual vocabulary, repeated expressions, and natural dialogues (Tyner, 2023). These characteristics make Disney animated movies potentially effective media for vocabulary learning, especially when learners engage with them beyond formal classroom instruction.

In the context of current educational demands, students are encouraged to develop self-directed learning skills, which emphasize learner autonomy, responsibility, and initiative in managing their own learning process (Knowles, 1975). Self-directed learning enables students to explore learning resources independently, regulate their learning pace, and reflect on their learning outcomes. However, preliminary observations at MTsN 2 Jember indicated that many ninth-grade students still rely heavily on teachers and textbooks, showing limited engagement in independent vocabulary learning. This condition suggests a need for learning media that are

not only accessible and engaging but also capable of fostering students' self-directed learning habits.

Previous studies have reported positive impacts of using animated movies, including Disney films, in English language learning, particularly in enhancing students' motivation and vocabulary acquisition (Hasanah et al, 2023). However, most of these studies focused on teacher-guided classroom activities or measured vocabulary improvement quantitatively. Research that specifically explores students' perceptions of using Disney animated movies as self-directed vocabulary learning media remains limited, especially in the Indonesian EFL junior high school context. Understanding students' perceptions is essential, as learners' attitudes and experiences influence their engagement, motivation, and willingness to adopt learning media independently (Shidu, 2003).

Therefore, this study aims to explore students' perceptions of the use of Disney animated movies as self-directed vocabulary learning media. By examining both positive and negative perceptions, this research seeks to provide empirical insights into how Disney animated movies support vocabulary learning and learner autonomy, as well as the challenges encountered by students during the learning process. The findings are expected to contribute to English language teaching practices by offering practical considerations for integrating popular audio-visual media into self-directed vocabulary learning in EFL contexts.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore students' perceptions of using Disney animated movies as self-directed learning media for vocabulary learning. The research was conducted in the ninth-grade classroom of MTsN 2 Jember. The participants of this study were 22 ninth-grade students who were selected purposively, as they had experience using Disney animated movies, particularly *Moana and Toy Story*, as part of their self-directed learning activities.

Data were collected through three main techniques, namely classroom observation, open-ended questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. Classroom observation was conducted to examine students' engagement and learning behavior related to vocabulary use after watching the movies. Open-ended questionnaires were distributed to all participants to gather students' written perceptions regarding the advantages and challenges of learning vocabulary through Disney animated movies.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students to obtain deeper explanations of their responses and learning experiences.

The data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, triangulation was applied by comparing data obtained from different techniques and participants. This process strengthened the credibility of the findings and ensured that the results accurately represented students' perceptions of using Disney animated movies as self-directed vocabulary learning media.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This discussion presents an in-depth analysis of how students perceive the use of *Disney animated movies* in their vocabulary learning process. By examining students' perceptions, this research provides insights into how *Disney animated movies* function as engaging and meaningful learning media for vocabulary development and how students respond to this learning experience both positively and negatively.

1. **Students' Positive Perception on *Disney Animated Movies* as Self-Directed Vocabulary Learning Media**
   a. **Disney Animated Movies Were Fun and Easily Accessible Media for Vocabulary Learning**

   Based on the data collected, most students expressed positive feelings toward learning vocabulary through *Disney animated movies*, primarily because these movies are familiar, entertaining, and easily accessible. Since students are already accustomed to watching *Disney movies* for leisure, the learning process felt more relaxed and enjoyable. The use of familiar characters and engaging storylines made students feel comfortable and interested in the activity

   The findings demonstrate that *Disney animated movies* serve as an engaging, enjoyable, and easily accessible media as most students can easily find and rewatch them through digital platforms such as *YouTube, Disney+*, or digital sharing. That significantly support students' positive perception toward vocabulary learning. Their familiarity with the content, emotional attachment to the characters, and the entertaining nature of the movies help create a classroom

environment that is far more relaxed and motivating than traditional language learning activities.

Figure   **1**

(Students showing enthusiasm while watching the movie)

b. **Disney Animated Movies Provide Contextual and Visual Support for Understanding New Vocabulary**

Another strong positive perception identified among students was that *Disney animated movies* provide clear contextual and visual support that helps them understand and remember new vocabulary more effectively. Through the combination of sound, images, and storyline, students were able to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words without the need for direct translation.

These findings highlight that the rich visual cues, contextual storytelling, repetition, and meaningful situations in *Disney animated movies* play a crucial role in helping students understand and remember new vocabulary. The learning becomes meaningful, multimodal, and closely connected to real-life use of the language.

Figure 2
(Students were seen writing down new vocabulary words during movie watching session)

c. Disney Animated Movies Improve Students' Pronunciation and Vocabulary Recall

Another positive perception that emerged from the findings was that *Disney animated movies* helped students improve both their pronunciation and their ability to recall English vocabulary. The repeated exposure to spoken words, dialogues, and songs provided students with natural auditory input, allowing them to imitate pronunciation and remember vocabulary more effectively. The combination of sound, visual cues, and memorable scenes created a learning experience that supported both listening and speaking skills.

During the movie-watching session, some students were observed attempting to repeat certain English words or phrases spoken by the characters in the *Moana* movie. Even though only a few students repeated the words out loud, many others mouthed the words quietly or whispered them to themselves. For example, when characters repeatedly used words such as *"ocean," "island," "wave," and "brave,"* students tended to mimic or rehearse the pronunciation.

Figure 3
(Students listening attentively and responding to repeated vocabulary)

d. Disney *Animated Movies* Encourage Independent and Self-Directed Learning

Another positive perception that emerged from the findings is that *Disney animated movies* encourage students to become more independent and self-directed learners. Students expressed that learning through movies motivated them to study English outside the classroom and explore vocabulary at their own pace. The accessibility of *Disney movies* on online platforms allowed them to rewatch scenes, pause for comprehension, and note new words autonomously.

The self-directed learning activity at home through the *Toy Story* assignment strengthened this finding. Students were asked to watch the movie independently, identify vocabulary, translate words, create sentences, and reflect on their experience. Completing these tasks required students to manage their own time, access the movie independently, and monitor their learning progress.

During this activity, one student highlighted the advantage of learning independently at home. As one student said:

> *"Kalau nontonnya di rumah, saya bisa pause dan catat kata-katanya kak."* (QN – ASK)
>
> "If I watch it at home, I can pause the movie and write down the words." (QN – ASK)

These results indicate that the use of *Disney animated movies* positively fostered self-directed learning behaviors among students. Through movie, students develop autonomy, take initiative, use personalized strategies, and reflect on their learning progress. Also by engaging with enjoyable and familiar content, students developed motivation, responsibility, and confidence to manage their vocabulary learning independently both inside and outside the classroom.

2. **Students' Negative Perception of Using *Disney Animated Movies* as Self-Directed Learning Media for Vocabulary Learning**
   a. **Difficulty Understanding Fast-Pace English Dialogue in Disney Animated Movies.**

   Although students generally expressed positive perceptions toward learning vocabulary through Disney animated movies, several challenges also emerged—one of the most frequently reported being the difficulty in understanding fast-paced English dialogue. The natural speech speed used by characters in *Moana and Toy Story* made it difficult for some students to follow the storyline, recognize new vocabulary, and process spoken language accurately. This difficulty often caused students to lose track of information and interrupted their learning flow, especially for those with lower listening proficiency.

   During the *Moana* viewing session, several students showed visible signs of confusion when characters spoke quickly or emotionally. Some students paused their note-

taking, while others leaned toward their peers to ask about unfamiliar words or repeated sentences. Their body language suggested difficulty processing the dialogue, as they often stopped watching momentarily to regain focus.

Figure 5
(Two students paused their note-taking during the Moana session after failing to catch a rapid dialogue)

b. **Dependence on Subtitles and Limited Comprehension Without Translation**

Another negative perception expressed by several students was their strong dependence on subtitles while watching Disney animated movies. Although subtitles are intended to support comprehension, many students in this study expressed that reading English subtitles felt challenging, especially when they had to read quickly while simultaneously following the movie scenes.

Interview results confirmed this issue. Some students were not accustomed to watching movies with English subtitles. As a result, they struggled to read and understand the text in real time. One student said:

> *"Kesulitannya di subtitle kak, karena saya belum terbiasa pakai subtitle bahasa Inggris. Saya biasanya lebih sering pake subtitle Bahasa Indonesia."* (IV – NAH)
> "The problem is with subtitles, because I'm not used to using English subtitles. I usually use Indonesian subtitles more often." (IV – NAH)

Another student admitted:

> *"Saya lebih suka pakai subtitle bahasa Indonesia supaya cepat paham ceritanya."* (IV – FAB)

> "I prefer to use Indonesian subtitles so I can understand the story quickly." (IV – FAB)[1]

This indicates that students' difficulty stemmed not only from the vocabulary itself but also from the lack of familiarity with English subtitles as a learning tool. Students who normally rely on Indonesian subtitles found it difficult to adjust to reading in English while processing the fast-paced visual information in the movie. Although subtitles can assist comprehension, over-reliance may limit the development of listening and inference skills.

c. Technical Problems During Movie-Based Learning

Another negative perception identified in this study was related to technical issues and environmental distractions that affected the learning experience, both in the classroom and during self-directed learning at home. Although the movies were engaging, several students faced difficulties caused by unstable internet connections, poor audio quality, or surrounding noise, which disrupted their focus and comprehension.

Interview data confirmed these technical problems. One student reported:

> "*Kalau sinyalnya jelek, filmnya suka macet, jadi agak ganggu belajarnya.*" (IV – MFIH)
> "When the connection is bad, the movie sometimes lags, which disturbs the learning." (IV – MFIH)

These findings show that environmental and technical factors can reduce students' engagement, especially when the movie-based learning activity depends on stable technology. In the classroom, background noise and occasional device malfunction distracted several students, while at home, internet connection issues were the most frequent problem.

d. Distractions and Limited Focus During Movie-Based Learning

The final negative perception identified in this study was students' difficulty in maintaining consistent focus during movie-based learning activities. Although *Disney animated movies* initially captured students' attention due to their entertaining visuals and storyline, sustaining concentration

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[1] F.A.B, Interviewed by author, October 14, 2025.

throughout the entire viewing session proved to be challenging for some learners. This issue highlights that engagement at the beginning of the movie did not always translate into continuous attentiveness for vocabulary learning.

The distractions were reported during the self-directed *Toy Story* activity at home. Without classroom supervision, students were more susceptible to multitasking and environmental interruptions. One student mentioned:

"*Kalau di rumah ke-distract kalau ada notifikasi aplikasi, jadi kadang nggak fokus sama kosakatanya.*" (IV – FAB)

"When at home, I get distracted when there are app notifications, so sometimes I can't focus on the vocabulary." (IV – FAB)

This indicates that the flexibility of learning at home also required self-discipline, which not all students were able to maintain consistently. The length of the movie and continuous exposure without breaks contributed to fatigue and reduced attention. Students indicated that watching a full-length movie made it harder to process throughout the entire viewing session remains a challenge for some learners. The entertaining nature of movies can sometimes shift students' orientation from learning to passive enjoyment, limiting opportunities for intentional vocabulary processing.

CONCLUSION

This study explored students' perceptions of Disney animated movies as self-directed learning media for vocabulary learning at MTsN 2 Jember. The findings indicate that students generally hold both positive and negative perceptions toward the use of Disney animated movies for vocabulary learning.

On the positive side, students perceived Disney animated movies as enjoyable, motivating, and helpful in understanding vocabulary through visual context, storyline, and authentic language exposure. The movies supported students' pronunciation awareness, vocabulary retention, and learning engagement. In addition, the use of Disney animated movies encouraged self-directed learning behaviors, such as replaying scenes, using subtitles strategically, and identifying unfamiliar vocabulary independently.

However, several challenges were also identified, including difficulties in understanding fast-spoken dialogues and subtitles, as well as technical issues such as unstable internet connections and unclear audio quality. Some students also preferred more structured

learning applications that provide explicit guidance and feedback. Overall, the study concludes that Disney animated movies can serve as effective self-directed vocabulary learning media, particularly in enhancing motivation and contextual vocabulary understanding. Nevertheless, their effectiveness depends on students' language proficiency, technological support, and the presence of appropriate learning guidance.

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